Innovative approaches to working with children who are homeless

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I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land - the Kulin Nation, to the elders past and present, on which this event takes place.
Together 4 Kids

• Together 4 Kids (T4K) is the child focussed specialist service, funded through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)
• Our work is aimed at children 0-12 years, who have experienced homelessness and/or at risk of homelessness
How we do it?

T4K has a three-pronged approach:

• Provide individual counselling (and case management where applicable) to children

• Develop and facilitate therapeutic groups for children (collaborating wherever possible)

• Provide training and support to the NAHA sector in child focussed best practice
Partnership with CAMHS

- An integral part of the response to the needs of homeless children is the partnership with the Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – Dept SA Health
- Senior CAMHS clinician provides consultancy, clinical supervision, case management and therapeutic intervention
- Transition pathway for children into CAMHS as required.
Philosophy & approach

- Strength-based approach
- Collaborative
- Child development
- Attachment theory
- Art & play therapies
- Aboriginal knowledge and wisdom
- Narrative approach
- Parents are our allies
Why do we need T4K?

Children who are homeless ....

• spend less time in school than other kids

• may move schools up to 5 times per year

www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au
T4K data collection

- 66% of parents accessing T4K are concerned about their children’s safety and wellbeing
- 93% of parents accessing T4K state that mental health issues are/have been are part of their life (self or immediate family)
- 80% of children have witnessed or experienced family and domestic violence
Presenting issues of children accessing T4K

- Separation of parents: 18%
- Physical Health: 3%
- School: 8%
- Cultural: 1%
- Refugee: 0%
- Migrant: 1%
- Disability: 2%
- Anxiety: 12%
- Marginalisation: 1%
- Trauma: 18%
- Bullying: 4%
- Anger: 11%
- Suicidality: 0%

Presenting issues of children accessing T4K.
Outcomes for children

- Since T4K’s inception over 600 children have received support
- Over 400 children have participated in a tailored therapeutic groups
- Over 100 children received a service from the T4K / CAMHS Senior Clinician in 2013
Working with schools

• T4K works in partnership with over 35 schools and children’s centres
• Delivering both 1:1 support and group programs
• Group programs are adapted to meet the needs of the children
• Children are selected based on need
What makes the difference?

• Provide additional support
• Coordinate case meetings
• Provide informal PD in impact of homelessness and trauma
• Provide formal training e.g Working with Nunga Kids
• Advocacy and support to children
• Promote SMART principles as best practice
Outcomes for children

• Increased engagement and school attendance
• Improved pro-social skills
• Increased learning capacity
• Increased awareness of children’s situation and need by school staff
• Increased participation by parents in children’s schooling
'Play is perhaps the most developmentally appropriate and powerful medium for young children to build adult-child relationships, develop cause-effect thinking critical to impulse control, process stressful experiences, and learn social skills.'

*Schaefer & Drewes*
Therapeutic group programs

- Pirates
- Caterpillars to Butterflies
- The Garden
- YogArts
- Therapeutic basketball
- Rev your engines
- Find ya Rhythm
- Infant massage
- Suitcase for our Journeys
Secret pirate question

Pirates travel a lot, always moving. What might a pirate be thinking before he heads off to sea?
Outcomes at 3 months

Emotional wellbeing - 3 month review

- 63% Significant improvement
- 21% Some improvement
- 8% Same or No change
- 8% Regressed
Outcomes at 6 months

Emotional wellbeing - 6 month review

- Same or No change: 50%
- Some Improvement: 33%
- Significant improvement: 17%
Children need safe spaces to play
Outcomes for the sector

• Over 800 sector workers have participated in range of child focussed training programs

• Training programs have been delivered across SA to sector workers in regional and remote areas
Sector training

Child focussed practice, assessment & case management

Therapeutic conversations with children

Child safe environments

Sandplay for the homelessness sector

Play with Purpose

Therapeutic Parenting

Working with Nunga Kids – Strengthening relationships
Feedback from parents

- [Link](http://youtu.be/3dxyGyUVdeQ)
More than half of women with children seeking specialist accommodation supports give FDV as the primary reason

40% of T4K incoming referrals are from DV services

www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au
Impacts of FDV & Homelessness

- Violence can harm the mother/child bond.
- Children can develop negative core beliefs about themselves.
- Impacts on child’s view of the world as a safe and predictable place.

I am going to be mean because I am a boy? Are all men mean?

(Cunningham & Baker 2004. AHURI Homelessness prevention for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence innovations)
‘Suitcases for our Journeys’
group...

Reconnecting children with their hopes and dreams
Suitcases for our Journeys

- Developed to respond to children who have experienced trauma.
- Invitation to children to share their stories in safe and non-retraumatising ways.
- 9-12 years old
- 7 week program.
- Run at Domestic Violence Service
- Co-facilitated by T4k – Carolina Haro, T4K CAMHS- Sandra Davis. Supported by CAYA DVS.
4 considerations in working with children who have experienced Trauma

- No re-traumatisation
- Connectedness/Solidarity
- Responses to trauma v/s effects - consequences
- Healing process

Narrative therapy principles applied
Therapeutic process in 4 stages

Session 1
Session 2
Session 3

Stage 1
Safe space of Identity

Stage 2
Reflect in our lives, re-engage with the trauma story and giving new meanings

Stage 3
Connectedness Collective voices

Stage 4
Witnessing children’s stories

Session 4
Session 5

Session 6

Session 7
Therapeutic process in 4 stages

Stage 1  The Suitcases
Stage 2  Journey Maps
Stage 3  The Banners
Stage 4  The Ceremony
Life as journey

Important things that we carry in our suitcases....
Being strong

Cracking up laughing!

Climbing and hiding

Being wonderful

Sports, footy

Trying new things

Being healthy

doing my best

using my words

Caring for animals

drawing

listening to what people say

good at maths

asking for help

Making new friends

Remembering happy times

making people laugh.

looking after people

being kind

Sports, footy

helping others

Doing my best

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Making new friends

Remembering happy times

making people laugh.

Looking after people

being kind

Climbing and hiding

Being wonderful

Laughing

being calm

responsible

Standing up for my rights

respect others

being strong and brave

travelling

Being careful

Determined

Being strong

Cracking up laughing!

Climbing and hiding

Being wonderful

Sports, footy

helping others

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Being careful
The stones and rocks are strong as the important people in my life and treasure memories.

These figures are my Support Team.
Family

Safety  teamwork  Being kind
happiness shared with friends

Being respectful

Playing
Being happy

Friendship

Helping other people

Being brave

Happiness

Respect
Religion

Trust
caring for people
caring for animals

Fun

To have hopes

health

To have fun with my Mum

Love

peace

passion

Honesty
What travelers do to not get lost?

The stars, the sun, the moon and compasses will guide me as my hopes and dreams
To live with both families

I want to see my family

Nice, Safe and Happy

I wish I may climb a mountain

I wish I will remember happy things instead of bad things

Happy times

trusting people again

To be famous and have friends

To be rich

Everyone in my family to happy

To get rid of bad things and to make this world a better place

I want to travel with my sisters and learn new things, so that we can teach other children to Hope and Dream

I want to be a lawyer to stick up for people

Love

A.F.L. player

To help my mum

To have good friends

Not let smoking and drinking to affect my life and others
Our Journeys...

And further Journeys...
The Banner

Documenting children’s collective voice

Together4Kids™
Children’s stand towards violence

“To learn how to stick up for myself without violence”

Values around **Respect**

Safety

How children should be treated

Children using their voices

Children doing things to protect themselves even when they can’t stop the violence or harm

Even when children have been through hard times they do things to feel better, to have happy memories, going to school, making new friends.
Ceremony, Certificates and Passports
Sharing our Journeys
Being an audience

- “My daughter has blossomed since attending this group.”

- “I’m very proud of him that he can develop and maintain friendships. I will reflect about whether it’s time to let my people in”

- “I feel I can forgive myself, that they’re ok. Because I blame myself for everything, putting them through what I’ve put them through. We’re moving forward”

- “We’re two soldiers and we’ve come back from our battle and we’re stopping at the playground to have fun now”
Documenting the mum’s voices
I found the experience to be entirely beneficial and rewarding. It was a joy to see the children build their self-confidence, draw on their strengths and look positively towards the future.

Given the children’s past exposure to trauma, this was a true gift to see such hope and optimism come from the children in their expressions, words and outlook.
“Homelessness can affect children in different ways. Children don’t necessarily see homelessness as whether they have a house, but rather the level of connectedness to family, the presence or absence of fear and feelings of instability and insecurity”

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