Keeping the Children in the picture

Our learnings from a collaborative approach to children in crisis or transitional housing because of family violence
Why we started

• EACH is an integrated Child and Family Service with a range of services

• We identified that we were not seeing children who were experiencing homelessness or risk of homelessness

• We had some Community Health innovations dollars to look at demand and had considered the idea of a supported playgroup
What we did

• We met with the Eastern Housing Network to ask for their ideas and identify an organisation that we could work with to develop a program

• Safe Futures put their hands up to work with us

• EACH identified Julie Slater, a Community Health Speech Pathologist to work with Safe Futures to develop the model

• EACH and Safe Futures developed an MOU to clearly identify the roles
What we did cont…

• Because we had the luxury of the innovations dollars which did not have targets attached we gave Julie 1 day a week to work with Safe Futures

• Established a management team across the two organisations so we could sort out the practical issues as they arose and be clear about roles of respective staff.

• Established regular timetable of meetings – important to address issues such as location, who provided resources etc etc.
The Partnership

• The foundation of the program is to support children effected by family violence through collaboration between our agencies to provide joint assessment, planning and intervention

• We aim to share information and communicate the identified needs, monitor and review the effectiveness of our intervention and proactively plan for the changing needs of the child in their family context
Our Name: Little Sunbeams

• We developed the name of our group to reflect the partnership between our organisations and our hope for the children involved

• Our vision: A brighter Future for EACH Child
Philosophy of Little Sunbeams

• Healing children from the effects of trauma from family violence begins with recognising and supporting the centrality of the relationships with their Mother (Ref: Safe and Secure Framework)

• We created a group to develop and strengthen the attachment relationship between Mothers and their children
Principles of the group

• Predictability through routines and repetition
• Relational model
• Modelling attunement to children’s needs
• Supporting eye contact, physical touch and comfort between parent and child
• Opportunities to share fun and laughter
• Connecting to community
Goals for the partnership

• Strengthen the attachment relationship between Mother and Child

• Sharing of knowledge and expertise to support children and families needs

• Breaking down barriers between health professionals and families

• Facilitate referrals to Community Health, Early Intervention services, Paediatricians or other community programs
Goals for the partnership continued…

• Educating Safe Futures Foundation staff to identify children’s social, emotional or developmental needs

• Professional development sessions provided by Allied Health Staff at EACH to the Safe Futures Foundation Staff. Topics included- Speech and Language Red Flags, Sensory Integration in the context of trauma, Trauma and Autism, and Strengthening Attachment Relationships.
Playgroup Structure

• The group runs for 1 ½ hours every fortnight during school terms

• Preschool children

• Aims to focus on fun through the power of songs and rhymes

• One structured activity often focusing on sensory play (e.g. play-dough)

• Snack time supports community and healthy eating (staff and parents model eating healthy foods together)

• Less of a focus on playing together and more a focus on being in the moment together with limited distractions
**Activities to support connection**

- Interactive songs and rhymes between Mother and Child
- Use of props during some songs to support regulation, engagement and attention (e.g. lycra, feather used during Feather Song, parachute, scarves, puppets, instruments)
- As trauma can impact on a child’s development, all the elements of the program have also been chosen to support language, literacy, numeracy, fine motor and gross motor development.
- Craft/sensory play
- Story time and the use of the story box with props
Staffing

• Coordinator from EACH attends every group for consistency

• Coordinator from Safe Futures Foundation oversees referrals and setup of the group and follow-up

• Ideally Family Case Manager to attend with any new family

• Usually at least two additional Safe Futures Children’s Workers to support Mothers with multiple children

• Additional EACH Staff Member to support the running of the program and for clinical observations
Organisational Challenges

• Change of staffing
• Time allocation to support the program (including administration)
• Part-time Coordinators (0.4 EFT)
• Transporting families to and from the group
• Communication between agencies
• Finding the time to monitor and review the needs of the children in an ever changing environment
• Limited financial resources for ongoing food/transport
Clinical challenges

- Transience of families
- High proportion of CALD clients
- Language barrier due to high focus on songs and rhymes
- Cultural sensitivity
- Consistency of attendance (though this has been better than expected)
- Arriving on time
- Evaluation of the program
Challenges for the families

• Mothers have expressed the challenge of not having an experience of playing with their children
• Diminished confidence in parenting (undertaking daily routines)
• A huge effort for the families to arrive at the group
• Father/Child contact visits
• Medical and or legal appointments which take priority
• Anxiety and or depression inhibits motivation to attend and engage during the group
Cultural Considerations

• Presentation of food
• Understanding of diverse faiths and religious practices
• Limited ability of Mothers to participate freely during physical movement and expression
• The role of a Mother in different cultures related to attachment
• Supporting Mothers to engage in play and have fun with their child
Storytime- “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt!”
Stretchy Lycra Song to support regulation- “leaning in and leaning out”
Row, Row, Row Your Boat- “if you see a crocodile don’t forget to scream!!”
“Twinkle twinkle little star how I wonder what you are?”
Puppet Play- “And on that farm he had a…..”
Sensory play- “helping hands” making a rainbow birthday cake
“Rock rock rock your boat gently to and fro, watch out give a shout into the water we go!”
Props - scarves with song ‘sailing’ to calm and transition between activities - “sail back home to me”
“The best time my children have had in a long time”.