

# Early intervention in child abuse prevention

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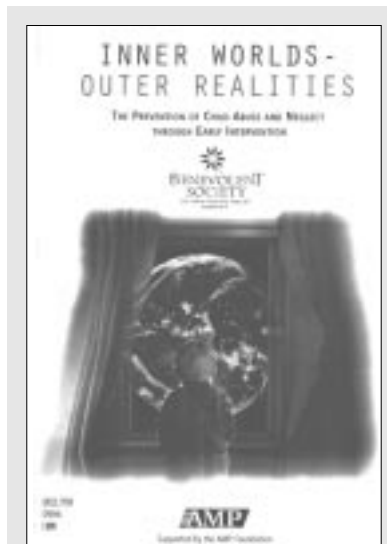
In November 1998, Professor Kim Oates, Chairman of the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse, launched *Inner Worlds – Outer Realities*, on early intervention in child abuse prevention, published by the Benevolent Society of New South Wales.

*Inner Worlds – Outer Realities* is a collection of papers by team members of the Society's Centre for Children's Early Intervention Programs. The book is a rich source of information and insights on practice issues in child abuse prevention. Being practice-oriented, it would be particularly useful for social workers, clinicians, therapists and workers with high risk families and infants, and the description of individual intervention programs provides information for those wanting to learn from, or replicate the programs. The book also deals well with issues of administration, use of intervention workers, training of volunteers for home visiting, and working with parents with substance abuse problems and with adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Case studies and personal insights into the helping relationship from both therapists and clients provide informative and interesting reading.

The following is a description of some of the chapters.

## *Introducing the book*

Suggesting that there is still a long way to go to understand fully the extent of abuse and neglect in the population, the Benevolent Society's CEO Adrian Ford introduces the book by arguing that the numbers of children at risk of all types of abuse and neglect are still vastly under-reported. He describes the wider and important trends in society which impact on children, such as structural violence in the form of unemployment; substance abuse; changing family structures and increasing rights for adults; and an increasing focus on services for the aged. The need to work with the maltreated child to prevent the cycle of violence



## *Inner Worlds – Outer Realities:*

*The Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect through Early Intervention*

Edited by S. Donnelly & J. Edwards

Benevolent Society of New South Wales, Sydney, 1998 (222 pages).

is discussed, particularly in terms of appropriate funding of children's services and the need to focus on the child and not the parents. Challenges of prevention work are identified and four quantitative measures developed by the Benevolent Society described. A plan for early intervention is briefly outlined, with the emphasis on home visiting and the need to involve parents in the process of healing.

## *Prevention programs*

In the chapter 'Prevention through early intervention in the Benevolent Society, Centre for Children's Early Intervention Programs', Judith Edwards describes how programs – the Families Together Program, the Infant-Parent Program, and the Home-Start Program – have been designed to complement the work in the Early Intervention Program. Their aim is to give children a better start in

life by supporting parents who are experiencing extra stress during pregnancy and their child's early years, and by developing relationships with other professionals and community organisations to advocate for children.

## *Early Intervention Program*

In 'The early years of the Society's Early Intervention Program', Beulah Warren discusses the background to the Early Intervention Program, the context of its germination, and the model 'Invitation to the Family' which was its framework. Beulah's involvement as part of the intervention team is outlined, providing details on management and administration. Evaluation of the Program is considered and the ways in which it encouraged the development of similar programs outlined.

The chapter by Elke Andrees and Belinda Keatinge, 'Seeing with different eyes: the knife edge between inner worlds and outer realities', gives an overview of what the clinicians and workers in the Early Intervention Program believe to be the fundamental framework in working with high risk families and infants, and explores some of the issues of the work, highlighting the difficulties of seeing with different eyes – the eyes of the therapist, of the parent and of the infant.

'Grappling with the issue of child protection in early intervention: one worker's perspective' presents Melinda Hughes' perspective as a social worker in the Early Intervention Program. She describes the context of the 1980s: the initial Program protocol, the denial surrounding child abuse, the struggle around notification; the extent of abuse which society is prepared to tolerate, emotional abuse, and systemic denial of emotional abuse.

In the Benevolent Society's early intervention programs, 50–60 per cent of women in the families involved have a history of childhood sexual assault and in the Early Intervention Program and Families Together, this

number is consistently 80–85 per cent. The chapter by Judith Edwards discusses how pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood affect this group, and presents an overview of appropriate intervention strategies, focusing on the safety of the baby and facilitating positive attachments between mother and child.

The problem of the social isolation of some mothers in the Early Intervention Program is addressed in a chapter by Justine Spurrs which discusses how the Program identified this need and established a play group in 1995, offering it as a free service to clients. The aim of the group was to help parents focus on and play with their children, break down social isolation and encourage parents to join other groups in the community.

The process of supervision of students in counselling and psychotherapy is discussed in a chapter by Karen Asgill, which focuses on some of the special aspects of training students through the Early Intervention Program and addresses the complications of working therapeutically on the relationship between parents and their infants in the home setting, particularly when there are concerns for the safety of the infant.

### *Home visiting*

The role of home visiting in the Benevolent Society's early intervention services is discussed in the chapter by Judith Edwards and Elke Andrees which examines some of the advantages and difficulties that accompany home-based clinical practices. Engaging harder-to-reach clients, empowerment of clients, and providing an individualised service are listed as advantages while difficulties include difficulty in worker containing feelings, harder to maintain a frame to work within, and missed appointments.

Primary Maternal Preoccupation is a state of emotional vulnerability seen in mothers following the birth of an infant. The chapter, 'Facilitating the development of empathy in parent-infant relationship', by the Early Intervention Program team, describes how the aim of early intervention is to strengthen and enhance the relationship between parent and infant so that all aspects of the child's development are facilitated and distortions in the interactions, which may put the child at risk, are minimised.

### *Families Together program*

The Benevolent Society received a two-year grant from the National Mental Health Project to trial a program called 'Families Together' to

work specifically with families where a parent has a long-term mental illness and who are expecting a child or have young children. This chapter by Jane West, Judith Edwards, and Sharyn Moses describes the program, outlines its basic principles, and discusses the importance of evaluation as an ongoing part of the program.

The nature of art therapy using an Object Relations approach is described by Belinda Swan. This program aims to assist in facilitating the attachment process between parent and infant.

### *Home-Start program*

Home-Start, a volunteer home visiting program which offers practical and emotional support to families with additional needs, is described by Maria Bourke and Eva Gloker in a chapter which outlines the objectives and history of the program and discusses issues such as: the use of volunteers in Home-Start; profile of volunteers; volunteer training and selection; matching volunteers with families; and support and backup of volunteers. The importance of clearly defining the role of the volunteer is stressed and case studies illustrating the need for clear boundaries, multiple births, and multicultural issues are presented.

### *Therapeutic relationship*

'Struggling for a space' is an account of Belinda Keatinge's two years of working with a very chaotic family. The first visit is described, the ambivalent relationship between the mother and author discussed and the difficulty in finding a space to think is addressed. Attitudes of both the author and the mother to the relationship which developed and to its termination are examined.

### *Role of administrative officers in early intervention programs*

This chapter by Suzanne Donnelly is a collection of thoughts and observations resulting from her experience of nine years as an administrative officer in early intervention programs. Some of the aspects of her position specific to the client group of families with young children from 0 to five years who are considered to be at high risk of neglect and abuse, and their workers, are explored, putting forward the notion that the administrative role contributes to the smooth flow of service delivery as well as to the therapeutic process.

### *Fathers*

Elke Andrees and Brian Hunt report on the experience of co-running a

series of meetings for men whose partners were either expecting a baby or who had babies and young children. Profiles of the men participating in the groups, their domestic situations, and their attitudes towards their wives or partners are described. The aim was to offer the men a therapeutic space in which to reflect on experiences of becoming and being a father, and perhaps having a depressed partner, and to allow the men an opportunity to express some of their emotional responses.

### *Substance abuse*

Figures available on the number of pregnant women who accessed substance abuse pregnancy services in 1996 are presented by Judith Edwards and Sandra Rees. Results of a Needs Assessment Report on parents with substance abuse problems in the Infant-Parent Program in 1997 raise issues such as the effect of drug use on parents' ability to look after their children, support of parents, and the consequences for children of being raised in a family where parents have drug use issues. The time around the birth of a child is identified as the best time for intervention services to have a positive impact on parents' behaviour.

### *Effect on workers*

The focus of the chapter, 'Catastrophe and containment,' by Ruth Safier, is on the impact of work with young families and children on the mind and wellbeing of the worker. Based on the premise that the therapeutic relationship is the important element in bringing about change, and that it is specifically the therapist's capacity to be open to emotional experience that mediates this, this chapter addresses issues of the effect on workers of being in close contact with catastrophic situations and coping behaviour.

Judith Edwards explores how anxiety is a fact in early intervention work because the work demands that workers remain open to the primitive non-verbal area of human experience. The necessary conditions to deal with anxiety in early intervention work are outlined, highlighting the need for a supportive workplace culture.

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*Ailsa Hamilton* indexes material for the Institute's *Australian Family & Society Abstracts* database.

*Inner Worlds – Outer Realities* may be obtained for the cost of \$30 plus \$5 postage and handling per copy. Contact the Benevolent Society of New South Wales on fax (02) 9365 7937.