

PURSUIT OF WELLBEING: SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

Parent mental wellbeing is often not addressed by child disability support services, despite poor mental health being increasingly recognised as a risk for parents.

About the project

We engaged in a partnership with Yooralla over 6 years to understand how to support parent mental wellbeing in their role as carers of children with a disability.

Methods

Interviews and focus group discussions were held with parents and with Yooralla staff members to understand their experiences before planning an approach.

A trial program to build staff skills and confidence in supporting parents' mental wellbeing during routine home visits was co-developed with Yooralla and implemented through their Early Childhood Disability Services.

The capacity building intervention program was progressively rolled out at different service sites over a 12-month period and evaluated using a stepped-wedge design.

Key findings

Our research showed parents need and want mental health support from disability services but staff tended to lack the confidence and strategies for providing that support.

Development and delivery of the new program was complex due to the broader sector changes under the new National Disability Insurance Scheme. Introducing the strategies to support parent mental wellbeing during this time of funding and service changes demonstrated the commitment of Yooralla to a family services approach.

A statistically significant improvement was shown in staff confidence to talk to parents of children with a disability about their wellbeing. Positive trends were also seen across a range of other measures including parent satisfaction and staff wellbeing. A reduction in staff sick leave partially offset the cost of the intervention.

Knowledge translation and impact:

Yooralla management and staff continue to incorporate parent support in their services.

Training materials continue to be available via the Yooralla staff intranet and within the induction training schedule.

This program provides a model for other disability services. Wider trialing is needed to confirm its feasibility, sustainability and impact.

In the current COVID-19 pandemic climate, effective strategies to support family wellbeing will be required even more as families of a child with a disability grapple with the impacts and ramifications of social and physical restrictions.

Strategic partners for translation of research into policy and practice

- Yooralla

Funding partner

- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) – Partnership Project

Key publications

1. Young D, Gibbs L, Gilson K-M, Williams K, Reddihough D, Tracy J, Tonmukayakul U, Carter R. **Early Childhood Intervention Services in Australia: understanding key worker experiences.** Health and Social Care in the Community. Accepted 5 February 2021.
2. Davis E, Young D, Gilson KM, Reynolds J, Carter R, Tonmukayakul U, Williams K, Gibbs L, McDonald R, Reddihough D, Tracy J, Morgan J, Ireland P, Kenyon C, Carracher R. **'A Capacity Building Program to Improve the Self-Efficacy of Key Workers to Support the Well-Being of Parents of a Child With a Disability Accessing an Early Childhood Intervention Service: Protocol for a Stepped-Wedge Design Trial'.** JMIR Res Protoc. 2019. 8(4)
3. Young D, Davis E, Gilson K-M, Gibbs L, Chan J, Reddihough D, et al. **Developing a new service model for children with a disability: What do parents want?** J Intellect Disabil Res. 2016;60(7):765.

