

REPORT

AUTISM SECONDARY CONSULTATION AND TRAINING STRATEGY (ACT-NOW)

July 2007

ABBREVIATIONS

ACT-NOW	Autism Consultation and Training – NOW Strategy
ADI-R	Autism Diagnostic Interview - Revised
ADOS	Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale
CDPP	Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology
ChAT	Checklist for Autism in Toddlers
DHS	Department of Human Services
ECIS	Early Childhood Intervention Services
PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorder
PEP-3	Psycho – Educational Profile (Third Edition)
ReACT	Regional Autism Coordination Team
SCS	Specialist Children’s Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In line with the goals of the Early Childhood Intervention Services vision and key priorities statement (DHS, 2003), the aim of the Autism Consultation Team: Now (ACT – NOW) program was to build skills and capacity to enable the network of regional early childhood intervention services to better identify Pervasive Developmental Disorders in at risk young children and provide a more integrated range of evidence based early interventions for these children and their families that will complement and interface with other agencies and services for young children and their families.

The aim was achieved by the development of Regional Autism Coordination Teams (ReACT); networking with their community through a comprehensive program of broadly accessible education and professional skills training workshops and multimedia resources; justified by the acquisition of specialist assessment and intervention skills; and supported and facilitated by specialist consultation.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The key element of this program was the community development of effective Regional Autism Coordination Teams (ReACT). An early task for this program was to conduct focus group meetings hosted by each regional Specialist Children's Service to identify potential key members of the ReACT. In some regions such as Loddon/Campaspe, North East Victoria and Eastern Metropolitan, these groups were well established and the task was to facilitate their involvement and ownership of the Children First Regional Autism Secondary Consultation and Training Program. The composition of the ReACT differed between regions given different available service and practitioner profiles but all groups included representatives from SCS, NGO Early Childhood Services, pre-schools and schools, paediatricians, general medical practitioners, CAMHS and regional autism assessment services and parents and consumer groups.

The ACT – NOW Program comprised professional development and training, provision of information and resources, community development and secondary consultation. As the expertise of the ReACT developed during the 3 year course of the ACT – NOW program, each ReACT progressively became self sustaining (See Appendix 2 for ReACT membership).

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- **A ReACT was established in each of the 9 DHS region and met a minimum of 4 times per year**
- **Each ReACT developed its own specific training calendar that reflected local needs and an action plan reflecting future training needs.**

TRAINING

1. Workshops

In concert with each ReACT and harnessing their advice and knowledge of regional service profiles and expertise we provided four (4) annual ½ day workshop training sessions presented either in a 4 X ½ day or a 2 X 1 day or 1 X 2 day format depending on local advice and learning outcome requirements. These workshops progressively involved the entire range of people in the region who work with young children and their families and come into contact with children with developmental delays and autism. Parents were also involved in some of the workshops. These workshops enhanced appropriate knowledge and practical skills in early childhood development and the signs of autism; screening for autism; assessment and diagnosis; developmental and biopsychosocial issues associated with autism; early intervention and management of social, communication, behavioural problems; teamwork and working together with families. The workshops included small and large group formats and multimedia presentations of material including printed and website information.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- **7,500 total attendances at workshops across the three years of the program.**
- **812 attendances at the Understanding Autism: workshops (3 X 2 hour workshops)**
- **4,115 attendances at specific workshops for kindergarten teachers, child care staff, HACC workers and parents**

2. Professional skills training

Three further more specialised and focussed training programs were provided that also enhance community development by improving services and their integration.

(i) Parent education and skills training program.

Evidence from the literature and our own work indicates that caring for a child with autism, the most severe developmental disorder, is a significant burden and stress for parents. The “Autism in Victoria” report made it clear that parents often feel unsupported and confused and lack knowledge and skills about how to respond to and manage their child. With the support of a NH&MRC grant (Tonge and Brereton) we have developed an evidenced based, manualised but flexible 20 week parent education and skills program for parents of pre-school children with autism. The training was a process of “see one – do one”. Early childhood professionals formed a group of 3-4 families of young children with autism then observed one of our team conduct the intervention program. Subsequently some of these professionals conducted groups of their own with our direct or videotape supervision. Some then proceeded to train, with our consultation if necessary, their colleagues in the conduct of the intervention.

(ii) Assessment and early diagnosis skills.

The “Autism in Victoria” report identified delays in diagnosis and access to timely early intervention in many parts of Victoria and the need for specialist children’s services and interested paediatricians to be supported to undertake screening and early diagnosis. The ACT NOW approach to assessment is multidisciplinary and has included offering training courses in the use of a standardised parent interview: The Autism Diagnostic Instrument (ADI) (Lord et al., 1994), assessment of the child (the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS (Lord et al., 2000), and the Psychoeducational Profile – 3rd edition (PEP-3) (Schopler et al., 1990). Working together with the ReACT we offered ADI/ADOS training to 2 key Specialist Children’s Services staff / paediatricians in each region across the life of the project and provided further direct or video consultation and supervision of their assessments as required. We also developed training packages for Maternal and Child Health Nurses to assist them in identifying very young children at risk for autism /developmental delay. In this manner regional autism assessment services were enhanced and more routine and less complex assessments are now able to be done by paediatricians and regional Specialist Children’s Services teams supported by the existing regional autism assessment services.

(iii) Autism in the Preschool Years– A series of three workshops (Brereton, Bull and Tonge). “Train the presenter program”.

We developed teaching materials for a series of three 2 hour workshops. The training package includes speaker’s notes, a CD-Rom of the PowerPoint presentations including imported DVD footage, handouts for participants and further reading lists. We offered training in the presentation of this material to each DHS region.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

- 71 early childhood professionals completed the training in the Parent **education and skills training intervention and received a Monash University School of Psychiatry, Psychology & Psychological Medicine certificate.**
- **210 parents have attended the 20 week parent education and skills training programme.**
- **Early Childhood professionals who were trained to deliver the Parent education programme have trained a further 12 colleagues.**
- **159 received training in the Psychoeducational Profile-3.**
- **20 (2 per DHS region) satisfactorily completed the ADI/ADOS accredited training and received a Monash University School of Psychiatry, Psychology & Psychological Medicine certificate.**
- **925 Maternal and Child Health Nurses were trained in the use of the DBC Early Screen and the CHaT to detect the early signs of autism.**
- **18 EC clinicians (2 per region) completed the ‘train the presenter’ program in the Autism in the Preschool Years workshop.**

SECONDARY CONSULTATION

The ACT - NOW team provided a hierarchy of Secondary Consultation that consolidated the progressive acquisition of knowledge and skills by early childhood services staff flowing on from our training activities and provision of information and resources. The aim was to help regional services, through the ReACT, to improve the integration of early childhood services for children with autism and develop a service that is mutually supportive and self sufficient.

Level 1 Consultation - focused on helping ReACTs to form and develop a vision and strategic plan for the coordination and integration of early childhood services for children with autism.

Level 2 Consultation - focused on the professional supervision required to enhance regional specialist skills particularly in connection with the Parent education intervention and the ADI/ADOS autism assessment training.

Level 3 Consultation - focused on individual or group supervision of specific cases or intervention issues. As each ReACT developed it acted as a clearing house and resource for agencies or individual professionals who needed advice or assistance on management or service provision. When the collective wisdom of the ReACT was unable to find solutions the coordinator involved the ACT – NOW team and consultation with the appropriate member of the team was organised. In most cases, rather than providing consultation on a 1:1 basis, individual or group case consultation opportunities were built into the regional workshop program, thus providing a wider education opportunity.

WEBSITE

A successful and popular website has been developed. It contains 30 fact sheets, regional training calendars, lists of further reading, quarterly newsletters about the ACT NOW program and links to reputable autism websites.

www.med.monash.edu.au/spppm/research/actnow

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