



Email Newsletter – September 2008

Dear all,

Welcome to the September edition of our electronic newsletter, and a special welcome to all our new members! In this newsletter, you will find details about;

- [PPSS Annual General Meeting](#)
- [KIC \(Kids in Care\) START Conference 2008](#)
- [Australian Foster Care Association Conference](#)
- [Attachment Issues & Your School](#)
- A testimony that [Intervention Programs Work](#)
- A range of helpful [resources](#)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members of the Post Placement Support Service Inc are advised that the Annual General Meeting of the Post Placement Support Service will be held on

Wednesday 29th October 2008

at

The Treacy Conference Centre

126 The Avenue, Parkville

7pm

PROGRAM

Annual General Meeting

Guest Speaker - Dr Dave Zeigler

Supper

Dr Zeigler is a licensed psychologist & family therapist who directs a treatment centre for youth in the mountains of Oregon. His areas of expertise include challenging behaviour, traumatic disorders & brain development. He has also written various articles, an assessment instrument on attachment, and four books: Raising Children Who Refuse to be Raised, Traumatic Experience and the Brain, Achieving Success With Impossible Children, and Beyond Healing: the Path to Personal Contentment after Trauma.



KIC (Kids In Care) START Conference 2008

A conference for professionals and carers. Over 30 workshops, an opportunity to view 'best practice' in a range of areas associated with infants, children and young people in care. Meet with colleagues and explore new ideas in a supportive, learning environment.

The KIC START Conference 2008

take a walk on the **Wildside the practice of care**

Date: Wednesday 29th and Thursday 30th October 2008

Venue: Treacy Conference Centre
126 The Avenue, Parkville, 3052
Melways Edition 29 Ref Map 29 F12

Cost: Early Bird Registration – Booked & Paid prior 1st
September

\$245.00 Workers
\$190.00 Foster Carers

Full Price – After 12th September

\$275.00 Workers
\$220.00 Foster Carers

To register, or for more information contact Leanne Bray on (03) 9302 2700 or via email at leanne@start.org.au.



National Foster Care Conference 2008

31 October to 2 November 2008

Novotel Brighton Beach

better outcomes

AFCA National Foster Care Conference

The theme for this year's Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA) Conference is "Better Outcomes". This year's conference will be in NSW hosted by the Foster Care Association (NSW) Inc.

This is the only National Conference dedicated to foster care issues. Attendees include kinship and mainstream carers; non-government and government workers; policy makers; researchers; students and academics; and professionals working in areas intersecting with care and protection.

The conference sessions and activities will focus on achieving positive outcomes or enhancing practice and, in particular, attempt to address the issues challenging the sector now and in the next five years.

Further details in regards to the Conference will follow soon, or can be found by accessing the FCANSW website (<http://www.fcansw.org.au/>) and following the appropriate links.

ATTACHMENT ISSUES AND YOUR SCHOOL

(The below extracts are taken from the “Adoption Attachment Issues and Your School” leaflet. Full details are available at <http://www.postadoptioncentralsupport.org>.)

‘Attachment Issues’ is a phrase being used at present to describe a variety of behaviours which may arise after a child has lost his/her ‘primary carer’. These behaviours can show themselves in many ways – children become overanxious to please, desperate to do anything to escape another abandonment. Some act out their chaotic feelings in chaotic behaviour. Others turn in on their own pain and withdraw, unable to relate to others. Either way, this can present major problems to the schools they are in.

What Sort of Behaviours Can Result from Attachment Issues and Why?

Poor concentration	maybe because	Scanning the room all the time for danger. Sights, smells and sounds can trigger desperate feelings of panic as reminders of past trauma.
Turning around	maybe because	Danger may come from behind
Talking all the time	maybe because	Life feels safer that way
Constant asking of the teacher apparently trivial questions	maybe because	It feels too dangerous to ‘get it wrong’
Ignoring instructions	maybe because	Too much anxiety to be able to listen
In trouble at intervals	maybe because	Panic sets in when in crowds
Disruptive behaviour	maybe because	Contact with birth family may be just coming or has just happened
Trying to create chaos and mayhem	maybe because	It feels chaotic inside so it feels safer if its around outside as well
Refusal to be helped with new work	maybe because	I was left helpless – I’ll never be helpless again
Lying, stealing, secret lives	maybe because	Life may feel like a lie – I am not sure who I am or what the truth is. I don’t know the difference between fantasy and reality
Special “explosions” around maths and spelling	maybe because	It is clear when maths and spelling is ‘wrong’ and being wrong may lead to rejection AGAIN
Sulkiness at meetings with head teachers or others in authority	maybe because	The child has no words to describe his/ her feelings - looking sulky is a cover up
Behaviour suddenly deteriorates	maybe because	A new sibling has arrived or there is a painful anniversary or changes at home

Practical Ways to Help

- Validate the child's feelings e.g. "You feel really angry today about this, don't you? It seems as if you are finding this really hard".
- The child will probably deny it at the time but will know inside that he/she IS BEING LISTENED TO. In that atmosphere, the need for 'dramatic' behaviour may lessen.
- Try not to tell them "Don't be silly", "Its only trivial", "It doesn't matter". It may be trivial to you but not to them.
- You are the responsible adult in the child's life at school. If you show the child you are trying to hear what he/she are saying through their behaviour, the panic may subside gradually and the behaviour improve.
- The child desperately needs the message "I want you here". Avoid threats of removal, exclusion etc. That is the greatest fear. If he/she needs to be removed from a room, try to put it positively e.g. " lets go to see Mrs. X".
- Try to find a way to reach the child other than through words. Words may be very difficult for adopted children, and yet they are expected to use words at school a lot of the time. If a child won't tell you 'what it is', he/she may experience more rejection. Maybe he/she CAN'T!
- Use music, dance, drama, play, art, poetry whenever possible to give the child alternatives to words as a means of expression
- Explain clearly any changes in routine and staffing. Explain the arrival of supply teachers. Explain why the regular teacher cannot be there. Otherwise the child may think the teacher has left because of him/her.
- Check that teaching material does not make it harder for the adopted child e.g. my family, family trees, genetics, sex education. Revealing information about adoption may make the child feel uncomfortable and different.
- At lunchtimes or noisy times is there someone a child could be with who will be reassuring – maybe an older pupil or adult helper. Ask the child who he/she would feel safe with.
- If a child is going into 'overload', have strategies to help defuse the situation e.g. listen to a tape, paint a picture, change to a less stressful activity
- Look for creative talents and gifts

Intervention Programs Really Work!

A testimony of lives changes

In December 2005 I sat in the Principal's office, at my son's primary school. My permanent care son was 6 years old, and had almost completed grade Prep. In the room was the Principal, Vice Principal, Integration Coordinator, class teacher, two representatives from the Education Department, Western Region, the school counsellor, my support person and me. The room was crowded, the atmosphere was tense. With over 20 suspensions during the year, possible expulsion was on the agenda. The class teacher was crying as she recounted the latest classroom behaviours. My son had scared his fellow students, his teacher's aide and his teacher with his most recent, violent episode just that morning.

It was my son's psychiatrist who finally sealed the decision to put my son into an intervention program. He was very clear that my son was not going to make progress until his behaviours were contained in a school setting.

Cheshire School in Glen Waverley offers an exciting, fun-filled curriculum that caters to the educational and development needs of children. It works on the premise that everyone can have a great time at school, as long as they are behaving appropriately (this includes doing excellent class work). Great work and good behaviour from the younger children is rewarded with fairy parties, sandpit and water play, dress-ups, cooking, dancing, circus school, and many exciting excursions. The students also help out at a nearby children's farm, cleaning out the bird aviary, and doing other chores around the farm, once a week.

There are only two classes at Cheshire. There are three classrooms, but it takes special teachers to commit to a program like this one, and the school has advertised unsuccessfully over the past few years, to find a third teacher. Each class has a ratio of 1 teacher to 8 children. Most of the children who participate in the program are boys.

All of the children have significant difficulties fitting into a mainstream school. Many use verbal and physical abuse, and property damage, as tools to express their frustrations, and avoid being labelled 'dumb'. Many have other specialists (eg. paediatricians, psychiatrists, speech therapists, occupational therapists) working with them.

Each term there are opportunities for parents, family and friends of the children to see their children being successful. There's a dinner for the parents, with the children waiting on the tables; there's a school ball, and parents have an opportunity to dress up and waltz around the floor with their handsome sons and beautiful daughters; there's a circus performance, and the children tumble, juggle, tell jokes and fly on the trapeze (catering to all abilities); there are graduation ceremonies each term, as students complete the program; and, finally, there's a wonderful, annual Christmas party, where past students and parents offer great inspiration to current students and their families.

Without exception, it's been my experience that people find intervention programs out of sheer desperation. Quite a number of the parents were travelling long distances to bring their children to the program each day, and many parents had needed to make special arrangements at work, to accommodate the school's drop off and pick up times, as there was no before or after school care on offer. By 2.50 pm each day, parents would start to gather at the school door. This became the setting for the development of informal support networks, as parents shared their stories, and drew encouragement from one another. The most frequent comment from parents was how good it felt to realise that they were not alone in their struggle to help their special child fit into mainstream school.

When my six year old attended Cheshire's intervention program he challenged the staff right away, and initially there was some doubt that he could be successful in the program. By the end of term one, he was suspended for five days, and I was beginning to feel that the travel and expense was not worth it. However, to my surprise, over the next two terms my son embraced the program, and I began to see significant, remarkable changes in him.

First of all, my son was suddenly better looking. He was really cute! It was the smile on his face, which had rarely been seen over the past six years. It was only a small smile at first, but it grew broader and broader. His eyes began to twinkle. He began winking, singing and dancing. He stopped wetting the bed. He stopped holding his family hostage each morning with his extreme and perplexing behaviours. He dressed for school each day. He attended school eagerly each day. He chatted about school. He was having fun. He was experiencing success!

Journeying into mainstream school

Hi. I'm a grade three student at St James the Apostle Primary School. Before I came to St James the Apostle Primary School I went to two other schools. They were called Cheshire School, and the other one is called Werribee Primary School. When I was at Werribee Primary School my behaviour was really bad. I had a whole lot of detentions and time outs. After a while I was pulled out of Werribee Primary School by my mum so that I could go to Cheshire School in Glen Waverley, to learn to manage my behaviour.

I had a whole lot of fun at Cheshire School. We went on a whole lot of excursions. Two of my most favourite excursions were going to the Polly Woodside and going to the Melbourne Aquarium. Nearly every week we would go to the Chesterfield Farm. We got to look after some birds in a cage. One of the birds that really liked me was a Cockatoo named Bert and I said, for a nickname, Nippy. We got to hold the rabbits in the barn. I had a whole lot of fun at Chesterfield Farm. I learned to manage my behaviour because every time I did something really naughty I would miss out on going on an excursion. I was happy at Cheshire School.

After a year of being at Cheshire School I left and I went to St James Primary School. The first year I was at St James Primary School in grade two my behaviour wasn't very good, and I had a couple of half days and suspensions. It felt difficult to go to a different school for the second time. My teacher was very nice in grade two.

This year I'm in grade three. I've only had one half day in grade three because I have been well behaved. I've changed my behaviour this year. The teachers are saying really nice things about me to my mum and other teachers. I have more friends than I did last year. I am feeling happier than last year too.

Thank you for listening.

Boy aged 9 years

Funnily enough, as my now seven year old's success became apparent, my ten year old grew keen to attend Cheshire School. He wanted the same opportunities that his brother was having. He wanted to spend two and a half hours with me in the car each day, having me to himself on the long and arduous commute to the school. He

wanted the praise and recognition that his brother was receiving. Most importantly, he was desperately unhappy at school, where in grade five, he was struggling to read and write. His behaviours were growing more and more extreme, as he struggled to hide his lack of understanding from his teachers and peers.

Cheshire School won't take two children from the same family at the same time, or even two children from the same school or social circle at the same time. This is to ensure that each child has their own space to work through their issues, and experience success. So when my youngest son completed the program at the end of 2006, I enrolled his big brother into the program, commencing in term 2 in 2007. I kept the first term free, so that I was available to support my youngest child's re-entry into mainstream school.

When my oldest son, now eleven and commencing grade six, entered the Cheshire School program he was reading and writing at grade two level. His maths was at grade four level. I was very concerned about how he could possibly succeed at high school when he could barely read and write.

In April 2008 when my oldest son, now twelve, entered grade six (I made the decision to hold him back a year also, to give him a further opportunity to catch up with his peers), he tested into many of the top groups in his class. His new teachers, who were yet to sit down with the Cheshire School staff and myself, thought that they were dealing with a child who was advanced when compared to his peers, and would need to be challenged! He is now doing year seven maths, and reading and writing at the 45th percentile for grade six students.

This incredible achievement can largely be attributed to the fact that my son desperately wanted school to improve. He was fully committed to the program, and determined to succeed. He understood how the program worked, thanks to his brother's prior involvement, and his goal was to participate in every excursion and activity that was offered (he missed only one). This meant that he had to participate fully, and work really hard. He found it extremely difficult at times, but his determination to succeed saw him achieve amazing results.

Another factor in my eldest son's ability to achieve was that a great deal of work had been completed around his social and emotional development over the preceding five years. This meant that he could leave the emotional baggage behind, and move forward to reinvent himself.

My youngest son had a challenging first year back in mainstream school. The new school took a while to figure him out, build relationships with my son and me, and learn how to get the best from my son. This year they gave him a teacher with an established reputation for building great relationships with her students. My son is flourishing now. The school's leadership team are missing him, because he's rarely in the office. Teachers and support staff at the school tell me, almost daily, how well my son is doing. Most importantly, my son's teacher was recently away from school for a period of seven days, and he continued to be successful through a variety of emergency teachers and split class arrangements. At his recent Program Support Group (PSG) meeting it became apparent that he had achieved every one of the goals we had set for him in term one.

Kid to Kid: A message for other kids when school isn't working

Hi, I'm a grade six student from Baden Powell College. I know what you are going through. I have been through a lot as well. You feel like no-one loves you, no-one likes you and you do not want to go to school because your behaviour is not good. You think you're not special, but you need to think again.

I was going through all this at Werribee about two years ago. I thought that no-one liked me, but I was wrong. My school work was not good, but then I met a great group of people. My brother went for a year and then I went for a year. The name of the great school is Cheshire School in Glen Waverley.

I was feeling very nervous because I did not know if people would like me, but I did not need to worry, because people liked me. My work has improved a lot. My behaviour has changed. I think my mum, my family and the staff at Cheshire have changed my life.

People think I am an angel, but I think I'm a saint ☺! Now I have a great family, a great life, and a great school – Baden Powell College.

Thank you and remember, think positively about yourself.

Boy aged 12 years

It's not sufficient to measure success by school attendance. Many children in the out of home based care system struggle to be successful in an educational setting. If this applies to a child you are caring for, then I hope that my family's story inspires you to seek additional support. There are many, great programs out there for primary and secondary students. Intervention programs really work!

Where to go for help:

- Cheshire School (5-12 yr olds): <http://bigtrousers.com.au/Cheshire/>
- Doxa School (11-14 yr olds):
http://www.doxa.org.au/programs/doxa_schools.asp
- There are many other good programs available...ask your school, paediatrician and support networks for recommendations

Useful resources:

- Downey, L., 2007, "Calmer Classrooms – A guide to working with traumatised children", Child Safety Commissioner, Melbourne, 36pp.
- Department of Education and Training (DET) & Department of Human Services (DHS), 2003, "Partnering Agreement - School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in Out of Home Care", Victorian Department of Education & Training, Melbourne, 24pp.
http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/placement-support/library/publications/placement/school_attendance

by Sandra Creaner

RESOURCES

NEW:

- *Australian Institute of Family Studies* – This site provides a link to the papers presented during the recent conference (9 - 11 July 2008)
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/afrc10/index.html>
- *International Network Foster Care* – This site provides the latest research on issues relating to foster care from around the globe <http://www.foster-care-research.org/>

PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED:

- *ICASN Newsboard* - This resource is updated on an ongoing basis so check it regularly to keep abreast of Inter-Country Adoption news and information
<http://www.icasn.org/newsboard.html>
- *ICASN Perspective Paper - Search & Reunion with Natural family*
<http://www.icasn.org/perspectives/ICASN%20Perspectives%20-%20Search%20and%20Reunion.pdf>
- *Australian Government Inter-country Adoption Strategic Plan 2007*
For more information go to <http://www.ag.gov.au> and follow the links to Families >> Children >> Inter-country Adoption >> What's New
- *Transitioning from the state care system: the impacts of in-care experiences on the post-care outcomes for young people leaving care.*
http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2007/papers/Mendes_9.pdf
- *Educational outcomes of children on guardianship or custody orders.*
http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2007/papers/Hunter_148.pdf
- PPSS Referral List – we provide a list of counsellors who have been recommended to us by at least one person or family (although we don't formally recommend any counsellor as an organisation). Contact us if you would like a copy of this.
- Child Parenting Skills - educational support services to prospective parents forming their families through adoption, fostering, permanent care, surrogacy and biological birth children. <http://www.childparentingskills.com.au/>
- Medicare subsidised counselling from psychologists – if you would like to find out more about this, the link on the Australian Psychological Society website (www.psychology.org.au) is: http://www.psychology.org.au/medicare/fact_sheet/

- Ruth Kelly from Ireland has been involved in a study on Inter-country Adoption undertaken by the Children's Research Centre (Trinity College) and the Adoption Board in Ireland. The research, which interviewed 180 families and nearly 100 children, is now complete and available as a PDF file from: www.tcd.ie/childrensresearchcentre and www.adoptionboard.ie
- Costs of raising children in Australia - based on research commissioned by the Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support and published through the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, this occasional paper (# 18) presents a collection of three reports on the costs of children in Australian families namely:
 - The estimated costs of children in Australian families in 2005–06
 - Updated costs of children using Australian budget standards
 - Costs of children and equivalence scales: a review of methodological issues and Australian estimates

A copy of the paper is available at:

<http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/research/ops-ops18.htm>

- British Association for Adoption and Foster Care (www.baaf.org.uk) - books on adoption and foster care. BAAF books can also be obtained in Australia from St Luke's Innovative Resources in Bendigo (www.stlukes.org.au).
- Permanent Care and Adoption - Teachers and Parents in Partnership - an information sheet for families to give to their children's teachers <http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/adoption-permanent-care/library/publications/teachers-parents>
- Permanent Care and Adoption of older Children - Information for Relatives and Friends - an information sheet for families to give to relatives and friends <http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/adoption-permanent-care/library/publications/older-children>
- Foster Care Association of Victoria website and newsletters (lots of interesting information) <http://www.fcav.org/newsletter.htm>
- Paediatric Policy – *Health Care for Children in 'Out-of-Home' Placements* www.racp.edu.au/hpu/paed/outofHome.pdf

INTERSTATE ORGANISATIONS OFFERING SUPPORT TO PARENTS & CARERS

- Post Adoption Resource Centre, Sydney, NSW. www.bensoc.org.au/parc/index.cfm. Information and counselling for anyone affected by adoption. Email: parc@bensoc.org.au
- Post Adoption Support Services, Relationships Australia, South Australia. www.relationships.com.au/what-we-do/services/post-adoption-support-service
Tel: 08 8245 8100. Nikki Hartmann, Coordinator. Email: n.hartmann@rasa.org.au
- Adoption Research and Counselling Service WA. www.adoptionwa.org.au
Counselling, support and outreach service for anyone separated from birth family, adoption, foster care, step family etc. Email: arcs@adoptionwa.org.au

WEBSITES/EMAIL LISTS

- Educational support services to prospective parents forming their families through adoption. www.childparentingskills.com.au
- Australian information on attachment – www.attachmentresources.com.au
- Information and news on a wide range of inter-country adoption issues - contact Lynelle Beveridge on: lynelleb@au1.ibm.com
- Advice, search and support services for the adoption triangle, care leavers and donor conception - VANISH - www.vanish.org.au
- Inter-country Adoption Service (new website addresses) - www.dhs.vic.gov.au/icas and office-for-children.vic.gov.au/placement-support/intercountry-adoption