



Written feedback on the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse Stage 2 Draft Five Year Strategy

January 2023

Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Parkerville CYC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the National Centre's Draft Five Year Strategy. In broad terms, we are enthusiastic about the opportunities for collaboration, innovation and best practice afforded by the work of the National Centre, as set out in its mandate and stated purpose. We welcome a resource able to be responsive to emerging and increasingly prevalent issues (such as harmful sexual behaviours and online exploitation), building our shared base of knowledge and best practice, and linking research and frontline practice (including support to frontline organisations' own research and evidence-building infrastructures).

Below, we set out more specific, in-depth responses to the National Centre's challenges.

National Centre Challenges	Our response
Challenge 1 <i>Child sexual abuse and its effects across the life course are not well understood or identified in the community.</i>	<i>'Collaborate to develop a shared language presented in a preferred definitions framework about grooming, child sexual abuse and exploitation, online and offline, what it is and how it affects individuals, at different times in their lives, families and diverse communities.'</i> - We welcome collaborative efforts to develop a definitions framework: this should be able to comfortably span community, education, therapeutic services, and be useable/translatable for children, young people and families. This will facilitate ease of comprehension, accessibility, and effectiveness. <i>'Commission further research into the intersection of child sexual abuse with other forms of violation such as gendered violence including family and domestic violence and other forms of child abuse, neglect and exploitation of services, and awareness raising efforts.'</i> - This is highly welcome: we support many families with multiple, complex needs, intergenerational trauma, and experiencing/at risk of poly-victimisation – both in our MIST and other services, including our Out of Home Care service, and youth homelessness and outreach services. We are looking to build our evidence base about the needs of this cohort of families, and would support collaborative efforts between researchers and frontline organisations.

Challenge 2 <i>People with lived and living experiences of child sexual abuse are often not believed and responded to with compassion.</i>	<i>‘Identify and commission research that will facilitate and build community awareness and understanding to reduce stigma and promote victims and survivors to seek help.’</i> - This is positive; however, meaningful partnership between community organisations and researchers, and/or supporting services to direct resources into research, would be welcome as part of addressing this challenge. Services and community organisations face challenges with accessing research funding, having the infrastructure to get research off the ground, resourcing the necessary changes to data collection and monitoring that embeds research and evaluation capacity, and therefore being research ready. Nevertheless, the benefits are significant: proper resourcing of practice-based, embedded research would help to produce a cogent and grounded evidence base, to support the ongoing development of the best possible services for children and families.
Challenge 3 <i>Children, young people and adults with experiences of child sexual abuse are often not identified or are not well supported when they raise concerns or disclose.</i>	<i>‘The National Centre will strengthen the capability of communities, professionals, services and systems to better identify and support victims and survivors... also identify other barriers to seeking and receiving help experienced by First Nations Peoples and people from diverse communities including CALD, people living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+’</i> - The core principle of our Multi-Agency Investigation and Support Team (MIST) is to reduce instances of children having to tell and re-tell their story, and coordinate services (including Police) to wrap around the child and family, through collaborative relationships and sharing knowledge to produce better outcomes. By having the Advocate involved at the point of interview – building trust and rapport, holding a non-judgemental space for child and family, and facilitating provision of immediate psycho/social/practical support – our service seeks to create as supportive and trauma-informed an environment around disclosure and initial help-seeking as possible. And by so doing, reduce post-disclosure stressors for the child and their family, i.e., supporting the carer/parent to support their child through disclosure and recovery, in what may be highly complex circumstances. - We therefore support strengthening efforts to better identify and support children and young people when they disclose CSA. We would welcome the opportunity to share our practice on multi-agency responses to disclosure, and learn from the best practice of others in the sector and emerging research findings.
Challenge 4 <i>Children and young people who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviour or experienced it require adults to better understand and meet their needs.</i>	<i>‘There is a greater understanding amongst service providers and the community about how trauma, and other relational and developmental disruptions can contribute to the emergence of harmful sexual behaviour by children and young people’</i> - We welcome focused efforts to address harmful sexual behaviour, particularly building best practice knowledge about how to equip parents/carers to respond, build knowledge and capacity; and how best to support victim/survivors who are gender-diverse, living with disability, are from Aboriginal or CALD communities, and/or neuro-diverse (given the degree of misdiagnosis with neurodiversity and trauma).

	- We also welcome focused efforts to understand the trauma experiences of children and young people exhibiting HSB, and building knowledge about best practice interventions to support recovery. <i>'Support the development and evaluation of developmentally relevant assessment and support programs for children and young people who have engaged in or experienced harmful sexual behaviour living with specific needs and in specific contexts'</i> - We recognise the need to adapt assessment to capture the needs of children and young people affected by/exhibiting HSB. We hope to undertake research to better understand the complex needs of the children and families that we support and adapt our assessment process, to improve our interventions, and to both develop best practice and learn from sector experience. Further, our research agenda would build our evidence about the prevalence and impact of HSB amongst the children and young people that we support. This would allow us to contribute to national best practice and knowledge generation e.g., around the development of consistent language, and contribution to a consistency of measures to track trends in HSB.
Challenge 5 <i>Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse are often unable to access the support and resources that meet their changing needs at different times in their lives.</i>	<i>'Identify and commission research that extends knowledge about victims and survivors, so they are provided with the support that meets their particular needs, at different times in their lives.'</i> - This is welcome, but again, consideration should be given to supporting the building and embeddedness of research capacity within services themselves. <i>'A better skilled workforce and better informed community create real and ongoing opportunities to support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to heal and recover.'</i> - In reference to the training needs analysis, we support efforts around workforce capability and skills (and this is something that we strive to keep up across our services, and explore further through our research agenda). It would be beneficial for this to be an ongoing, iterative process that can respond flexibly and with agility to emerging and increasingly prevalent issues (for instance – as we see in our service – HSB). <i>'Embed trauma-informed change within the justice system which enables survivors of child sexual abuse to proceed through a survivor-centric justice process which upholds their human rights, minimizes the risks of additional trauma, and ensures perpetrator and offender accountability'</i> - We welcome this, and it reflects the trauma-informed, victim/survivor-centric approach to our partnership approach with the Police through our MIST service. We are enthusiastic about sharing our learning and best practice to meet this challenge, and produce better outcomes for children and families.
Challenge 6 <i>Knowledge about complex and intergenerational trauma and dissociation does not generally inform responses to individuals with lived and</i>	<i>'Develop clear definitions regarding 'trauma', including complex and intergenerational trauma that support understanding the needs of victims and survivors, including clarity about a 'trauma-informed' approach and therapeutic practice'</i> - It would be highly beneficial to see greater clarity, in definition and practice, about 'trauma' and a 'trauma-informed approach', and we welcome this

<i>living experiences of child sexual abuse.</i>	commitment. We would note, however, the benefits of an integrated/multimodal approach that uses multiple modalities to intervene at individual, social-environmental, and systemic levels, rather than one limited to a single theoretical construct. <i>‘Commission research to understand the relationship between prior victimization, responses to it, intergenerational cycles of child sexual abuse in families and communities, and subsequent offending and victimization.’</i> - We welcome efforts here; we support many families with complex and/or intergenerational trauma, and follow an Intensive Family Support model (including, where necessary/appropriate, multiple Advocates supporting family members, regular case reviews, frequent and flexible contacts with clients, complex needs assessment, supportive counselling, family mediation). Our research agenda seeks to explore this further, and to use learning about the cohort of children and families particularly affected in this way, and adapt/codify our service to respond more holistically.
Challenge 7 <i>Child sexual abuse will not be stopped unless there is a comprehensive framework for addressing the power dynamics and factors which enable it.</i>	<i>‘An evidence-informed and integrated theory of change should form a collective and shared way of understanding how to stop child sexual abuse before it starts.’</i> - We welcome coordinated efforts towards an evidence-informed, integrated preventative approach. Our services see the impact of CSA for children and young people, and across the life course as its impacts are felt inter-generationally for the families that we support. We recognise the value of a public health approach to CSA, and are exploring ways to implement this across the organisation: through our research agenda, and how we structure our services and engage with CYP and families. - We also note the criticality of building clear step up/step down processes into service design: enabling children and families to disengage from services in ways that are supported, empowering, and result in a lower likelihood of presentations to crisis-end services.

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