



## Gatehouse Centre – REFOCUS Program

A program for children & adolescents who exhibit problematic and harmful sexual behaviour and their families

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## Who provides SABTS? (Sexually Abusive Behaviour treatment Services)

- There are nine Centre's Against Sexual Assault (CASA) who receive SABTS funding across Victoria
- In addition, Kids First in the north west and Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) in the east of Melbourne.
- Peak body CEASE for all SABTS service providers in Victoria including representatives from MAPPs (Caraniche)
- Current chairperson is Ms Kerry Burns, Manager of Centre Against Family Violence, Ovens Murray.
- Deputy Chair is Ms Jenny Wing, Manager at ACF

# History: 1990's-2000's



- Shift from adult intervention model
- Developmentally informed; effects of family/environment context.
- Close liaison with victim services...integration of work within state-wide victim treatment services.
- Representative body-CEASE-effective advocacy and liaison with Govt. Influential. Invitation/participation in Royal Commissions.
- Regular increase in funding.
- CEASE/CASA Forum annual training program
- Striving for evidence based and consistent practice yet scope for innovation.
- Participation in annual Aus/NZ Roundtable of agencies involved in this work(Initially under auspice of Australian Institute of Criminology) .

# Context – Language



Language carefully chosen to reflect both current legislation (CYF Act) and developmental context

Those under 10 years who have exhibited *problem sexual behaviour (PSB)*

Those from 10 – 17 years who have exhibited *Harmful Sexual behaviour (HSB)*

**Note:** Terms used to describe adult offenders such as perpetrator or paedophile are developmentally inappropriate and therefore not used to describe children and young people.

*separation of behaviour from identity of young person*

# Context - Legislation



- *Therapeutic Treatment Orders* (TTO) as a legislative amendment to the Children, Youth and Families Act – enacted in 2007 children and young people 10 – 14 years
- Legal age of responsibility in Australia is 10 years of age - wanted a developmentally appropriate response.
- Subsequent amendment to CYP Act enacted in March 2019 – children and young people 10 – 17 years.
- The introduction of the TTO enabled a more developmentally appropriate response, in keeping with more recent research indicating that *many of this cohort do not go on to exhibit SAB into the future* (Elcovitch, et al.2009; Longo, 2003; Longo and Prescott, 2006; Prescott, 2007).

# TTO – A family focused therapeutic response



- TTO – a child protection order heard/made in the Children’s Court – Family Division
- A therapeutic alternative to criminal charges – direction to engage for 12 months with conditions – Family also engage – Overseen by Child Protection.
- Family can also self refer and engage voluntarily without the need for an order. No CP oversight.
- *[note: voluntary engagement often includes the family being advised that no engagement will lead to Child protection involvement. A Structured choice?]*

# How do we achieve this?



- Takes a multi systemic and ecological view – whole of life
- takes a developmental approach
- more than simply stop the PSB/HSB
- increased quality of life focus
- Promotes healthy sexuality
- includes strengthening their skills and capacity for positive and respectful relationships both within the family and in the relationships of their future lives
  
- Responsive to the individual and family - multi modal in approach
- Combination of individual, dyadic and family responses

# Harmful Sexual behaviour



..”sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people 10 – 17 years at time of referral that also include the use of threat or force, presence of coercion, inequality of age, physical size and cognitive capacity ...” (ATSA, 2006)

- developmentally inappropriate ,
- May be harmful toward self or others,
- Or be abusive toward another child, young person or adult”....(*Hackett, 2014*)

# Sibling Sexual Abuse – A form of family violence



- A complex area- individual and family dynamics
- Our lens has been primarily on sexual abuse
- Same accepted definition applies
- Coercion may be part of the grooming process
- Aggression *may* be part of the SSA

# A case of Underreporting



- Statistics are largely based on sexual crimes reported to police
- Other sources (such as the families we work with) advise us the numbers are much higher
- Numbers of younger people (less than 15 years) are suggested to be much higher than official stats suggest.
- Behaviours of concern and the impact on the victim/survivor for the younger group are just as concerning

# From the field....



- For year 2017/2018 Gatehouse received 276 new referrals for children and adolescents exhibiting PSB and HSB
- For year 2018/2019 Gatehouse received referrals for 344 children and young people exhibiting PSB and HSB
- The enactment of the new legislative amendments which extended applications for a TTO's to 17 years saw a state wide increase in the number of 15 – 17 year olds referred to all agencies.

# Can we predict who will exhibit HSB?



- Despite multiple lines of enquiry ...“there is no factor X” that clearly identifies [or predicts] children and young people at risk of exhibiting further HSB.(Rich, 2006. p.237)
- There is agreement about common sets of risk variables within the developmental histories of these children and young adolescents that align their psychological profiles with other same-aged clinical groups (Chaffin, Letourneau and Silvosky, 2002).
- Individual differences
- Common variables in the family environments and relationships
- Secondary trauma – systems responses (young people in out of home care)

# Common variables in the young people's presentations



- *Atypical Neurodevelopment*
  - Autism Spectrum Disorders
  - Cognitive impairment
  - Learning disability
  - Language disorders
  - Behaviours of concern as a form of Communication

## Individual differences -



- Problems with sensory processing
- Dissociative Disorders
- ADHD – difficulties with concentration, attending and emotional regulation due to hyper arousal
- Oppositional Defiance
- Conduct Disorder
- Mood instability (Bipolar)
- Complex PTSD
- Borderline Personality Disorder - emerging
- Anxiety and depressive disorders – less often identified at time of referral, most often identified through assessment and treatment.

# The role of multimedia



- In the absence of or in place of social engagement in real time – gaming becomes all consuming – compulsive?
- Young children and exposure to Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty – tolerance affect?

# The role of pornography



## The ‘porn genie’ is out of the bottle: Understanding and responding to the impact of pornography on young people (Russell Pratt, 2015)

- ..”youth are the main consumers of pornography, with research indicating that young males aged 12-17 years were the most frequent consumers of online pornography”.. (Haggstrom-Nordin, Hanson & Tyden, 2005).
- research indicating that large cohorts of teenage girls do not regard oral sex as sex, but rather something that is provided to young men as a way of not having sex – thank the porn industry;
- pornography is also bringing an increasingly aggressive edge in its portrayal of sex.
- Australian research by Crabbe and Corlett (2013) showed very clearly that young men actually believe that what they are watching provides real templates for sexual activity.

# Common variables in the family environments and relationships



- an increased presence of family violence, past and current
- Attitudes and beliefs which underpin the use of violence
- Traumatized and under resourced sole parents – predominantly mother's parenting traumatized and highly dysregulated adolescent boys
- Financial disadvantage leading to an increased likelihood of the presence of neglect (Elkovitch et al. 2009)
- Poor boundaries – highly sexual or sexually repressed family environments
- Poor distinction between the roles of young people and adults within the family

# PSB and HSB – An Australian Snapshot

(El-Murr, A. Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2019)



- ABS statistics indicate that 15 years was the peak age at which young people carry out sexual offences
- Young men aged 15 responsible for 3% of all reported sexual offences committed by males
- Young women aged 15 responsible for 15% of all sexual offences committed by females (Warner & Bartels, 2015)

## Young people exhibiting HSB who also exhibit broader violence in the home



- 17 year old male – Cognitive impairment – social isolation – bullying – exposure to significant family violence – under resourced sole parent mother traumatised
- 15 year old male – ASD – bullied and bullying – exposure to family violence – under resourced sole parent mother traumatised
- 15 year old male – ASD – physical disabilities- overt rejection by mother – physical parenting style – lack of consistent stable caregiver – poor boundaries at home – poor boundaries at school – further rejection



Thankyou