

National Child Protection Clearinghouse

The Mission of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse is to help families and communities create an environment conducive to the wellbeing, care and protection of children.

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse is an informational and advisory resource on child abuse prevention, child protection and associated family violence, and forms the hub of a network of people concerned about preventing child abuse and neglect.

In a two-way relationship with the community concerned with child abuse and neglect and its prevention, the National Clearinghouse collects, shares, monitors and distributes information and resources on the latest developments in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. It aims to inform policy, practice and research in child abuse prevention, and clients are those people needing information and resources on the latest developments in the prevention of child abuse and neglect for their work.

Knowledge base

The Clearinghouse forms a knowledge base from which to inform policy, practice and research in child abuse prevention by compiling a collection of, and access to, information.

Resources

The Clearinghouse currently holds a collection of over 4000 items on the latest developments in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and ancillary topics. Details of all materials are added to an online catalogue which is widely accessible via the National Child Protection Clearinghouse Web site. A regular current awareness feature detailing new acquisitions appears in the Clearinghouse newsletter.

Bibliographic database

So that information about collected materials may be disseminated to clients, bibliographic information about resources

and materials is incorporated into the Institute's computerised, public access database, *Australian Family & Society Abstracts*, which currently holds over 4000 items related to the child maltreatment and family support area.

Database of child abuse prevention programs

Information is collected on prevention programs to serve as models from which other program providers may benefit, and to provide a picture of prevention activity throughout Australia. This information, which is incorporated into an electronic database, may be accessed in a number of ways: first, it is mounted on the internet site; second, clients without internet access may ring the National Child Protection Clearinghouse advisory service for customised printouts from the databases; third, visitors to the Institute may search the database on a computer terminal; and fourth, the database is included in the CD-ROM, *Australian Family Resources* (2nd edition).

The Clearinghouse draws on this knowledge base to support clients by providing various services.

Communications

Issues Papers and two Newsletters were produced last year for distribution to clients on the Clearinghouse mailing list, and for electronic publication on the Institute's Web site. The Newsletters include feature articles plus information on the latest publications and resources, developments in policy or legislation, and forthcoming conferences and workshops.

Up-to-date information on child abuse prevention is provided and maintained on the Institute's Web site. Features of the site include the full text of all Clearinghouse publications; dates for forthcoming conferences; regularly updated bibliogra-

phies on prevention of child abuse and neglect; and access to the Child Abuse Prevention Programs database. Australian and international organisations concerned with child abuse prevention are listed, with links to their Internet sites.

Between June 1998 and June 1999, 6068 visits were registered at the site. Between June 1999 and June 2000, 209,366 visits were registered. This figure represents an enormous increase in use of the Web site over the last year, and supports use of the Internet for disseminating information to this group of clients.

During the year, 67,242 visits were recorded on the publications section of the site. This figure, plus the mailing list of nearly 7000 individuals and organisations, indicates a wide dissemination of Clearinghouse publications to clients.

Information and advisory service

A free information and advisory service is provided through the Institute's Family Information Centre. The Clearinghouse Research Advisor responds to more specialised queries. A total of 865 requests were responded to during 1999–2000, and the take-up of this service demonstrates that it is much needed and well used by clients.

The Clearinghouse Research Advisor is a researcher specialising in the field of child abuse prevention, child protection, child maltreatment and other associated forms of family violence. The Research Advisor provides research direction to all Clearinghouse activities, in particular, the Research Advisor writes the Issues Papers produced each year, and has primary responsibility for the networking/outreach and advisory functions. To that end, specialist advice and information on child abuse prevention and child protection issues, research methodology, program evaluations and best practice, is provided to all levels of government, the academic community, non-government agencies, community organisations, members of the helping professions, students and the general public.

Research/consultancy service: A number of the requests mentioned above resulted from an offer published in Clearinghouse publications to provide more detailed support to service agencies who are in the process of developing or refining child abuse prevention interventions, and in particular to assist agencies to adequately evaluate their programs. The Research Advisor ran a well attended Evaluation Workshop at the Seventh Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in October 1999.

Networking: As part of the networking and outreach function, the Research Advisor provides a visible presence at numerous workshops, conferences and related activities, presenting papers and seminars upon request. Further, the Research Advisor sits in various capacities on a number of state-based and national advisory groups and committees committed to child abuse prevention or the improvement of the current child protection system. Networking is facilitated by the provision of the programs database which includes contact details for participants, and also by the formation and maintenance of a mailing list to which information is disseminated.

Policy support

The Clearinghouse provides specialist advice to policy makers, in particular the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and to Child Care and Family Support personnel from the Department of Family and Community Services. It also responds to policy-related requests from overseas, state/territories government officers, and contributes to inquiries, forums and peak bodies. In 1999–2000 these included consulting on the development of a new client intake policy for the New South Wales Department of Community Services child protection services.

At the request of the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse, two initiatives were carried out with the aim of identifying child abuse prevention and research activities throughout Australia, and thereby informing the Federal Government's funding plans.

National audit

With the cooperation of the Australian states and territories, a *National Audit of Child Abuse Prevention Activity* was begun in late 1999. The intention was to provide a 'State of the Nation' report on child abuse prevention, describing the range and scope of child abuse prevention activities throughout Australia.

Results of the audit will provide agencies and professionals in the field with an opportunity to highlight the preventative work they are doing and to disseminate that information to others. By identifying programs from which service providers can learn, the audit will help to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'.

Project staff distributed over 35,000 Audit questionnaires nationally, with the assistance of the states and territories. Information collected has been incorporated into a searchable database which will shortly be mounted on the Institute's Web site and kept updated.

Analysis of the resultant database will be completed shortly and it is expected that a draft report will be ready for the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and the various state/territory government partners early in the next financial year.

Research strategy

The Clearinghouse has been commissioned by the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse to develop a National Child Abuse Prevention Research Strategy. The project involves: a detailed assessment of the current state of child abuse prevention research in Australia, within the context of national and international trends in child welfare, family support and child abuse prevention; and the development of a National Child Abuse Prevention Research Strategy that can be endorsed and published by the National Council.

The project will complement the National Audit of Child Abuse Prevention Activity currently being undertaken by the Clearinghouse, and will inform the development, and/or funding, of research activities by the National Council, government agencies and other research bodies in the years to come.

Project staff have finished data collection via literature searches, a questionnaire distributed to the mailing list, and requests for comment from researchers and service providers in the child abuse prevention field. The report is currently being drafted. The project is to be completed and the National Strategy presented to the National Council in September 2000.