

When is the right time for allied health intervention? A review of Children in Out of Home Care requiring intervention.

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Background

Out-of-home-care (OOHC) health pathways have been implemented across the state of NSW based on a mandated statewide referral pathway. Children and young people are screened through a 2 tier model by health professionals and referred to allied health streams for intervention. Allied Health in South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) are mandated to prioritise these clients. Anecdotally staff were reporting low rates of attendance, and identified behavioural concerns as the main priority for intervention in comparison to the numbers being referred for Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy services.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was used to review the OOHC pathway within SWSLHD. A semi cross sectional retrospective file audit was completed to review a child's journey along the pathway and a survey of staff working within the OOHC pathway was also completed and was used to determine the therapeutic outcome for clients receiving Speech Pathology and Occupational therapy intervention.

Result

Results support the current literature about attachment and the neurobiological impact of trauma on children in OOHC, demonstrating the need to incorporate more trauma informed practices into intervention for better outcomes. The results also support modifications to the current pathway which may improve services to children and their carers who have been placed in OOHC and will be extended to those children now placed into kinship care.

Discussion

An emerging body of evidence suggests that children placed in interim OOHC do not benefit from immediate speech therapy intervention without addressing the child's perceived sense of safety and attachment disruption. (Perry, B. 2009). The project has identified enablers and barriers to accessing intervention and supports recommendations from neurobiology research on abuse related trauma to re-think how, when and why we provide intervention to these children. The file audits and surveys were used to identify enablers and barriers to children and their carers when accessing Allied Health intervention within an established OOHC pathway and the results are being used to recommend changes to the referral pathway in SWSLHD and raise awareness amongst all service providers for children in OOHC.