

KIDS THRIVE – BABY CHOIR 2015: Outcomes Evaluation

Kids Thrive received funding from the Ian Potter Foundation, Australia Council, Bannellong Foundation and the Harold Mitchell Foundation to deliver **BABY CHOIR** at the Banyule Community Health Service during 2015.

Baby Choir focuses on using music, movement, and joyous interactions to nurture babies and parents/carers in this vulnerable community in the early years of their relationship - increasing attachment between babies and their adults; increasing connection between babies, adults and their community; and offering a non-threatening gateway for parents and carers to access further Banyule Community Health services.

Baby Choir is a strengths-based program, celebrating and building on the current capacities of babies and adults, differentiating it from various 'parenting programs' which focus on correcting issues. The program was provided free of charge on a weekly basis to babies and carers attending Banyule Community Health (BCH). It was delivered as a 'drop in' program asking no ongoing commitment from attendees apart from what they felt they could manage, in acknowledgement of their variable and at times difficult home lives.

In 2015 for the first time Kids Thrive and BCH introduced afternoon tea after each session, to encourage ongoing connections and engagement for adults and babies, plus a weekly segment called '3 Tiny Tips in 3 Minutes', in which individual Banyule Community Health professionals introduced themselves and their work, and offered their 3 top tips for parenting and child health / welfare. Professionals were also encouraged to participate in the workshops with kids and adults, and stay for afternoon tea to chat with and answer questions from the adults and kids. These sessions involved professionals such as dentists, podiatrists, physiotherapists, maternal health nurses, community nurse and others, and engendered very positive responses from both families and professionals.

In 2014 Kids Thrive and Banyule Community Health undertook an extensive evaluation of the program. In 2015 we undertook a simple internal evaluation, collecting statistical data and gathering participant feedback, identifying the impact of Baby Choir for both adult and baby participants using the following summative evaluation questions

1. To what extent did babies and adults participate in Baby Choir?
2. What did Baby Choir deliver?
3. Did Baby Choir support positive engagement between adults and their babies?
4. Did adults have regular positive informal contact with other adults who share similar experiences?
5. Did Baby Choir support positive interactions between adults and service providers?

Data for the evaluation was obtained from the following sources:

- Statistical data collection
- Participant surveys
- Staff surveys
- End of year interviews with staff and participants

Results

1. To what extent have children and adults participated in Baby Choir?

55 adults and 66 children aged from 2 weeks to 4 years attended the 2015 program, with the majority attending on a regular basis. An average of 30 people attended each session.

2. What did Baby Choir deliver?

Baby Choir delivered:

- 21 weekly sessions
- 10 'Tiny Tip' sessions delivered by children's health professionals
- 3 staff reflection and planning sessions
- 1 evaluation session with participants
- 1 evaluation session with professionals
- 1 original song

3. To what extent has Baby Choir supported positive engagement between adults and babies?

In response to the question about what participants 'loved' most about Baby Choir, many nominated connecting with their child, with comments such as:

'I love being allowed to be crazy with my kids and how they respond'

'All the fun we've had here together really helps'

'My little one is more independent here'

'She gets so excited when we are coming to Baby Choir and we just laugh'

Maternal and Community Health Nurses also commented on the impact of Baby Choir on the bond they observed between adults and babies, and the professional benefits for them to observe clients interacting with their babies in an unpressured, joyous, group space.

4. To what extent have adults had regular positive informal contact with other parents who share similar experiences?

The connections made through Baby Choir were evident in the open-ended responses to survey questions, such as:

'I love the friends we have made – our little community'

'Sofia and I loved the slow dancing and sharing this time with others'

'There is such nice music. We love making friends and playing'

'We loved singing, dancing and sharing'

6. To what extent has Baby Choir supported positive interactions between adults and service providers?

When asked what they had 'learnt' from Baby Choir, adults expressed the following:

'How to calm my children with song'

'Lots about what we've got ahead of us – its great having different ages here, and having professional advice.'

'Relaxation tips for bubs.'

'The value of little people.'

'To relax more.'

'Lots of things: behaviour, food, footwear.'

'New songs.'

Staff expressed greater confidence in their informal interactions with families, particularly in having a reason to say 'hello' in the foyer, creating considerable warmth and relaxation between professionals and clients. In 2016 we will be continuing '3 Tiny Tips' and BCHS will monitor the flow on to participants accessing further services.

Conclusion

Baby Choir delivers significant benefits to its vulnerable adults and babies, and to the service providers who see this as a significant way to engage with their clients and other local families. It is clear that the program is a positive and joyous activity that opens up pathways and opportunities for families that may not otherwise be possible. At a more fundamental level, Baby Choir offers adults new parenting skills and insights to assist in their day to day role as parents and carers. Attendance in 2015 continued to grow – particularly with repeat attendances, and the building of a strong sense of community for the regular participants.