

# *Childcare as a “hub” of relationships*

*Promoting  
connections  
and relationships  
between children,  
staff, families and  
communities*





# *Who are we?*

---

- The Benevolent Society

- a welfare organization with a long history of early intervention programs, child protection services and childcare centres focussing on relationships

- KU Children's Services

- an organisation with a long history of providing a range of high quality educational programs for children and families.



# *Why form a partnership ?*

---

- Both organizations focussed on enhancing services to children and families in vulnerable communities.
- Partnering could offer a new dimension to support extremely vulnerable families.
- A shared recognition that preschool and childcare centres offer a natural place of connection to families and the community  
(Garbarino, 1997, An ecological approach)
- KU approached TBS to provide an intervention in a Sydney inner city preschool



## *How did we “do” the partnership?*

---

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) established between the organizations
- Joint child protection protocols formulated
- Evaluation framework established
- Staff and consultant engaged in project
- organisational resources secured
- Funding secured



# *The partnership timeline*

- **2001/ 2002**
  - project developed
  - intervention for 10 hours per week for 6 months
- **2003**
  - Intervention reduced to 4 hours per week (same preschool) for 9 months
  - Comparative intervention in alternate inner city KU preschool for only 4 hours per week for 6 months
- **2004**
  - The Benevolent Society successful submission for 1 year Families First Project in an Outer Urban area
  - New joint project planned and implemented in KU preschool
  - Existing project continues at inner city preschool

# *Who benefits? Presenting problems*

---

- **The community**
- **The families**
- **The children**
- **The staff**

# *Framework of the Inner City project*

---

- relationship-based
- based on attachment principles and enhancing capacity for emotional availability
- underpinned by Kobak and Esposito 2002
- made accessible by Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman & Powell's Circle of Security Project (2002)
- Methodology designed by R Dolby

# *Model for Developing Reflective Practice within a Children's Service*

---

## **Three key components**

- Attachment training for staff
- implementation of zones as a way to be with and reflect on the children
- Layered support for reflective practice

Dolby in Swan, Dolby and Croll 2004

# *Outcomes from Inner City projects*

---

- **62%** of high-need children showed significant improvement in behaviour (n=13)
- **60%** of children who had difficulty with emotional regulation showed improvement (N=15)
- **83%** of children maintained gains or improved further in the second year (N=6)
- **82%** of parents noted the settling effect of the zones on their children

Reference R Dolby & B Swan (2003)

# *Significant findings and observations*

---

- Staff less focussed on control and more focussed on being emotionally available
- Feelings of staff toward the children became more positive
- Staff retention enhanced with consequent continuity of care
- Environment for children became more safe and predictable
- Engagement with families fostered by physical yet informal presence of psychologist
- Support, supervision and reflection time vital for staff
- A minimum of 10 hours intervention per week for more than 1 year is needed

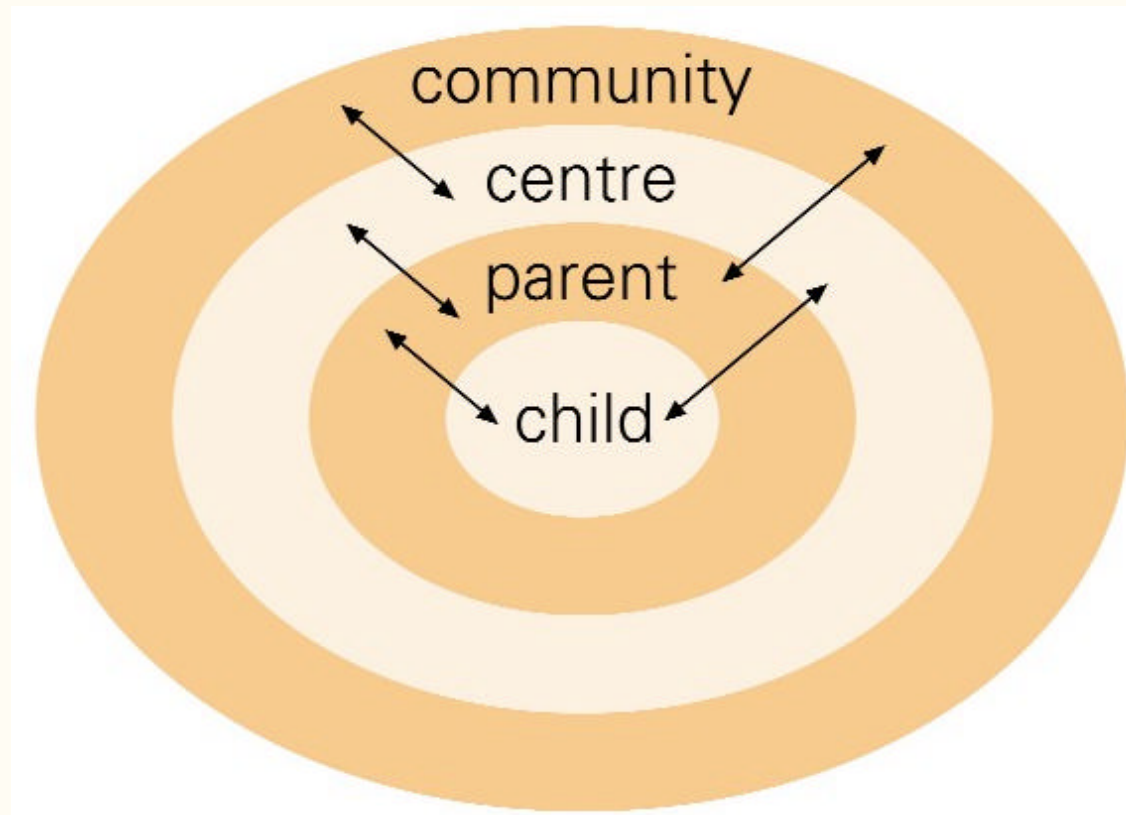
# *The Benevolent Society trials a different model*

---

- Where and who
  - Outer Urban Sydney region within a housing estate
  - A KU preschool
  - A family worker provides the intervention (not a psychologist)
- History of the new model
  - Funding from Families First for 1 year pilot project
  - Different community, different needs.
  - More vulnerable families outside the preschool community
- Issues / needs established for
  - parents in the community
  - parents inside the preschool
- Staff
  - identified families in need of support
  - **not** experiencing significant stress

# *The Framework*

- An ecological model



© Garbarino and Eckenrode, 1997

# *How did it work*

---

- Preschool used as a base for the worker
- Inside preschool
  - Informal connection, 1-1 support and parenting groups offered to parents
  - Referral resources enhanced
- Outside the preschool (in the community)
  - “Play and Chat” group established
  - a collaborative approach with Anglicare
  - Positive interactions between parents and children fostered and modelled

# *Results and Outcomes*

---

- **100%** of playgroup participants indicated that seeking friendship and information on parenting issues were the main reasons for attending.
  
- **100%** reported feeling less isolated
  
- **88%** of playgroup parents felt they had improved:
  - their parenting skills and confidence
  - their interaction with their child
  - had gained information on how to be a parent.
  
- **75%** stated their feelings about being a parent had changed

# *Reflections from Outer Urban project*

---

- Parents feel more empowered and confident
- Enhanced parent child interactions were observed
- More integrated approach to working with vulnerable families at an earlier stage
- Soft point of entry develops trust and sustainability between families and workers
- Transition to preschool/childcare supported
- Stronger community links

# *Components of an emerging model*

Hands-on training to increase understanding of children's behaviours and relationship needs. Support, consultation and reflection time offered to all staff. Classroom observation and support offered

Parent gatherings (both formal and informal) focusing on needs and strengths of parents Grounded in the daily interaction between parents and children.

Individual support and counselling for parents offered informally or by request.

Work with children, parents and staff at the childcare centre to identify and support vulnerable and high need children and families.

## **Partnerships in Early Childhood Program**

## **A psychologist / family worker alongside staff and families**

Supported playgroup, open both to families at the centre and to families living locally whose children are not enrolled at the centre

Group may be held in a community location.

Listening and responding to the community inside and outside the childcare centre.

Develop and maintain links with other local service providers, and connect families to those services.

Practical and emotional support offered.

# *Summary of achievements*

---

- Childcare Settings.....
  - shown to be accessible soft-entry points into the community
  - recognised as **hubs** connecting local stakeholders
- Able to meet needs of different communities
- A flexible collaborative and integrated working model for children's services
- model easily growable in other locations
  - now planted on the central coast of NSW!
  - seeds sprouting in South West Sydney!



# *Contributors to this partnership*

- Dr Robyn Dolby
  - Research psychologist

Ku Children's Services staff

## The Benevolent Society

- Belinda Swan
  - psychologist
- Sue Wyatt
  - today's presenter
  - Senior Manager,  
Centre for Children

## Ku Children's Services Consultants

- Judy Croll
  - Special Projects Consultant
- Carol Findlay,
  - Centre consultant
- Liz Lees
  - Centre consultant

## *Funding gratefully received from*



# *About our children's programs*

---

- The Benevolent Society
  - Early Intervention Program (EIP)
  - Child Protection Services
  - Volunteer Home Visiting programs
  - PlayPower
  - Early Childhood Centres
  - Partnerships in Early Childhood (PIEC)

---

# *Childcare as a “hub” of relationships*

*Download this paper from the  
Benevolent Society’s website,  
[www.bensoc.org.au/children](http://www.bensoc.org.au/children)*