

# conference review: training curriculum project (TCP) goes to Rome..

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Presentation of the Training Curriculum Project & Evaluation Data- David Dossetor, Donna White, Jane McCarthy & Lesley Watson

The theme of the 3<sup>rd</sup> IASSID (International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities) Europe Conference was *Integrating Biomedical and Psycho-Social-Educational Perspectives*. The Clinical Framework and its evaluation data were presented to delegates on October, 21<sup>st</sup> and were very well received. A lively discussion followed the presentation of the three papers and there was significant audience encouragement to publish both the curriculum and evaluation outcomes.

The conference provided a wonderful opportunity to connect with colleagues with similar areas of interest; primarily the growth of services for children and adolescents with intellectual disability and emotional/behavioural disturbance. A key attendee of our symposium was Dr Jane McCarthy, a Child Psychiatrist working at the Institute of Psychiatry at The Maudsley, King's College London. Jane was keen to discuss differences in our service systems and the allocation of resources to this area. Jane, like us, noted the relatively small number of presentations specific to child and adolescent mental health/challenging behaviour.

There were many inspiring presentations over the week, amongst these the plenary session given by Dr Ted Brown, which focussed on recent progress in understanding the genetics of intellectual disability. This presentation highlighted the genetics of autism as one area of new and additional discovery and talked to the number of specific gene mutations and copy number variations within individual cases. Dr Brown outlined recent studies on autism that suggest that there is a lower risk of heritability than previously thought. These same studies point to the prenatal environment and epigenetic factors, in genetically susceptible children, as poten-

tial contributors to autism phenotypes. This work is continuing. Included in the many fascinating presentations were several Australian research projects and practice papers that offered new insights into our work. Keith McVilly (School of Psychology, Deakin University, Burwood, Australia) spoke to the models of effective services for people with challenging behaviour and highlighted the current focus on ecological manipulations and environmental engineering within behaviour support plans. There was discussion in this session about the tendency to minimise the importance of systematic skills building, including a drop off of adaptive behaviour skills assessment for planning and intervention, rather than diagnosis only. This session highlighted the complexity of the service system required to meet the needs of this population and affirmed that bringing together critical elements of this system is achievable where a set of practitioners and the agencies they represent are committed to a sector-wide longitudinal plan.

Of great interest was the symposium presented by Karen Nankervis (University of Queensland, Ipswich, Australia), titled *Relinquishing Care*, which was seated within the Families and Parenting stream. This presentation focussed on the many reasons a family might relinquish care of their family member with a disability and considered the age of the person and the scale of their support needs as contributors to this decision. Several take-home messages stood out – the need for respite models to incorporate intervention alongside respite, as a means of addressing some of the causal factors that lead to relinquishment, and that challenging behaviour is often a key factor in cases of relinquishment (more than half of the cases considered as part of this research identified challenging behaviour as causal). Factors examined by the study included individual characteristics, family characteristics and the support context.

Also home-grown was Kylie Gray's presentation on the behaviour and emotional problems in pre-school children with developmental delay (Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology, Monash University, Clayton, Victoria, Australia). In this study, the Developmental Behaviour Checklist – Under 4, had been used to examine the behaviour problems of children in a community setting aged between 18-48 months, with or suspected of developmental delay. The study also considered associations with maternal and paternal psychosocial distress. This presentation underlined that greater understanding of the emergence of behaviour and emotional problems during early childhood is critical in developing specific early interventions. Kylie suggested that this may also provide insight into the origins of severe behaviour difficulties observed in later childhood and adolescence.

Following Kylie's presentation in the Mental Health and Behaviour stream, Eric Emerson spoke about the predictors of persistent conduct difficulties. An Australian sample had been used and the research done in collaboration with Stuart Einfeld and Roger Stancliffe. The bottom line was that there were strong and independent associations between persistent conduct disorder and child gender, socio-economic context, family composition and parenting styles at aged 4-5 years. The implication here is that there is a need for preventative preschool interventions for children at risk of persistent conduct difficulties.

Other presentations of note included a series of three regarding parental stress, moderated by Chris Oliver, a systematic appraisal of the evidence for behavioural intervention presented by Kathy Lowe and a presentation delivered by Richard Hastings titled, *Continuities of engagement: towards a revised analysis of staff working with people who challenge*. This last presentation provided an updated model for considering staff behaviour and support needs. This research suggests a move away from staff training and staff beliefs about challenging behaviour to a model of support that includes acknowledgment of staff emotional responses. Mindfulness and acceptance-based training were flagged as potential means of addressing staff avoidance and escape processes.



**Poster Session: A special school based initiative for improving mental health outcomes of children and adolescents with ID**

Thankfully David thrives under pressure, because as well as the TCP symposium during the afternoon of the 21<sup>st</sup>, he also managed the poster presentation of the School Link project. David had a steady stream of delegates interested in speaking to him about the details of this initiative. Many educators in particular wanted to talk about the connection of mental health services and educational settings and were very pleased to be able to take copies of the School-Link newsletter away.

All in all, an exhausting but enriching few days. ●

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