

Chapter I: Introduction

I.1 Overview

This is a summary of the first evaluation report of the Take Two intensive therapeutic program for infants, children and young people who have been traumatised by abuse and neglect. Take Two is auspiced by Berry Street Victoria (BSV) in partnership with the Austin Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), La Trobe University, Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Social Work and Social Policy, and *mindful* (centre for training and research in developmental health). Take Two commenced clinical operations in January 2004 and is funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS). It is a partnership of the service systems of mental health and child welfare and the academic fields of psychology, psychiatry and social work.

This summary report reflects the first of a series of three evaluations and is focused upon the inaugural 12 months of the program. This first report is a formative and process evaluation providing a rich description of the Take Two program, the client group, the interventions and the broader context. The second stage of the evaluation will be undertaken at the end of the second year of the program and will include an analysis of outputs and some outcomes of the program and stakeholder feedback. At the completion of the third year the third evaluation report will continue this in-depth outcomes analysis with further recommendations regarding planning for the next three-year research and evaluation cycle.

As a formative and process evaluation this first report focused on the following key questions:

- Has Take Two been established according to the stated objectives and expectations?
- What are the inputs and processes put in place in the first year of operation?
- Are these inputs and processes sufficient to achieve the stated objectives for the program?
- Is Take Two working with the intended client group?
- In what way is Take Two working with the client group and are the interventions in accordance with the available evidence and expectations of key stakeholders?
- What are the lessons from this first year of operation that continue to inform the ongoing development of the Take Two program?

This report begins with a description of the policy context of the Take Two program, followed by a review of the literature relevant to the client group and underlying the program's development and Practice Framework. There is then a brief description of the methodology.

There is a description of the program's design, infrastructure and systems and how Take Two became established and operationalised in 2004. The program's establishment includes the implementation of the training and development strategy and the broader research and evaluation functions. There is analysis in relation to 'who is the client group', followed by analysis of the range of interventions utilised. Specific attention is paid to the Aboriginal² client group who are significantly over-represented within the program compared to the general population; consistent with their over-representation in the Child Protection system. In conclusion, there is discussion of the implications of the findings from this initial evaluation, particularly as they inform the ongoing planning and management of the Take Two program.

I.2 Policy context for the Take Two program

The Take Two program is an integral component of the Victorian Government's current policy direction as outlined in a number of documents including: the Ministerial Statement (4 June 2003a) 'Putting Victoria's Children First'; DHS (2002) 'Integrated Strategy for Child Protection and Placement Services'; DHS (2003b) 'Public Parenting: A Review of Home-Based Care in Victoria'; DHS (2004a) 'Protecting Children: Ten Priorities for Children's Wellbeing and Safety in Victoria'; a Ministerial Speech (DHS, 7 September, 2004b), 'Launch of Child Protection Week'; and the DHS (2004c) 'Victoria's Child Protection Placement and Support System: Major Initiatives 2000-2004' report. Other initiatives within this strategy include the Innovations projects, the Looking after Children project and Best Start.

The government strategy aims to strengthen prevention and early intervention services and improve service responses for children more deeply involved in the protection and care system. It provides strategic directions to lead to more effective responses to the increasingly complex and chronic problems which occur for some children and families in the community. The strategy moves away from a narrow approach on risk to promoting children's healthy development. It shifts from a focus on a crisis response within a poorly connected service system to a whole of community approach. The aim of reducing Aboriginal over-representation in child protection and out of home care systems and an increased range of culturally specific supports and services is also addressed in the strategy. Associated with this approach is a call for evidence-based interventions.

These reports noted the need for greater access to therapeutic services for children involved in the protection and care system within Victoria.

² Aboriginal refers to either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children

'Therapeutic services are beneficial for clients with severe behavioural and/or mental health problems. These clients have higher rates of substance abuse, aggressive behaviour, criminal activity and suicide.' (DHS, 2003b, xvii)

The DHS submission brief for the intensive therapeutic service recognised that there was no comprehensive or integrated therapeutic service previously available to meet the needs of children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. More recent documents comment directly on the introduction of Take Two to address the complex and long-term emotional and mental health needs of the Child Protection client group.

'Take Two brings together many agencies to share their knowledge in mental health and expertise in service delivery to children and young people who have suffered severe abuse and neglect.'

(Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, MP, Minister for Community Services, 4 June, 2004, 5)

1.3 Description of the Take Two program

Take Two is a statewide developmental therapeutic service for Child Protection clients who have suffered trauma, disrupted attachments and other adverse consequences as a result of serious abuse and neglect. Take Two is funded by DHS to provide a direct service to Child Protection clients, as well as undertaking research and training to build and disseminate knowledge and to contribute to the service system's response to the needs of this group of highly vulnerable children and young people.

Take Two aims to respond to the child's needs for safety, healthy relationships, recovery from trauma and promotion of their development, health and wellbeing. The program emphasises the importance of

understanding each child and how they experience trauma and disrupted relationships within their life context. It aims to intervene at multiple levels to help the child harness resources available to them. In addition to a strong culture of specialist intervention and outreach, the program seeks to develop a research culture and engage all staff in monitoring outcomes and knowledge development.

One element of Take Two is early intervention within a tertiary context – to provide a service to children who have experienced severe abuse or neglect to assist them to avoid the extreme negative consequences of trauma on their lives. Another focus is to work with those children where the repercussions of this and related traumas are already evident in their emotional and behavioural responses.

1.4 Organisation of the report

Following the introduction, Chapter Two presents an overview of literature used to inform the establishment and implementation of Take Two. Chapter Three describes the evaluation methodology. This is followed by a detailed description of the design, establishment and operation of the program in Chapter Four. Chapter Five describes and analyses the client characteristics for the Take Two population in 2004 as a whole. Chapter Six explores the interventions used for the regional Take Two client group. The final chapter outlines the conclusions and lessons learnt from the first year of operation of Take Two.

Case vignettes are placed throughout the report to allow the experiences of the children to tell the story. Each vignette illustrates the complexity of a child's situation and the role of Take Two in responding to the child's need for specialist intervention. The following account of 'Dan' at the time of his referral is such an instance.

Dan

Dan is a seven-year-old boy, with a sister who is one year younger. They were severely neglected by their mother who had struggled with heroin addiction. Dan has recently been referred to Take Two.

Dan witnessed severe violence in his home, including the rape of his mother. His mother died of natural causes a year ago and the children witnessed the efforts to resuscitate her. After their mother's death Dan's father was unable to care for them. None of their relatives were able to care for the children because of their concerns about Dan's severe behavioural problems. Dan and his sister's first foster placement broke down ostensibly due to Dan's behaviour problems.

His most recent foster carers are less anxious about these behaviours and have applied for permanent care of both children.

Dan had two therapists work with him in the last nine months, prior to his referral to Take Two. The first therapist stopped because of the placement change, and the second because of a change in employment.

Dan's behaviour at school has deteriorated significantly in the last six weeks. This had not been followed up prior to his referral to Take Two. The foster care worker supporting the carer thinks Dan needs more therapy to deal with his loss and grief issues. Dan has told his carer he is behaving the way he is because he misses his Mum. The carer has told him that he needs to put this behind him and move on.