

# Collaboration proves vital for children in crisis

July 27 2017

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Credit: University of South Australia

Understanding the benefits of child protection, police, and child and family advocates and therapists working together in local communities to respond to allegations of sexual and other severe child abuse has been the focus of recent research led by the University of South Australia's Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP).

The research comprised an evaluation of the pilot Multiagency Investigation and Response Team (MIST) program, established as an innovative partnership between government and non-government

agencies in Perth in 2015.

The approach aims to provide a victim-centred and holistic [response](#) to allegations of severe [child](#) abuse. This includes bringing professional multidisciplinary teams together in [local communities](#) in a more timely and effective way, and early connection of children and their families to support services.

The research findings released today show co-location of specialist child abuse detectives, interviewers, [child protection](#) officers alongside child advocates and therapeutic services in a purpose-built child friendly setting had significant benefits for children, families and the response teams.

Through the allocation of a dedicated child advocate, children and families were provided with an ongoing and central point of contact across all areas, who also ensured referrals to the most appropriate support services to best meet immediate and ongoing child and [family](#) needs.

With improved communication and coordination across the response teams, investigations were concluded in almost half of the time with MIST Detectives finalising investigations within an average 44 days, compared to 86 days in standard practice, with arrest rates for alleged perpetrators being maintained.

The research also found that the professionals in the MIST Pilot reported improved collaboration and saw the MIST approach as offering real improvements on standard practice. Parents and carers of children involved were also highly satisfied with the services provided.

As lead researcher on the project from the Australian Centre for Child Protection, Dr James Herbert says the project came from the recognition

that although all workers have the best interest of children at heart, coming from diverse backgrounds and having different objectives and responsibilities can sometimes put different agencies at cross-purposes.

"Our evaluation of the pilot has highlighted some of the advantages in a planned cross-agency response, where all the objectives of these different workers and agencies can be brought together for an improved overall response," he says.

"The research also highlighted the importance of a Child and Family Advocate role; a worker that acts as the primary supporter and contact point between the families and other agencies, actively helping to address some of the barriers children and families have to engaging with needed services."

Co- Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, Professor Leah Bromfield says the project is an example of the need for and value of thinking across systems to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

"The research undertaken has explored comparable national and international responses and has shown that the MIST approach is leading practice internationally, for those types of very severe child abuse cases that require cross-agency approaches, which unfortunately our society sees on an all too frequent basis," Prof Bromfield says.

"Our approach to this project and the ongoing research of the ACCP is to work in collaboration with governments and non-government agencies to help to understand what needs to change at the policy, program and system level to make real and impactful changes to the lives of vulnerable [children](#)."

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Collaboration proves vital for children in crisis (2017, July 27) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-07-collaboration-vital-children-crisis.html>

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