

Tu Tangata Tonu

Supporting Children in Families where there is Parental

Mental Illness

Tu Tangata Tonu is a Pilot Project at the Kari Centre (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service at Auckland District Health Board) to provide support for children in families where there is a parental mental illness. Services are provided directly to these families, as well as to the Mental Health Services that support them.

Many parents experience struggles in their parenting role, and this can be even more difficult when trying to cope with mental health issues at the same time. Children and young people may also struggle at times in families where their parent/s are mentally unwell, and may experience emotional, behavioural, social or other difficulties. Meeting practical needs of children may become a difficulty within some families. We believe that it is important that each member of the family is able to get appropriate support in a way that promotes positive relationships and a safe environment within the family.

Services offered to Families

A number of interventions have been developed over the 2008—2009 year, including:

- Practical support for families via Community Support Workers from Connect, an NGO working together with Tu Tangata Tonu. Goals are set together with each family and supports are individualized to the family's needs.
- KIDZONE – a psychoeducation and peer support group for children aged approximately 8-12 years. This programme aims to give children age-appropriate information regarding mental illness, as well as provide opportunities for fun activities, and meeting others

whose families are affected by mental illness.

- H.O.P.E. (Helping Ourselves Parent Effectively) - parenting support and skills group. This group covers topics such as: the impact that having a mental illness may have on a person's capacity to parent effectively; developing support networks; discussing mental health and illness confidently and accurately with children; developing strategies that assist parenting during times of unwellness; skills for developing positive relationships with children; promoting children's development and managing children's behaviour. The group provides a safe forum for discussion and learning around parenting difficulties as well as the opportunity to build networks and support systems.
- A pathway to accessing family therapy and / or individual therapy for children via referral to Kari Centre or other NGO's if this is identified as a need.

Interventions will continue to be developed in the 2009-2010 year, including a psycho education and peer support group for adolescents.

Service offered to Mental Health Workers

Tu Tangata Tonu also provides consultation and liaison to Adult Mental Health Services with the aim of assisting mental health workers to:

- Improve their knowledge and practice around identifying the needs of their clients' children.
- Support clients and their families through inclusion of their children in Care and Crisis plans.
- Support clients and their families by providing age appropriate information for children regarding their parent's mental illness.
- Refer families/ whanau to appropriate support services.

Referral Criteria to Tu Tangata Tonu

- Children and Adolescents aged 0 to 19 years.
- The identified child/ adolescent has a parent with a severe and/or chronic mental illness, and the parent/ child is currently engaged with a Mental Health Service within ADHB (provider arm) and is eligible for public health services.

- The child or adolescent's family or legal caregiver is involved in the referral and interventions, or has given their consent for the young person to be involved, if the young person is under 16 years of age.
- The parent, child and / or referrer believe that the parental mental illness is having an adverse impact on the wellbeing and/ or functioning of the child.

Referrals are required from a professional who is engaged with the parent/ child, and who has met the identified parent and child/ adolescent. If a referral is accepted, we would like to meet the family together with the keyworker from the relevant Mental Health Service.

Research

Families will be asked if they would like to participate in the evaluation research for the Project. This is optional and will not affect the Services available to them.

For more information:

To make or discuss a possible referral, please contact one of the Tu Tangata Tonu coordinators.

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