
Our Practice Journey

Over the last six months the ac.care TSBC Program has been working towards the development and consistent implementation of a best-practice therapeutic program model for children and young people who present with backgrounds of instability and trauma. To this end, we have partnered with the Life Buoyancy Institute to develop an innovative therapeutic model called 'Synchronise'. This approach unifies the program components, procedures and templates of the TSBC Program, under the organising framework of intentional practice, a strength-focused and transformative approach to deliver safe and higher impact outcomes. Through this approach, all caregiver and programming actions now bring a strong focus to responding to the healing, developmental and therapeutic needs of children and young people. We share our journey and approach here.

Our Context

DELIVERING THERAPEUTIC RESIDENTIAL CARE ACROSS MULTIPLE REGIONAL SITES

The ac.care TSBC Program is a residential care program providing therapeutic care and support to children and young people with backgrounds of instability, abuse and trauma who are not able to live with their family of origin. The TSBC Program has six, three to four bedroom houses, across Murray Bridge and Mt Gambier (South Australia).

In the past 12 months, significant growth has occurred with the TSBC Program. This has included the doubling of the program from three to six houses. This has required us to bring a sharp focus to ensuring that the quality of the program is not only maintained, but strengthened.

We know that young people residing in the TSBC Program present with unique healing, developmental and therapeutic needs that often require specialist responses by trained and skilled staff. The hurt and pain carried by children can sometimes manifest in challenging behaviours that can be difficult for supporting adults to understand and respond to in a consistent manner.

Our Vision

A HEALING AND GROWTH ENVIRONMENT THAT RESPONDS TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

We are strongly committed to ensuring that our work is underpinned and supported by scientific evidence. In this regard, the research is quite clear, the care

environment, in particular caregivers, have a key role in providing children and young people with healing opportunities. This requires caregiving responses and interactions that are individually tailored to children and young person's unique healing, developmental and growth needs. We know that these responses often look different to traditional parenting strategies.

Our Challenge

IMPLEMENTING A HEALING AND GROWTH ENVIRONMENT THAT RESPONDS TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

We discovered that there are a number of challenges in providing an individualised therapeutic approach within a group-based residential care setting. These include:

- Caregivers bringing different personalities, worldviews and background experiences to their roles.
- A sometimes challenging and chaotic care environment, which can require a crisis management response (at times).
- The challenges associated with balancing individual versus group needs.
- High staff turnover and the heavy investment required to grow the capacity of staff to understand children's needs, and apply therapeutic language and strategies that responds to these needs.

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- Care environments require grounded, self-aware and resilient staff, and this is a personal skill-set which needs awareness brought to through recruitment, training and professional development.
- The rotating nature of a rostered care environment, and the stress this can place on children, young people and staff members.

We came to learn that caregiving environments can unintentionally foster experiences that have a suppressing or negative effect on children and young people.

We realised that we did not have a cohesive and sustainable therapeutic approach

In other words, the individual needs of children and young people are not understood, or consistently met through the caregiving environment, and through caregiver communication and strategies.

With this awareness, in 2016, we acknowledged that we were not having the level of impact we were desiring, and that the individual healing, growth and developmental needs of children and young people were not being as consistently met within TSBC Program as we would have liked.

While we had invested heavily in implementing therapeutic components and services, including Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI), staff training and clinical psychology support, we realised that these components or services were not always working in a unified manner, and the messaging and intent behind their implementation was not always consistent. For example, some services brought a stronger content focus to crisis management, while others were more behaviourally driven with less focus on individual children's needs and experiences.

In short, we realised that we did not have a cohesive and sustainable therapeutic approach that brought deep and ongoing attention to the unique therapeutic, healing and developmental needs of individual children and young people.

Our New Direction

INTENTIONAL PRACTICE

The method that enabled us to bring cohesiveness to our therapeutic approach, and bring ongoing attention to the unique therapeutic and healing needs of children and young people, was intentional practice. This method and system asked our entire program, leadership team and all of our staff, three key questions:

- What intent or energy is our program, and individual caregiving relationships, bringing to our work with children and young people?
- What outcomes are we are hoping to achieve?
- How, or by which method, are we seeking to deliver these outcomes

There was some degree of challenge attached to this process as we were engaged through a review process to evaluate our program through a different lens. During this process we realised that 'behaviour management' was overemphasised in the program and that we were not consistently considering the individual healing, developmental and growth needs of our children through the work we were doing.



What attracted us to the intentional practice method was that it was inclusive in its design, promoting a shared understanding of our work through common language, but doing so in a manner that empowered both our program and individual staff to draw upon existing knowledge, skills and program components.

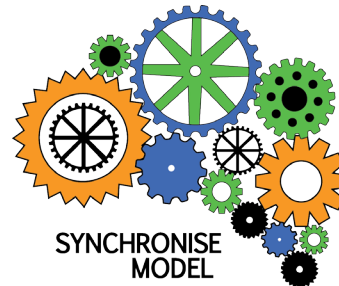
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In other words, the approach was not prescriptive, but instead supported us to describe what we were doing both at the entire program level, but also at the moment-to-moment practice level with our staff. It also gave us a framework to systematically build staff skills for therapeutic practice, and bring attention to children and young people's needs through all the work we were doing. We saw the approach as complimenting and strengthening what we did, as opposed to replacing the wisdom and experience our program had built.

We saw this as a transformative model of practice, which translated to higher organisational and staff awareness of the intent behind our work, including what outcomes we were seeking to deliver and the method or how they are being delivered.

At this time, we also realised that quality therapeutic outcomes in our program were dependent on having key and influential program staff in the right positions, but if for some reason they left, the therapeutic quality of our services had the potential to be severely compromised.

We wanted an approach or model that brought focus to high quality and sustainable therapeutic practice that occurred outside individual people, and could be maintained even through staff changes, and be scaled up across multiple sites as our program grew. In short, we sought a robust and sustainable method to ensure that higher quality therapeutic outcomes were being delivered. This was the impetus behind the development of the Synchronise Model.



Synchronise was founded upon a growth-focused model of intentional practice, informed by positive psychology or strength-based concepts. The approach unifies or brings together all program components, procedures and templates. It does so in a manner where all caregiver and programming actions bring ongoing awareness to responding to the healing, developmental and therapeutic needs of children and young people, thereby supporting the delivery of sustainable outcomes. The model includes five key features, which are unified under the construct of intentionality.

- **Program Logic** – This is a framework that describes all the features of our therapeutic program. It is underpinned by a growth-focused approach that brings high awareness to client outcomes, and the processes or components to deliver those outcomes. This has brought our attention to the key therapeutic program components that we must consistently deliver to maintain high quality services and to make a difference in the lives of children and young people.

Our New Model

SYNCHRONISE - AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF INTENTIONAL THERAPEUTIC CARE

Given the early piloting, and benefits we saw in the intentional practice method, we partnered with the Life Buoyancy Institute to develop a program model that was individualised to our program and context. We called it 'Synchronise'. This model described and brought together (or 'synchronised') all of our program components of therapeutic care in a manner that made sense and could be consistently replicated, and in a manner that brought ongoing attention to the individual needs of children and young people.



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- **Flowchart** – This describes the day-to-day implementation of our program to ensure we are operating in alignment with our program logic.



TSBC Program Flow Chart (Synchronise Model)

- **Procedural and Template Integration** – This includes key embedding templates, quality assurance processes and all procedures that enables us to deliver this program. This includes a unifying Care Plan document that ensures we are responding to the unique therapeutic, healing and developmental needs of individual children and young people.
- **Growth-Focused Intentionality** – We use an intentional practice training system, called IMPACT, as the method of building staff skills for intentional therapeutic practice. There is a focus on intentionality and 'knowing what our growth intent is' across our whole program which is embedded and supported with training, resources, supervision and clinical support.



IMPACT

- **Quality Assurance Systems** – Synchronise includes a number of embedded quality assurance systems, benchmarks and templates that allows us to monitor and track our practice quality.

How it Works

DESCRIBING, RE-ENERGISING AND MONITORING

The Synchronise Model has given us a language and system to consistently describe our work, and how we can consistently meet the individual needs of children and young people, and respond in a growth-focused and therapeutic manner. It has done so in a manner that has not required us to let go of existing knowledge, tools and systems (for instance TCI). Our work is about consistently describing the model to our staff, re-energising the key concepts and learning through supervision, clinical support and training, and monitoring quality through the embedding tools and benchmarks.

We are on a journey of embedding the Synchronise Model. We have a clear implementation strategy, and we are confident that we will reach an endpoint that culminates in a robust, consistently delivered and high quality therapeutic program.

More Information

The Synchronise Model can be adapted to other therapeutic contexts and/or programs using agency specific outcomes, program components, templates and procedures. We strongly believe in the utility, strength and therapeutic value of the modelling, and are very happy to share information about our journey and approach with other agencies. For additional information, please contact Michelle Toogood at MichelleT@accare.org.au.

For more information on growth-focused intentional practice, including accredited training and services (IMPACT Program), please contact Dr Ivan Raymond at Life Buoyancy Institute at ivan.raymond@lifebuoyancy.org.

