

Working as a Psychologist with the Department for Child Protection

Psychologists working with South Australia's Department for Child Protection (DCP) are responsible for the provision of a specialist, professionally independent, clinical psychology service which promotes the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who are the victims of neglect and/or abuse and who are involved in the child protection system.

Key priorities for the provision of psychological services within DCP include the assessment of matters that are before the Youth Court and the delivery of clinical psychological services to children and young people who are under care and protection orders.

A DCP Psychologist's role involves the provision of targeted psychological services to young people, carers and family members including:

- holistic psychological assessments (which assist in improved case planning)
- the provision of independent expert opinion and written reports to Courts regarding children's placement and other needs
- the provision of therapy and intervention services for children in care
- the provision of consultation services to field staff and residential care workers
- participation in case conferences and other formal case discussions
- the provision of training regarding psychological issues, including psycho-education for foster and kinship carers
- the provision of support and advice to enhance young people's experience of contact with their family members, and
- the provision of services to assist young people to exit the care system with an enhanced self-awareness and knowledge of their care history.

A DCP Psychologist also has a role in the department's broader practice improvement efforts through bringing a psychological perspective to the understanding and management of practice issues.

Importantly, the deployment of psychological expertise in child protection provides opportunities for prevention. Many people who experience difficulties related to mental health, substance abuse and criminal behaviour have a history of child maltreatment or neglect. The work undertaken by DCP Psychologists can help to prevent the abuse of children and the subsequent development of serious and often treatment-resistant difficulties in adulthood.

DCP Psychologists are located in Psychological Services, a business unit within DCP. The structure of Psychological Services supports dedicated teams of psychologists to provide services to:

- DCP Offices in the metropolitan and country regions, and
- children and their carers in family-based and non-family based alternative care.

Each team operates under the leadership of a Lead Clinical Psychologist and provides:

- expert clinical and forensic psychological services
- a focal point for consultation and expert psychological opinion, and
- an expert witness service to the Youth Court.



In the child protection context, psychological assessments assist DCP case managers to make decisions regarding children's needs and in particular their future care arrangements. Assessments may provide DCP with advice regarding:

- parents' ability to provide children with appropriate care and protection, and
- children's:
 - future care arrangements
 - family contact
 - attachments with family members, and
 - psychological functioning (intellectual, educational, social, emotional and behavioural functioning).

Therapy and intervention services may involve working with children and their carers and/or parents to address children's attachment difficulties and experience of abuse and trauma.

Psychological services in the alternative care area include:

- staff and carer training, consultation, professional guidance and expert advice
- information to staff and carers
- development of behaviour management interventions for individual young people
- clinical assessments and reports
- individual therapy as appropriate
- input into service direction and development
- attendance at various client-related meetings (eg schools)
- representation on various forums, groups, committees, and working parties, at various levels
- input into practice papers, clinical and operational guidelines and contributions to research
- delivery of brief interventions for identified individual young people.

DCP Psychological Services Panel for Children and Young People

Psychological Services also manages the outsourcing of referrals for psychological assessments and therapy/intervention services to an approved (via a departmental procurement process) panel of private providers. Referrals are outsourced to private providers to assist Psychological Services to meet the demand for services, and in cases where a particular specialist service (eg neuropsychological assessment) is not available in-house.

Child & Family Clinics

DCP supports the operation of two university-linked clinics: the Southern Child & Family Clinic in partnership with the Flinders University of SA, and the Northern Child and Family Clinic (Ngartunna Wiltanendi) in partnership with The University of Adelaide. The Clinics provide supervised placement experience to students enrolled in the Master of Psychology (Clinical) degree. Students on placement work under the supervision of the Clinic Director (a Psychology Board of Australia endorsed Clinical Psychologist) to undertake non-Court related psychological assessments and interventions with DCP clients.

Why choose a career as a DCP Psychologist?

- an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children and young people
- an opportunity to develop specialist skills in child protection psychology
- a strong supervision structure
- good access to peer and senior support
- support to meet professional development requirements for maintenance of registration
- supervision towards clinical endorsement can be negotiated
- benefits of public sector employment (eg good pay and conditions, flexible work arrangements, salary sacrifice options and generous employer super contribution).

Inquiries

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