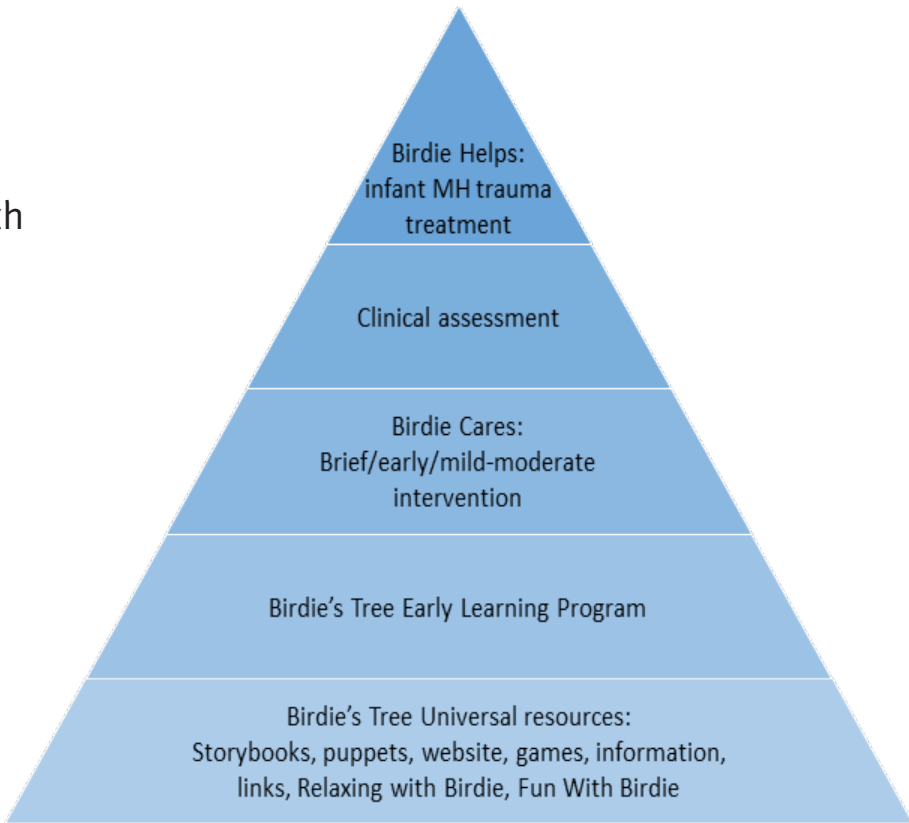


Birdie's Tree

Disaster Risk in Early Childhood Education

Sharleen Keleher - Central Queensland University
Anita Nepean-Hutchison - Qld Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health

Natural hazards, disasters and disruptive events like cyclones, floods, bushfires and drought can profoundly affect the mental health and emotional wellbeing of babies and children. Early childhood educators are well-placed to help young children process stressful experiences
BUT
many educators feel they don't have the knowledge or experience to support children emotionally through these events. QCPIMH has developed a suite of resources to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of infants, young children and those who care for them. Birdie's Tree helps in preparedness, response and recovery phases of disasters and disruptive events.



Birdie's Tree Early Learning Program

QCPIMH and CQUniversity collaborated to design and trial an early learning program, supported by a professional learning program for early childhood educators

The Birdie's Tree Early Learning Program provides educators with:

- Information about how disasters and other traumatic experiences can impact on young children.
- Strategies for creating a healing environment.
- Tips for identifying signs of stress and trauma in young children (age / developmentally appropriate).
- Educational programs and activities for children from 0 – 2 years, and 3 – 4 years.



Evaluation

The Birdie's Tree Professional Learning Program was implemented in 16 learning services, engaging 128 educators across urban, regional, rural and peri-urban communities in Queensland and New South Wales:

Program Structure

- Introductory workshop
- Module 1: Exploring emotions through play
- Module 2: Exploring disaster resilience through play
- Module 3: Responding together
- Module 4: Identifying signs of stress and trauma
- Module 5: Educator self-care
- Focus group/Professional conversations

Outcomes of Evaluation

- Increased knowledge of how to talk to babies and young children about "big feelings" and disruptive events.
- Creating learning environments for babies and young children to learn about weather, climate change and disruptive events supported by carers.
- Access to evidence-based resources designed for younger age groups
- Importance of strengthening relationships between educators and children, educators and families, early learning services and external organisations (e.g. emergency services, health) to support resilience.
- Creating space for professional conversations that support professional growth, collaboration and connections between stakeholders that work with young children and their families.
- Encouraging and supporting reflective practice.

Next steps:

- Revision of the Birdie's Tree Early Learning Program Guide and the Professional Development Program based on feedback from the evaluation
- Additions to the Birdie's Tree suite of resources
- Dissemination of the Birdie's Tree Early Learning Program

Links to Early Years Learning Framework & National Quality Standards

The Birdie's Tree Learning Program supports children's learning and development in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) and the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2019):

- Outcome 1:** Children have a strong sense of identity
- Outcome 2:** Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Outcome 3:** Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Outcome 4:** Children are confident and involved learners
- Outcome 5:** Children are effective communicators
- Principle 1:** Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Principle 2:** Partnerships
- Principle 5:** Ongoing learning and reflective practice
- Quality Area 1:** Educational program and practice
- Quality Area 2:** Children's health and safety
- Quality Area 3:** Physical environment
- Quality Area 4:** Staffing arrangements
- Quality Area 5:** Relationships with children
- Quality Area 6:** Collaborative partnerships with families and communities



Educator quotes:

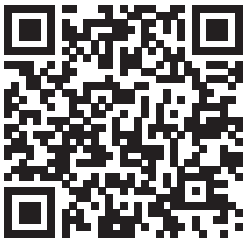
"Our children were kind of in the mindset of they needed to help, they needed to do something about something this drought, they needed to be the heroes of the story...they really loved the whole volunteer thing...one them suggested that we would be water soldiers, and we went through all these different ideas on how we would start saving water, so that we wouldn't be in a drought, and they came up with all their own ideas...even today I heard a little one go in and say "turn off the tap, Birdie has no water", so they really, like they're contributing to this drought thing...it didn't rain for like four weeks straight ... every day we would go through our weather chart and we would ask the clouds to rain... one day it did and we took buckets out and saved the water and watered the gardens, and that was really nice, so they really felt like they helped Birdie in that way"

"Allowing time and space for children to process their emotions – we're noticing more when certain kids need space and quiet time... encouraging the other children to notice this too and respecting when others need that quiet time".

"We are their safe spaces.... they [the children] need places they recognise and they need us to be here when something bad happens, and you're always going to be there and not let them down"

"... there was an activity in the sandpit, just about flooding, and we made a bank with like the water and the hose and the sand and the river bank broke and we had some little animals and toys like down like further in the sandpit and they just watched the water like how fast it can come down and destroy what we have and one little boy was like "that's really sad when that happens, I'll give my mum a hug".

If you have the internet on a phone, tablet or computer, you can read Birdie storybooks and play more games online.
Search 'Birdie's Tree' or scan the QR code.
E: Birdies-Tree@health.qld.gov.au



Children's Health Queensland
Hospital and Health Service

