

Vancouver Coastal Safe Babies Program



Contributing factors to development of the project:

- Increased number of infants entering foster care system
- Increased awareness of the effects of prenatal substance exposure on the newborn and child
- Baby M investigation (1998)



2009 Profile of infants in foster care

- Total of 82 infants from Vancouver, Richmond, North Vancouver and West Vancouver placed in foster homes – 39 from birth/ 43 from biological parents home later
- Ethnicity: First nations, Caucasian, Chinese
- Known substance abuse history: 55%
- After 1 year: 35 infants no longer in MCFD care – 27 returned to parent or relative and 8 were adopted

Context of evidence for prenatal substance exposure



- Each infant responds and develops individually
- Continuum of effects
- Many confounding factors
- Research is difficult to conduct
- Few long term studies available

Vulnerability processes for infants:

- Biological vulnerability due to prenatal stressors (substance exposure, maternal health)
- Birth family issues such as poverty, stress, drug-using environment
- Infant “temperament”
- Inconsistent or disrupted caregiving

Protective processes for infants:

- Parenting practices, skill of caregiver
- Family social supports
- Ability of infant to communicate needs
- Supportive professionals
- Specialized guidelines and policies
- Supportive physical environment

Resilience:

- The maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging life conditions
- Thriving within the context of adversity
- The human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by the adversities of life (International Resiliency Project, 1995).

History of Program in Vancouver Coastal Region

- 2000 Safe Babies program started
- 2001 MCFD contracted with Vancouver Coastal Health to hire a Public Health Nurse to coordinate the program and provide training and supports to program
- Public Health nurse focused on partnerships with Vancouver Coastal Health, BC Women's Hospital (Fir Square), Aboriginal Social Services (VACFSS and nations within region), Infant Development Program

Components of Vancouver Safe Babies Program

- Safe Babies Foster parent training program
- Safe Babies Advisory committee meets 4 times per year: composed of foster parents representing the population of foster parents in region, Resource social workers from MCFD and VACFSS, Safe Babies Public health nurse
- Monthly Safe Babies Foster Parents support group meetings for foster parents – with an education component as recommended by Advisory committee
- Newsletter sent to all Safe Babies foster homes 2 times per year
- Mentorship of newly trained foster parents by experienced Safe Babies foster parents

2010 Safe Babies 10th Anniversary

- In recognition of the Safe Babies program 10th anniversary, MCFD and VCH sponsored Evelyn Wotherspoon, RSW, to speak to foster parents, health, and social services professionals.
- Issues of Infant abuse and neglect – including current research for clinicians working with infants 0 – 3 years in foster care were discussed

Impact of workshop:

- Over 300 participants including: foster parents, health and social services professionals
- Greater understanding on the impact of trauma on brain development
- Greater understanding of the impact of early childhood trauma on parents when they are parenting their own children
- Knowledge on the importance of social emotional development during the first 3 years

Prevention of violence, abuse and neglect in foster children:

- All foster parents and relief caregivers must have criminal record checks every 3 years
- Safe Babies foster parents must take 2 day training and 52 hour MCFD training
- Period of PURPLE CRY DVD (prevention of shaken baby syndrome) has been distributed to all infant foster homes and must be watched annually by all caregivers
- Foster parents have a safety plan with respite caregivers they can call when needed.

Research Study

- 2003 – 2004 a research study was done in the Vancouver region with 22 infants in foster care who were prenatally exposed to 2 or more substances
- The evidence showed that infants in early specialized foster care had better than expected developmental outcomes
- There was no evidence of clinically significant atypical development
- Study involved both full term and premature infants
- Researchers are recommending further studies with larger samples and a longer follow-up period

Safe Babies Training includes:

- CPR Level B
- Substance exposure
- Health and Safety
- Neurodevelopment
- Partnerships with birth parents
- Sheway and Fir Square update
- Care for the Caregiver
- Role of the resource worker

Safe Babies Training Course

