

Thirdlink Charity profile - Act for Kids

‘Our vision is for all kids to have a safe and happy childhood, free from abuse or neglect’.

Act for Kids is an Australian charity providing free therapy and support services to children and families who have experienced or are at risk of child abuse or neglect. Act for Kids has helped thousands of children and families over the last 30 years through its deliberate strategy in supporting the children and families they work with as well as the wider community. Act for Kids operates under three pillars of service – prevention, treatment and education. A range of support services delivered across multiple locations underpin the three pillars.



HISTORY

Act for Kids was established in 1988 when a group of health professionals launched a public campaign to fund a treatment and rehabilitation centre in Brisbane for abused and neglected kids. Working out of premises provided by the Queensland Government, the treatment centre treated more than 140 kids in the first year. Momentum continued to grow and over the next thirty years, Act for Kids has gone on to open more than 26 centres and employ over 350 staff members. In the 2016-17 financial year alone, Act for Kids supported more than 34,000 children and families through its education, treatment and prevention programs. Sadly however, the need for Act for Kids services continues to grow and in FY16-17 alone, more than 49,000 children were confirmed as abused or neglected.

KEY PROGRAMS

Act for Kids runs more than 12 programs supporting the needs of children and families across Australia. Below is a snapshot of the important work they do.

Integrated Therapy Service is a fully integrated therapeutic service for children who have behavioural, emotional and/or developmental difficulties due to trauma from abuse and neglect or who are at risk of harm. Children, young people, their families and/or carers work with a psychologist, speech and language pathologist and occupational therapist to enhance the wellbeing of children and improve their relationships with the people around them.

Flourish Child & Family Therapy is a school-based counselling service delivered by Act for Kids and funded by the government for children and families who have experienced or are at risk of harm. It provides the same integrated therapy approach as the Integrated Therapy Service and is free of charge for the children and families involved.

Intensive Family Support provides case management support to families at risk of entering the child protection system. Trained social workers support struggling families with issues such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, poor financial management and parental stress. They help families learn to cope, provide health and wellbeing resources, connect families with local services and support families with their cultural needs.

Family & Child Connect is a Queensland Government initiative that, in partnership with Act for Kids, endeavours to provide advice, information and/or referrals to anyone interested in the safety and wellbeing of children and families. Anyone, including parents, family members and community members, can contact Family and Child Connect for advice and information.



Learn to be safe with Emmy & friends is a protective behaviours program facilitated for children in grade one at primary schools. To prevent potential harm, it is crucial young children learn to identify when they don't feel safe and know safe adults they can ask for help. The program consists of five weeks of interactive classes teaching children to identify their feelings, differences between their public and private parts of the body, safe and unsafe secrets and how to manage different situations that make them feel unsafe.

CLIENT BASE

Act for Kids works with children aged 0-18 and their families and/or carers who have been affected by child abuse and neglect or are at risk of harm.

EVIDENCE BASE

Research on interventions for traumatised children clearly identifies an ecological approach as providing stronger outcomes. Act for Kids' methodology therefore centres around Integrated Therapy, working with children, young people and their families and often includes teachers and other professionals where appropriate.

All Act for Kids programs track outcomes through pre- and post-intervention measures of functioning and wellbeing. The child and family wellbeing and functioning measures identify whether a particular area is a challenge or a strength. On average, the pre-intervention scores indicate challenges across the board. The average post-intervention scores indicate improvements in most areas to bring functioning into the average/normal range. The areas that are measured include children's sense of belonging, sense of identity, their relationships with peers, relationships with family and meeting developmental milestones.

Act for Kids partnered with Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology and James Cook

University to evaluate the 'Learn to be safe with Emmy & friends' program in the very first large, multi-site randomised controlled trial of school-based protective behaviours programs in Australia. The results show that compared to children who had not yet received the program, those who participated in the program demonstrated a substantial increase in protective behaviours knowledge which was maintained at six-month follow-up.

HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE NOT JUST SURVIVE

At Act for Kids, there is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to therapy. Each child receives a personalised treatment plan to help them achieve the best possible outcomes on their road to recovery. The integrated teams work together in a unique model that addresses each child's development delays across areas, including emotionally, mentally, behaviourally and psychically. Act for Kids not only provides these young people with the tools to overcome the abuse or neglect they've suffered, they also give them the ability to go on and live a safe and happy childhood and fulfilled adulthood.

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Act for Kids understands there is no 'quick fix' when it comes to helping children that have experienced abuse or neglect. This organisation works with children for as long as it takes for them to overcome the trauma they've suffered, whether that is two months or two years. Additionally, Act for Kids works alongside a child's support network including parents and/or carers, siblings, teachers, doctors, etc. to ensure that each stakeholder is aligned to the treatment plan and equipped to help the child reach his/her goals. This inclusive, integrated, long-term approach to therapy is why Act for Kids is a highly regarded service provider among government and community referral agencies nationally.

GROWTH OF SERVICES

In the last five years, Act for Kids has opened a number of new Integrated Therapy Services across Australia including Western Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. The protective behaviours program has been expanded and is now delivered to schools in every state, achieving a growth rate of 227% across the organisation from 2012-2017. Act for Kids has identified significant areas of need and, after consolidating the work currently being delivered, will endeavour to open centres in these locations in the future.