

Strengthening supports for young people in residential care services.

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Background/Purpose:

Young people in residential care services are at significantly increased risk of child sexual abuse; either as a victim/survivor or carrying out harmful sexual behaviour, child sexual exploitation and/or dating violence. The most common red flag for a young person experiencing sexual abuse is 'going missing from home, care or education.'

In Ballarat, all youth residential care services reported a high proportionate of young people in care were regularly going missing from home. Although health, safety and exploitation concerns were high, residential care staff reported they 'do not feel equipped to discuss sexual health issues with young people, while they do feel more comfortable addressing other health issues'.

Responding to this need, Ballarat Community Health (BCH), supported by MacKillop Family Services, delivered the Power To Kids (P2K) program to all residential care service staff.

Approach:

P2K, developed by MacKillop Family Services, implements three strategies to reduce child sexual abuse, whole-of-house respectful relationships and sexuality education; missing from home strategy; and sexual safety response.

BCH are delivering P2K to three local residential care services; providing training to all staff employed in residential care housing and 12 months of ongoing training to House Champions.

Outcomes/Impact:

P2K is currently being implemented across 7 residential houses, to 50+ residential care staff; with 13 staff self-nominate to be a P2K House Champion and receive ongoing training support.

Innovation and Significance:

Building the capacity of carers and increasing their confidence to have 'brave conversations' about sexual safety and harm minimisation, allows for young people to build trust with carers; whilst enhances carers capabilities to prevent, identify and intervene when they see indicators of abuse.

Evaluation findings from the BCH P2K program will inform MacKillop Family Services for rollout of the program nationally to all residential care services and agencies.