

A JOINT PROJECT IMPLEMENTING AN APPROACH TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: FACILITATING ATTUNED INTERACTIONS (FAN)



Project Goals

- I – Deliver Level I and Level II Training in the FAN Approach
- II – Deliver Training across disciplines and services – health, education, child protection
- III – Train New Zealand Trainers
- IV – IMHAANZ becomes an International member of the Fussy Baby Network®
- V – Evaluation across services and Teams.

Why have we chosen the FAN Approach?

It is a singularly well-developed approach for workforce development proven over the last 14 years and supported in the USA as a 'national model prevention programme'.

It provides training that addresses regulatory difficulties (feeding, sleeping, crying, emotional and behavioural difficulties) in the early months and years; key concerns for parents and sources of risk for infants, parents and relationships.

It has a supervision pathway that consolidates improved practitioner skills.

It has a pathway to support sustaining the programme within services and within New Zealand.

What is the Facilitating Attuned Interaction (FAN) Approach?

Crying, sleeping and feeding concerns are the most common worries for parents in the first year. Crying has received particular focus because of the adverse risks associated with early infant crying and research noting the need for a relationship based approach to understanding the infant's presentation. The risks include shaken baby syndrome (abusive head trauma), family stress, parental depression and anxiety, parent-infant relationship distress and developmental and behavioural problems.

Erikson Institute in Chicago was one of the first organizations in the USA to recognize the importance of a child's early years and works to improve the care and education of children from birth to eight years. Within Erikson, the Fussy Baby Network® initiative (Gilkerson et. al., 2012)¹ has been funded to develop and implement the FAN approach in Chicago and disseminate the programme nationally.

To support stressed parents struggling with their infant's crying, sleeping, or feeding during the baby's first year of life they developed an infant mental health based, prevention, home visiting programme. The presentations are complex and the FAN approach can be an intervention of itself or an entry point for other services.

¹ Gilkerson L., Hofherr J., Steier A., et. Al (2012) Implementing the Fussy Baby Network Approach Zero To Three 33: 59-65



Fourteen networks are now represented at the training level and the FAN approach is now used in “prevention and clinical programmes in state wide home visiting and early childhood mental health systems, child protection, paediatric residency training and social work education” (Gilkerson 2016²).

The FAN is a conceptual model and practical tool for family engagement. At the centre of the model is the parents’ current/urgent concern which is dynamic and may change over the course of being seen. The practitioner has the five core processes of the FAN approach available to use to address the parent’s concern in a way that builds longer term parenting capacities. The processes include Mindful Self-Regulation (calming), Empathic Inquiry (Feeling), Collaborative Exploration (Thinking), Capacity Building (Doing) and Integration (Reflecting).

The core processes are defined with guidelines on how to match the processes with what parents are showing they can most use in the moment. Intervention strategies for each core process have been developed. Practitioners are trained to track the engagement of a parent in the moment, matching or attuning to the parent increasing the likelihood that parents will feel understood and not alone. When parents feel understood, they feel calmer, safety replaces anxiety and they are more able to use their internal resources.

Helping practitioners to better match a parent’s state, to understand the baby the parent sees and to be able to hear and hold the parent’s experiences and stay with them through difficult discussions is ‘attuning’. Being with a practitioner who is able to do that calms a parent and helps them find ways to attune to their baby to discover effective ways of parenting. A baby who is attuned to relationally is calmer and in time more regulated. Emotional regulation is key to optimal development across physical, emotional, social and cognitive domains.

These core processes also structure time with parents over the course of a visit so practitioners begin with the relationship between the parent and their infant/young child, a check midway that they are talking about what the parent wanted to talk about and finishing with what the parent wants to recall from the time together that they want to hold onto or that has been helpful.

Efficacy and Research Evidence

Quantitative outcome data from research between The Erikson and Healthy Families Massachusetts³ – a programme with to 250 home visitors dealing with first time parents [≤ 20 years] is providing support for qualitative and quantitative outcomes.⁴

- Practitioners and supervisors feel more confident, more satisfied with their work with families and more able to support parent-child relationships
- Improved retention of staff

² Gilkerson L. and Imberger J (2016) Strengthening Reflective Capacity in Skilled Home Visitors Zero To Three 37: 2, 46-53

³ Healthy Families America – an evidence-based national home visiting model

⁴ Personal communication L Gilkerson 2017, publication in process



- The FAN provides a structure to visits, an unhurried posture to the visits
- Practitioners describe being better able to support families
- Families are empowered by the FAN approach.

The FBN New Orleans and Gulf Coast programme found that when parents contacted the service they rated their average level of stress at 4.05 on a scale of 1 to 5. By completion of the programme their average stress score decreased to 2.14.

The FAN approach is being used to support reflective practice in Child Welfare and Juvenile Court in Nebraska.⁵ A review of its use over two years in the Child Welfare and Juvenile Court found

- Workers built capacity even though the stress of the job remained the same
- Workers were retained at a much higher rate
- Workers became more reflective in their work with clients and professionals

Rationale for Workforce Training in New Zealand

Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development – intellectual, physical, social, emotional, behavioural and moral⁶

Most practitioners working with infants and young children have limited training in understanding and working with social and emotional difficulties in this population and in relationship based practice.

From population based research in Scandinavia there is general consensus that 15% of this population (0-4 years) have moderate to serious concerns with the numbers increasing as adversity increases.⁷ New Zealand has problematic levels of early adversity particularly with emotional and physical abuse and neglect in the early years.

Only a small percentage of concerning infants and young children will be seen by specialist services. Many are seen by Tamariki Ora/Early Childhood Health services including Plunket and a significant group in Early Start/Family Start home visiting programmes. Others raise concern in early childhood education settings and child protection.

⁵ Jennie Cole-Mossman and Jamie Balm “When Feelings Aren’t Allowed: The FAN in Court” – presented FBN Network meeting Chicago, March 2017

⁶ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004) Young children develop in an environment of relationships Working Paper 1

⁷ Ministry of Health (2011) *Healthy Beginnings: Developing perinatal and infant mental health services in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry of Health. ISBN 978-478-0-37374-5 (online)

T. Woudes, S. Merry, and D. Guy [2011] *Social and emotional competence: Intervening in infancy [35-48]* from **Improving the Transition Reducing Social and Psychological Morbidity during Adolescence** – A Report from the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor. Published by the Office of the Prime Minister’s Science Advisory Committee

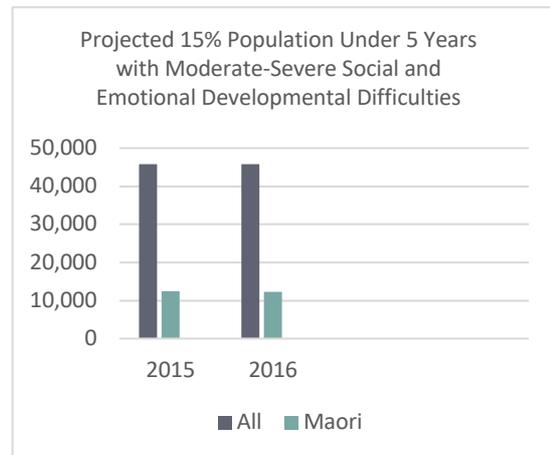


A key point of intervention is to promote the caregiving relationships an infant has to be one's that are attuned to the infant. These relationships when optimal provide resilience in the face of adversity and are key to ongoing cognitive, social and emotional development.

The practitioners working in these areas as well as specialist infant mental health services want to improve their capacity to work effectively but have limited access to training programmes that consolidate the components of relationship based reflective practice in these first few years.

The New Zealand Affiliate of the World Association of Infant Mental Health (WAIMH) has committed to the training of its own facilitators to support the implementation of the FAN approach. WAIMH and IMHAANZ prioritise multi-disciplinary workforce development. We are in a position to support training across the fields of education, health and child protection supporting collaboration and evaluation.

Attendance at short workshops although interesting tends not to support a practitioner with reliable skills in applying the new learnings to their day to day work. That only happens when supervision over time is directed to the consolidation of these new skills.



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