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Aiming to alter behaviour

CHILDREN DISPLAYING INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL CONDUCT ARE BENEFITING FROM A NEW SHEPPARTON PROGRAM

By Jenna Bishop

A new program aimed at addressing concerning sexual behaviour in children and young adults in Shepparton is already being recognised as a success after less than a year of operation.

The Problem Sexual Behaviour program is part of the Australian Childhood Foundation's Child Trauma Services and has ongoing funding through the Department of Human Services.

Foundation chief executive Joe Tucci said the program aimed to engage with children who displayed concerning sexual-related behaviours.

"We're looking at different things to understand why kids act out and what's going on in their lives that has an effect on them," he said.

The program began in Shepparton six months ago.

Dr Tucci said early indicators signalled the program was beneficial for Shepparton children referred to it.

"It's going well — young people are responding to it positively and the systems

around these kids are seeing it as a positive step in making a new start that hasn't been addressed in the local community," he said.

The program employs two full-time counsellors in Shepparton who assess, counsel and support children who display problem sexual behaviours.

At any time, the program works with about 15 children across the region, aged from 10 to 14 years.

Children are generally referred to the program through Child Protective Services or through police.

Dr Tucci said problem sexual behaviour was often an expression of stress or trauma in a child's life.

"In general, a lot of the children have experienced some form of heightened stress in their life due to family issues, for example their own sexual assault, going through a divorce or some other family problem," he said.

"There's generally more than one factor that leads to that kind of behaviour

emerging. We have to change the pattern of behaviour that leads to the problem."

Dr Tucci said modern pop culture also had an influence on children's sexual behaviour.

"Part of the reason these people are engaging in this behaviour is an understanding that we live in an oversexualised society," he said. "The kids see it in music videos, television, advertising and real life. It confuses them and there's not enough explanation for them to understand what the images mean."

**WE LIVE IN AN OVERSEXUALISED SOCIETY
... THE KIDS SEE IT IN MUSIC VIDEOS,
TELEVISION, ADVERTISING AND REAL LIFE.
— AUSTRALIAN CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
CHIEF EXECUTIVE JOE TUCCI**