

I AM
EVERY
CHILD

Child Protection Service Improvement Project

Project Update July 2023

Project Summary

Child abuse is a heart breaking reality that affects countless children in the Western Cape. Many of these children suffer in silence, enduring physical, emotional, and psychological harm.

The existing systems and resources dedicated to child protection services often fall short in addressing the complex and sensitive nature of these cases. The challenge the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital (RCWMCH) faces is that the first point of entry for these children is spread across multiple departments in the Hospital, including medical emergency, trauma emergency, medical outpatient and surgery departments. This first point of contact is a critical opportunity for early intervention for child abuse and all staff in these departments should be prepared to suspect a diagnosis of child abuse, evaluate the child, report to social work services, develop a medical treatment plan, and make referrals as part of discharge planning.

That is why the RCWMCH has taken the initiative to address this critical gap and create a comprehensive approach that will transform the way child abuse is managed. Furthermore, they aim to expand the impact beyond the Hospital. Many abused children seek help at local clinics and district hospitals, where frontline and junior staff often lack the necessary skills to address the complexities of child protection cases. By broadening the reach of training programmes and knowledge-sharing initiatives, they can ensure that healthcare professionals across various facilities are equipped to provide comprehensive care to these vulnerable children.

We express our heartfelt gratitude for your generous support and the opportunity to improve the experience of care for vulnerable children who have experienced violence, abuse, or neglect. We are pleased to share with you the progress made in these first 6 months towards improving the coordination of care within RCWMCH and strengthening the overall delivery of child protection services in the Western Cape.



I am every child. This is my reality.



Over **200 children** have been treated by the Child Protection Services (CPS) team at RCWMCH between January and June this year alone. These cases relate to different types of abuse, in which almost **2/3rds** of these were due to **physical abuse or neglect**. More than **40%** of the children treated by CPS were between the ages of **1-5 years**.

CPS does not solely identify abuse; it is also about identifying the children who are at risk as well as establishing interventions to promote health & safety. By adopting this approach, the Hospital is able to promote the well-being of children and also ensure that the clinical practices prevent unnecessary trauma.

"It started when I was only 11 years old. I am 12 now.

"Mommy and I lived with Grandpa. I saw him every day except weekends when I visited my daddy and stepmom. I was scared of Grandpa, and sometimes I just didn't want to go back home.

"He'd wait till I came back from school and Mommy was at work. He'd call me to his bedroom and then touched me. I cried every time, but he said I must not tell anyone – it was our little secret.

"One day, when Mommy got back from work, I told her Grandpa's secret. Mommy got very angry; she shouted at me and told me to stop lying. My mommy didn't believe me. The next day I went to visit my daddy and was so excited. At Daddy's house, me and my sisters played and had fun. Before bedtime, while we were having a bath, my stepmom looked at my panty and asked if someone had touched me down there. I don't know how she knew. I cried and told her Grandpa would hit me if I told anyone.

"The next morning, Daddy and my stepmom took me to Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital. The nurse and doctor took me to a room and examined me. I was scared again, but the friendly doctor told me they won't hurt me; they wanted to help me. Another lady came in; she was kind and spoke softly. She said she was a social worker and helped keep children safe. She asked me about Darla, my teddy, and Grandpa and what he did to me. I told her the secret. She didn't shout at me like Mommy did. She said everything was going to be okay.

"I am no longer scared to go home after school and still take Darla everywhere with me. My new teacher says I am doing well and will pass very nicely."

***This 12-year-old, due to the efficacy of the staff and medical team, was removed from her mother's care and placed in the care of her father and stepmother. Her grandpa was arrested and is in jail. The young girl is at a new school with new friends and is in a safe environment. The CPS medical and social work team have tailored a structured plan to help her in her healing journey.*

Key Achievements To Date:

Since the project was launched in January this year, significant progress has already been made towards the goal of creating a supportive and coordinated system for children in need.



Strengthening medical and surgical service coordination for child abuse victims at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital.

- **Strong Child Protection team** in place supported by project support staff which includes an experienced Forensic Medical Officer and Clinical Forensic Nurse Practitioner.
- Clearly **defined roles, responsibilities, and internal referral pathways** for all child protection cases at the hospital have been established;
- Relevant **clinical guidelines have been updated** ensuring up-to-date and comprehensive guidance for medical management;
- Development of an **online Teams network** with new protocols and clinical case studies. This is currently available to RCWMCH CPS staff and paediatric consultants. The aim is to get this across a bigger platform and become more accessible to other health facilities;
- **Monthly multidisciplinary CPS meetings**, in addition to **weekly Clinical CPS meetings**, have been initiated to coordinate surgical, medical, and social work functions and plan the efficient flow of patients;
- An **assessment of current staffing capacity** has identified areas where additional support is required. The recent appointment of a **Western Cape Government-employed medical officer** within the CPS team has provided **extra clinical capacity**.



Training Model Development for Health Service Personnel:

- **All day-shift nursing** staff have received in-reach training from the project clinical forensic nurse.
- **9 doctors** have enrolled in the Evidential Learning programme (an internally accredited Clinical Child Protection Management Course).
- **In-service skills development sessions** have been provided alongside the training program, ensuring continuous professional growth.
- Development of a programme for inclusive teaching and training sessions with Medical Outpatient staff and collaborative teaching with rotating registrars is currently underway.

THANK YOU
for you support

Financial Report:

	Budget Year 1	Expenditure Jan-May	Notes on Variance
Project support staff	R 1 298 037	R 174 169	Project Co-ordinating Medical Officer started 3 April; Admin assistant starting 1 August
Training and skills material development	R 333 000	R 220 024	
Operational Costs	R 134 000	R 61 355	
Monitoring and evaluation	R 50 000	-	Database for monitoring outcomes under development
Total	R 1 825 037	R 455 549	

