

City of Stonnington transforms group sessions for parents

INFANT snapshot: City of Stonnington

LGA location: Metropolitan area of Melbourne (Armadale, Glen Iris, Kooyong, Malvern, Malvern East, Prahran, South Yarra, Toorak and Windsor)

Births per year: 1009 (as of 2020)

INFANT model: MCH led partnering with the Community Health Service

In a charming pocket south of the river in Melbourne, the City of Stonnington has taken a comprehensive approach to INFANT implementation - integrating INFANT content alongside their other group sessions for all parents including their first-time parents.

Embedding INFANT into established services

Impactful change began when the City of Stonnington's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Coordinator, Samantha Cooke, recognised that getting started with INFANT relied on finding a way to integrate the program into an already busy schedule.

During COVID, the MCH Team reviewed the content of the group sessions provided to parents to ensure they were addressing the relevant issues, especially by new parents and carers.

As a result of the review, the team replaced their 'Starting Solids' talk with the INFANT group sessions as they covered the same content and provided the latest information and resources.

"INFANT messages are core business for our MCH service, and therefore we have prioritised that all our MCH nurses, Family Support Worker and our Supported Playgroup Facilitator are INFANT-trained to ensure consistency of messaging in both the Universal and Enhanced MCH Services" said Samantha Cooke.

Staff were provided time to complete the free INFANT training, which is online, over a 4-6 week period and is offered several times/year, enabling flexibility to fit into their busy schedules.

To embed INFANT into Stonnington's programs, INFANT is referred to in week 2 of the First Time Parent Group (FTPG) and the first INFANT session is presented at week 6 of the FTPG. Samantha Cooke said repeating the information at different stages helps reinforce the messages.

"We repeat these INFANT messages in our Key Ages and Stages (KAS) consultations as well, so we are reinforcing the same information again and again. It is consistent within the whole MCH services team because they have all done the training and the information is being provided to parents prior to needing the knowledge and then repeated".

Working in partnership

To assist with the facilitation of INFANT, local community health services were approached, however, due to their immense workload, it took time to get them involved. The local pediatric dietitian is now INFANT trained and co-facilitates four of the 6-month INFANT sessions/year. By

involving allied health professionals, parents are introduced to the community health services in their local area, which supports stronger connections and confidence with these services.

Supported Playgroup

The City of Stonnington's Supported Playgroup (SPG) facilitator integrates INFANT alongside a 10-week 'Small Talk' program, targeting babies to primary school age children. The SPG facilitator utilises the INFANT key messages in incidental teaching and addresses regular topics such as fussy eating at snack time.

In addition, the SPG facilitator invites parents to bring their lunch to an SPG session to discuss the INFANT key messages. A paediatric dietitian attends this session and helps address topics that align with these messages, without specifically running one of the four INFANT group sessions.

Parents are also given the opportunity to attend a short one-on-one dietetics session, aimed at answering specific questions relating to the key messages addressed in the group discussion.

Variety in delivery of group sessions

The City of Stonnington trialled several options for presenting INFANT which included:

- Online sessions provided during the COVID pandemic to connect with families. While these sessions were well attended during COVID, post COVID restrictions found online sessions were not as popular.
- Face to Face Saturday morning sessions facilitated by MCH Nurses were well attended, especially by dads and partners.
- Wednesday evening sessions were well attended, although dropped off during the colder months. This highlighted the possibility of running these sessions during warmer and longer days of the year, so possibly only for 6 months of the year.

The result of these trials included:

- Some session starting times have been moved to later in the day so dads, mums, partners and carers can attend.
- The City of Stonnington is continuing to evaluate and receive feedback to modify and adapt what they offer. They regularly trial different approaches as the demands and feedback from parents are considered.
- They look to cross promote the existing programs that their local government provides such as the dads group, swimming lessons and a nature playgroup.

The group sessions are organised as follows:

First Time Parents Groups

- Week 1 - Getting to know you
- Week 2 - Baby's development in 1st Year
- Week 3 – Sleep and Settling 1st session
- Week 4 –Your health your relationships
- Week 5 - Where to from here?
- Week 6- INFANT 3-month session

Group sessions offered in addition to the FTPG that all parents are welcome to attend are:

- 3 months - INFANT session (1st INFANT session)



- 6 months - INFANT session (2nd INFANT session)
- 6-12 months Sleep and Settling (offered between this age range depending on demand and time of year)
- 9 months - INFANT session (3rd INFANT session)
- 12 months - INFANT session (4th INFANT session)
- 18 months - 0-2 years Sleep and Settling

Key benefits:

- Group sessions decreased the need for one-on-one consultations, giving MCH nurses, time to complete Key Ages and Stages (KAS) visits and cover other topics.
- Prevented issues such as fussy eating arising as often because in many cases, providing the information addressed the issue prior to it presenting.
- Ability to involve more people involved in the caring such as dads, partners and carers due to groups being offered later in the day and on Saturdays.
- The My Baby Now app supports the information presented in the group sessions and during KAS visits.

Want to implement INFANT in your LGA? [Start here.](#)

To get in touch with queries contact:

Samantha Cooke

Coordinator, Maternal and Child Health and Supported Playgroups Services

Email: scooke@stonnington.vic.gov.au | Phone: 0418538901