

# Unconditional care: a study of professional practice with high risk adolescents.

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## Unconditional care: a study of professional practice with high risk adolescents

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**Title** Unconditional care: a study of professional practice with high risk adolescents

**Author(s)** [Meade, M](#)

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**Abstract** The complexity of providing care and protection to High Risk Adolescents is becoming increasingly apparent. In the State of Victoria, Australia, the response to this highly vulnerable population has remained the same for over ten years

remained the same for over ten years (1998-2008). Victoria's response to High Risk Adolescents is focused around the three-pronged approach of Home Based Care, brokerage funding and Intensive Case Management Services. The Department of Human Services has not updated its program even in the face of evidence which demands change.

The method used in this research was action research. The aim of action research is to achieve action (solutions) and increased knowledge. It offers a structure for working collaboratively with other professionals to explore complex problems. The action research project described in this thesis attempted to address the question of how to improve the response to highly vulnerable young people who have suffered abuse and trauma. It brought together three groups of case managers from child protection and community sector organisations over 12 months to explore and test a practice approach titled Unconditional Care.

The Unconditional Care approach was written as an initial set of principles which was more fully developed in the research through the use of 19 reflective tools. These tools were based on concepts of critical reflection. The approach encouraged the case managers to examine the source of their professional knowledge and practice. Profiles of the case managers and young people were also collected as data and analysed. An extensive literature review informed the development of the principles.

Unconditional Care is built on concepts of persistence, stability and continuity. It holds that case managers and the service system should respond with endurance and consistency to build stability and relationships

to build stability and relationships; no matter what. The approach involves both notions of care and control in statutory environments. Unconditional Care reflects an emphasis on valuing young people and interacting with them, accepting the validity of their experience and right to human dignity and relationships.

This research achieved both action and increased knowledge. The first action was that case managers supported the application of Unconditional Care and believed themselves to be practicing in this way. The second critical action achieved was that the case manager's skills in critical reflection were substantially enhanced over the 12 month period. Thirdly they recognised the need for greater integration between 'what we think we do' (espoused theory) and what we actually do (practice in action). Such reflection resulted in the realisation that the existing Victorian system was not supportive of an Unconditional Care approach. Further, it often prevented case managers from enacting stable and consistent care.

This research highlights that solutions to providing care and protection for this group of highly vulnerable young people are currently available. It highlights that given resources and opportunity case managers will apply practice principles based on the notion of unconditional care. This research confirms that this approach reflects best practice and provides great opportunity for High Risk Adolescents.

**Degree**

Masters by Research

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