

Submission: Concerns About the Thriving Kids Program

Introduction

This submission raises concerns about the *Thriving Kids* program from a lived experience perspective. On paper it appears to support children and families, however in practice it is built on weak foundations. Families deserve programs that are safe, respectful and properly funded, not ones that recycle outdated models that have already caused harm.

1. No Real Financial Backing

There is no clear or secure financial support behind *Thriving Kids*. Without stable funding families are left questioning whether the program can deliver on its promises in the long term. Too often programs begin with enthusiasm only to be cut, withdrawn or under resourced. This leaves children without the consistency and reliability that are essential to their wellbeing.

2. Based on ABA Principles

A core concern is the reliance on Applied Behaviour Analysis, often promoted as a gold standard. Autistic people, families and advocates have spoken for many years about the harm caused by ABA. It is a model that emphasises compliance, masking and behaviour modification rather than genuine understanding, acceptance and respect for neurodivergence.

By grounding *Thriving Kids* in ABA principles the program risks repeating mistakes of the past. This does not reflect modern rights based or neurodiversity affirming practice.

3. The Human Cost

Compliance based programs place the burden on children. The message is often that who they are is not good enough and that acceptance comes only if they suppress or change their natural ways of being. The long term harm of masking, loss of identity and internalised shame is well documented.

Families also feel pressured to accept programs like this even when instincts suggest it is not right. When the strategies fail to deliver families are left with guilt, confusion and misplaced responsibility.

4. What Families Actually Need

Children deserve more than survival through compliance programs. They need opportunities to flourish in environments that are:

- Neurodiversity affirming
- Guided by lived experience voices
- Backed by transparent and sustainable financial support
- Rooted in developmental research that prioritises individuality and

autonomy

This is the standard families are asking for and *Thriving Kids* does not currently meet it.

Conclusion

The *Thriving Kids* program in its current form is not fit for purpose. It lacks genuine financial stability and relies on an ABA framework that has been shown to cause harm.

Children and families need programs that recognise strengths, uphold rights and provide opportunities to thrive as themselves. Until programs are designed with these principles at their centre families will continue to be let down.