

WACOSS Discussion Paper

Early Years Reform: Working Together to Achieve Outcomes



August 2010

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About WACOSS

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) is the leading peak organisation for the community, representing 300 member organisations and individuals, and over 800 organisations involved in the provision of services to individuals, families and children in the community.

Each year, WACOSS member organisations deliver services to hundreds of thousands of West Australians.

WACOSS' policy work has a major focus on vulnerable West Australians, especially children and their families. Strengthened by our children's policy advisory council (appendix 1) and other consultative mechanisms, we have significant interest and expertise in advocating for the needs of children and young people as arguably the most vulnerable members of our community.

Each year, WACOSS submits to State Government a pre-budget submission, outlining what it sees as the priority investments in the community services sector. We have advocated for a number of years for better investment in and coordination of early years services, including an increase in the number of child health nurses; quality early childhood education for indigenous children; an investment in community and not-for-profit childcare centres; and an independent Office for Early Childhood.

WACOSS is also heavily involved currently with negotiating the implementation of recommendations from the Economic Audit Committee (EAC) report, handed to state government in late 2009. A major plank of this work is about reforming service delivery and the relationship between state government and the community services sector, in particular through the piloting of community hubs and models of self-directed service delivery across the state. The provision of early years services using these models might well be a way forward.

Background

The importance of the first stages of a child's life in determining their future wellbeing is well understood. As a community, we can all agree that the way children develop socially, physically and cognitively has an enormous influence on their success in life further down the track.

Children who are healthy, well educated, nurtured, and have access to services when they need them are more likely to remain out of contact with the justice and state care systems, less likely to live in poverty or experience disadvantage, and more likely to remain in the education system for longer. It is incumbent on us to invest in our kids' wellbeing now in order to reap the benefits as a community later.

Research undertaken in the USA has suggested that for every US dollar invested into education and care programs, a return of more than US\$16 is returned to society.¹

¹ HighScope Perry Preschool Study. See <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=282>

None of this is news to anybody working in the early years space. The provision of early childhood services in WA has suffered significant under-investment for a number of years. Numerous parliamentary committee inquiries² have exposed the inadequacies of the system, particularly in terms of health and developmental outcomes for children. While the State Government's recent investment in child development services (\$49.7 million from 2010-11 to 2013-14) is welcome, it still falls short of what is required, and has not addressed the shortage of child health nurses in the community.

We know for example that in January 2010 there were 6,405 children in the metropolitan area waiting for child development services and waiting times are getting progressively worse.³ We know that birth rates have increased by thousands yet there has been no comparable increase in child health nurses to enable them to support families.⁴

While there are fine examples of good practice and effective program delivery in the community, these are fragmented, ad-hoc, and vulnerable to funding constraints that threaten their viability. In the public system, departments work in siloes without integration, making service delivery patchy and undermining the quality of care. It is clear that current structures do not support continued investment and efficient, effective service delivery.

We are looking to the state government to make a leadership decision about the future of early years in WA. We need a shared understanding of the outcomes we want to see for West Australian children, some agreement on the structure that will best achieve these outcomes, and a way of articulating this clearly to the Premier. Finally, we need a way of measuring and monitoring our progress so we can assess the impact we are having on children.

Western Australian political context

There is an acknowledgement across government that investment in the early years is required, but so far there has been no public commitment to a coordinated, integrated way of working. Responsibility of early childhood services fall across three separate ministries and numerous departments.

The *Department for Communities' Children and Family Services Division* has responsibility for childcare licensing, as well as coordinating support services such as Parenting WA and the Early Years Network. The network is part of the Department's Early Years Program, which applies an "integrated and strategic approach to early childhood activities"⁵. The Department also supports local

² *Healthy Child - Healthy State: Improving Western Australia's Child Health Screening Programs* (2009); *Inquiry into the Adequacy of Services to Meet the Developmental Needs of Western Australia's Children* (2009); *Invest Now or Pay Later: Securing the Future of Western Australia's Children* (2010); *Destined to Fail: Western Australia's Health System. Volume 2: Community Health Sector* (2010).

³ Education and Health Committee Inquiry Report. (2010) (p.ix). *Invest Now or Pay Later: Securing the Future of Western Australia's Children*

⁴ Education and Health Committee Inquiry Report. (2010). (p.xi). *Invest Now or Pay Later: Securing the Future of Western Australia's Children*

⁵ Department for Communities. See <http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

communities to become specific Early Years Sites, which can deliver a range of programs relevant to the early years.

The *Department for Health's Child and Adolescent Health Service* comprises Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) for Children, Child and Adolescent Community Health (CACH), and the New Hospital Project. The CACH "provides a comprehensive range of health promotion and early identification and intervention community based services to children and families, focussing on growth and development in the early years, and promoting wellbeing during childhood and adolescence".⁶

The *Department for Education and Training's Office for Early Childhood Development and Learning* focuses on closing the gap for Aboriginal children; better coordinating Kindergarten and Pre-primary programs with child care services; and working closely with parents to help with early learning in the home and the transition to school. Children and Family Centres have also been established to provide health, care and education services in areas with high Aboriginal populations who need better access to these services.⁷

While each department has a valuable role to play in the provision of early years services, there is a distinct lack of collaboration, integration, and coordination, which has resulted in an inefficient delivery of services with many gaps and duplications. There is no overarching outcomes framework that goes across the whole of government. There is no single management structure that supports the health, development, wellbeing and learning of WA's children by overseeing services including child care and kindergarten, maternal and child health, supported and community playgroups, parenting services and early childhood intervention services.

The community sector has been very vocal in calling on the Premier to publically demonstrate a meaningful commitment to the early years. In mid 2009, a stakeholder group made up of numerous chief executive officers from early years peak bodies and early childhood service providers wrote to the Premier and relevant Ministers seeking a commitment around the coordination of early childhood health, education and care, and how government plans to progress this agenda. A list of these organisations can be found in appendix 2.

There is also a significant amount of work being done at present in order to implement recommendations made in the EAC Report.⁸ The report makes various recommendations that are relevant to the community sector. Some of these include developing an 'outcomes area' approach to service delivery; establishing pilots of community hubs in metropolitan, regional and remote areas; and implementing pilots of

⁶ Department for Health. See <http://www.pmh.health.wa.gov.au/general/CACH/index.htm>

⁷ Department for Education and Training's Office for Early Childhood Development and Learning. See <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/ece/index.html>

⁸ The Economic Audit Committee's Final Report: Putting the Public First: Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes; Final Report. See [http://www.dtf.wa.gov.au/cms/uploadedFiles/Treasury/Economic Audit/eac_final_report.pdf?n=761](http://www.dtf.wa.gov.au/cms/uploadedFiles/Treasury/Economic%20Audit/eac_final_report.pdf?n=761)

self-directed service design. There is potential for early years services to benefit from a number of these reforms.

National reform

The Council of Australian Government's (COAG) *Investing in the Early Years* strategy is a collaborative effort between state and territory governments to ensure that by 2020, all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation.⁹ It focuses on engaging with and responding to the needs of young children and their families, while also highlighting the important role of communities, non-government organisations and government in shaping children's early childhood development. Various reform initiatives have come out of this strategy. Some of these include:

- A national quality agenda - including care standards, a rating system and an Early Years Learning Framework;
- A national child protection framework;
- A National Partnership Agreement in Indigenous Early Childhood Development;
- A National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, with a provision of some \$98 million for WA; and
- Workforce initiatives to improve quality and supply of early childhood education and care workforce.

These reforms and others create a valuable opportunity to achieve better outcomes for children, but we must be able to engage with the reform process in a meaningful way. Without a collaborative approach to reform and a clear whole-of-government articulation of this commitment, we are in danger of being left behind in the negotiations. If we are to meaningfully engage with national reform processes, WA must develop an early years plan as a blueprint that can be enacted by a dedicated Early Years Office.

The way forward – central coordination for the early years

Various parliamentary committee inquiries have recommended that the Government establish a Department with a Minister with portfolio responsibility for early childhood education and development, family services and childcare.¹⁰

Those inquiries have shown that in Victoria and South Australia especially, a coordinated response to the early years is successful. Jurisdictions across the country have various policy documents that articulate this commitment across government:

- Victoria: *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*
- Queensland: *Towards an Early Years Strategy*
- Tasmania: *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years*
- South Australia: *Action Plan for Early Childhood and Childcare*

⁹ COAG (July 2009). (p.4). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*.

¹⁰ Education and Health Committee Inquiry Report. (2010). (p.183). *Destined to Fail: Western Australia's Health System. Volume 2: Community Health Sector*. See [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/%28Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID%29/DB2BFDA0BADC32E54825771B0012CC7F/\\$file/Report+6-+Vol+2-+CtyHealth+Care.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/%28Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID%29/DB2BFDA0BADC32E54825771B0012CC7F/$file/Report+6-+Vol+2-+CtyHealth+Care.pdf)

Both the *Healthy Child - Healthy State: Improving Western Australia's Child Health Screening Programs* report in May 2009 and the *Inquiry into the Adequacy of Services to Meet the Developmental Needs of Western Australia's Children* report in August 2009 recommended that the Western Australian Government reform the management of early childhood health and education policies along the lines undertaken in South Australia and Victoria¹¹. While in WA there is an Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning, it reports to the Minister for Education, and does not play a coordination or management role in the provision of child health and development services.

Further afield, research¹² conducted by one of WACOSS' Children's Policy Advisory Council members shows that like Australia, many countries suffer from a lack of coherence and coordination of early childhood care and education services. However, there are some examples of best practice that we can and should learn from. Many international models of service delivery highlight how child-centred approaches achieve better outcomes in child health, learning, development and wellbeing.

An Office for Early Childhood

WACOSS has advocated for a number of years for an Office of Early Childhood, bringing together a wide range of government and non-government activities including health, parenting support programs, playgroups, childcare and early childhood education. Rather than reporting to a Minister and being a government department however, we have proposed that the Office for Early Childhood be an independent statutory body.

The Office would be responsible for developing a set of agreed outcomes for children across agencies, which would be measured at a local level every two to three years to monitor the progress of communities in caring for children. It would identify the best research and evidence for what works for young children and families, and function as a coordination point for industry, the not-for-profit sector and government, providing much needed advice and support to those wanting to invest in early years projects.

With this in place, service delivery to and by the early childhood sector would be streamlined, bringing cohesion, coordination and improved economic efficiencies.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People has been a vocal advocate for the establishment for an Office for some time. Recent media attention has also highlighted calls for an urgent investment in the early years in light of recent parliamentary inquiries, and has continued to highlight the establishment of an Office as a good way of coordinating this.

There are various models of service delivery that could be coordinated by the Office. The National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY) sees Early Learning and Family Centres as one model of integration that could provide a range of services in a coordinated way. They are a place for families, with early childhood teachers, midwives,

¹¹ Education and Health Committee Inquiry Report. (2010).(p.181). *Destined to Fail: Western Australia's Health System. Volume 2: Community Health Sector*. See [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/%28Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID%29/DB2BFDA0BADC32E54825771B0012CC7F/\\$file/Report+6+-+Vol+2+-+CtyHealth+Care.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/%28Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID%29/DB2BFDA0BADC32E54825771B0012CC7F/$file/Report+6+-+Vol+2+-+CtyHealth+Care.pdf)

¹² The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia. (2002). Report by Margaret Owens. See http://www.churchilltrust.com.au/site_media/fellows/Owens_Margaret_20022.pdf

child and family nurses, and an array of early intervention and preventative specialists readily available.¹³

The centres can facilitate access to secondary and tertiary services within a universal service environment, in a non-stigmatising way. A similar model of service delivery has been advocated for strongly by the community services sector as the Department for Child Protection reforms secondary services in response to the expansion of mandatory reporting.

Victoria and South Australia have shown that a coordinated response to the early years is successful.

WACOSS Social Policy Seminar - 25 August 2010

The purpose of WACOSS' social policy seminar was to extend the dialogue around early years reforms by sharing some learning from Victoria, and convening a cross-departmental panel of senior state government representatives.

Carolyn Atkins, Deputy Director of the Victorian Council of Social Service provided a keynote presentation.

The panel consisted of:

- Rebecca Brown - Executive Director, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Helen Creed - Executive Director, Child and Family Services Division, Department for Communities
- David Ansell - Executive Director, Office for Early Childhood Development and Learning, Department of Education
- Mark Morrissey – Child and Adolescent Health Centre, Department of Health

Approximately 70 people from approximately 40 community organisations as well as state and local government were in attendance (see appendix 3).

Initial feedback from attendees indicated that the event had been of value and that Carolyn shared some important lessons from Victoria's journey so far.

Keynote

Carolyn's presentation highlighted a few key points:

- The need for data to inform cross-government policy and decision making;
- That a 5 - 7 year change management timeline is feasible, considering Victoria's experience;
- That if we are to achieve meaningful reform, we must 'do with', not 'do to';

¹³ NIFTeY NSW. Early Learning and Family Centres as Models for Integration. See http://niftey.net/documents/NIFTeY_NSW_Early_Learning_and_Family_Centres_paper.pdf

- Strong leadership from the Premier and key Ministers to support the reform process was a critical factor of success.

A true partnership between academia, the community sector, and Victoria's ministry and state government enabled a message to be delivered to the Premier. A key component of this message was the privileging of irrefutable evidence around brain development and the impact this has on the rest of a child's life and their chances of success as an adult.

While Victoria still has some way to go, they have progressed significantly in achieving integrated service delivery across government. The Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework is a fine example of whole-of-government collaboration.

Further information relating to Carolyn's presentation can be accessed by clicking on the links below:

Children's Centres evaluation:

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/integratedservice/childcentrereview.pdf>

Victorian Child & Adolescent Outcomes Framework:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/vcams/default.htm>

Her presentation is also available by clicking on the link below:

http://wacoss.org.au/images/assets/Latest/News/2010_09_02_Carolyn_Atkins_VCOSS_Early_Years_Presentation.pdf

Panel

Western Australian early years practitioners across the community have been calling on the Premier to take a clear lead and publically demonstrate a commitment to early years reforms for a number of years.

The EAC process offers an opportunity to reform the way we deliver services and the relationship between government and the sector. The aim of these reforms is to think differently about service delivery and build the capacity of the community to more effectively meet their needs by outsourcing more of that delivery to the community sector. If government is to facilitate this effectively, there is a need to break down the siloes that currently exist within the bureaucracy.

A number of good programs are being delivered in the early years space, across a range of government departments. From the Department for Communities, Early Years

Networks and Early Years grants, as well as co-located services in the form of community hubs, for example in the City of Mandurah.

Out of the Department of Education, Children and Family Centres operate in areas where there is a high Indigenous population, offering a range of child health, parenting, and family support programs.

The Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Community Health division offers a range of community-based health promotion, early intervention and child development services.

While the panel discussions highlighted that there are some effective programs and services being delivered across government agencies, the sector still perceives a significant lack of leadership in the commitment to and coordination of early years. Lessons from Victoria suggest that high level leadership was a central component of their success.

WACOSS will continue to work with all relevant stakeholders across the community sector and state government to try and achieve some consistency and integration around early years policy. Each of the panelists made a commitment on their Department's behalf to be actively engaged with WACOSS and the sector more broadly to try to achieve this.

To download Mark Morrissey's presentation, click on the link below:

http://wacoss.org.au/images/assets/Latest/News/2010_09_02_Mark_Morrissey_Dept_Health_Early_Years_Presentation.pdf

Next steps

WACOSS is committed to leading a coordinated community sector response to early years reform. A targeted investment in the early years would lessen the numbers of children being caught up the system later in life. We must work closely with all relevant stakeholders to develop a consistent message that resonates with the Premier, state government ministers, local government, the community sector, the private sector and academia.

Advocating for an investment in the early years as a preventative measure is the foundation for much of WACOSS' policy work relating to children and families. Some of this work includes:

- Opposition to mandatory reporting;
- Opposition to compulsory income management and welfare quarantining for truancy;
- Reform of secondary support services for individuals and families at risk or in crisis;

- Permanency planning for children in the state care system; and
- National standards for out of home care.

This work is strengthened by advice from and collaboration with our Children's Policy Advisory Council (PAC). We welcome engagement from relevant community sector organisations as we continue to review the PAC's membership.

WACOSS is interested in working with the community sector and government more broadly to identify additional strategies that will achieve better outcomes for and integration of early childhood health, education and care. Some of these strategies could include conducting further research, or developing a targeted campaign to lobby parents and teachers.

In addition, the EAC's Policy Capacity and Collaboration Steering Group, which is working on EAC implementation, is putting together project teams to coordinate outcomes-based service design and delivery. One of the project teams will be focusing on the early years area.

WACOSS is currently calling for expressions of interest to be involved in this project work.

Some key questions that this discussion paper has explored and that need to be considered further:

- What trigger is required to get a leadership decision from the Premier?
- What lessons can we apply from other jurisdictions?
- What could our sector be doing more effectively or differently in the absence of government leadership?
- How can we engage in the EAC process to achieve outcomes for the early years?

For more information or to get involved in WACOSS' policy work, please contact:

Lorilee Beecroft
Senior Policy Officer
WACOSS
lorilee@wacoss.org.au
9420 7222

Appendix 1

WACOSS Children's Policy Advisory Council

- Ruah
- Playgroup WA
- Mission Australia
- Youth Affairs Council of WA
- Ngala
- Parkerville Children and Youth Services
- CREATE
- Wanslea

Appendix 2

Early Years Stakeholder Group

- CHILD Australia
- Early Childhood Australia
- YMCA
- NIFTeY
- Gowrie Western Australia
- The Smith Family
- Wanslea
- Yorgum
- Playgroup WA
- WACOSS
- Childcare Association of WA

Appendix 3

List of attendees – Wednesday 25 August 2010

Anna Alderson	Learning Conversations
Anne Lawson	Disability Services Commission
Anne-Marie Connolly	City of Perth
Barbara Cartwright	Australian Red Cross
Carmen Gregg	Investing In Our Youth Inc
Claire Mowday	City of Stirling
Colin La Galia	Therapy Focus Inc
Cornelia Staats	Graduate School of Education UWA
Courtney Mickan	Child and Adolescent Community Health

David Zarb	Playgroup WA
Dawson Ruhl	Child Australia
Deirdre Davies	Playgroup WA
Dianne Mazzucato	Foothills Information & Referral Service
Elizabeth Buckton	Department for Communities
Gaby Levi	State Child Development Centre
Greg Ryan-Gadsden	The Smith Family
Heather Whitebrook	City of Melville
Helen McGinty	Department for Communities
Helen Miles	Community Vision
Jacinta Ellis	City of Swan
Jackie Murray	South West Regional College of TAFE
Jacquie Thomson	Lotterywest
Jan Hill	Community Vision
Jemma Snow	The Smith Family
Jenni Werner	Community Vision
Jennie Burns	YMCA Perth
Jennifer Brodie	Ngala
Jenny Lynch	CHILD Australia
Joanne Pollard	WAAMH
Jody Adams	Polytechnic West
Julie McKay	The Smith Family
Karen Collins	Bunbury Early Years Network
Kat Pinder	City of Belmont
Kedy Kristal	Pat Giles Centre
Kendal Head	Australian Red Cross
Leonie Hellwig	Statewide Child & Adolescent Policy

Lesley Reagon	YMCA
Lianda Gibson	City of Subiaco
Liza Beinart	Save the Children
Lucy Reynolds	Lotterywest
Luisa Wing	YMCA Perth
Lyn Smith	Child & Adolescent Community Health
Margaret Abernethy	Child & Adolescent Community Health
Margaret Owens	Ngala
Maria Turoy	CHILD Australia
Mark Teale	Lotterywest
Megan Dawson	Ngala
Nigel Carrington	Child & Adolescent Community Health
Paula Sgherza	Community Vision
Prof Trevor Parry	Niftey WA
Ronelle Campbell	Department for Communities
Roz Bailey	City of Swan
Sally Kirk	Department for Communities
Sarah Janali	City of Stirling
Sue Fielding	The Smith Family
Sue Rebeiro	Community Vision
Vicky Murray	Mercy Community Services Inc
Vivienne Cockayne	Mission Australia