

MEDIA RELEASE

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WACOSS Welcomes New Early Years Centres

The WA Council of Social Service has welcomed the Premier's announcement this week of additional investment in the early years.

The Premier has announced the establishment of ten *Child and Parent Centres* to be located at primary schools in areas where there are high rates of disadvantage, with a co-ordinator for each site, commencing in the second half of 2012.

"While many schools are already operating a range of programmes aimed at assisting disadvantaged families, this significant injection of over \$28 million in new funding and additional coordination capacity will make a real positive difference to lives of many children and families," said Irina Cattalini, CEO of the Council.

"A particularly important part of this announcement is the recognition that coordination of services for families doesn't just happen and needs to be facilitated. The proposal includes recurrent annual funding to ensure local coordination is sustained at the community level."

Ms Cattalini said the community sector had been anticipating the announcement since the Premier's first signal of this intention in December 2010.

"The community sector is looking forward to the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Government on the development of local models, working with the Education, Health and Communities Departments. The expertise the sector brings from working at the local level with families and children can help make these centres a success."

The ten sites chosen will all benefit greatly from being part of this new network of *Child and Parent Centres*, and clearly reflect areas with high needs. There are other areas however that have not been included which rate proportions of developmentally vulnerable children according to the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) that are as high or higher.

The Council hopes that the model has the capacity to be expanded and that the *Early Years Service Grants* that were also part of the announcement will have clear criteria for eligibility based on AEDI scores.

Ms Cattalini also reinforced the community sector's call for an *Office of Early Childhood*. "While these centres provide for a range of professionals working together across sectors and departments, WA still needs an overarching vision for early childhood development and a clear link to a measurable outcomes framework, so that these initiatives can be evaluated based on the real improvements for children, their families and their communities. A central coordinating office would make a great difference." she concluded.

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