

Response to the Inquiry into Child Family Centres.

Men's Resources Tasmania Inc. is a community based, not-for-profit organisation that supports and promotes the wellbeing of men and boys in Tasmania. We contribute a male voice to community conversations and public sector policy, particularly around social, health and wellbeing issues relevant to men. We operate primarily through volunteer involvement, with some support from member organisations. Please find more information about MRT at our website: www.mrtasmania.org

MRT is pleased to contribute to the Tasmanian Legislative Council Inquiry into Child Family Centres. MRT created a survey to gauge the views of the community, particularly men, on Child and Family Centres. We will also share some of our views based on our experience and understanding of engaging and supporting men.

MRT Perspective

The health and community services sector employs significantly more women than men. In early years and primary education it is our understanding that a similar imbalance is also exists. This gender imbalance is of course due in part to the opposite imbalance in many other sectors. MRT is supportive of equal opportunity for all genders no matter the industry. However we feel addressing this imbalance is important, as some men or fathers may engage more fully in community and health activities such as CFC's if environments were more welcoming to men, and provided the support men want. While many men, indeed possibly most men are quite happy to work with, or be supported by female workers much of the time, there are men who would relate to, or would prefer a male worker.

We feel it is also very important that children grow up seeing men in caring roles, and that they are available to children for the qualities, understanding and characteristics that men offer.

We encourage CFC's and the education system more broadly, but particularly in early years and primary education, to consider the prevalence and role of men at the front line of services and to work towards great inclusion.

The low numbers of male respondents is in part symptomatic of our community and health service systems, that don't engage men well. There is often discussion in community services sector about men changing their help seeking behaviours to take up the opportunities that are available. As we know changing other people to conform with our own ideas is very difficult.

Instead services should consider changing the approach they take to engaging men. Things to consider include:

- opening hours – many men simply do not take up service opportunities during business hours due to their own work commitments
- access and availability to male workers, who can share potential experience of parenting as a male as well as their professional experience and understanding can at times be very important to some men
- activities that more men might relate to: sport, competition, outwardly focused

activity that assists men to solve issues, rather than a focus on talking or socialising.

Men's Resources Tasmania is keen to play a role to help educate and train workers to think differently about how to engage men.

Survey Summary

Please find below a summary of the results from the survey, including comments. We have removed the particular centres that were talked about, as the number of responses was quite small, and it might be possible for workers to determine where comments came from.

The survey was distributed through the MRT list of members (106 community sector workers, and members of the public), via our social media page, and directly to the CFC staff, with a request to pass onto their clients.

A problem with the survey is that we didn't separate CFC workers from other community sector workers (CSW), so it's possible all CSW were from CFC's. It also would have been good if we had asked if men for their preferences for male or female staff.

Responses were primarily positive, but some comments do lend support to our concerns about CFC's and community health services more broadly.

Demographics

17 responses

11 from Community Sector Workers (CSW)

6 from male parents

1 ATSI

2 CALD

14 English speaking background

Question 4

Tell us about your experience of Child and Family Centres during the last two years. 1 is low or unsatisfied 5 is high or very satisfied. (please provide a response whether it was you personally who used the centre, your partner or client)

	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Weighted Average
I used the centre once (1) - through to used it five or more times (5).	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	84.62% 11	13	4.69
The information and resources were useful for me as a man/father/male carer.	0.00% 0	23.08% 3	7.69% 1	7.69% 1	61.54% 8	13	4.08
I felt welcomed by staff and volunteers at the centre	7.69% 1	15.38% 2	0.00% 0	7.69% 1	69.23% 9	13	4.15
Programs and services were inclusive of me or my male partner.	7.69% 1	0.00% 0	15.38% 2	15.38% 2	61.54% 8	13	4.23

Some comments/suggestions for improvement:

I would appreciate things like Kinder Gym. (a male parent)

reception area very poor at this centre. staff are behind a large enclosed panel. Suggest revamping area to provide more friendly welcoming experience and encourage staff and clients to interact with each other.

Some events were held for dads at the CFC. I do think that more attempts could be made to promote male attendance at the CFC. (a male parent)

Was told "Boys play is too rough for the Centre."
Not open at any really useful time.

Some positive comments

The centre offers some father focussed programs which appear to bring in fathers. My client has reported to me how good it was to be able to share what he was going through with other men who access the centre. Having 'male focused' programs is good to be able to advertise to my male clients. (Another CSW who supports men using the centre)

Sometimes (there are male staff) but mostly female staff. They are excellent though (a male parent)

The centre is largely responsible for both children becoming socially adjusted and up to early learning standards. Thank you very much! (a male parent of two children each with some minor issues)

A very high level of service and support is provided by the CFC team. They are always happy to involve our daughter in specific programmes, and to spend extra time and effort helping her to learn. Centre is also very inclusive - we've always been made to feel welcome.

First class quality of service and support. We have learned lots about how to communicate with our kids and parent more effectively. More men should make use of this great resource.

The full content of the survey is available on the MRT website: www.mrtasmania.org

Final comments

Looking at our community more broadly, MRT is aware of good work done in many of the CFC's. We are also aware of much good work happening through Neighbourhood Houses. We do question why there appears to be duplication in some areas, where Neighbourhood Houses have operated for many years. Neighbourhood Houses could also do more to engage men. However enabling both networks to do more could be achieved by not duplicating services and by greater consultation in communities where new centres might be built. Our understanding is that the community development approach by Neighbourhood Houses is potentially better value for money.

As an unfunded voluntary organisation, MRT has sought to make a contribution in good faith, to support improvement in the support of men and boys in our community, through this submission to the CFC inquiry. While we are unfunded currently, we do our best to be available for consultation, and are keen to develop training and consultancy to bring greater expertise in engaging men and boys to Tasmania.