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### THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON TASMANIAN CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON MONDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2017

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**Ms SANDY FREIMOND**, SENIOR CONSULTANT, AND **Ms JANE ROBERTS**, SENIOR CONSULTANT, CHILD AND PARENT CENTRE, OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WESTERN AUSTRALIA WERE CALLED VIA TELECONFERENCE AND WERE EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Willie) - Hello, I am Josh Willie, Chair of the inquiry into child and family centres in Tasmania.

**Ms ROBERTS** - Hello, I am Jane Roberts and this is Sandy Freimond from the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning, Department of Education in Western Australia.

**CHAIR** - Welcome to the public hearings of the Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry into Tasmanian Child and Family Centres. We really appreciate you making time this afternoon. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available. However, if you are at all concerned about the nature or appropriateness of any evidence you want to provide to the committee, you can ask that we hear that evidence in camera. The committee will consider your request and will make a determination on whether to receive that information in private or public. Please advise at any time if you wish to make such a request to the committee.

I invite you to make a verbal submission, if you would like to start, and if you could identify who is speaking.

**Ms ROBERTS** - Hello, it is Jane Roberts. I will provide a very brief snapshot. Having looked at your terms of reference, I have to say there are quite a lot of synergies in the Tasmanian model with the Western Australian model. Across the states they probably all have a great deal of similarity.

I will give a very brief snapshot of the different models of services that Western Australia has had, with the main focus on support for families and young children.

The government of the day established - and I think this is one of the benefits of being old enough to have been around for a long time as you see a cycle of events that happened - and funded neighbourhood houses and community centres during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These were places where a variety of activities occurred for families and children, but with a much broader focus, not just on the early years.

In the early 1990s, the Western Australian government responded to community needs for the provision of extending programs for what was then four-year-olds. The main emphasis was to be on children's socialisation. The family centre program was then developed. As well as those programs for four-year-olds, these centres, which were and are still operating, were managed by different community groups or parents who came together and would seek funding from the state government. They were placed where there were play groups and parenting programs; some child health provision was provided, and also community spaces for other activities, depending on what the particular needs of those communities were. You might get broad groups for supporting

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families from a different ethnic group. There were programs for outside-school-hours care. There was no childcare as such but there were vacation programs and there were even programs for seniors.

In 1995, the transfer of that program for four-year-olds from these centres commenced under a program called Goodstart, to lead those community family centres and transition more thoroughly into the state education system schools. That left more room for an opportunity for other groups to come in and other services to start looking at those pre-kinder years, in the much earlier years. That opportunity was also still with support from government and they were able to be supported by government and also non-government work.

By 2001 the Western Australian government provided universal access to kindergarten for 11 hours a week. As part of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy the federal government introduced in 2008-09, Western Australia, like other jurisdictions, was a signatory to the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership. Under that agreement, Western Australia received funding for five centres, which were built and established in four remote community locations and one in an outer urban area of Perth. The Department of Education managed that national partnership agreement and it included the build and the procurement of the non-government organisations to deliver the services and provide ongoing support to ensure integration of early childhood services.

With the growth of those place-based initiatives in promoting positive child development, in 2012 the then premier announced that 10 child and parent centres would be established on selected public school sites in vulnerable communities. The following year the premier announced that a further six centres would be established over a four-year period. That total commitment by the Western Australian government to build, establish and operate those 16 child and parent centres was \$48.7 million.

In June 2015 the then minister for Education announced that part of the five Commonwealth-funded children and family centres, which, as I mentioned before, were located four in our remote communities and one in an urban community and metro, were to be included into our child and parent centres program from 1 January 2016. These centres were in those remote communities and one in the metro area. The childcare component of those centres was not going to be part of the child and parent centre initiative.

That then brings our total now to 21 child and parent centres located throughout Western Australia. Twelve of them are in a metro communities and nine are in regional and remote communities. From our understanding, we think there is quite a strong similarity with some of your Tasmanian child and family centre model. My colleague Sandy is now going to provide you with some further information pertaining to the child and parent centre model.

**Ms FREIMOND** - We now have 21 child and parent centres and based on the learning that we have of plans for the child and family centre initiative, as well as other initiatives located on the school sites, such as Challis and Roseworth, we are using a hub-and-spoke service delivery model whereby the hub would be either on or near to a host school and the spoke would be a combination of identified host schools as well as community locations.

We talk about our services being offered at and through to reflect that hub-and-spoke model. The hub and spoke is operated by non-government organisations. We currently have 13 NGOs identified across 21 sites. In order to determine which NGOs would operate our centres, we went

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out to a public tender under the state government's Delivering Community Services in Partnership policy.

Each centre has a centre core data and then, dependent on the arrangements within the non-government organisation and the community needs, a varying number of team members are on site as well.

Each centre has a local advisory committee that includes the key stakeholders and is invariably chaired by the principal of the host school site. However, the chair can also be rotated between the surrounding school principals as well. All our child and parent centres offer a range of both universal and targeted services in the area of early childhood so this would include transition to kindergarten programs and play groups. We also have a focus on parenting and family support so the critical element there being the parent, as Jane has already mentioned.

Some of the services in that category would include programs such as the Triple P Program and the Circle of Security and others. There are also child and maternal health provision on site. We actually have health standard and health rooms and all consulting rooms; a number of these variants depend on the site. Invariably we have the services of a child health nurse and allied health workers, which could include speech therapists and occupational therapists. The number and arrangement of the health provision varies from site to site and we tend to have occasional gaps in service provision, particularly up in our regional and remote locations. Health is our biggest partner in the initiatives today, along with our NGO partners.

There are also mental health and wellbeing services at some sites and with all of our service provision there is a strong emphasis on quality of provision with an expectation that services are aligned for the early years framework and the National Quality Framework. Measures identified such as the Australian early development centres are included in the consideration of which programs are offered. There is also an expectation we will work closely with early childhood teachers and workers at each of the school sites.

For all of the provision for the child and parent centres the target is pre-birth to eight years of age with a particular focus on the pre-birth to four-year-old children. Through us, our journey, we currently have a number of data collection processes in place which record, for example, attendances at each program and service offered across the 21 sites. We also conduct point-in-time collections and surveys to understand more about the community that are using our centres and to understand them better.

We understand that throughout this journey there is constantly a need to be reflect and to improve and refine what we do. We invariably do that in partnership with both our government and non-government partners. You may be interested to know that very recently an independent evaluation of the child and parent centres was conducted, which has just been released and is looking very positive. It appears that the model is being closely adhered to, as it was intended to be. While we are still early on in the initiative, there are strong indications that we are on track to achieving outcomes that were originally specified for the initiative.

Then we have Jane Roberts again.

**CHAIR** - Yes.

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**Ms ROBERTS** - Just very quickly, a couple of areas of interest in terms of the Holy Grail of integration. We realised early on when we were trying to work, as this is an across government initiative, as Sandy mentioned, partnering with our non-government and community sectors we established a letter of agreement for the provision of programs and services at and through the Child and Parent Centres.

The purpose of that agreement was to outline the collaborative intent of the departments of Education and Health. You may be aware that we have had quite a major change in machinery-of-government in Western Australia recently, going from about 44 agencies to 25. What used to be called the Department of Child Protection and Family Support is now called the Department of Communities, but we also work closely with the Mental Health Commission and originally our colleagues in the Department of Indigenous Affairs. That agreement has been really useful in assisting all the players. The Health department is quite a big and unwieldy beast. It helps us to look at how we can collaborate, plan and deliver the programs from a strategic and operational perspective.

Part of that governance Sandy mentioned on the local level is a local advisory committee. At a slightly more strategic level, there is a steering group made up of senior representatives from those government agencies which is led by Garry Hewitt, the Executive Director of the Office of Early Childhood.

We also have representation from the host school. A principal sits on that group. There are two representatives from one of the 13 providers - regional and metro - from the non-government organisation and also a representative from the Western Australian Council of Social Services. That group meets approximately four times, once a term - in the Education department we speak in terms.

When the initiative was first introduced, there was also a director-general's group. They met once a year to do that.

We then used that model of letter of agreement because we found it quite a useful tool, especially where we were supporting agencies, health services et cetera when we were out in the community.

Sandy Freimond, I and our manager, Robin Kincaid, visit the 21 sites on a fairly regular basis. When there was a misunderstanding or perhaps there was not the clarity having come down from the central offices, we were able to use that document to assist workers on the ground with their understanding of the initiatives.

We then took it and decided to look at other letters of agreement rather than particular individual organisations like our State Library of Western Australia to deliver the Better Beginnings program. Rather than them being bombarded by 21 printers to say 'Can you please come and deliver this? Will you put this program on?', we use that same model to set out an agreement to see what the commitment of the State Library of Western Australia, with the support of what is called the Special Projects Team, to provide the Better Beginnings program, which is an early literacy program that supports parents to ensure their children start off life with a great love of reading and have various programs with that.

We then developed other initiatives with all the different groups like the School Canteen Association and the WA incontinence and toilet training program. We were looking at models of

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rather than individually those 21 centres contacting, from a central office perspective, how we could support them to ensure that some of the programs could be delivered easily.

Would you like to ask us any questions?

**CHAIR** - Thanks, Sandy and Jane. I am sure there are plenty of questions here from the committee. There are a lot of synergies, as you outlined at the start. We are working through some of the challenges that our child and family centres are facing.

I am sure committee members would like to ask you some questions, so I will hand that over.

**Ms FORREST** - I come from a rural electorate with quite a dispersed population and some of them get isolated in the winter with snow.

You talked about your 21 different sites. Can you give us an indication geographically whether they are centrally placed and what sort of population they serve?

**Ms FREIMOND** - Sure. I can start with the regional locations. We will start up at the top. We have three centres currently in the Kimberley - in Kununurra, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. Kununurra is the biggest of those centres; Halls Creek is slightly smaller and Fitzroy Crossing is a very small community. Two of those centres are very remote.

We then have two centres located in the Pilbara - one in South Hedland, which is a slightly bigger centre, and the other in Roebourne, about half an hour's drive from Karratha, which is a bigger centre. The next, coming down geographically, is Geraldton. We have a centre there. Then I need Jane to talk about the metro.

**Ms ROBERTS** - We also experience those communities being cut off but it is not usually from ice and snow.

**Ms FORREST** - No, floods and distance.

**Ms ROBERTS** - Yes, floods. When we go down to the south about two-and-a-half hours from Perth, we have a community, Collie, then Bunbury, which is probably our largest regional south-west community on the coast. There is Mandurah, which some consider to be another suburb of Perth but it is regional. Then right down to the bottom is Albany. I am sorry, I do not have the population figures. There are a huge amount of challenges with our very remote communities, particularly, as Sandy, said with the staffing. For instance, if health nurses are not available, it could take two months for another one to be allocated again. We have a real commitment to supporting NGOs that also have qualified staff in these centres in these roles. When you are going into these remote communities, sometimes things like housing are problematic.

**Ms FREIMOND** - The model also gets a little bit more interesting in your remote locations where you have quite considerable distances in some instances between your host school and your surrounding school. The hub-and-spoke notion looks a bit different in some of those locations to what it would look like in our metro centres.

**Ms FORREST** - In the very remote communities, which are often quite small as well, I am guessing as is the case with ours that it can happen with any of them, that there are families who

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are very difficult to engage with, mainly because they have had a bad experience with government entities or whatever. Is that a problem in Western Australia? If it is, how do you deal with it and try to engage these families and get them involved?

**Ms ROBERTS** - That was probably an issue right across Australia. I don't think it is something that is only reflected in Western Australia or Tasmania. When you choose to go into communities where there is high vulnerability and disadvantage, you often find that those communities have individuals who have very poor memories, particularly in our Aboriginal communities, of government intervention. Also, we have communities with non-Aboriginal families who may have had very poor memories of school and very poor memories of government intervention under child protection.

One of the key strategies of having the non-government organisations managing these centres, being tendered out to manage and deliver the services, was that all of them had a good, decent footprint in those communities and they had a relationship with families in those communities. Their ability to add value to the government's original initiative was brilliant because they were bringing in other expertise. Government is able to provide a certain amount of funding but NGOs bring in other services like counselling, financial support or services to support migrant families that have just come in. They include a whole range of strategies working together in partnership. While Sandy mentioned there were 13 non-government organisations, many of those organisations also support each other. It is not just one agency in one particular area. It might bring in another NGO that has specialisation in trauma. Even though we are trying to say these are universal and they are not meant to be secondary- or tertiary-supported services, we find that sometimes the creep into the complexity of family lives requires a little more than just a general universal parenting and early learning support.

**Ms FORREST** - How are those funded? On that point, if you are bringing in outside NGOs, they would have their own funding to deliver their services within their own facility or context or agreements they have. Do the centres have to financially have an agreement or a contract, or how does that actually work?

**Ms ROBERTS** - Our non-government organisations are actually provided with operational funding to deliver the services from the child and parent centre. Then our department actually maintains and funds everything to do with the building, cleaning and maintenance. They are generously funded to provide the service in our locations. The other added value is the Western Australian Government has a lottery system where many of the NGOs are able to source extra funding. While the Government has a set it provides as part of a yearly grant, many NGOs are very resourceful. Some get sponsorships, other partnerships, state and Commonwealth tenders they marry together. Having spent 10 years in the not-for-profit sector, you learn how to stretch the dollar.

**Ms FREIMOND** - Also getting back to your question. At the next level, through our guided collection processes, we keep an eye on the extent to which the services are servicing a particular community in which our facilities are located. There is a census twice a year, for want of a better word, which reports the suburb, for instance, of the families visiting our centre. At the moment it stands quite steadily at around 74 per cent of our clients during those census periods who are actually from within what we call our child and parent centre service boundaries. While they are universal services, the uptake from within the community remains relatively high.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Thank you very much for your great presentation.

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I am interested in services that might be coming out of your child and parenting centres that actually break the cycle of disadvantage of some parents who may not have had a good education themselves. Do you assist them to get into other forms of education they may not have accessed in the past?

**Ms ROBERTS** - That is one of the extra benefits. This was not necessarily the initial intent of the initiative. It was about giving parents the skills to be able to ensure their children are at the best possible place for when they enter into the schooling system. We have had some great success stories from parents who have had very limited educational opportunities. They have been coming in to volunteer. We have a couple of centres where they have been putting them through the education certificate; the first three years in community work. This is both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. Some of them have been employed by the NGOs to work as support workers in the centre.

While never the original intent, it has had some real benefits to various communities. But one of the biggest is that some families who have always seen education as a very negative connotation - we have had families who could not even bring themselves to go through the school gates - wanted something better for their own children. To ensure the families were coming onto school sites before they needed, to get to learn and understand about the new school because schools do change. Even though the buildings may not look different, our methodology and working with parents has. That is the greatest shift for the education department over the last 10 or even five years. Shifting away from taking children away from parents to educate them to then bring the families with them. We had other initiatives - we work with the child and parent centre to ensure we are working alongside and with families rather than taking children at that school gate and moving them away.

**Mr VALENTINE** - The other question is in respect of the breadth of your services from pre-birth to eight years old.

What about families with slightly older children? Is there any attempt to try to provide a service for those older children, up to 12 perhaps, or is that something each centre handles as they see fit, but more specifically up to eight only?

**Ms FREIMOND** - Our focus is up to eight years with a particular focus on preschool. We acknowledge that from time to time siblings come along. In particular, school holiday activities are a particular crunch time where they have to make plans for the older siblings.

Some of them have been very creative in the way they have approached this. They have, for example, put on two crèches, one for the older children doing something more suited to engage them and another arrangement for the younger children.

Obviously, during school hours, the centre attempts to direct the older children to attend school but it is case by case and they make provision where they possibly can.

**Ms ROBERTS** - They also have some really good partnerships with other organisations in their community so if there are older children, they try to help the family be made aware there are other programs that can suit.

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Being in the non-government sector myself, generally speaking, non-government never turn families away. If they are there, they will try to do the best that they can. Ultimately there is some self-selection with older children because they do not want to playing with playdough and doing line time.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Do you find some parents are reluctant to come to the centres purely because they do not know what is behind the door? Is that an experience you find?

**Ms FREIMOND** - Any new experience or program is always a bit daunting. We often get comments about 'How do you get those really hard to reach families?' No one program is ever going to get those hard to reach families.

What our experience has shown over perhaps the last three to four years, is that if the lady down the road whose sister's best friend goes to the child and parent centre knows the hard-to-reach parent, it is not going to be the centre, but someone who knows the family who has attended the centre.

With some of our remote services they have Aboriginal staff running the programs so there are Aboriginal faces when they come in. There is a strong cultural understanding - it is not sometimes appropriate to have men and women together.

We are mindful there is quite a lot of politics with the Aboriginal community. It is about the NGO that runs those programs understanding those complexities. Can we say, with our hand on our heart, we are reaching all those families? No, we cannot, but we keep trying.

**Ms FREIMOND** - I also say our centres are very welcoming places. They have been very carefully designed and are places you would generally think families would really like to come to.

**CHAIR** - Excellent. I am going to ask a few questions. You talked about the hub-and-spoke model in your introduction. Does that require further resourcing? You have a centre on a school site and that centre will then reach out to other school sites. Is that how it works?

**Ms ROBERTS** - Correct, yes.

**CHAIR** - How many FTEs would you have within a centre to be able to do that outreach?

**Ms FREIMOND** - The model is hub and spoke, bearing in mind it is not necessarily the non-government organisation contracted to operate the centre that provides all the services. Part of their role is to coordinate what is in the community and bringing other services into either the centre or the surrounding schools. Most of our child and parent centres have a wide range of providers offering the services so it is spread around the service providers to deliver. The 21 centres all have a full-time coordinator and then how the NGO manages their own service is really up to them. We have some guidelines but we are not directive of how they map it; we work in. They all had a full-time coordinator which we think makes the big difference. Many of them will have some sort of administration support; all of them have an early childhood officer who is engaged in family liaison or community. They will call them different things, but they will have someone who is running the early learning and part-time and then they will have someone who might be a family liaison/community development officer.

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Through our memorandum of understanding with the state government, the child health nurse is paid for by Health, the speech therapist and the occupational therapist are paid public servants. When you are looking at an integrated approach, as Sandy mentioned, you try to bring together and facilitate the provision of what might already be happening so they are not wanting to double it up. Some services may just need a venue to deliver their programs and that is where the CPC comes in.

**CHAIR** - You said that in 1995 that the services moved out of neighbourhood houses. Are neighbourhood houses still operating in Western Australia and how is the dynamic?

**Ms ROBERTS** - No, that was the family centres. Yes, they are; they changed quite dramatically over the decade. They still have some family centres and several of our child and parent centres work quite closely, particularly in our regional communities. They might do programs together but a family centre's brief is usually from birth-to-death so their mandate is much broader than what the child and parent centre is.

I will be honest with you: there were some challenges when this new initiative came out in 2012. The family centres felt very threatened because there were some similarities with what they were doing. Overall, the first 16 of the child and parent centres have worked very hard, as has the Department of Education with our other state government colleagues, to ensure they are not duplicating or taking away. They are building on or they are enhancing or they are ensuring gaps in services are actually provided at the CPC.

**CHAIR** - There are no competitive pressures remaining between the two?

**Ms ROBERTS** - With the current machinery-of-government changes, some changes are coming to tendering out programs but not from the Education department: we have already done that. There are some models that over about 12 months ago had a tender for all the parenting that used to be provided by the state government - Parenting WA - that was then put out to the not-for-profit sector. Various non-government organisations received funding for that. That is still settling in because that only started in April this year, those NGOs, some of them are the same NGOs that are running our child and parent centres, but others are not. There are new players on the block.

It is about relationships. They are not always easy to start with but generally speaking there is a real commitment in that not-for-profit sector as there is with government. It is not an empty bucket; funding is tight at the moment, so anyway if we can work together, the government and those non-government agencies, it helps.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. You talked about data collection - you collect attendance and you collect other information to better understand the community. How is that data shared among the services, NGOs and government agencies?

**Ms FREIMOND** - I love data. Together with the non-government organisations and Health, predominantly, we have developed an online database whereby each attendance at every program and service is added on to this large database. The benefits of that are that not only can the state government access the information as required, but also at each individual site, the providers can make use of their data almost immediately as the database generates a range of reports for them to make use of.

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In addition to that, as I mentioned, we have what we call a census, which essentially is more intensive data collection for four weeks of the year over two separate occasions. That information is also added on to the child and parent centre online database.

We also have developed - and it has taken us years and we are still refining and working on it including as of tomorrow - parent satisfaction surveys, which again are required to be submitted biannually. We collate them centrally but essentially, the richness of those surveys is used by the coordinators onsite as they gain an understanding of how parents are perceiving the services they have been offered and what is impacting on their life.

**Ms ROBERTS** - The interesting thing about the parents' satisfaction survey is that obviously there are families who have English as a second or even a third language and there are also those who are a little bit hesitant to fill things out. This is where the relationship with the coordinators comes in. They can often talk to the family about it or they might use other more culturally appropriate ways to gain that information.

It is really crucial. It is not merely a bunch of bureaucrats sitting here telling families what they need and they work very closely with the services. Also, as we do, from government agencies. Sandy mentioned we have a very close working relationship with Health because they are our major partner. We are also developing quite a good relationship with our child protection agencies and we have protocols that we can provide and share information with, being mindful that there are still some family information we do not share.

**Ms FREIMOND** - At the next level, in terms of the data collection, we also have a mechanism whereby our school system can identify flagged children who have been involved in a regular program and service at the child and parent centre on our school systems. Ultimately, this will allow us to do some longitudinal class studies.

We also have contracted the Telethon Kids Institute at the moment. We have got some GIS matching tools whereby we have set the baseline indicators and we are about to open information from a range of state government and commonwealth government indicators over the top of our child and parent centres community boundaries.

**CHAIR** - Before I finish, you mentioned an independent report has been released. Are you able to make a copy of that available to the committee? The evaluation?

**Ms FREIMOND** - Yes, I certainly can. I will send you the link. Currently it is up on our Department of Education website; I will certainly send the link to Natasha.

**CHAIR** - Yes thank you. I am going to hand you over to Ms Rattray.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Hello, how are you, Sandy and Jane? I am interested in drilling down a little bit more into the local advisory committee aspect of the child and family centres. Can you give me some indication as to whether they are established prior to the centres being built or are they something that happens after the centres are up and operational? Can you give me some indication about how they work?

**Ms FREIMOND** - The local advisory committees are very much something that is created when the centre is fully operational. It involves our close partnership between the schools, both the host school and the surrounding schools, and the child and parent centre. How it works is that

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most centres will have one advisory committee once a term, together, as best practice. We have a few variations on that theme. Generally, the principal of the host school and the specific childcare centre coordinator sit around the table and determine the agenda for those meetings. We encourage the strategic directions and strategic approaches to planning to be part of those meetings. They involve a range of stakeholders. From time to time we have seen the membership of the advisory team being reviewed in various ways. They are starting to be valuable vehicles for progressing services within those centres.

**Ms ROBERTS** - To your question, did you do it before the centre was built, the interesting thing was when these centres were announced and the NGOs were operating, many of them did not have a centre because it took a year to build, or possibly a little longer, in some of the regional areas. The state government had a commitment to provide funding to the NGOs so many of them were working out of broom closets, the school or their NGO offices down the road. For six months they were able to go out and scope their communities, learn who was doing what and where, what were the gaps, where were the best locations. Then once the buildings became operational - that is, the front door was open - they formally established their local advisory committees.

It has been interesting to see some of the shifts over the last couple of years. All we did in the operating guidelines we provided was give them a brief about a local advisory committee - 'We suggest you have this, this and this'. Now some of them are morphing into possibly only three or four people on them who report back to subgroups. Others have every school connected to them. They will often have key community people with them. Some are bigger than Ben Hur while others are quite small and intimate. They are very important because, as with my comment that it is not a bunch of bureaucrats sitting in central office telling people how they should operate, it is the same thing about these child and parent centres: it is not the NGOs telling families what they need. It is about working out together and looking at what the needs of the community are and how they can best address that, with every so often this special project team reminding them of the outcomes we were hoping for. Sometimes they seem to get a little sidetracked.

**Ms RATTRAY** - With the host school part of it, does every child and family centre established in WA have a host school?

**Ms ROBERTS** - Yes, and that includes the five child and family centres that were originally funded by the Commonwealth. While they are not necessarily all located on a primary school site, they are very near to that. While that original model was a little different to the child and parent centre model, we worked pretty hard over the last couple of years to help them amalgamate with their host school.

**Ms FREIMOND** - Also bear in mind that the surrounding schools are not all necessarily government schools. There are some Catholic and independent schools in that and they work in very well with the model.

**Ms ROBERTS** - That was considered quite a brave decision by the then previous government. It is not that if you go to this child and parent centre at East Maddington, your child has to go to the East Maddington Primary School. That child may end up going to the local Muslim school down in that same corridor. People were quite surprised that the government did that.

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**CHAIR** - Mr Dean, are you still on line?

**Mr DEAN** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Would you like to ask some questions? I would like to ask a couple of questions and some of them have been covered. The CFCs here were built with accessing those families that were difficult to get to in the lower socio-economic group and its issues in mind. There are difficulties here - and you have already mentioned that about Western Australia as well - in getting to some of those families that should be there who are not there. There is an indication here that we have a lot of children or families going to these centres who are from well-off or better-off families, and that we are probably not getting as many of the others there as we should. Do you have any comment on that?

**Ms FREIMOND** - Yes, I do. I guess that is something we hope we are picking up when we do our census collection, where we ask the child and parent centre operators and NGOs to identify the suburb of residence where their families are coming from. To date, in the last two census collections, around 74 per cent are coming from within that vulnerable community we have identified. It looks different obviously; that is across all 21 sites. You get a slight variation in different locations but there is a strong indication that the very families we are trying to target are actually participating in those services. Whether that 74 per cent comprises the more able or the more willing to engage, we cannot necessarily comment on, but we are certainly confident that we are targeting that particular community and they are coming along.

As Jane said, the government put a lot of effort into the planning at the location. The original Commonwealth-funded child and family centres were originally under Closing the Gap. They were located in extremely disadvantaged communities, so there was no question about that.

The 16 child and parent centres in the state government program - if you understood the geographics of Western Australia - were located in regions. They were not our greenfield sites. They are not our leafy greens; they are our communities where there are the socioeconomic indicators. There were lots of indications that showed high vulnerability. The employment situation was not great in some of these communities; a lot of public housing. Purely on the basis of where they were located, you were going to get families of high needs but you are still within that. As Sandy mentioned, you get the 'worried well', those who are doing well, but the worried well sometimes bring along the other friend who is not doing that well. That is how we are trying to get to those.

Again, because of our working relationships with some of our other key government agencies, the family support side of child protection is trying to get to families before they need to become clients. With that family support element, they are working quite closely with the child and parent centres to help bring those families into the centre before they become clients of child protection.

**Mr DEAN** - My electorate covers a broadacre Housing Tasmania development site and it is one of the largest in the state. One of the issues we have found where one of the centres is located in a very low socio-economic area is that some parents are not accessing the CFC because of the need to have a parent. The child must be accompanied by a parent or a grandparent, or whatever, and that is a deterrent to some of these. Is that the same system in WA?

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**Ms ROBERTS** - One of the key strategies of the child and parent centre initiative is to build parents' capacity so no, children cannot attend - these are not early learning and care centres, they are not childcare. In our Aboriginal communities, it may not be a mother or a father - it could be a grandmother, it could be a carer of the family, but children do not come by themselves.

**Ms FREIMOND** - Also, particularly up in the north, NGO providers are very skilled at creating stopped entry arrangements for the families. There will be a combination of activities which will potentially bring families to the door, and then they will have a more solid educative component to those. That is a strategy that has worked well. They go out into the community, run activities from local parks and collaborate with other providers who have more traction within the community. Many of them also provide transport which in itself has a number of problems attached. In some locations - for example, Fitzroy - that often is the only way they are going to bring families in - through picking them up and dropping them off again.

**Mr DEAN** - You mentioned the Holy Grail of integration and we are no different to anybody else. We have a plethora of organisations and services providing similar services. How all is brought together and works together seems to be one of the issues with our Neighbourhood houses. Some of them are saying, one in particular, 'Well, the CFCs are taking some of our clientele'. How do you work around this?

**Ms ROBERTS** - That is always going to be an issue. Whenever any new government comes in, it puts new programs in. We have a new government that is supporting the child and parent centre initiative; they are working quite closely with some different directions particularly early learning and care on school sites. You just work with it. It is about the relationship and there were family centres very close to where child and parent centres were built on school sites. I would be lying if I said there was not some concern and angst out there, but people work together.

One good strategy was the local advisory committee. People who ran those other centres were actually on the local advisory committee. We have childcare directors on local advisory committees. Sometimes, as in Albany - it is a small farming community - there are still some tensions with a couple of neighbourhood houses, but people just keep working at it. Eventually, hopefully through relationship and a better understanding, they might be working with the same families, but they are not necessarily doing the same program.

We have sent some very clear messages about working in a complementary way and really supporting what is working well in the community and not competing. We have made those messages really clear up front. Do some index scoping of your communities and make really sure you are not doubling up advertising and promoting and that you are supporting what is working well.

**Mr DEAN** - Thank you very much.

**Mr VALENTINE** - You talked about the hub-and-spoke model and the host school being the hub. You then said something else about the spokes, but I did not catch exactly what that was.

**Ms FREIMOND** - The spoke is a combination. The hub is the host school, the child and parent centre on the host school site, then the spokes we have identified for each location and number of what they call official surrounding schools. A combination of both government and non-government schools are identified. The non-government organisation is contractually required to work with the surrounding schools and also in close relation with the providers and all

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site locations. We may have a service operated, for example, at a community facility or in the community library so it does not exclude other locations.

**Ms ROBERTS** - One of the strengths we are also starting to see - not in all locations, but in several - is the role of local government authority. We have some particularly great examples of where the local government or shire has provided venues for night-time parenting sessions.

The child and parent centre has been working quite closely with some of the Goodstart childcare because many of those parents cannot access some of the programs during the day. So local government authorities are providing a venue for perhaps a whole south-east corridor, three or four centres all coming together, so families are able to have the parenting program. It might be Triple P or it might be other sites. We have three sites connected to the child and parent part time. Three child or school psychologists who are also connected to the Child and Parent Centres Western Australia program and they are now starting to offer things at night and Triple P at night. This is not necessarily at the child and parent centre. It is often out in a community facility.

Can I also elaborate and mention that to make the understanding of what the hub and spoke looks like at each child and parent centre location, we have a defined what we call a 'child and parent centre community service boundary', which we have physically drawn up for each location. Within that, the schools involved are identified.

That is based on SA1 - school area 1 - and it is very clearly defined so each NGO knows exactly what its community boundary looks like.

As an example, the metro might be around about five kilometres from the child and parent centre in radius. Some of our regional centres can vary, maybe 12 or 20 kilometres, and then you have something like Kununurra, which is practically closer to the Northern Territory border.

**Mr VALENTINE** - A few hundred kilometres. Thank you very much for that. A final thing - what does Triple P stand for?

**Ms ROBERTS** - It is the Positive Parenting Program.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, that is fine.

**Ms ROBERTS** - It is a national program developed by Professor Matt Sanders in Queensland. The Western Australian Department of Education has a very strong role in delivering the Positive Parenting Program, not only through the child and parent centres but also to our primary schools and teenage schools, and the health sector as well.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Okay, thank you very much for that. Very much appreciated.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Sandy and Jane. Is there anything you would like to finish with?

**Ms ROBERTS** - No. Good luck. We had a quick look on the website and Mark Morrissey is well known to us in Western Australia, your children's commissioner. I guess it is about taking the time. We have learned a great deal from the evaluation. We are nowhere near finished. There is still a long way to go.

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It is also up to the parents. Really, we can have an idea of what we are doing but working with the families, we have done some great things with Paul Pritchard and the platform and family partnership training. As I said at the start, there is a great synergy and like-mindedness.

Each version for every jurisdiction is built on something, and every decade something new comes along. Hopefully you can take the message from what you have known and that is what your inquiry is hoping to do.

Take what you know, what works and what is not working, and see how you can get it better.

**CHAIR** - You have certainly given us some food for thought. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your time today.

**Ms ROBERTS** - Our pleasure.

**Ms FREIMOND** - Thank you very much.

**THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.**