

Australian Education Union Tasmanian Branch

17 March 2017

The Secretary
Legislative Council Select Committee – Child and Family Centres
Legislative Council
HOBART TAS 7000
By email: cfc@parliament.tas.gov.au

SUBMISSION: Legislative Council Select Committee – Child and Family Centres

The AEU strongly believes that promoting connections between families, communities and the public education sector from early childhood is critical to improving educational outcomes for all students and, in particular, those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.

The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute¹ reported in June 2015, that improving educational, health and wellbeing outcomes for children requires developing shared understanding, a shared vision and a new culture of service delivery between public services and local community. The AEU asserts that Child and Family Centres (CFCs) are an essential element of this new culture. The above-mentioned report recognises the importance of engaging communities of disadvantage in the co-production of local service models and names up CFCs as effective vehicles in achieving this within the public education sector. The AEU strongly believes in the importance of genuine partnerships between parents, community and the education sector and advocates for a priority of place for CFCs in the bigger picture of local service provision models in an integrated child and family services sector. It is vital that the community supports the engagement of families in their children's education to achieve generational shifts in health, wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Tasmania has 12 existing CFCs operating in communities across the state. These centres provide high levels of service in the early childhood sector and opportunities for community participation. The report² asserts that these centres have the potential to continue to make a significant difference for child, family and education outcomes in the 12 existing CFC communities. To take advantage of this potential, in the opinion of the AEU, there needs to be continued and increased funding of CFCs, including the addition of new CFCs in communities of high risk of student and family disengagement from the education system.

Child and Family Centres partner with parents to improve the health, well-being and education of children from birth to five years of age. In 2008, the then State Government identified the need for 30 such centres but these plans were shelved and only the current 12 were established. Geographical distance now prevents many families, particularly

¹ Centre for Community Child Health, (2015), *Supporting Tasmania's Child and Family Centres – The Journey of Change Through a Learning & Development Strategy*, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Melbourne.

² Centre for Community Child Health, (2015), *Supporting Tasmania's Child and Family Centres – The Journey of Change Through a Learning & Development Strategy*, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Melbourne, p. 19.

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disadvantaged families in our regional areas, from accessing this vital support. This increases the risk of disengagement and additional disadvantage for families and the children within.

The Department of Education³ states - the goals of the Child and Family Centres are to:

- improve the health and educational outcomes for children – birth to five years.
- provide a range of early years services in the local community to support the development of children birth to five years.
- build on the existing strengths of families and communities and assist in their educational needs.
- increase participation in early years programs such as those offered through Launching into Learning (LIL).
- build community capacity by developing partnerships with parents, carers and the community.
- respond to child and family needs in a seamless and holistic manner.

With these goals in mind, the AEU asserts that there is definite need for additional CFCs within the state and has identified the communities of Sorell and Glenorchy (outreaching to Moonah and West Moonah) as being in high need of CFCs. Australian Bureau of Statistics⁴ data indicates that both Sorell and Glenorchy (incorporating Moonah and West Moonah) have a relatively large and growing population of 0-4 year old children. This increase in early childhood numbers combined with a low decile ranking⁵ within these communities creates an environment in which the need for child and family support and services is great.

The existing CFCs have produced excellent results since opening in their respective communities. Clarence Planes (Clarendon Vale) and Ravenswood CFCs are two such centres that have achieved positive results. CFCs such as these, which are co-located with their respective public schools develop strong relationships with families and community via the CFC programs. This co-location facilitates a natural pathway for potentially disengaged parents to participate in the education of their children and improve individual and community outcomes.

The Chigwell and tagari lia (Bridgewater) CFCs have both recently won design and architecture awards⁶ and as the then Minister for Education and Skills, Nick McKim stated, "These awards are testament to the vision of the architects and the hard work and commitment of staff in the Department of Education in working with local communities to achieve such fantastic facilities." Of Chigwell, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) commented that, "Early stage consultation with the community was a

³ https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents_carers/early_years/Programs-and-Initiatives/Pages/Child-and-Family-Centres.aspx

⁴ Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Released at 11.30am (Canberra time) 18 August 2016, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3235.0>

⁵ A lower score indicates that an area is relatively disadvantaged compared to an area with a higher score.

⁶ <http://education-news.education.tas.gov.au/2013/06/cfcs-win-architectural-awards.html>

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vital aspect of building the trust essential for this integrated centre to be effective." This indicates that the State government, with the Department of Education, and in consultation with the community, has made an important and genuine commitment to Child and Family Centres⁷. The AEU implores the government to continue to support these essential local community service centres.

We table the above mentioned report as an important document to be considered when deliberating on the future of CFs in Tasmania -

http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/151014_Supporting-Tasmanias-Child-Family-Centres_June2015.pdf

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Helen Richardson".

Helen Richardson
PRESIDENT

⁷ Tasmanian Department of Education, *An Overview of Child and Family Centres*,
<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/documentcentre/Documents/Overview-of-Child-and-Family-Centres.pdf>

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