



Northern Early Years Group,
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NEYG Submission to Legislative Council Select Committee into Child and Family Centres

Introduction:

The Northern Early Years Group, Tasmania Inc (NEYG) represents a group of services and agencies working with young children and their families across Northern Tasmania. The group includes people who work in government services, schools, neighbourhood houses, various community organisations, Tas TAFE and the University of Tasmania. Our vision for the region is:

By 2020 Northern Tasmanian children aged 0-5 years will have reached or exceeded national benchmarks in the areas of health, development and education.

NEYG members adopt a collective impact approach to achieve our vision. In so doing, our members regularly engage with vulnerable children and families across all early childhood sectors at both a personal level and through our networks. Our collaborations on research projects and practice initiatives underpins NEYG's capacity to interdependently advocate for and apply well-informed and evidence-based health, social and educational supports for children and their families living in Northern Tasmania. Collectively and individually, NEYG members and friends have long term interactions and experiences with Child and Family Centres (CFCs) in the region. NEYG acts as an agent for Communities for Children by holding and re-directing funds for programs offered in the Ravenswood and Georgetown CFCs, and therefore have direct contact with these services.

At a recent meeting held 16th February 2017 NEYG members shared their collective knowledge of CFC programs and outcomes for families and children. They also raised issues related to how CFCs might best partner with families and communities to provide integrated services that prioritise children's best interests. We frame our comments relating to each of the Select Committee's terms of reference from these discussions and from evidence outlined in several Reports on the development and delivery of Tasmania's CFCs. Each of the terms of Reference are addressed in turn.

1. The challenges to and benefits of the provision of an integrated collaborative health and wellbeing and early education and care service delivery model.

Young children's health, wellbeing and learning is holistic and involves caring for and developing their physical, social-emotional, communication and cognitive capacities. Environments that best cater for such complex learning offer integrated collaborative health and wellbeing and early education and care services. In such environments interconnected adults ensure that children are nurtured in responsive, predictable and stimulating ways. We contend that this occurs in Tasmania's CFCs. In CFCs young children and their families are connected with one another, and more broadly with friends, local community members and professionals from the health, education and social services sectors.

Operating under the principles and practices outlined in Prichard, Purdon and Chaplyn (2010) *Moving Forward Together: A Guide to Support the Integration of Service Delivery for Children and Families*, Tasmania's CFCs are contributing to a wide range of positive outcomes for children. Many of the benefits of CFC's have been reported by McDonald, O'Byrne and Prichard (2015). These illustrate the effect on children's wellbeing when parents are empowered by their participation in the Davis, Day, and Bidmead (2002) *Family Partnerships Model* adopted by the CFCs. Parents not only contribute ideas to how services might best suit theirs and their children's needs, but also carry into their home-lives health and educative practices learned at the centre.

Some families require additional support. For example where there is a child with a disability, or when mental health of substance abuse is involved, these families often need to make contact with a range of services. Our experiences show that CFCs assist families to negotiate complex government and non-government systems. Our experiences also show that CFCs have become a first port of call for parents seeking to engage with child health and education services if they think that their child may need additional support. By building long-term trusting relationships, CFCs have overcome long-standing resistance by parents in some communities to seek help for their children.

Recommendation

We recommend that in order to provide for the holistic nature of children's learning and healthy development, CFCs continue to develop and monitor the integrative nature and operations of their services based on the 'Journey' model on Page 9 of the Prichard et al (2010) Moving Forward Together guide.

2. The role of Child and Family Centres in providing early learning to children.

The various early learning programs offered in CFCs reflect the integrated nature of the centres. While *Launching into Learning* (LIL) is offered regularly, other social and skills-based programs, both formal and incidental, give children a broad range of learning opportunities. Playgroups and arts programs provide children with integrated learning adding to the outcomes of the LIL experiences. While LIL progress reports have documented long term gains made by children who have attended LIL programs (See for example Educational Performance Services report, 2014), it is unclear how the other health and learning programs have contributed to these gains in children who attend CFC programs.

We contend that when children are provided with integrated services in CFCs such as Antenatal, Child Health and Parenting Services (CHAPs), Oral health, Immunisation, Nutrition in the early years, Children's therapies such as speech and language and Adjunct care, these contribute to children's capacity to engage in LIL and other specialist learning programs. In addition, the flexibility of programs offered to young children in CFCs help to provide timely and targeted learning support. More importantly, the input of the community to the decision-making regarding how and when learning programs are offered ensures that the focus remains on meeting the needs of identified cohorts and individual children.

Recommendation

We recommend that funding of CFCs incorporates the need for flexibility in offering early learning programs alongside health and wellbeing service delivery; and that future LIL progress reports differentiate the outcomes for children who attend CFCs in ways that show how health gains contribute to these outcomes. By doing this, the integrated nature of services offered by CFCs are recognised in learning benchmarks.

3. The role of Child and Family Centres in providing education and support to families and carers in their parenting role and participation in early learning programs.

There is substantial evidence to show that when support for parents in their parenting role is framed in a 'partnering' context children make many gains including improved educational outcomes stemming from their increased participation in early learning programs (Arney & Scott, 2010). It seems that there is an association between (1) sharing a variety of understandings about parenting and the many roles and responsibilities involved, and (2) parents' valuing the opportunities that early learning programs provide for their children. It is here that CFCs have enjoyed success due to the integrated nature of both their services and the spaces in which these occur.

The open planning of CFC environments promote interconnections between adult and child programs. We contend that CFCs have been specifically designed for this purpose and are functioning well to achieve goals related to parenting and early learning programs. Open structures and the combination of *Platforms* as a theoretical guide for facilitating the development of CFCs using the *Family Partnership Model* has contributed to the success of CFCs. We suggest that this is especially so in the provision of appropriate strengths-based parenting and early learning programs. The challenge for continued success is ensuring the upskilling of CFC staff and community members in *Platforms* and the *Family Partnership Model*.

Recommendation

We recommend that there is continued support by government in both funding for and development of connectivity between parenting and early learning programs in CFCs, along with funding for continuous professional learning. We further recommend that schools in the local CFC communities be harnessed to build on the work of the CFCs in progressing parent involvement in children's learning throughout their school lives.

4. The outcomes and broader impacts of Child and Family Centres to the communities which they are located in.

Tasmanian CFCs have been recognised by national and international early years' leaders as leading the way in engaging communities of disadvantage in the co-production of local service models (Pritchard, O'Byrne & Jenkins, 2015). NEYG highlights the many positive outcomes for community members of such collaborations in the development, management and operations of CFCs. From their inception, the establishment and operation of Tasmania's CFCs have incorporated community involvement. Continuing such processes is vital for the delivery of relevant and timely support for families and young children.

The success of CFCs in 12 communities in Tasmania is due in part to their operating under the principles outlined by Prichard et al, (2015) of: inclusion, equality, engagement, relationship development, shared understanding, and partnership. Such principles have been observed in operation at CFCs and members of NEYG note the empowerment of community members which have occurred over several years. Many individuals in CFC communities have also gained initial qualifications and experiences in CFCs enabling them to enter the paid workforce, important for moving out of poverty and associated stressors. Other issues such as domestic violence and drug abuse have been prioritised in CFCs and addressed in collaboration with those experiencing the effects of these in their children's lives. Finally, in our experience, when community members take

ownership of 'their' CFC there is considerable flow on effect to the wider community by way of shared events and celebrations.

Recommendation

We recommend that consideration be given to sourcing and establishing further links between CFCs and their wider communities with a view to increasing involvement in and 'ownership' of these centres and programs. We also recommend that additional attention be paid to gathering insights from children about what works in their best interests. This, we believe, is paramount to maintaining the CFC primary focus on children's health wellbeing and early learning.

5. The level of government funding provided to Child and Family Centres and whether there is a need for more Child and Family Centres in particular communities or locations.

As we have indicated already, we cannot overestimate the importance of positive nurturing experiences in children's early years for their growth, development and learning. There is much evidence for the subsequent flow-on effects for children's later participation in society. NEYG adopts the premise that investment in Tasmania's young children and their families is a cost-effective way of enhancing social capital now and in the future. We wish to reinforce the premise articulated by Prichard et al. (2015); namely that the co-design of services with community members, particularly in communities of distinct disadvantage, is the most respectful and sustainable approach to reaching families who struggle to access, or are disengaged from, early childhood services. We refer to the Department of Education Strategic Plan 2014 to 2017 (for CFCs) in concert with the CFC Strategic Plan and suggest that future planning incorporate the provision of additional CFCs to further the goals articulated in those documents to a wider range of communities across Tasmania.

Recommendation

We recommend that investment in CFCs is prioritised and expanded so that all young children and their families in Tasmania have access to integrated, futures-focused and collaborative services to enhance children's health, wellbeing and early learning. Building additional CFCs for the Rocherlea and Waverly communities are highly recommended for immediate consideration.

References

- Arney, F., & Scott, D. (2010). *Working with Vulnerable Families: A partnership approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, H., Day, C., & Bidmead, C. (2002). *Working in Partnership with Parents – The Parents Adviser Model*. London, UK: Harcourt Assessment.
- Educational Performance Services (2014). *Launching into Learning Longitudinal Study – Progress Report 2013*. Tasmanian Government
- McDonald, M., O'Byrne, M., & Prichard, P. (2015). *Using the Family Partnership Model to engage communities: Lessons from Tasmanian Child and Family Centres*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Centre and the Royal Children's Hospital.
- Prichard, P., O'Byrne, M., & Jenkins, S. (2015). *Supporting Tasmania's Child and Family Centres: The journey of change through a Learning & Development strategy*. Hobart, Tasmania. DOI: 10.4225/50/558CD4D667CED

Prichard, P., Purdon, S., & Chaplyn, J. (2010). Moving forward together: A guide to support the integration of service delivery for children and families for children and families. Hobart, Tasmania: Murdoch Children's Research Institute/Centre for Community Child Health, Vic/Tasmanian Early Years Foundation.

Additional Sources

Links to resources accesses by NEYG to obtain comprehensive information on Tasmania's CFCs

[Engaging, supporting and working with children and families in Tasmania's Child and Family Centres, August 2015](#) (report prepared by the Telethon Kids Institute)

[Using the Family Partnership Model to engage communities: Lessons from Tasmanian Child and Family Centres, August 2015](#)web

[Supporting Tasmania's Child and Family Centres: The journey of change through a Learning & Development Strategy, June 2015](#)

[Moving forward together: A guide to support the integration of service delivery for children and families, June 2010](#)

CFC Documents

| Title | |
|---|---|
|  | An Overview of Child and Family Centres |
|  | CFC - Publications and Resources |
|  | CFC Contact List |
|  | CFC Statewide Outcomes Based Framework |
|  | CFC Strategic Plan |
|  | Child and Family Centre Functional Design Brief |
|  | DoE Strategic Plan 2014-2017 |
|  | Platforms Roadmap Revision 2012 |
|  | Respectful Schools and Workplaces Framework |

Submitted by

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