



The Secretary
Legislative Council Select Committee – Tasmanian Child and Family
Centres
Legislative Council
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The following submission has been prepared by the **Telethon Kids Institute/University of Western Australia and Menzies Institute for Medical Research** by Professor Cate Taylor, Daniel Christensen, Professor Stephen Zubrick and Dr Kim Jose.

Our team was responsible for a research project that investigated the short-run impact of CFCs on parents' use and experiences of early childhood and family support services. As Centres were only recently established when the project took place 2013 – 2015, evaluating the impact of CFCs on children's health, wellbeing, development and learning would have been premature. Hence, the project focused on the impact of CFCs on parents' use and experiences of early childhood services and supports since the Centres opened.

Key findings

The Tasmanian CFC model is a place-based initiative designed to break the cycle of disadvantage and promote positive child health, development and learning in twelve communities that are amongst Australia's most socio-economically disadvantaged. Consistent with international place-based initiatives (e.g., Sure Start, Toronto First Duty, Promise Neighbourhoods), Tasmanian CFCs have been explicitly designed to overcome barriers to access and participation in mainstream early childhood services and cater for multiple, complex service needs.

- Our research showed promising signs that the CFC model is working as intended and overcoming barriers to parental engagement in early childhood services in a number of ways:
 1. There was a strong sense of community ownership of CFCs.
 2. The comprehensive, complementary and coordinated services that were available locally under one roof addressed many of the physical barriers to access, such as transport, cost and time that can impact on service use.
 3. Centre users made more use of most services and supports than non-users (playgroup, Launching into Learning, child health nurse, parenting program, Vocational Education and Training and Community/Neighbourhood House). There were no statistically significant differences in the usage of antenatal clinics, childcare, GP and dental services. The average number of services accessed by Centre users was 4.0, compared to 2.3 for non-users.
 4. The single entry point also facilitated 'soft contact' with service providers by parents and families through drop-in sessions, that then led to subsequent engagement with more targeted services and supports where necessary.

5. Co-location of services also enabled some parents to access services and supports without having to disclose their use to family and friends.

- Parents identified CFCs as informal, accessible, responsive, non-judgemental and supportive places where they felt valued, respected and safe.
- Parents experienced CFCs as welcoming places that were helping them to develop positive child, family, school and community connections. These qualities appeared critical for facilitating parental access and engagement in early childhood services.
- As CFCs are recently established, evaluating their impact on children's health, wellbeing, development and learning will take time. Longitudinal research, using quantitative and qualitative methods, will be critical to understanding the impact of CFCs on children and families.

Current research

Professor Cate Taylor leads the 'Tassie Kids: Pathways to better health and education outcomes for Tasmania's children' project. The 'Tassie Kids' project will track the progress of 12,000 children from birth to age five, to better understand the impact of early childhood health and education policies and services, including Child and Family Centres, on children's development in their first year of full-time school at age five. The methods include linkage of health and education administrative records and ethnographic research with parents, carers and early childhood service providers (e.g., Child and Family Health Nurses, Early Childhood Educators) working in different ways (e.g., Child and Family Centres) across Tasmania.

Telethon Kids Institute and The University of Western Australia researchers are partnering with researchers from the Menzies Institute for Medical Research and the School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania, as well as three Tasmanian government departments. The project has been made possible thanks to the support of the Department of Education (DoE), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPaC) and a National Health and Medical Research Council Partnership Project Grant (1115891).

The results of the 'Tassie Kids' project will provide outcomes-linked evidence needed to inform future early childhood service planning – including CFCs – from pregnancy to the start of full-time school.

Thank you for considering our submission. Should you require any further elaboration on our research, Dr Kim Jose and I are based in Tasmania and would be pleased to meet with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



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Biographies

Professor Cate Taylor (BAppSc PGradDipHlthSc PhD FSPA)

Cate is a Senior Principal Research Fellow employed at the Telethon Kids Institute and lives and works in Launceston, Tasmania. She specialises in large-scale longitudinal studies of children's health, development, education and wellbeing. She has developed successful multidisciplinary research partnerships with government agencies and uses linked cross-sectoral government agency datasets to provide practical analysis and insights into best practice service provision and the role of early childhood health and education services in supporting families and young children. She began her career as a paediatric speech pathologist at the Launceston General Hospital and her primary research is in children's language and literacy development. Cate is a Research Fellow in the Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Lifecourse.

Professor Stephen Zubrick (MSc AM PhD)

Stephen is based at the Telethon Kids Institute and the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia. He is also Chairman of the Consortium Advisory Group for the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and Deputy Director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Lifecourse.

Daniel Christensen (BA (Hons) MSci)

Daniel is based at the Telethon Kids Institute, and is a Research Fellow in the Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Life Course.

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Kim is a post-doctoral research fellow based at the Menzies Institute of Medical Research, University of Tasmania and is a Research Fellow in the Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Lifecourse.

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