

Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011

**... it's their outcomes that
matter**



As the peak body representing 98 community service organisations across the State of Victoria the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) presents this submission as a collaboration of sector views and ambitions, to reduce trauma and provide the best outcomes for all vulnerable children, young people and their families.

The responsibility for us all to hold the best outcomes for vulnerable children and families as the single driver for systemic change is unquestionable. Addressing generational disadvantage, committing to prevention strategies and building systemic responses that focus on *need* is essential to building the best future for children and young people.

This submission acknowledges that the State of Victoria has led many of the nation's changes to the way we respond to vulnerable children, young people and their families. Evaluations and critiques of the system have been varied and complex, identifying incremental progressions and highlighting procedural failures.

The Centre's membership as a whole acknowledges the many significant changes that have enabled it to build a strong community network of responses but remains challenged by unmet demand and programmes which do not meet the complex needs of people.

The sector views this Inquiry as an opportunity to create the next wave of reform and change, to build on existing strengths and openly debate systemic challenges and credits the Minister for the courage and conviction to debate the best strategy.

Our submission is framed on the collective understanding that systems and processes should:

- include the voice of children and families as significant stakeholders across all spectrums of the system
- support and develop families so children stay with their families and grow up in their care
- provide a range of care services that are safe, stable, address issues of trauma and meet the assessed needs of children and young people
- ensure risk, abuse and neglect are not caused by systems pressures
- demand and achieve mainstream outcomes for children and young people, in care and in vulnerable communities, as the only acceptable benchmark.

This submission reflects the following principles which our members identified through a series of consultations:

- vulnerable children and young people should remain above politics
- a shared vision and outcomes framework for the optimal development of vulnerable children is essential for building a strategy and the annual reporting of success
- funding models should be equitable, accountable and transparent
- shared decision making, self-determination and respect for cultural and family connections are the baseline of practice

- a true whole of government commitment to addressing issues of poverty, vulnerability and trauma is essential to progress
- all staff and volunteers are supported in continuous skill development.

The Centre would like to acknowledge the work of all our members in contributing to this Inquiry. While views may vary the commitment is singular – the best outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

In particular we would like to acknowledge the views and intent expressed in the submissions of Community Child Care (CCC), Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC), Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS). The Centre further acknowledges and commends the joint submission of Anglicare Victoria, MacKillop Family Services, Berry Street, Salvation Army and VACCA. The Centre was pleased to accept the invitation to participate as an active contributor to both its content and recommendations.

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Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

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Executive Summary

With the passage of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 the Victorian community had a clear road map with which to support vulnerable families. However significant system changes which accompanied the legislation have not improved outcomes. Challenges are raised by:

- population growth
- the impact of entrenched disadvantage and exclusion in some local areas
- increased notification of protective concern.

In addressing this concern, the Centre proposes changes to existing structural responsibilities and the creation of a Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy, informed by all stakeholders and open to public scrutiny. The Centre further proposes broader local governance and flexible responses, informed by the children and families that it supports. The Centre believes this is critical to frame our next stage of development across the State of Victoria.

To provide the best outcomes for individual vulnerable children, young people and their families the Centre believes the following actions are required to allow the 2005 reforms to work in the way we all hoped they would:

- the adoption of a *shared social responsibility model* for vulnerable children, young persons' and families across the state of Victoria brought to life by a multi-partisan political, sector and academic agreement on a whole of system strategy including an outcomes framework and a broad based/two dimensional concept of vulnerability
- provision for greater self-determination of children and families incorporating the strengths of relationship-based practice
- recognition of the need for a broad and responsive secondary system as an early intervention and prevention strategy specifically relevant to individual, vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- empowerment of local decision making and responsiveness and
- substantial change to sector structures with the appropriate and corresponding governance, accountability and transparency mechanisms.

Our submission provides the arguments, recommendations and details on how these actions would be achieved, monitored and reviewed.

The Centre guided by its membership has set out an ambitious and challenging vision for the sector. The adoption of these reforms will require substantial courage from all involved, an essential and obvious ingredient to achieve the best outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

The following presents recommendations as listed throughout the body of this submission.

Identifying Vulnerability

Recommendations

1. The Government of Victoria commit to the development of a Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy to be led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and developed by a committee comprising multi-party political membership, all government agencies and community sector representatives. The committee should be chaired by an independent expert academic.
2. The development of the Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy, must include an outcomes accountability framework and should be delivered within a two year time frame and thereafter be reported on an annual basis.
3. A broad-based concept of vulnerability should be developed as part of the strategy, be conceptually aligned with the paradigm of wellbeing and expand further than the standard measures of resource-based disadvantage.
4. The outcomes framework should produce relevant data and findings from a State down to a local catchment level aligned with existing Child FIRST catchments and be open to public scrutiny.

A Promotion and Prevention Approach

Recommendations

5. A promotion and prevention approach must be underpinned by a whole of Government approach to children that fully addresses the primary, secondary and tertiary components of the service system.
6. A robust secondary service system should receive the resources and supports required to meet the individual needs of vulnerable children, young people and families.
7. Universal services should be appropriately resourced to identify and engage with vulnerable children and young people across the State.

Governance and Legal Framework for Vulnerable Children and Young People

Recommendations

8. A system governance approach should be adopted in respect of vulnerable children and young people and their families to produce a focus on better outcomes for children and young people.
9. The Department of Consumer Affairs should take on the role of the registration and accreditation of all not for profit and community service organisations.
10. An Independent Office of Children and Young Persons' Guardian should be created.
11. Local Area Children Young Persons and Families Networks should be created.
12. Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal should be created.
13. The functions and powers of the Children's Court remain unchanged.
14. The current Office of the Children's Safety Commissioner should become the Independent Office of the Children's Commissioner including special provision for an Independent Aboriginal Children's Commissioner.

Services for vulnerable children, young people and their families

Recommendations

15. All out-of-home care should be delivered in line with current successful therapeutic service models.
16. Family support, youth and all preventative services should be funded on a demand model.
17. Rates of reimbursement for foster, kinship and permanent carers must be immediately raised in line with the recommendations made by Dr Marilyn McHugh and the Social Policy Research Centre, adjusted for CPI, in order to cover the true costs of care.¹
18. Strategic and significant additional investment must be made to allow for the state-wide coordination and provision of recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster, kinship and permanent carers.

¹ M McHugh, *The costs of caring: a study of appropriate foster care payments for stable and adequate out of home care in Australia*, Social policy research centre, Australia, 2002.

Accountability and Transparency

Recommendations

19. The development of CPP&FSOF measures for individual outcomes in addition to aggregated information for all children in the system should continue and be expanded to identify the needs of all vulnerable children and young people at a State and catchment area.
20. A shift to an outcomes funding model should be developed to create a greater level of flexibility regarding meeting needs of children, young people and families, and not targets.
21. Development of a system wide workforce strategy should be undertaken as part of a Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy.
22. The Inquiry's recommendations should reflect the priority for action on advocacy set out in the *National Compact with the Third Sector*, and Recommendation 11.3 of the Productivity Commission's report
23. Funding and service agreements should respect the independence of community service organisations and not impose conditions associated with the general operations of the funded organisation, beyond those essential to ensure the delivery of agreed funding outcomes.

Decision Making and Building a Voice

Recommendations

24. As part of the Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy a joint framework around inclusion in decision making should be developed and be supported by resources for professional education and development.
25. Children and Young Persons' Commissioners should review the involvement of children and young people in decision making of the Department of Human Services, The Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons' Guardian and Community Service Organisations.
26. Family group conferencing should be mandated and appropriately resourced, and be made available to both the Children's Court and the Children and Young Persons' Tribunal.
27. The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 must continue to provide for the Family Division to hold the jurisdictional powers currently held under 7.2. Protection Applications by Place of Safety, contested applications and jurisdiction for Custody Orders to a third party, a Supervised Custody Order, Custody or Guardian to the Secretary Order or a Permanent Care Order, and their extension and revocation should be retained by the Children's Court.
28. The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 should be amended to provide for non-adversarial decision making by a Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal.

29. Provisions requiring the involvement of parents in case conferencing should be reviewed to ensure that parents are resourced to attend and participate.

I. Identifying Vulnerability

Pamela, a case manager, understands the adversity and difficulties experienced by many families. One such family is a father trying to support his four children removed from their biological mother after a long history exposed to violence in her care. The stress felt by the family had led to the deterioration of the father's relationship with the children's school and counselling services. "Repairing these relationships was vital if the children were to receive the best possible support both at home and at school. I was adamant that it was vital to not only link this family to services but to be there for them. I was with that family, rain, hail or shine, every week".

Centre Case Study 2010

Term of Reference 1: The risk factors that increase the risk of abuse or neglect occurring and effective prevention strategies.

Term of Reference 2: Strategies to enhance early identification of and intervention targeted at children and families at risk including the role of adult universal and primary support services.

Key Principles

1. Individual measures to identify vulnerable children, young people and families must be accompanied by strategies designed to address their needs.
2. Population measures to identify vulnerability should be applied to secure long term sustainable improvement in the wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and their families and should be built into all program planning and evaluation.
3. Transparent evidence and integrated data must inform policy and program development.
4. Clear indicators of wellbeing should be identified and reporting should occur at the level of the child, family and community.

Key Issues

All families in Victoria are facing rising costs of living especially for education and utilities. Not all families living on low incomes are vulnerable but vulnerable families on low incomes are particularly susceptible to the pressures of rising costs of living in ways which are often not recognised by the wider community. The Government in its 2011 Victorian Families Statement demonstrated the impacts of rising costs of living in relation to average weekly earnings and has moved to address electricity

costs with its recent announcement of electricity concessions.² The Victorian Families Statement presents a possible framework for assessing future strategies to ensure that the needs of vulnerable families in relation to utilities, housing, education, health, transport and safety are addressed and this needs to be pursued.

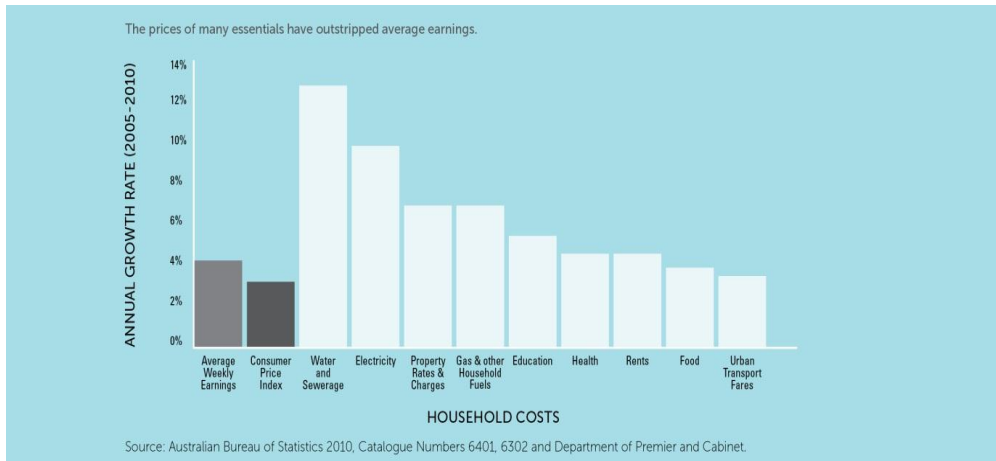


Chart 1 – Household Costs in Victoria³

There are several ways of identifying vulnerability in Victoria. A number of vulnerable families in Victoria can in the first instance, be identified by establishing receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowance, eligibility for which is determined on the basis of possession of a Centrelink income tested pension or concession card. In 2006-07, the last year in which the number of recipients of the Education Maintenance Allowance was reported in State Government Budget papers there were 205,000 or 25.0 % of children enrolled in Victorian schools receiving this payment.⁴ A further indicator of vulnerability is eligibility to receive maximum rate, Family Tax Benefit Part A where this is received at incomes less than \$45,114 per year. Approximately 430,000 families receive this payment in Victoria.⁵

Typically the operationalisation of the concept of vulnerability and disadvantage has focused on the assumed link between poverty, or lack of resources, and vulnerability/disadvantage. Thus, if a child, family or community score low on a set of resource criteria such as income, employment and other socioeconomic indicators they are defined as being disadvantaged or ‘vulnerable’.

Viewed from an outcomes perspective, measures have operationalised the identification of vulnerability and risk by measuring, typically, physical health,

² Victorian Government, *Victorian Families Statement*, 2011, viewed on 19 April, <<http://premier.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Families-Statement-pdf-document.pdf>>.

³ *ibid*, p. 8.

⁴ Victorian Government, *Victorian State Budget, Budget Paper No 3, Service Delivery*, 2006-2007, viewed on 18 April 2011, <[http://www.budget.vic.gov.au/CA25713B0016B131/WebObj/BP3Ch3DET/\\$File/BP3Ch3DET.pdf](http://www.budget.vic.gov.au/CA25713B0016B131/WebObj/BP3Ch3DET/$File/BP3Ch3DET.pdf)>.

⁵ Herald Sun, 2011, viewed on 2 April 2011, <www.heraldsunonline.com.au/dbs/centrelink/search_FTBA_A.php>.

educational performance and personal safety. The essential assumption behind the operationalisation of these measures is the definition of vulnerability and disadvantage as being primarily a lack of resources from which to achieve health and educational outcomes.

Vulnerability is not equally distributed across the community. Vulnerable families and children are more likely to live in some areas than others. The Australian Bureau of Statistics SEIFA indices of relative disadvantage have provided a platform for local area planning for many years.⁶

In recognition of the impact of disadvantage and the cycle of inter-generational poverty, the operationalisation of measures has further been extended by others to also include factors such as community and social factors, community perceptions, perinatal history, familial mental health and familial support systems and consistency of care, and social/emotional maturity and functioning. Examples of these measures are the Sure Start measure in Britain and Best Start profiling in Victoria.^{7 8 9} These approaches have critically extended metrics and measures of the concept of vulnerability and disadvantage in that they are able to:

- Discriminate between differences in profile/performance across different localities
- Identify difference in resources and performance between communities traditionally recognised as 'vulnerable' - such as Aboriginal and CALD communities
- Offer insight into the nature of deficits and lack of resources for service and intervention planning at both the policy and the local levels.

Recently further work has been undertaken to identify the interaction between poverty, locational disadvantage and vulnerability, with the aim of integrating national and state-based programmes and strategies at the local level. The Australian Social Inclusion Board has undertaken a number of key pieces of research which link the identification of poverty and disadvantage with social inclusion, local strategies and programmes for vulnerable children.^{10 11 12} The work by Tony Vinson for Jesuit Social

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Information Paper: An introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for areas (SEIFA) 2006*, 2008, viewed on 19 April 2011, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2039.0Main%20Features32006atest>>.

⁷ Centre for Parenting Research, *Early years program evaluation: The UK evidence base: Seminar Notes*, NSW Department of Community Services, 2006, viewed on 19 April 2011 <www.community.nsw.gov.au>.

⁸ TNS Social Research cited in Australian Social Inclusion Board, *Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage*, 2011, viewed on 19 April 2011, <www.socialinclusion.au>.

⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Best Start Atlas: Children aged 0-8 years in Victoria*, 3rd Edition, State of Victoria, 2009.

¹⁰ Australian Social Inclusion Board, *Children at risk of long-term disadvantage and elements of successful programmes and services*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, viewed on 18 April 2011, <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Partnerships/Board/Documents/Summaryofelements.pdf>>.

¹¹ Australian Social Inclusion Board, *Social Inclusion policy design and delivery toolkit*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, viewed on 18 April 2011, <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Documents/SIToolKit.pdf>>.

Services is particularly important as it indicates spatial disadvantage in Victoria, as outlined in Figure 1, and makes a direct link with child protection notifications as one of the indicators in building an index of disadvantage while also including other indicators of vulnerability which Bromfield identifies as factors associated with children being notified to Child Protection.^{13 14}

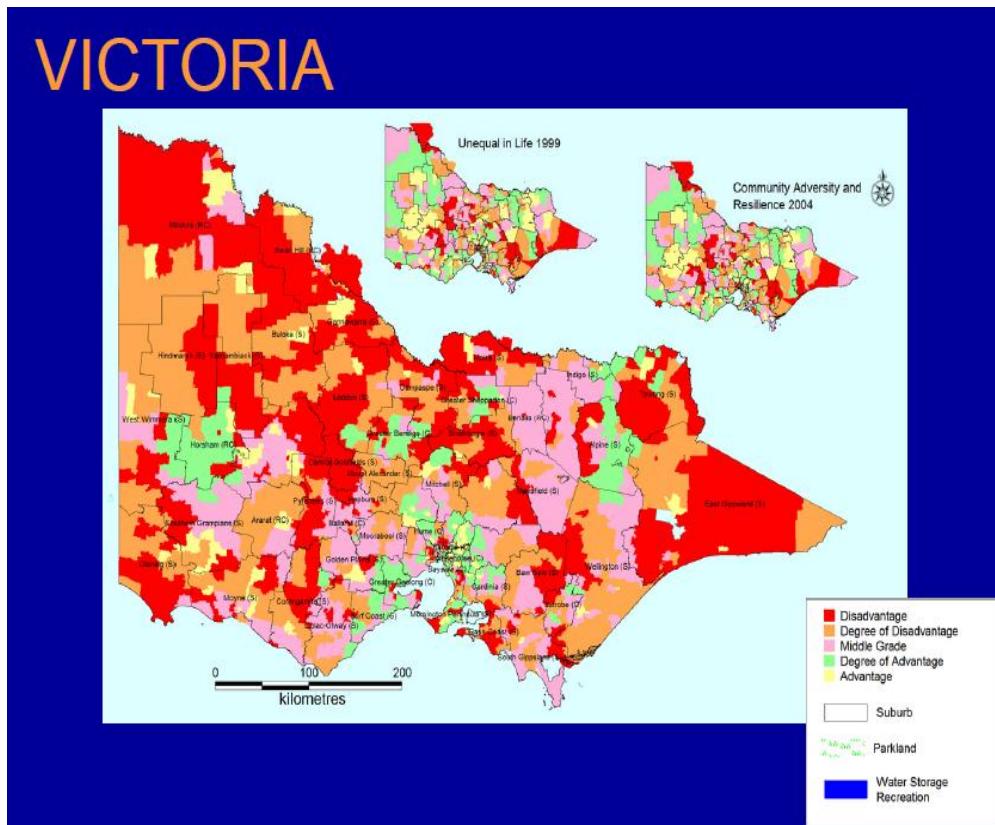


Figure 1 - Spatial disadvantage in Victoria, 2007

¹² Australian Social Inclusion Board, *Breaking Cycles of Disadvantage*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, viewed on 18 April 2011,

<<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Breakingcyclesofdisadvantage.pdf>>.

¹³ T Vinson, *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of spatial disadvantage in Australia*, Catholic Social Services Australia and Jesuit Social Services, 2007.

¹⁴ L Bromfield & P Holzer, *A National Approach to Child Protection Project Report*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008.

More recently child protection reports arising in Child FIRST catchment areas have also reflected spatial disadvantage, as highlighted in Figure 2.¹⁵

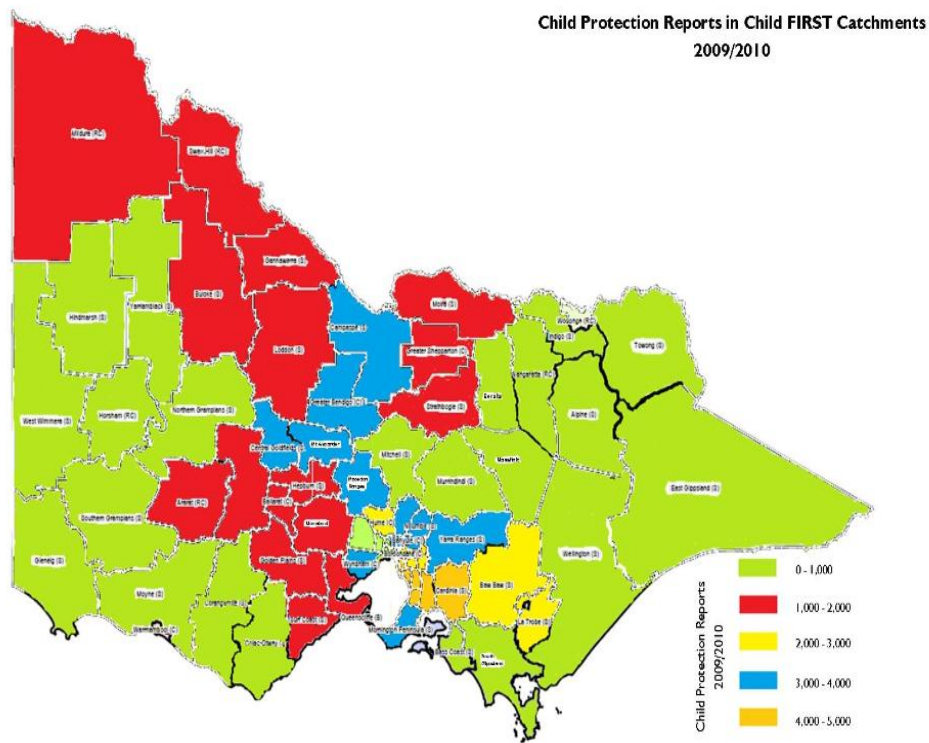


Figure 2 - Child Protection Reports in Child FIRST Catchments 2009/2010

Child protection report data has been used to develop many of the state-wide strategic reforms particularly in Child FIRST and for local area planning within the Department of Human Services. What is unclear is the extent to which the Department of Human Services is using a layered understanding of vulnerability derived from its own departmental data and from other key government agencies. Transparency and debate about how regional and local priorities are set and which of the available indicators, including aggregate information from data bases about service usage, is critical if lasting whole of population impacts are to be achieved.

The Centre would suggest that what we seek to measure needs broader consideration. Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths¹⁶ have postulated that from a social inclusion paradigm, vulnerability should be conceptualised and measured on two dimensions:

¹⁵ M Naughton, Presentation to Department of Human Services Victoria, *Child Protection, Family and Early Parenting Services and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services*, 2010.

¹⁶ P Saunders, Y Naidoo & M Griffiths, *Towards new indicators of disadvantage: Deprivation and social exclusion in Australia*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, 2007, viewed on 19 April 2011, <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SI/Agenda/Principles/DOcuments/SIPinciples.pdf>>.

Deprivation

- measuring what a community / individual cannot afford - an inability to afford essential items

Social Exclusion

- measuring disadvantage and alienation experienced; what a community / individual can and cannot do. A measure of where individuals do not have the opportunity to participate in widely practiced social and economic activities.¹⁷

A number of advantages of this approach to the measurement of vulnerability are evident utilising a two-dimensional approach. These being:

- Insight into the nature of social vulnerability and disadvantage - that might remain 'structurally' and inter-generationally despite welfare based income initiatives
- The opportunity to understand the combination of stresses - financial, medical, emotional, social and structural that combine to indicate vulnerability and greater insight into the range of policy levers required to address it
- The potential for more targeted and effective interventions and the opportunity to track the impact of interventions on patterns of deprivation and exclusion over time
- An extension of the concept of vulnerability to include the interaction of economic capacity and resources with access to support networks and capacity to participate.^{18 19}

Using these measures, vulnerability is understood in a cultural and community context based on an understanding of what is considered to be social and community rights or essentials - things that most Australians enjoy on a regular basis or should not have to go without today.

From an Australian perspective vulnerability has been measured by several means. The nationwide introduction of the highly respected international measure of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is one such approach. This measures competencies at age 4-5 in order to identify communities where children are vulnerable or disadvantaged - measuring physical health and wellbeing, language, cognitive, communication and general knowledge skills as well as social competence and emotional maturity.²⁰

¹⁷ P Saunders & M Wong, *Still doing it tough: an update on deprivation and social exclusion among welfare service clients*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, 2009, viewed on April 18 2011, <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/Report7_09_still_doing_it_tough.pdf/File/Report7_09_still_doing_it_tough.pdf>.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p. ix.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. ix.

²⁰ National Report, *A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia: The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)*, 2009 (Re-issue 2011), viewed on 18 April 2011, <<http://www.aedi.org.au>>.

Current research using the AEDI has shown that in some areas designated as disadvantaged using standard economic and socio demographic data, children are doing better than expected, and in some advantaged communities, some children are doing worse than expected.²¹

In Victoria, specific data about vulnerable children and young people is fragmented. Since 2006 an annual report has been produced by the State relating to how children and young people are faring. Each year the focus of these reports varies and while valuable cannot be considered strategically targeted or consistent enough to direct change. The annual release of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Child Protection report is also another valuable report however more focused on an national comparison than a State or regional measurement tool.²²

The Centre notes that data collection occurs across many differing Government agencies and community service organisation however our collective understanding of vulnerability across the State of Victoria remains poor, disaggregated and opaque.

Many individual measures for identification of vulnerable children and young people have been developed internationally. Within Victoria the Department of Human Services introduced the Best Interest Case Practice Model with a range of tools and resources for family services practitioners in Child FIRST and other family support services. Recently the Australian Government has announced it will provide \$1.1 M to trial a new tool to help doctors, nurses, teachers, and childcare workers to identify issues early and respond to the needs of individual vulnerable children and their families. It is important that tools developed to ensure the best response for children through identification of vulnerability or risk are not applied as exclusion tools in the context of scarce resources.

Recommendations

1. The Government of Victoria commit to the development of a Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy to be led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and developed by a committee comprising multi-party political membership, all government agencies and community sector representatives. The committee could be chaired by an independent expert academic.
2. That the development of the Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy, must include an outcomes accountability framework and should be delivered within a two year time frame and thereafter be reported on an annual basis.

²¹ Murdoch Children's Institute, *Children: Selected projects*, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2011, viewed on 19 April 2011, <<http://www.mcri.edu.au/pages/research/research-grop.asp?P=projects&G=146>>.

²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child protection Australia 2009-10*, Child Welfare Series No. 51, Cat. No. CWS59, Canberra AIHW, 2011.

3. A broad-based concept of vulnerability should be developed as part of the strategy, be conceptually aligned with the paradigm of wellbeing and expand further than the standard measures of resource-based disadvantage.
4. That the outcomes framework produce relevant data and findings from a State down to a local catchment level aligned with existing Child FIRST catchments and be open to public scrutiny.

2. A Promotion and Prevention Approach

Barbara was a long-term cannabis user combined with a diagnosed dissociative personality disorder and was referred to Child FIRST due to the effect this was having on her ability to positively parent her two sons. Barbara's mental health often made life unpredictable and confusing for her sons who had become increasingly resentful, argumentative and refused to attend school. Barbara attended a number of care team meetings convened by the Anglicare Family Solutions. These meetings also involved other services and paid careful attention to the collaborative working relationship between services and Barbara. Barbara is now a full time parent to her boys and suggests that a year ago she would never have believed she would be experiencing life as it is for her now.

Adapted from DHS Good practice: a statewide snapshot 2010

Term of Reference 1: The risk factors that increase the risk of abuse or neglect occurring and effective prevention strategies.

Term of Reference 2: Strategies to enhance early identification of and intervention targeted at children and families at risk including the role of adult universal and primary support services.

Key Principles

1. A whole of Government approach to vulnerable children and young people requires investment across the continuum of promotion, prevention and protection (primary, secondary and tertiary services).
2. Deficiencies in the provision of secure income, homes, utilities, adequate health, education, transport and employment must be viewed as critical contributors to vulnerability.

Key Issues

The Centre supports a promotion and prevention approach to vulnerable children. This approach recognises the need for social programming across the service continuum of primary, secondary and tertiary services. The Centre recommends the adoption of the Prilleltensky²³ 'wellness' model to depict this approach but favours the use of the term 'wellbeing' for the Australian context. The promotion, prevention and protection continuum described in the Prilleltensky model can be aligned with the

²³ I Prilleltensky, G Nelson & L Pierson, *Promoting Family Wellness and Preventing Child Maltreatment: Fundamentals for intervention, thinking and action*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2001.

traditional description of primary, secondary and tertiary services associated with a public health approach.²⁴

While subtle in its difference the Centre believes the current discourse around the public health approach for vulnerable children and their families has an over-reliance on universal services alone. There is a need to recognise that improvements in population based outcome criteria may not necessarily improve the immediate outcome for individuals, groups or families or indeed address situations of harm for vulnerable children and young people. The importance of targeted early intervention secondary services informed by state-wide and local evidence is crucial if true changes are to be achieved.²⁵

A promotion and prevention approach has several advantages to a child welfare approach in addressing vulnerability. It recognises that social programming and service systems can also be described in terms of their capabilities and wellbeing, just as individuals and families can be described.²⁶ The approach provides a framework that involves an emphasis on the causes of problems at the level of populations rather than the individual, recognition of the need to focus attention on changing behaviour universally and a shift of emphasis toward prevention and promotion.²⁷ The approach is also consistent with principles of promoting the wellbeing of the family, the principle of minimum statutory intervention in the life of the family and the provision of services at a local level with the engagement and involvement of families in the services provided.

Such an approach also recognises the importance of promotion of child wellbeing through shared social responsibility. With the community, the community services sector and government sharing responsibility in protecting vulnerable children, young people and families, all in line with their real and reflected capacity to do so.

On the whole a promotion and prevention approach represents the best way of conceptualising and planning services for all families, including the relatively small number of families facing protective intervention.²⁸ For these families social programmes across the full spectrum of secondary services are important.

²⁴ Council of Australian Governments, *Protecting Childrens Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.

²⁵ G Allen, *Early Intervention: the next steps*, An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government, 2011, viewed on 27 April 2011, <<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf>>.

²⁶ A Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

²⁷ J Barlow, viewed on 14 April 2011, <www.Nspcc.org.uk/inform/newsandevents/conferencereports/SettingtheScene_wdf60476.pdf>.

²⁸ National Child Protection Clearing House, *Defining the public health model for the child welfare services context*, Compiled by P Holzer, Resource Sheet No. 11, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2007, viewed on 18 April 2011, <<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs11/rs11.html>>.

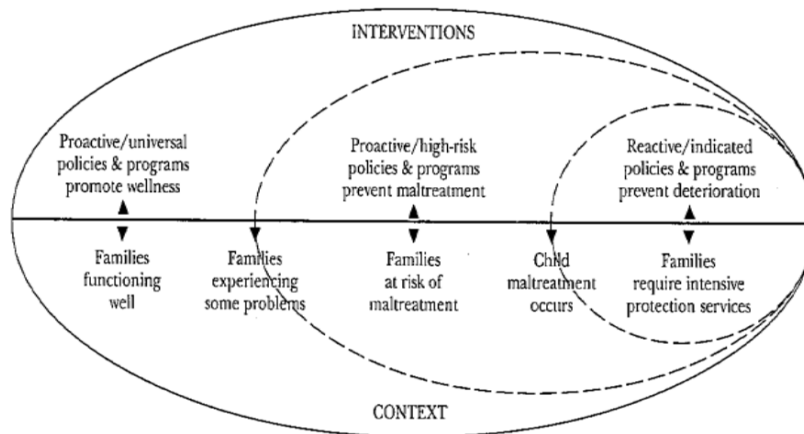


Figure 3 – The Promotion-Prevention-Protection Continuum

As adopted in some European countries promotion and prevention is predicated on an extensive system of social care such as income security, housing, education, health and public transport and infrastructure. This is also critical for vulnerable children and families in Victoria.

The Centre notes that while it is a critical part of a whole of population response, the universal service system does not necessarily include vulnerable children and their families or have capacity to respond to vulnerability. There are various reasons for this: some families avoid the engagement, in some cases user-pays costs preclude participation and in some cases universal services are not welcoming to families of difference.

If Victoria is to rebalance its approach to vulnerable children away from an investigative and forensic approach to one which relies more on promotion and prevention it must be recognised that universal services cannot respond to vulnerable children and their families alone. A well-functioning continuum is fully reliant on multi-disciplinary and cross-service training, resourcing, supports and a well-resourced targeted secondary service system to support families. Further, it should be recognised that anti-poverty strategies are essential to the success of a promotion and prevention approach.

Aboriginal Services

Specific attention must also ensure Aboriginal concerns must be upheld across the promotion, prevention and protection continuum. The Centre's Governance proposition includes provision for an Aboriginal Guardian in the Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons' Guardian and for an Aboriginal Children and Young Persons' Commissioner.

The disproportionate number of Aboriginal children coming into the protective services arises out of long standing individual and community dispossession and exclusion. These can only be addressed by having a range of Aboriginal targeted prevention services as part of each Local Area Service Network to ensure that Aboriginal children, young people and their families have the supports necessary to avoid protective intervention.²⁹

The development of the Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy should lead with an approach to address these needs and be developed by Aboriginal people through strong representation.

Recommendations

5. A promotion and prevention approach must be underpinned by a whole of Government approach to children that fully addresses the primary, secondary and tertiary components of the service system.
6. A robust secondary service system should receive the resources and supports required to meet the individual needs of vulnerable children, young people and families.
7. Universal services should be appropriately resourced to identify, engage and include vulnerable children and young people across the State.

²⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Welfare 2009*, Australia's welfare series, No.9, Cat, No AUS117, Canberra, AIHW, 2009.

3. Governance and Legal Framework for Vulnerable Children and Young People

*It takes time for trusting and positive relationships to develop, especially for a young person facing many complex personal issues, without many family or community supports to assist them to live independently.
Leaving Care Mentor – Brophy Family & Youth Services 2010 Annual Report*

Term of Reference 5: The appropriate roles and responsibilities of government and non-government organisations in relation to Victoria’s child protection policy and systems.

Term of Reference 8: The oversight and transparency of child protection, care and support system and whether changes are necessary in oversight, transparency, and/or regulation to achieve an increase in public confidence and improved outcomes for children.

Key Principles

Governance of complex systems supporting and responding to vulnerable children and young people requires:

- Accountability - being answerable for decisions and having meaningful mechanisms in place to ensure adherence to all applicable standards.
- Transparency and openness - having clear roles and responsibilities and clear procedures for making decisions and exercising power.
- Integrity - acting impartially, ethically and not misusing information acquired through a position of trust.
- Stewardship - using every opportunity to enhance the value of the public assets and institutions that have been entrusted to care.
- Efficiency - ensuring the best use of resources to further the purpose and objective of the organisation with commitment to evidence-based strategies for improvement.
- Leadership - achieving commitment to good governance through leadership.³⁰

³⁰ Australian Public Service Commission, *Building Better Governance: Part One-What is Public Sector Governance?*, viewed on 18 April 2011, <<http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/bettergovernance1.html>>.

Key Issues

Constructing a promotion and prevention approach to vulnerable children and young people introduces considerable complexity to governance arrangements given:

- the significant role of independent not-for-profit community service organisations in providing services and supports
- differing government structures, systems and funding arrangements at both a state and national level and
- differing cultural and community needs and local area differences.

Effective governance arrangements must address **system governance** rather than **organisational or entity governance** and requires clarity of roles for each participant in the service system.

The Australian Public Service Commission states that “good governance is about both performance and conformance:

- performance defines how an agency uses governance arrangement to contribute to its overall performance and the delivery of goods, services or programmes, and
- conformance defines how an agency uses governance arrangements to ensure it meets the requirements of the law, regulations, published standards and community expectations of probity, accountability and openness”.³¹

It is important each entity in the service system demonstrates both performance and conformance however these elements are not evenly developed across the service system for vulnerable children and young people.

The current provision under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 for the Minister to appoint an administrator of a registered community organisation and to displace the Board of Management of that organisation is an example of regulatory requirements displacing good governance.

A significant conflict of interest exists in the Department of Human Services being both regulator and registrar and contractor and contract manager for services provided by the community services sector on behalf of Government. This issue was raised in the Victorian Ombudsman’s Own Motion Report into Out-of-home Care. He stated that “the extension of the partnership approach to incorporate the role of regulator is not compatible with ensuring a robust system of regulation and quality assurance for the out-of-home care system”.³²

The governance arrangements proposed by the Centre seek to address this by placing registration and approval of the organisation as a community sector

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Victorian Ombudsman, *Own Motion Investigation into Child protection – Out of Home Care*, 2010, p.57.

organisation with the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Issues of service standards and monitoring remain in the domain of funding and service agreements. In making this recommendation we are cognisant of the significant changes mooted at the federal level for not for profit registration, regulation and monitoring arising out of the Productivity Commission report. The Productivity Commission recommended that the Commonwealth Government establish a one-stop shop for “consolidation of various regulatory functions”.³³ The Centre argues that the conflict of interest for the Department of Human Services is so significant that an interim registration process with the Minister for Consumer Affairs is necessary irrespective of the possibility of this role being taken up federally in the longer term.

Another conflict of interest we have identified is the role of the Department of Human Services as both funder of services and the guardian/custodian of the child. Members of the Centre have drawn attention to circumstances in which they have been directed to place a child in a clearly unsuitable placement and have been concomitantly threatened with withdrawal of funding if the placement was not made.

The Centre is therefore arguing that any role of “guardian ad litem”, custodian or guardian arising from court orders in the Children’s Court should be bestowed on a new entity able to focus on the ‘best interests of the child’. The Centre has called this entity the “Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons’ Guardian”.

Further conflicts of interest are raised by underdeveloped administrative review arrangements around decision making for children and young people. The Centre believes that the current administrative review arrangements are insufficient both in the protective investigatory sphere and where a child is under the care of the Department of Human Services. While it is important that each entity in the service system including a community sector organisation, has a vigorous internal review process there should be a separation of case management and quality review functions. The Centre proposes that the office of the Child Safety Commissioner be enhanced and it becomes responsible for the monitoring and review of services for vulnerable children and young people. The Centre envisages the following governance arrangements would provide improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people as part of a promotion and prevention approach.

³³ Productivity Commission, *Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector Research Report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2010, p. 43.

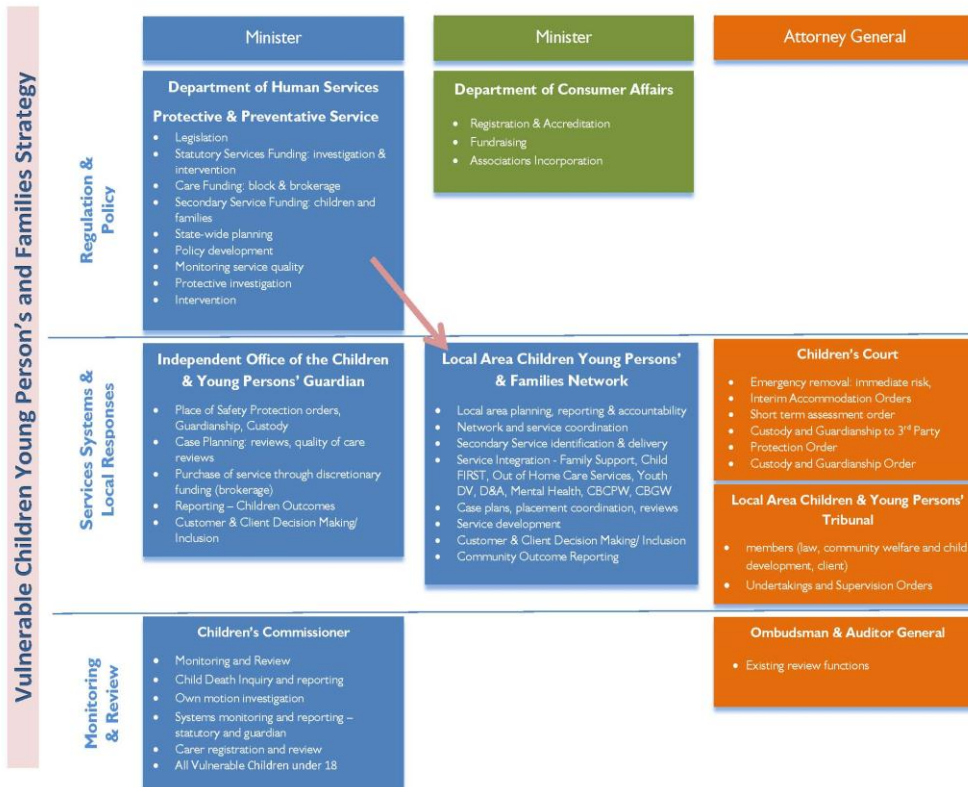


Figure 4 - System Governance Map

The following outlines a brief description of the functions proposed above. The figure is reproduced in larger format in Appendix ii

Regulation and Policy

The Department of Consumer Affairs

Registration of many community service organisations is a responsibility of the Department of Consumer Affairs under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981. The Department is also responsible for the regulation of fundraising. The Department of Consumer Affairs should be given a broadened role including the registration and accreditation of not-for-profit community service organisations seeking to provide services to the Victorian Government.

The Centre acknowledges the recent work to integrate standards to a 'One DHS Model' and strongly supports this important work being adopted in its entirety in the first instance by the Department of Consumer Affairs, including the choice of previously approved accrediting bodies. The combined impact of these changes

would greatly reduce the regulatory burden on community service organisations, especially those involved with multiple government agencies.³⁴

The Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services should have responsibility for protective and investigative role in relation to child protection or risk notifications and preventative processes encompassing responsibility for state wide planning and policy development and implementation. Development and administration of legislation around vulnerable children and young people should also be a Department of Human Services responsibility. Funding of investigatory, intervention and care service components should be retained as a Department of Human Services responsibility with the addition of funding of the proposed Local Area Children and Young Persons' Network and service responses. The governance arrangements and responsibility to the Minister should remain unchanged.

Service Systems and Local Responses

The Independent Office of Children and Young Persons' Guardian

The Independent Office of Children and Young Persons' Guardian would take on responsibility for case management once a child is placed on an order by a Children's Court. There would be provision for Aboriginal Guardians within this office along with a greater focus on the voice of children and young people in care, and an aim to construct more responsive approaches to care based on individual need. The Guardian would be independent and appointed by the Governor in Council on recommendation of the Minister. The Guardian would have the power to appoint others to case manage a child or young person under their care and would work closely with community service organisations to uphold 'best interest principles'. Most of the functions of placement and care services currently held by the Department of Human Services would be transferred to this new independent office along with associated resources.

As well as rigorous internal review processes the decisions of the Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons' Guardian would be subject to review by the Children's Court under the current legislative provisions applying to the Secretary. The work of the Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons' Guardian would also be subjected to the expanded review provisions of the Independent Children's Commissioner. The Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons' Guardian would have a local and regional presence and be part of the Local Area Children and Young Persons' Network.

³⁴ Victorian Ombudsman, *Own Motion Investigation into Child protection – Out of Home Care*, May 2010.

This office would receive funding for the purchase of services through discretionary brokerage on behalf of the children and young people in their care. This restructure is being proposed in order to elevate the importance of improving outcomes for children and young people and to ensure transparency around the true needs of children in care.

The Local Area Children and Young Persons' Network

The Local Area Children and Young Persons' Network is a means of integrating services and supports to vulnerable children, young people and their families. The Network should build on the model of Child FIRST for cooperative service integration and governance and be based around service clusters. The development of Child FIRST, which grew out of the Carter³⁵ report recommendations and the associated Department of Human Services response, has demonstrated an effective approach to local area planning and service integration.³⁶ Governance of local area networks is of increasing interest to Government as place-based approaches to complex and resistant social problems such as vulnerable children and young people become more prevalent. The Social Inclusion Board³⁷ identified the following as necessary for effective governance of locally oriented Government programmes:

- a mechanism for coordinating services provided by all levels of government, the non-profit and business sectors, allowing service providers to deliver a 'no wrong door' entry point for residents seeking services
- a community governance mechanism comprising: a formal council, board or similar entity which represents the community in all its diversity, including representatives of residents, the non-profit sector, business (particularly major employers), all levels of government, philanthropy, and special interest groups; governance mechanisms for driving local consultation and engagement and advocating for the needs with Governments and the broader community; and local governance mechanisms to be developed by building on existing mechanisms rather than creating new ones; and
- that sufficient time and resources must be allocated to allow for the development of a local governance mechanism, to build community engagement and to develop locally agreed priorities.

Resourcing of the networks would be required alongside resources for family support programmes to give effect to a "no wrong door" principle. The Local Area Children and Young Persons' Network would comprise statutory and non-statutory services providing a more comprehensive understanding of local needs and response requirements. It would initially aim to build a multidisciplinary understanding of local catchments informed by the state-wide Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and

³⁵ J Carter, *Report of the Community Care Review*, Victoria, 2000.

³⁶ Department of Human Services, *New Partnerships in Community Care*, Victorian Government Melbourne, 2000.

³⁷ Australian Social Inclusion Board, *Governance Models for Locally Based Initiatives*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2011.

Families Strategy, and move to making recommendations regarding appropriate investment strategies. As in other jurisdictions this role may transition to including funding allocation and management and may need to be mandated in the future to ensure the resources of all government agencies are allocated transparently. Within this proposed structure the development of these networks would be the role of the Department of Human Services.

The Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal

The Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal would sit alongside the Children's Court and operates at the local area level. This model of decision making on behalf of children and young people who have come to the attention of protective services brings together multi-disciplinary teams to make decisions regarding the protection and welfare of children. This could represent a considerable diversion to the pressure on the Children's Court by dealing with issues not likely to lead to Custody or Guardianship Orders. These should remain the responsibility of the Children's Court.

Utilising multi-disciplinary teams while being chaired by a legal practitioner with regionalised access was an approach recommended by the Carney review.³⁸ The Office of the Child Safety Commissioner also supported a tribunal approach in their response to the Victorian Law Commissions review of Protection Applications in the Children's Court but referred to a "Children's Safety and Wellbeing Tribunal".³⁹

The Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal would be appointed by the Attorney General.

The Children's Court

The functions and powers of the Children's Court should remain essentially unchanged. All cases involving the potential for Custody, Guardianship or Permanent Care Orders should continue to be handled by the Children's Court. However, the centralisation of the Court has reduced access to local area supports for children and families attending Court. The Children's Court Family Division should re-establish a metropolitan and regional presence to facilitate better access and local linkages.

³⁸ Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review, *Executive Summary and Recommendations Report*, the Carney Committee Report, Government of Victoria, 1984.

³⁹ Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, *Review of Victoria's Child Protection Legislative Arrangements: Submission by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner*, 2010, viewed on 19 April 2011, <<http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/ocsc-submission-vlrc-review-cp-legislative-arrangements.pdf>>.

Monitoring and Review

The Independent Office of the Children's Commissioner

This office would build on the current Office of the Child Safety Commissioner. An Aboriginal Commissioner should also be appointed. The Commissioners would be appointed by Governor in Council on recommendation of the Minister and report directly to Parliament. They should be empowered to undertake Own Motion inquiries for vulnerable children and young people to the age of eighteen and should be empowered to review decision making and actions of the Independent Office of the Children's and Young Persons' Guardian.

The Ombudsman and Auditor General

The Victorian Ombudsman and Auditor General have been invaluable in creating transparency in governance and operation of the services and supports for children and young people through Own Motion inquiries and audits. It is vital that this active oversight continue.

Recommendations

8. A system governance approach should be adopted in respect of vulnerable children and young people and their families to produce a focus on better outcomes for children and young people.
9. The Department of Consumer Affairs should take on the role of the registration and accreditation of all not for profit and community service organisations.
10. An Independent Office of Children and Young Persons' Guardian should be created.
11. Local Area Children Young Persons and Families Networks should be created.
12. Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal should be created.
13. The functions and powers of the Children's Court remain unchanged.
14. The current Office of the Children's Safety Commissioner should become the Independent Office of the Children's Commissioner including special provision for an Independent Aboriginal Children's Commissioner.

4. Services for vulnerable children, young people and their families

The Masons already had two children when they took in brothers, aged 11 years and 16 weeks. The oldest boy had a significant history of trauma and attachment disorder issues and desperately needed counselling services. “We were placed on a long waiting list, typical for rural clients, and waited two years for him to meet with a counsellor” (*Not their real name)
Centre Case Study 2010*

Term of Reference 3: The quality, structure, role and functioning of: family services; statutory child protection services, including reporting, assessment, investigation procedures and responses; and out-of-home care, including permanency planning and transitions; and what improvements may be made to better protect the best interests of children and support better outcomes for children and families.

Term of Reference 2: Strategies to enhance early identification of, and intervention targeted at, children and families at risk including the role of adult, universal and primary services. This should include consideration of ways to strengthen the capability of those organisations involved.

Key Principles

1. Coordination of a whole of government approach to service delivery is vital for vulnerable children, young people and families.
2. Individualised, tailored, child and young persons-centered service delivery which includes the family should be the ultimate aim of any service restructures.
3. Broad service structures and responses are available to meet the needs vulnerable children, young people and families.
4. Early intervention and prevention services should be targeted at the causes of all vulnerability.

Key Issues

Protection Services

Out-of-home Care

It is the view of the Centre that there are four critical issues within out-of-home care:

- the capacity to fully and appropriately meet demand
- access to therapeutic services
- the range of placement options available to vulnerable children and young people, and

- ongoing investment needs in workforce development

It is commonly acknowledged that the Victorian out-of-home care system is restricted by the limited number of care options and is struggling to meet the demand. This results in the placement of children and young people being driven by availability as opposed to individual need. The Victorian Ombudsman recently referred to projections of demand which are far in excess of the current capacity highlighting a pending catastrophe if left unaddressed.⁴⁰

Outcomes also continue to be poor, with research demonstrating that children in out-of-home care continue to have poorer health and educational outcomes than their peers.^{41 42 43} Many children and young people are also receiving services which do not properly take into account their cultural or religious background. For example, only 10 per cent of out-of-home care services reviewed by the Victorian Ombudsman were found to be fully compliant with current cultural competency requirements. With the highest representation of Aboriginal children and young people per 1,000 across the country this must only be considered alarming.⁴⁴

Lack of clarity around roles, inefficient communication, and impossibly high caseloads for Departmental case managers currently hamper their ability to deliver quality outcomes for children and young people. Recent increases in the number of cases managed directly by community service providers have demonstrated an increased capacity to support positive outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care, and to respond to emerging issues in a timely and efficient manner. However, systemic funding and resourcing issues still remain barriers to achieving positive outcomes.

Given the system complexities and challenges posed by caring for children and young people it is clear that we should provide greater care for those we rely on most, the carers. For those currently referred to as volunteers in our system, carer packages are critical and should include such elements as heavily increased levels of remuneration for carers, access to high levels of respite care as required, involvement of a therapeutic specialist, highly targeted educational support, increased crisis response capacity, and increased carer involvement in case planning and the care team. The prevalence of such well resourced placements would greatly reduce placement breakdowns across out-of-home care.

³⁸ Victorian Ombudsman, *Own motion investigation into Child Protection – out of home care*, Victorian Government, Australia, 2010.

⁴¹ S Wise, S Pollock, G Mitchell, C Argus & P Farquhar, *Care-system impacts on academic outcomes*, Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission Victoria, Australia, 2010.

⁴² V Franji, *Educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care*, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Australia, 2010.

⁴³ The Royal Australasian College of Physicians, *Health of children in "out-of-home" Care*, RACP, Australia, 2006.

⁴⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child Protection Australia 2009-10*, Child Welfare Series, No. 51, Cat. No.CWS39, Canberra AIHW, 2011, p.55.

Minimising the number of placements children in all forms of out-of-home care is essential.⁴⁵ Multiple placement breakdowns may cause psychological damage to a child or young person that can impair their ability to establish intimate relationships and relate to others in the future, and make them far more likely to display behavioural problems.⁴⁶ This in turn makes children and young people more difficult to care for. In addition, research indicates that when a child has experienced two or more placement breakdowns, there is a significantly increased likelihood of this pattern continuing.⁴⁷ Placement stability from the outset is therefore vital, and, alongside the provision of holistic therapeutic care packages, one of the best ways to achieve this is through appropriate placement matching when a child or young person first enters care through appropriate assessment strategies. To achieve this, placement coordination function should be a joint responsibility between those with the statutory responsibility to place, the service provider, carer, family and child.

Finally, fundamental to all protection services is the acknowledgement that all children, young people and families who become involved with the care system have experienced significant trauma through abuse, family violence, neglect and deprivation. All children, young people and families must have ongoing access to therapeutic supports during and post their involvement with the system. In order to effectively support and sustain families, professionals and volunteers, who also work with these children, young people and families must also have an intimate understanding of the effects of trauma and be equipped and resourced to respond appropriately.

Kinship Care

Kinship care is increasing in prevalence both in Australia and overseas.^{48 49 50} In Victoria, the number of children living in statutory kinship care increased from 1,335 to 2,185 between June 2005 and June 2010, with the total percentage of children in kinship placements rising from 30% to 40%, and with Australia having a far higher percentage of children and young people in kinship care than many OECD countries.⁶^{51 52} This increasing reliance on kinship care is creating many challenges for Victoria's

⁴⁵ D Smith, P Chamberlain & J Eddy, *Preliminary support for multidimensional treatment foster care in reducing substance use in delinquent boys*, *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, vol. 19, 2010, p. 343-358.

⁴⁶ E Munro & A Hardy, *Placement Stability – A review of the literature*, Centre for Child and Family Research, United Kingdom, 2007.

⁴⁷ Department of Communities (Child Safety), *Child Safety Practice Manual*, Queensland Government, Australia, 2010.

⁴⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child protection Australia 2009-2010*, Australian Government, Australia, 2011.

⁴⁹ P Curtis, G Dale & J Kendall (eds), *The foster care crisis: translating research into policy and practice*, University of Nebraska Press, United States of America, 1999.

⁵⁰ J Mason, J Falloon, L Gibbons, N Spence & E Scott, *Understanding kinship care*, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies and the University of Western Sydney, Australia, 2002.

⁵¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child protection Australia 2004-2005*, Australian Government, Australia, 2006.

out-of-home care system and the older generations of Victorians who make up the majority of kinship carers.

Managing kinship care placements is complex. International studies have shown that kinship carers tend to be older, less financially stable, and in poorer health than foster carers.^{53 54} However, little local research into kinship care has been undertaken and there is little documented evidence of effective practice available.⁵⁵

Compounding the problem even further is the lack of data available on the number of non-statutory kinship carers living in Victoria. These carers also receive little or no monitoring, training and support, which is problematic as kinship carers tend to require greater social, financial and service supports than other carers.⁵⁶ If an inadequate level of support continues it is likely that placement breakdowns will occur, triggering the need for statutory involvement.

Given the recent roll-out of case-managed kinship care services around the state and ever-increasing number of children and young people placed in kinship care it is imperative that more research is undertaken to inform current practice. Research should include impacts on children, types of services required to support carers and the outcomes for children. Financial supports for kinship carers should be reviewed immediately.

Foster Care

It is the view of the Centre that a wide-ranging misunderstanding exists across the community which portrays foster care as simply helping to look after children in the local neighbourhood. Despite this being evidently false, we continue to resource and support foster carers as if this was the case. Foster care has long since ceased to comprise only this form of support, and now ranges from the simple model of neighbourhood care to highly specialised 24/7 therapeutic interventions for vulnerable children and young people.

Although there has been an increase in the number of Victorians seeking to provide foster care in recent years there has also been a corresponding increase in attrition of foster carers. To halt this churn it is now time to modernise and professionalise this

⁵² J Thoburn, *Reunification of children in out-of-home care to birth parents or relatives: a synthesis of the evidence on processes, practice and outcomes*, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom, 2009.

⁵³ J Berrick, R Barth & B Needell, *A comparison of kinship foster homes and foster family homes: Implications for kinship foster care as family preservation*, Children and Youth Services Review, 16(1-2), United States of America, 1994.

⁵⁴ H Dubowitz, S Feigelman, D Harrington, R Starr, S Zuravin & R Sawyer, *Children in kinship care: How do they fare?*, Children and Youth Services Review, 16(1-2), United States of America, 1994.

⁵⁵ The Benevolent Society, *Relative and kinship care – enabling families to support their children*, The Benevolent Society, Australia, 2009.

⁵⁶ L Bromfield & A Osborn, *Kinship care*, Research Brief No. 10, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australia, 2007.

system for the foster carers who provide care for over 40 percent of all children and young people requiring out-of-home care in Victoria.

The first step towards the modernisation and professionalisation of foster care in Victoria should be the wholesale adoption of the existing Circle Program. International evidence has shown that children and young people in therapeutic foster care:

- Are up to five times less likely to experience placement breakdown even though they typically have an elevated level of social and behavioural problems compared to children and young people in general foster care placements⁵⁷
- Have a reduced incidence of substance abuse, antisocial behaviour, recidivism and involvement in the justice system
- Have foster carers with greatly reduced stress levels
- Experience an increased rate of successful reunification with their birth families
- Experience an increased rate of participation in school.^{58 59 60}

In financial terms alone these benefits have been calculated as having the potential to save communities up to fourteen dollars in future justice system costs for every dollar they invest today.^{61 62}

In addition, improved outcomes for children and young people can only be achieved when service providers have a wide range of appropriately resourced and supported available foster carers to choose from. Urgent action must be taken to strengthen the intake and support system for foster carers and to raise the profile of the various aspects of foster care in Victoria. In addition, gathering consistent data regarding our foster carers is a priority.

Research shows that one of the most common reasons given for not fostering is the financial costs associated with foster care.⁶³ Raising the level of reimbursement

⁵⁷ P Westermark, K Hansson & B Vinnerljung, *Does multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC) reduce placement breakdown in Foster Care?*, International Journal of Child & Family Welfare 4, 2008, p. 155-171.

⁵⁸ P Fisher, P Chamberlain & L Leve, *Improving the lives of foster children through evidence-based interventions*, Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, Vol 4, No 2, 2009, p. 122-127.

⁵⁹ D Smith, P Chamberlain & J Eddy, *Preliminary support for multidimensional treatment foster care in reducing substance use in delinquent boys*, Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse, vol. 19, 2010, p. 343-358.

⁶⁰ P Westermark, K Hansson & M Olsson, *Multidimensional treatment foster care (MTFC): results from an independent replication*, Journal of Family Therapy, Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2010.

⁶¹ National Centre for Health Marketing, *Guide to community preventative services*, National Centre for Health Marketing, Georgia, United States of America, 2004.

⁶² National Guideline Clearinghouse, *Therapeutic foster care for the prevention of violence: a report on recommendations of the task force on community preventative services*, National Guideline Clearinghouse, Maryland, United States of America, 2008.

⁶³ A Osborn, S Panozzo, N Richardson & L Bromfield, *Foster Families*, Research Brief 4, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australia, 2007.

provided to foster carers to meet the costs of providing care and professionalising their role is of urgent importance.⁶⁴

Permanent Care

Permanent care as we know it in Victoria does not exist in most jurisdictions in the world.⁶⁵ There are strengths and weaknesses to the Victorian model. The concept of permanent care was initially developed with the aim of providing security and stability for children whose birth family is unable to care for them.⁶⁶ However, as the approach to out-of-home care has changed, permanent care has not.

One of the key changes required is the inclusion of permanent care into existing and proposed foster care practices. Currently, permanent care services are co-located with those for local adoption, and are informed by adoption practice.⁶⁷ The Centre believes that this has not resulted in good outcomes primarily due to the prevailing notion of 'family-forming' taking precedence over the best interests of the individual child or young person.

Residential Care

The interim report, "Evaluation of the Victorian therapeutic residential care pilot programmes"⁶⁸ shows that these programmes are resulting in excellent outcomes for the children and young people involved. It has been widely acknowledged by Government and the sector alike that day-to-day care for children and young people in residential care is no longer enough, and that therapeutic care such as that provided by these programmes is vital. Built in to therapeutic models of care should be the capacity to provide for appropriate matching of children and young people to specific residential care programmes and to ensure that group dynamics of children and young people living together are conducive to the creation and maintenance of a healing environment.

Home-based Care placement options for children and young people in residential care, such as the Specialised In-home Care program, is critical as we move forward. Understanding a broader range of options and introducing a greater level of flexibility is critical to ensure appropriate placement options.

⁶⁴ M McHugh, *The costs of caring: a study of appropriate foster care payments for stable and adequate out of home care in Australia*, Social policy research centre, Australia, 2002.

⁶⁵ D Scott, *Report on permanent care program*, Department of Human Services, Australia, 2001.

⁶⁶ Department of Human Services, *Adoption and permanent care learning guide*, Department of Human Services, Australia, 2004.

⁶⁷ KPMG, *Redevelopment of adoption and permanent care*, Department of Human Services, Australia, 1998.

⁶⁸ D Faircloth & P Brann, *Evaluation of the Victorian therapeutic residential care pilot programmes*, VERSO Consulting, Australia, 2010.

Care for Carers

Provisions must be made to ensure that we are not harming the very people our system relies on to make it work. It has been reported that one in three foster carers leave the system after less than one year of caring.⁶⁹ There is considerable evidence to show that the failure to support and retain current carers has a major impact on the ability to recruit and retain new carers.⁷⁰ Research has consistently indicated that current carers need to be provided with a greater level of support in order to grow the existing carer pool and increase the capacity of carers to provide quality care. Carers identify the key commitment which must be communicated to potential carers is that they will be supported.⁷¹

The following strategies would address the obvious need for the system to better support carers, particularly in their first years of caring:

- An improved carer intake system incorporating the state-wide coordination and provision of recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster, kinship and permanent carers⁷²
- The development and implementation of an Out-of-home Care Learning and Development Strategy
- Therapeutic support to mitigate the impacts of vicarious trauma.

Care for Families

The birth families of children and young people in out-of-home care are generally not considered part of the service system. However, for children and young people their birth family is critical. The Centre believes that there are four major areas of concern in this regard:

- Co-location of siblings in out-of-home care
- Therapeutic care of familial relationships
- Intensive reunification and post-reunification support where appropriate
- General support of parents and families.

Currently the out-of-home care system is inadequately resourced to keep siblings together in all situations where this is desirable. International research has shown that separation has the potential to be extremely harmful and that sibling colocation in care has a number of benefits. Australian researchers have recommended that our out-of-home care system should provide a new service structure to accommodate sibling placements.⁷³ Despite this, recent local research has continued to show a high

⁶⁹ R Gurney, *Supporting strong parenting in the Australian foster care sector*, The Australian Foster Care Association, Australia, 2001.

⁷⁰ The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, *Strengthening the recruitment and retention of foster carers in Victoria*, The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Australia, 2007.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Victorian Ombudsman, *Own motion investigation into Child Protection – out of home care*, Victorian Government, Australia, 2009.

⁷³ F Ainsworth & A Maluccio, Siblings in out-of-home care: Time to rethink?, *Children Australia*, vol. 7, Australia, 2002, p. 4-8.

prevalence of sibling separation, low numbers of intact sibling groups, and poor levels of contact between separated siblings.⁷⁴

An increased focus on the therapeutic care of familial relationships for children and young people in out-of-home care and increased post-reunification support are also vital in order to increase the rate of successful reunification and to mitigate the effects of trauma caused to many children and young people through their experience of being separated from their birth families.

The Centre recognises the need for support of parents and extended family in this work.

Leaving Care

The Victorian Ombudsman recently stated that young people leaving care are at considerable risk of negative experiences such as unemployment, homelessness, and involvement with the criminal justice system as they enter their adult lives⁷⁵.

Unfortunately this has been well known for decades and yet little improvement has been made. Intensive support needs to be immediately provided to these young people in order for them to grow into stable, healthy adults, particularly in the areas of education, housing, mental health, and employment.^{76 77 78 79 80}

Research has suggested that increased investment in leaving care support would be beneficial to the society and economy in general. Recommendations from research include many solutions such as an integrated model of leaving-care support for young people up to 25 years of age, and the provision of a range of support services for care leavers.

Prevention Services

Child FIRST services have provided a legitimate alternative to protective notification, allowing the provision of more holistic supports to vulnerable families. Evaluations currently being undertaken by KPMG, yet to be released for public dissemination, strongly indicate that the impact of Child FIRST of diverting families from entering the child protection system can be substantiated.

⁷⁴ S Wise, *All together now: research examining the separation of siblings in out-of-home care*, Anglicare Victoria, Australia, 2010.

⁷⁵ Victorian Ombudsman, *Own motion investigation into Child Protection – out of home care*, Victorian Government, Australia, 2010.

⁷⁶ J McDowall, *CREATE report card 2009*, CREATE Foundation, Australia, 2009.

⁷⁷ P Mendes, *Young people transitioning from State care*, Monash University, Australia, 2008.

⁷⁸ P Mendes, *Young people transitioning from State out-of-home care: jumping hoops to access employment*, Family Matters issue 83, Australia, 2009.

⁷⁹ P Mendes, *Moving from dependence to independence: a study of the experiences of 18 care leavers in a leaving care and after care support service in Victoria*, Youth Studies Australia, Australia, 2010.

⁸⁰ A Osborn & L Bromfield, *Young people leaving care*, Research brief, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australia, 2007.

The role of Child FIRST has had many positive outcomes; the creation of a local intake and response system, a network of local agencies and the co-location of Community Based Child Protection Workers - all creating strong partnerships between agencies that work with vulnerable children and families.

However, from a systems perspective, current governance arrangements, while effective, have been supported at the expense of the participating community service organisations, a cost which has not been reflected in the provision of funding.

An intentional but negative impact has seen the contraction of family support services within the Child FIRST network to a primarily protective role. This has drastically limited the preventative family support services available to families with serious but not 'at risk' issues.

Anecdotally the Centre is often advised of the significant pressures upon this system. Pressure of demand, types of families they are working with and a lack of ability to meet the needs of families with lower levels of risk. Studies of early prevention programmes are now sufficiently comprehensive to be able to identify that what these families require is a focus on intervention earlier than the current service arrangements allow. Allen has recently undertaken significant work to identify the impact of such earlier intervention.⁸¹ Steps should be undertaken to immediately assess true demand across the prevention service end and ensure relevant secondary services are rolled out to the communities across Victoria with an initial focus on highly vulnerable communities.

Youth services in particular, are often overlooked as an important part of the preventative service system. Young people in Victoria encounter many difficult issues on a daily basis. In addition to ensuring all policies which are implemented at a State Government level are inclusive of and are not discriminatory towards young people, it is of vital importance that every young person in Victoria is able to access local services which will help them make the transition to becoming happy, healthy adults.

Finally, the provision of appropriate advice, support and referral to families whose children have been placed on Supervision Orders is critical. Each year well over a thousand of these orders are issued across Victoria but the opportunity to act in a timely manner and prevent these children and young people entering statutory care is often squandered.⁸² Appropriate resourcing and case management of vulnerable families subject to Supervision Orders would keep families together and free up money and resources elsewhere in the service system.

⁸¹ G Allen M.P, *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*, H. M. Government, Cabinet Office, London, 2011.

⁸² Children's Court Victoria, *Annual Report 2008-2009*, Children's Court Victoria, Australia, 2010.

Promotion Services

Services essential to the promotion of wellbeing such as housing, education, health and transport are vitally important for vulnerable children young people and their families, yet they are more at risk of not being able to access these services.

Vulnerable children and young people have great challenges in being able to access education. Victorian Government school fees and charges and “voluntary” contributions for both ‘core’ and elective curriculum and enrichment programmes, uniforms, books and excursions and camps are additional costs which many vulnerable families are unable to afford. Fees and charges exacerbate the vulnerability of children and young people. While many families receive the Education Maintenance Allowance the application of fees and charges by schools does not necessarily accord to Departmental Instructions. The Centre recommends that fees and charges relating to core and enrichment programmes and books and excursions and camps and extra-curricular activities should be waived for families and young people in care receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance. This requires the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to issue a new Departmental Instruction to schools but would ensure that children from vulnerable families have access to the same Government school program as other students whose families can afford participation.

An additional problem for vulnerable children and young people is the school suspension and exclusion process. Extremely disruptive behaviour is an indication of vulnerability. Where suspension or exclusion are being considered an education plan for the ongoing education of the young person should be developed and implemented by the school prior to the sanction being imposed. Ideally, endorsement of the school welfare officer and approval by the Regional Education Office should be required.

The Victorian Government has recognised the important role of schools, particularly primary schools in identifying and responding early to the vulnerability of children, young people and their families. The commitment to provision of School Welfare Officers in all schools is an excellent promotional response to vulnerability. However, the role of Primary school welfare officers should be extended beyond managing ‘bullying’ to encompass support and inclusion of vulnerable children and their families generally. The welfare officers should be trained in Child First referral processes alongside the training they already receive for protective notification arising from their mandatory reporting responsibilities.

Housing is crucial to ensuring that vulnerable children and young people do not enter the protective services. In Victoria housing availability and affordability has been the subject of attention from the current Government. While concerns in relation to availability and affordability extend across the community, the situation of vulnerable children, young people and their families is extremely serious. Housing is still

essentially unaffordable for vulnerable families living on low incomes despite recent rises in affordability indicators. More public housing is required in Victoria. The Centre recommends that to improve access to affordable housing for vulnerable children and their families all housing developments whether green field or infill should be required to deliver a minimum contribution to public or social housing stock based on a ratio of total units developed.

Sole parents are disproportionately represented among those subject to notifications compared with their numbers in the general community. It is widely acknowledged that this has to do with the relative poverty in which they live. It can be compounded with issues of domestic violence. The Centre notes the Victorian Government's recent commitments in relation to priority for public housing for women leaving family violence and recommends that women with children under eighteen years of age and women leaving family violence should be given absolute priority in access to emergency, transitional and social and public housing.⁸³ Referral by Child FIRST teams, Protective teams and Family Violence teams should constitute a mandated absolute priority for response by the Department of housing and housing services. In addition specialist supported housing units should be developed within the out-of-home care service to support young people 'leaving care' and these should be available to young people up to the age of 25.

Mental health issues have been identified as significant reason for vulnerable children and young people being notified to child protection. The Government has made significant commitments to the development of mother and child units to address issues of post-partum depression. This should impact on the numbers of infants coming to the attention of the protective services. However in-patient support which is inclusive of older children is difficult to find. The Centre recommends that places in family friendly mental health women's residential treatment services for women with older children should be expanded by 50 places. In addition there is much which adult based services can do to incorporate family preservation in decision making and their planning. The New South Wales framework provides an example for adoption in Victoria.

In relation to drug and alcohol dependency which has also been identified as a significant reason for vulnerable children and young people being notified to protective care, there is a similar dearth of residential treatment facilities which allow the placement of women's children. The Centre believes that places in family friendly women's residential drug and alcohol treatment services should be expanded by 50 places.

⁸³ Victorian Government Parliament of Victoria Family and Community Development Committee, *Inquiry into the Adequacy and Future Directions of Public Housing in Victoria*, Victorian Government, 2011.

Recommendations

15. All out-of-home care should be delivered in line with current successful therapeutic service models.
16. Family support, youth and all preventative services should be funded on a demand model.
17. Rates of reimbursement for foster, kinship and permanent carers must be immediately raised in line with the recommendations made by Dr Marilyn McHugh and the Social Policy Research Centre, adjusted for CPI, in order to cover the true costs of care.⁸⁴
18. Strategic and significant additional investment must be made to allow for the state-wide coordination and provision of recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster, kinship and permanent carers.

⁸⁴ M McHugh, *The costs of caring: a study of appropriate foster care payments for stable and adequate out of home care in Australia*, Social policy research centre, Australia, 2002.

5. Accountability and Transparency

This has kept me out of mischief and made me realise I am going to try my hardest, aim for the best realistically, strive for a better more fulfilling life than I've had and improve my abilities in every aspect of my life.

To finally become the real me, who I found only through the support, financial help and smiles you get from someone who cares”.

Sarah's Story – St Luke's Anglicare 2010 Annual Report

Terms of Reference 5: The appropriate roles and responsibilities of government and non-government organisations in relation to Victoria's child protection policy and systems.

Terms of Reference 7: Measures to enhance the government's ability to: plan for future demand for family services, statutory child protection services and out-of-home care; and ensure a workforce that delivers services of a high quality to children and families.

Terms of Reference 8: The oversight and transparency of the child protection, care and support system and whether changes are necessary in oversight, transparency, and/or regulation to achieve an increase in public confidence and improved outcomes for children.

Key Principles

1. Programmes, services and supports across the promotion, prevention and protection continuum should be identifiable, accessible, accountable and transparent.
2. Information about vulnerable children and young people, including data on the development of individuals, programmes and systems should help parents, families and guardians make informed choices and engage with the care of their children.
3. The community should have access to information that enables an understanding of the decisions taken by governments and the status and performance of services for vulnerable children and young people in Victoria.
4. Community service organisations should have reliable, rich data on children and young people in their care.
5. Governments need sound information on the performance of programmes and services to support ongoing improvement for children and young people, their families, community service organisations, and social care systems.

Key Issues

The Centre acknowledges the significant investment in accountability mechanisms in both the public and community service sector. These include:

- Ministerial accountability to Parliament
- Reviews by the Victorian Ombudsman and the Auditor General
- Annual reports to Parliament
- Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiries
- Independent statutory commissions with a brief for oversight and investigation
- Internal and external organisation and programme audits undertaken to comply with community service organisation registration
- Professional practice and training and practice standards reporting such as that envisaged for the Child Protection Practice Standards and Compliance Committee.

However, there are a number of outstanding issues relating to accountability which need to be addressed.

Transparency of Outcomes for Children and Young People

Accountability and transparency requires agreement on performance criteria and regular review.

The Centre endorses the rigorous and substantive research work that has been carried out to develop methods of measuring the outcomes for children and young people within the Child Protection, Placement and Family Services Outcomes Framework.

The Child Protection and Family Services Outcomes Survey (CAFSOS) is a system-wide collaborative research project which aims to provide essential information on how children receiving services from child protection placement and family services are faring⁸⁵. The survey has been developed to provide a base line for the Child Protection and Placement & Family Services Outcomes Framework (CPP&FSOF) and aims to provide “data and information about the health and wellbeing of clients (children) and carers and their service experiences” with particular emphasis on including data currently not available from other sources.⁸⁶

The Centre concurs with the underlying vision of children who are: “safe healthy and continuing to develop, learn and achieve wellbeing”, welcomes the breadth encapsulated by the indicators for this vision, and the inclusion of physical, social, educational, behavioural and family and community engagement measures.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁵ Department of Human Services, *CAFSOS information sheet*, 2010.

⁸⁶ Department of Human Services, *CAFSOS Information sheet*, 2010.

⁸⁷ Department of Human Services, *Internal working document*, Victoria, 2009.

Centre applauds the approach of involving extensive consultations with community service organisations in the development of the measurement tools.⁸⁸

The Centre believes that this work has the potential to assist all parts of the sector by providing ground-breaking insight into the operationalisation, implementation and interpretation of measures for assessing individual outcomes for children and young people, and in policy and planning. Most critically, this work offers the potential to maintain the focus on enhancing the quality of life for each individual child and young person.

This outcomes framework provides an excellent opportunity to broaden our understanding of vulnerable children and young people currently known to the system and could further be considered in the development of a geographical/catchment tool. As part of our proposed Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy, the development of an outcomes framework with the capacity to inform at a State, catchment and individual level is essential.

Departmental and community sector information systems are essential for demonstrating outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. The deficiencies of CRIS/CRISP have been widely canvassed including by the Ombudsman. Community service organisations are extremely frustrated by the incapacity and resistance of the Department to ensure that the system interfaces with their own data systems. Aggregated data on even the simplest level is not available to the community service organisations from which the data is collected. This is an obstruction in their own reporting and planning and limits their service responsiveness to community needs.

Trauma and Outcomes Measurement

The goal for all vulnerable children and young people should be parity with their peers. However, it is of the utmost importance that we acknowledge that all children and young people in out-of-home care have experienced significant trauma; at the very least they have experienced being separated from their primary caregivers.⁸⁹

Many children and young people even experience “triple trauma”: witnessing or being involved in traumatic events; relationship trauma caused by insecure or disorganised attachments, such as those involving a drug-addicted or mentally ill parent; and separation from their primary caregivers.⁹⁰ This often results in a child or young persons' emotional age being significantly lower than their chronological age.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ G Charles & J Matheson, *Children in foster care: issues of separation and attachment*, Community Alternatives: International Journal of Family Care, 2, 1990, p. 37-49.

⁹⁰ F Thomson-Salo, *Trauma and attachment in foster care: using attachment experiences to ease the trauma* KICstart Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2006.

⁹¹ B Perry, *Maltreated children: experience, brain development, and the next generation*, W.W. Norton & Company, United States of America, 1996.

Research strongly suggests that all children and young people in out-of-home care should be cared for with their emotional age in mind.³

Given their extraordinary experiences, the challenge will be to develop measures that will both acknowledge individual progress while measuring outcomes against mainstream developmental benchmarks.

Transparency and Funding

Victoria has one of the lowest profiles of funding on child protection and out-of-home care services of the States.⁹²

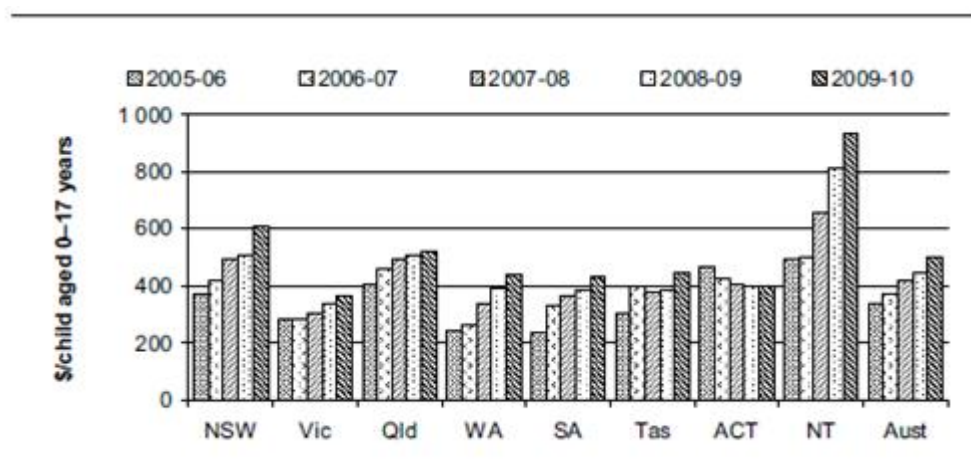


Chart 2 – Comparability of Expenditure

The Productivity Commission distinguishes between funding which government is obligated to provide and funding which it expends on activities seen as beneficial.⁹³ In the case of vulnerable children and young people, Government has an absolute obligation to provide for children and young people in its care and a strong imperative to fund secondary support services as a way of avoiding the entry to care of children and young people.

While some progress has been made by the Department of Human Services in the development of Funding and Service Agreements and in the development of Unit Costing for key program areas including family support services and out-of-home care, these programmes are **not fully funded**. The Productivity Commission in its review of the Contribution of the Not-for Profit sector has recommended that Governments fully fund those services which it has an obligation to provide. Family support services which prevent admission to care and out-of-home care programmes are a core obligation of Government. They should be fully funded.

⁹² Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services*, 2011, viewed on 18 April 2011, <http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/105356/072-chapter15.pdf>.

⁹³ Productivity Commission, *Contribution of the Not for profit sector*, 2010.

Additionally the Centre believes greater consideration around funding models is required. Systems focussed on targets alone enforce a greater emphasis on records administration adherence as opposed to demonstrating improved outcomes for children, young people and families. A move to funding for outcomes, and with greater flexibility at the service delivery level for implementing the necessary service mix to achieve outcomes is the obvious next step. An approach that would result in specified levels of funding from government, should be based on a new resource allocation methodologies, for the achievement of outcomes.

Transparency and the Workforce

Workforce issues have constrained service responses to vulnerable children young people and families for a period of over ten years. The Australian Services Union has pointed to issues of gender, the aging of the workforce, pay rates, conditions such as portability of long service leave and ongoing professional education as significant workforce issues which must be addressed for the community services sector in the immediate years ahead.⁹⁴ Several iterations of a workforce strategy have been developed by the Department of Human Services but these have related more to their own workforce rather than a system wide approach aimed at improving quality of outcomes for vulnerable children young people and their families. A system wide workforce strategy should be developed which deals with:

- Issues of remuneration
- Issues of professional development
- Entry and qualifications
- Working conditions
- The recruitment and support of volunteers
- Workforce profile – issues of gender and diversity.

The Centre acknowledges there has recently been shared action related to creating a better understanding the demographics of the community sector workforce through the Knowledgebase Project and believes more work is needed.

The issue of remuneration permeates many of the problems which beset the system. These include:

- The capacity to employ multidisciplinary teams despite this being demonstrated as an effective approach in targeted prevention services and in protective intervention
- The capacity to attract workers to country and regional settings to ensure state wide availability of services.
- The capacity to provide targeted and therapeutic intervention in out-of-home care settings.

⁹⁴ A Ride, *Building Social Inclusion in Australia: priorities for the social and community services sector workforce*, Australian Services Union, 2007.

The Centre welcomes the commitment of the Government to fund the outcomes of the current pay equity case but is concerned that the cap of \$200 M is not sufficient to cover pay rises in services contracted to Government or in the broader services continuum relevant to vulnerable children young people and their families. This has potential to result in staff reductions especially in the promotion and prevention services provided by not-for-profit community service organisations. These are the very services essential for diverting children young people and their families from protective intervention. Reduction of services in these areas will lead to more referrals to protective intervention increasing systems pressures.

Issues of ongoing professional development also need to be addressed. There is evidence that there has been significant underinvestment in ongoing professional development in the community services sector for many years. In 2001-02 the average per capita expenditure on ongoing worker training was about \$400 compared to \$450 for all other industries.⁹⁵ Evidence from the Centre's own work in ongoing professional education provision indicates that the current expenditure per capita is about \$350. Some initiatives to improve professional development have been undertaken by the Department of Human Services who have contracted the Centre under the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy (RCLDS) to provide ongoing training for the residential care workforce.⁹⁶ Such a strategy is urgently needed for the workforce in the preventative services and for the workforce in other out-of-home care. An example of the training offered under the RCLDS strategy is appended. (Appendix ii)

Research into the community service sector workforce indicates that workers are very committed to the users of services. Values and mission are important influences on recruitment and retention of staff but the aging of the workforce and difficulties in recruitment are an indication that these factors will have a diminishing influence on the capacity to attract qualified staff.

Transparency, Accountability and Contracting

Government policy and program responses to the complex problems of vulnerability are under increasing pressure. Outsourcing of service provision has been a feature of Governments seeking to maximise efficiencies as well as seeking to capitalise on the communitarian characteristics of mutuality reciprocity and the voluntariness which are features of the community services organisations providing responses to vulnerable children young people and their families.^{97 98} Promotion and Prevention strategies for vulnerable children, young people and their families particularly rely on a dispersed

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p. 38.

⁹⁶ *Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy*, 2007.

⁹⁷ K Brown & R Keast. *Social Services Policy and Delivery in Australia: Centre-Periphery Mixes*, Policy and Politics, vol. 33m, p. 505-518.

⁹⁸ Victorian Auditor General, *Partnering with the Community Sector in Human Services and Health*, 2009.

service system where community engagement is essential. Therefore any innovation, efficiency measure and social capital created by government must be reinvested to overcome vulnerability and trauma rather than divested to disconnected shareholders of for-profit entities.

Advocacy

The need for public advocacy by community service organisations has been recognised and valued in a number of significant recent reports, including the National Compact with the Third Sector⁹⁹, the Productivity Commission Report on the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector¹⁰⁰, and the November 2009 report by the Victorian Ombudsman, Own motion investigation into the Department of Human Services Child Protection Program.¹⁰¹

The prevailing incapacity to boldly advocate prevents a transparent view of system design, resourcing and evaluation that could assist future planning and implementation of high quality services. In turn, the lack of public scrutiny undermines public confidence that the needs of vulnerable children and young people are being met. This current environment can be attributed to several key factors relating to singular responsibilities for registration and funding and expressed preferences for limited public discussion of individual cases, even where such discussion is possible without the inclusion of identifying information.

The Centre contends that advocacy relating to poor practice or system failure should be able to be discussed in sufficient detail to progress solutions and should be made publicly available in the public interest, and in the ultimate best interests of children and young people.

Recommendations

19. The development of CPP&FSOF measures for individual outcomes in addition to aggregated information for all children in the system should continue and be expanded to identify the needs of all vulnerable children and young people at a State and catchment area.
20. A shift to an outcomes funding model should be developed to create a greater level of flexibility regarding meeting needs of children, young people and families, and not targets.

⁹⁹ Australian Government, *National Compact: working together*, Australian Government, 2010, viewed on 2 April 2011, <http://www.nationalcompact.gov.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Nat_compact.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Productivity Commission, *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector, Productivity Commission Research Report*, January 2010.

¹⁰¹ Ombudsman Victoria, *Own motion investigation into the Department of Human Services Child Protection Program*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, November 2009, <http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/resources/documents/Investigation_into_the_Department_of_Human_Services_Child_Protection_Program.pdf>.

21. Development of a system wide workforce strategy should be undertaken as part of a Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy.
22. That the Inquiry's recommendations should reflect the priority for action on advocacy set out in the *National Compact with the Third Sector*, and Recommendation 11.3 of the Productivity Commission's report
23. Funding service agreements should respect the independence of community service organisations and not impose conditions associated with the general operations of the funded organisation, beyond those essential to ensure the delivery of agreed funding outcomes.

6. Decision Making and Building a Voice

My case manager really listens to me, and I trust her because I know she works hard to make things better in my life. When things don't work out the way we want them to we always talk about why decisions are made so that I understand and am more in control of my life..- Bobby (*Not her real name)
CREATE Report Card 2010*

Term of Reference 6: Possible changes to the processes of the courts, referencing the recent work of and options put forward by the Victorian Law Commission.

Term of Reference 3: The quality, structure, role and functioning of: family services; statutory child protection services, including reporting, assessment, investigation procedures and responses, and out-of-home care, including permanency planning and transitions; and what improvements may be made to better protect the best interests of children and support better outcomes for children and families.

Term of Reference 4: The interaction of Departments and agencies, the courts and service providers and how they can better work together to support at-risk families and children.

Key Principles

1. Children, young people and their families are experts in their own lives and must be involved in decision making.
2. Children, young people and their families are entitled to minimum State intervention in their lives but they are entitled to maximum protection and support for their parental and caring responsibilities.
3. Conciliation of protective concerns is antithetical to decision making based on the child or young persons' 'best interests' principles, and decision making processes in respect of children and young people should be inquisitorial rather than adversarial.
4. Decision making should take place as close as possible to the community in which the child or young person and their family reside.

Key Issues

Aboriginal People

Aboriginal Elders play a crucial role in decision making around Aboriginal young people in the Koorie Children's Court and in the Aboriginal Family Decision Making

process. There has been considerable effort as part of the development of Community Services Organisation Registration Standards to ensure that workers have information about the Aboriginal community they are working with and that they develop culturally competent practice.

Examples of the involvement of Aboriginal people in decision making can be seen across some services in the promotion, prevention and protection continuum. However, capacity for involvement appears most systematic in the protection sphere where decision making is underpinned by legislative and procedural measures such as the Aboriginal Placement Principles and the requirement to prepare a Cultural Plan under section 176 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. The Victorian Ombudsman Review¹⁰² reported evidence that only 20% of the required Cultural Plans had been prepared. This is an indication that Aboriginal children and young people and their extended families are not being involved in decision making. Barriers to the involvement of Aboriginal people in decisions about themselves and their young people include inadequate resourcing of Aboriginal community service organisations to support and facilitate the involvement of Aboriginal children and young people in decisions about themselves. Another is the need to bring professional competencies about involving Aboriginal people in decision making consistently into the promotion and prevention services. While there are examples of where this does occur there are also significant gaps exacerbating the vulnerability of children.

To achieve this there is clearly a need for more resources for Aboriginal community service organisations to support the involvement of Aboriginal children and young people decision making.

Involving Children and Young People in Decision Making

The Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 affirms the involvement of children and young people in decision making - they have a right for their views to be taken into account and their dignity must be respected.

It is the view of the Centre that participation in decision making is protective against exploitation and abuse and provides for protection of cultural identity. Participation in decision making can give a sense of stability and continuity and provide for the maintenance of links to family members. Participation in decision making can model skills of communication and independence which equip children and young people for education and the work force.

Participation in decision making for children and young people is built into Victoria's promotion, prevention and protective processes in various ways. It is provided for in Community Services Organisations Standards and in Protective Services procedures

¹⁰² Victorian Ombudsman, op. cit, p.77.

for preparation of reports and case planning reviews. It is provided for in judicial decision making through provision of representation of children and young people in Court.¹⁰³

Guidelines for participation suggest that participation of children and young people in decision making should be based on agreed and understood principles of involvement rather than prescriptive procedural requirements. This requires a commitment of professionals to the principles of involvement and a high degree of professional comfort in working with children and young people in order that their wishes can be articulated and reflected in intervention processes. Active participation can be supported by interdisciplinary approaches with the involvement of early childhood workers and youth workers.

Much can be done to further the active participation of children and young people in decisions about themselves.

The Decision to Report

Mandatory reporting as introduced to Victoria in 1993 was retained in the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and was not extended beyond those groups already required to report. Mandatory reporting is now deeply entrenched in the Victorian response to vulnerable children and young people but the fundamental dilemmas obvious at its introduction remain: an under-resourced and poorly distributed system of prevention services to address the needs of those children, young people and families caught up in a report.¹⁰⁴

Mandatory reporting contributes to the high number of notifications and volume is extremely sensitive to media coverage. However, the Centre does not believe that expanding current mandatory reporting requirements at this stage would lead to greater security for vulnerable children, young people and their families. Rather, effort should be focused on the provision of comprehensive and well distributed prevention services to families who are subject to report that would act as a real diversion.

Protective Decision Making

Child protection practitioners have vitally important decision making roles in relation to vulnerable children and young people. Following a number of reviews of child protection practice and the passage of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, significant effort and resources have been expended by the Department of Human Services in training, supervision, consultancy support and the development of detailed

¹⁰³ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Child Protection: Protection Applications in the Children's Court*, Final Report, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ P Mendes, *The historical and political context of mandatory reporting and its impact on child protection practice in Victoria*, Australian Social Work, vol. 49, No. 4, 1996, p. 25-32.

practice guidelines through the Child Protection Practice Manual.¹⁰⁵ These represent major improvements on child protection practice of the 1990's and fulfil commitments of Government to improve policy and programming. The impact of these developments on improved decision making in what is a highly complex area is often underestimated and undervalued.

The unanticipated consequences of similar reforms on professional decision making are also the subject of detailed scrutiny by the Munro Review of child protection in Britain.¹⁰⁶ In the recently released interim report Munro examines the impact of frameworks designed to ensure timely decision making and of prescriptive procedural guidelines imposed to manage organisational risk. Her hypothesis is that, whilst timescales and fixed stages of assessment provide some control of the child protection system (for example by preventing drift and controlling demand), they can do so at the expense of thoughtful social work practice. It is possible that a different approach to local management and leadership could mitigate these negative tendencies. It should be possible to provide thoughtful assessment and timely decision making without the need for false assessment distinctions and timescales which seek to over-standardise the many varied and complex needs of vulnerable children.¹⁰⁷

Munro has reviewed pilot programmes in several local authorities where departure from rigid timelines and prescriptive decision making have been aimed at enabling protection workers to re-engage on an extended basis with vulnerable children and young people and their families. This she argues develops reflective practice and better decision making by workers and a responsive organisational climate which builds knowledge and deals with the complexity of protective decision making. She argues that this results in more inclusive decision making with children and families since workers have the time and permission to build relationship.

A Victorian example of critical decisions being made in response to systemic pressures is that of the worker and supervisor considering whether to divert to Child FIRST and other support programmes or alternatively lodge a Protection Application by Place of Safety or Protection Application by Notice. These decisions are often bound by systems pressures. Notable are the relative balance of Protection Application by Notice and Protection Applications by Place of Safety. In Melbourne 78% of Protection Applications are by safe custody. In examining the difference between the numbers of lodgements for each order the Law Reform Commission explains that actions originating in Protection Applications by Notice are unlikely to

¹⁰⁵ Department of Human Services, *Protecting Victoria's Children: Child Protection Practice Manual*, Government of Victoria, viewed on 22 April 2011, <<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/office-for-children/cpmanual/index.htm>>.

¹⁰⁶ The Munro Review of Child Protection, Interim Report, *The Child's Journey*, Department of Education, Great Britain, 2011, viewed on 19 April 2011, <<http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/>>.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 18.

lead to a Court order for removal of the child from home, even where further investigation and assessment reveals significant harm to the child. As a result, workers choose a precautionary approach by lodging Place of Safety applications leading to removal of the child.¹⁰⁸

In the Victorian context it seems important to maintain the framework for timely decision making set down by the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and the accompanying practice guidelines developed to give effect to it. Australian protective systems rely on a robust diversion approach resulting in a lower incidence of children and young people entering care. Despite this reduced rate of entry to care, overall numbers are climbing in Victoria primarily driven by children and young people remaining in the care system for longer.¹⁰⁹ The Victorian system does not have a strong tradition of active permanency planning leading to permanent care as exists in the British system. Rather, extended stays in foster care lead to long term arrangements and perhaps Permanent Care Orders. Under this scenario children can drift in care and external review by the Children's Court is therefore important. There are circumstances, however, where workers believe that this review process contributes to instability and insecurity for the child.

Departmental workers have also cited the tension between duty of care, which is immediate, and their knowledge about the prospect of long term support for children, young people and their families if the children remain at home. Workers ask whether the services exist to give the support to families with significant vulnerability issues, and are acutely aware of the regional differences in the availability of services to support families. This issue has also been identified by the Victorian Ombudsman. Other issues which make the role of protective worker highly complex are the tensions between assessment as a protective intervener with a forensic approach and the proactive intervention skills taught in clinical approaches at universities. The current context in which Departmental workers operate is also a cause of tension.

The Department of Human Services has a role defined by legislation, but the expectations of the community are often much higher in terms of being able to protect children and young people from harm. In many ways these issues identified by new workers in the protective service area reflect the competing ideologies of child rescue, child rights, child protection and family welfare approaches identified in the Allen report.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Protection Applications in the Children's Court Final Report 19*, Victorian Law Reform Commission, Melbourne, 2010, p. 80.

¹⁰⁹ C Tilbury & J Thoburn, *Children in out-of home care in Australia: International Comparisons*, Children Australia, vol. 33, No. 3, 2008, p. 5-12.

¹¹⁰ The Allen Consulting Group, *Protecting Children: The Child Protection Outcomes Project*, Final Report for the Victorian Department of Human Services, Sydney, Australia, 2003.

Family Group Conferencing

The Victorian Law Reform Commission review of Child Protection Applications in the Children's Court identified Family Group Conferencing as one of a graduated tier of alternative dispute resolution processes available to the Children's Court.¹¹¹ Family Group Conferencing has been a foundation of the New Zealand approach to ensuring cultural sensitivity within protective processes for over 30 years. Family Group Conferencing has struggled in Victoria to establish presence within the decision making processes applying to vulnerable children and young people but has been present here within pre court decision making, post court decision making in both the family and criminal divisions. Social Welfare practitioners view family decision making as an essential part of their practice of case conferencing and development of protective plans. Legal practitioners view family decision making as an alternative dispute resolution process. While both professional orientations embrace family decision group conferencing, neither profession has delivered its original promise of empowering the family to find their own solutions to the vulnerability of children and youth within their midst.

Inadequate resourcing and the lack of trained family group conference facilitators have been identified as barriers to its adoption in Victoria. The Centre believes that family group conferencing could act powerfully to divert children and young people from the protective process. The Centre supports the recommendation of the Law Reform Commission that "family group conferences should become the primary decision making forum in the child protection system and that family group conferences should be conducted prior to filing a Protection Application."¹¹² This should happen without the direction from the Court, but the Court should be empowered to direct a family group conference at any point in a Protection Application.

Such an approach must be resourced and would require independent practitioners well versed in administrative decision making and due process as well as being expert in child development and family processes.

There are limitations to the appropriate use of family group conferencing. For example the conference convenor must be versed in family violence dynamics and familial sexual abuse dynamics since family systems are notoriously unable to respond to this abuse in their midst. Its occurrence often means that the usual systems of family mores and responsiveness have not discouraged or prevented such behaviour.

The Centre does not believe that families should have legal representation within the family group conference but that they should be provided with legal advice before and after the family group conference.

¹¹¹ Victorian Law Reform Commission, *Protection Applications in the Children's Court Final Report 19*, Victorian Law Reform Commission, Melbourne.

¹¹² *ibid*, p. 18.

Appropriate family group conferencing should be a mandatory part of pre-tribunal and pre-court processes except where family violence or child sexual assault matters form grounds for the Protection Application. The agreement should be able to be formally recognised by the Court or the tribunal and the outcomes should form part of a supervision order if one is required.

The Children's Court and Decision Making

The Victorian Ombudsman has noted the detrimental aspects of the adversarial approach for children, young people and their families of child protection cases being heard in the Children's Court.¹¹³ The subsequent review by the Victorian Law Reform Commission promoted a number of alternative decision making processes, but recommendations for joint training between Court staff and Department of Human Services staff appear not to have changed the culture significantly.

Adversarial approaches were not envisaged when the Court, in the form of the family division, was first proposed by the Carney review.¹¹⁴ Subsequent reviews have also acknowledged the need for non-adversarial approaches in decision making around children and young people requiring protection. The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 does not appear to have predisposition towards adversarial approaches.

The Centre acknowledges the important and delicate role of the Court when any intervention into the life of the family is contemplated, particularly where a change of custody or guardianship is involved. At the same time this needs to be balanced by the capacity to test and inquire into the appropriateness of a contemplated action.

The Centre proposes that the Court should continue to hear Protection Applications where a Place of Safety order is involved, where an Application is contested, and where custody or guardianship of parents may be under consideration.

The Centre further proposes that local area tribunals comprising of a Children's Court magistrate and practitioners in child and family welfare and community welfare become the forum in which decisions regarding children and young people likely to need a supervision order be considered. A minimum of one tribunal would ideally cover each region of the Department of Human Services, facilitating the engagement of local knowledge and supports. Ideally, the Attorney General would also consider regionalising the sitting of the Children's Court, especially in metropolitan areas.

Strengthening regional links with the local area service systems, which seems to have been lost with increasing specialisation and status of the Court, is also of key

¹¹³ Victorian Ombudsman, *Own motion investigation into the Department of Human Services Child Protection Program*, 2009, p. 66.

¹¹⁴ Child Welfare Practice and Legislation Review, op. cit, p. 36.

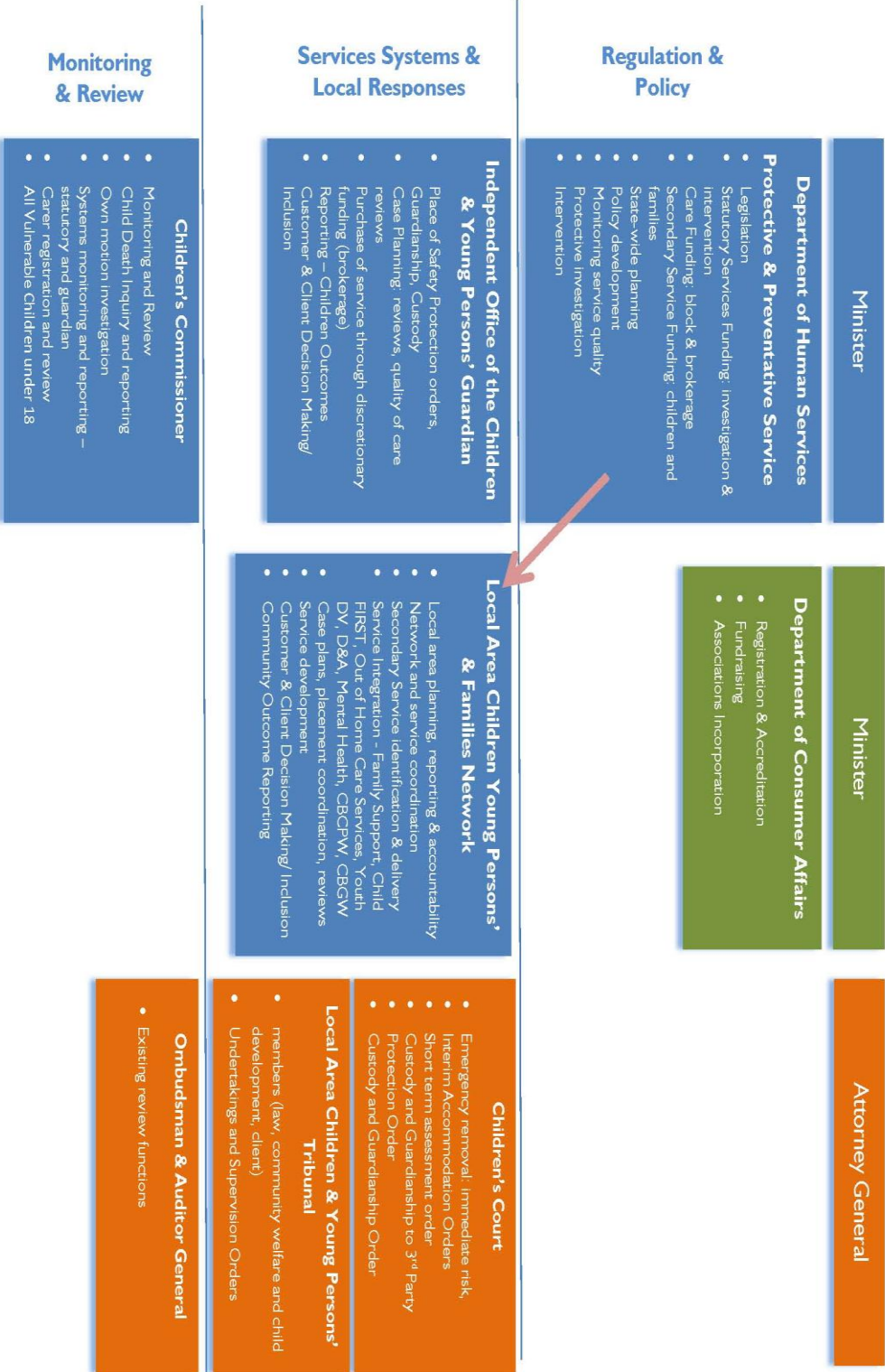
importance. This could be achieved through the proposed Local Area Service Networks.

Recommendations


24. As part of the Vulnerable Children, Young Persons' and Families Strategy a joint framework should be developed around inclusion in decision making and be supported by resources for professional education and development.
25. Children and Young Persons' Commissioners should review the involvement of children and young people in decision making of the Department of Human Services, The Independent Office of the Children and Young Persons' Guardian and Community Service Organisations.
26. Family group conferencing should be mandated and appropriately resourced, and be made available to both the Children's Court and the proposed Children and Young Persons' Tribunal.
27. The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 must continue to provide for the Family Division to hold the jurisdictional powers currently held under 7.2. Protection Applications by Place of Safety, contested applications and jurisdiction for Custody Orders to a third party, a Supervised Custody Order, Custody or Guardian to the Secretary Order or a Permanent Care Order, and their extension and revocation should be retained by the Children's Court.
28. The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 should be amended to provide for non-adversarial decision making by a Local Area Children and Young Persons' Tribunal.
29. Provisions requiring the involvement of parents in case conferencing should be reviewed to ensure that parents are resourced to attend and participate.

Appendix i

Vulnerable Children Young Person's and Families Strategy



Appendix ii



Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy (RCLDS)

A unique collaborative strategy between DHS, the sector and the Centre for Excellence that identifies and implements sector-wide learning and development to enhance outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. Representing 23 Community Service Organisations and more than 750 workers state-wide, the strategy has been central to the development of training for a staff who care for the most vulnerable and marginalised children and young people in our community.

RCLDS Aim
The development of a competent and appropriately trained residential care workforce that is supported to provide a high standard of care that improves outcomes and life opportunities for children and young people in out-of-home care.

RCLDS Goals

- The ongoing development and maintenance of a skilled and stable workforce
- Provision of high quality training, supervision and support for workers
- Development of appropriate pre-service and in-service qualifications relevant to the field
- Commitment to and development of a lifelong learning culture in the workplace



RCLDS Further Education Program

The aim of the RCLDS Further Education program is to support the improvements in residential care service provision through the Scholarships and completion bond programs.

RCLDS Scholarships continue to support the improvements in residential care service provision, by supporting residential care workers who have a Certificate IV in Child Youth and Family Intervention (Residential and Out of Home Care) or similar to obtain a Diploma of Community Services or equivalent qualification.

RCLDS Completion bonds are available to all Community Service Organisations (CSOs) offering residential care. The completion bond will fund residential care workers and/or supervisors who have completed the Certificate IV in Child Youth and Family Intervention (Residential and Out of Home Care) delivered by preferred training providers.

RTO & TAFE Network is the collaboration between industry training providers and CSOs providing residential care to assist in the delivery of contextualised out of home care training.

Quote to go here'

Resi ROCKS

"Thank God You're Here!" is the theme for Resi ROCKS in 2011. This year's forum to be held at the IMCG will celebrate the relationship between the Resi worker and the young person. The day will explore the ways that positive relationships between the worker and young person can improve developmental outcomes. The day will be supported by Richard Berger and Andrew Fuller who speak by popular demand.

With Care Training
The RCLDS program continues to support the development of the specific care through the funding of the highly regarded With Care Training. The positive feedback from the sector has prompted RCLDS to fund Stage 3 With Care Training "Digging Deeper". Go to the Centre's website for more details.

Special Events
RCLDS has sponsored Residential staff to attend special events such as the ACWA conferences and international speakers such as Dr Bruce Perry. More information about up and coming events is available on our website.

Training Forum
The Training Forum held in November each year, provides the RCLDS Reference Group with the opportunity to consult with the sector about the RCLDS Training Plan, to report on achievements over the year and to gain feedback from the sector about emerging training needs.

With Care	Effective conflict management	Youth Mental Health First Aid	Supervision	Sexualised behaviour	Indigenous
<p>With Care 1 2 day 900am to 430pm</p> <p>Sunshine February 7th and 8th</p> <p>Ballarat March 8th and 9th</p> <p>Geelong May 15th and 16th</p> <p>Highton June 7th and 8th</p> <p>With Care 2 (Therapeutic photo only)</p> <p>Highton March 21st - 25th</p> <p>Preston May 16th - 20th</p> <p>With Care 3a 2 days 900am to 430pm</p> <p>Sunshine February 14th and 15th</p> <p>Geelong March 16th and 17th</p> <p>Sunshine May 23rd and 24th</p> <p>Ballarat June 15th and 16th</p> <p>With Care 3b (Therapeutic photo only)</p> <p>Sunshine February 23rd and 24th</p> <p>Richmond March 7th</p> <p>Bendigo May 31st and 1st</p> <p>Geelong June 22nd and 23rd</p>	<p>Effective Conflict Management 2 day 900am to 430pm 2 hour coaching session post workshop</p> <p>Sunshine February 3rd and 4th Coaching Feb 16 and March 3</p> <p>Bendigo February 17th and 18th Coaching March 1st and 2nd</p> <p>Shipperton April 23rd and 16th Coaching April 28th, May 12th</p> <p>Geelong May 5th and 6th Coaching May 17th, June 9th</p> <p>Gippsland June 20th and 21st Coaching June 28th, July 4th</p> <p>Southern Metro June 14th and 21st Coaching June 10th and 20th</p> <p>VACCA August 1st and 2nd Coaching 15th and 31st</p> <p>Ballarat August 22nd and 23rd Coaching Sept 2nd and 15th</p> <p>The Centre September 22nd and 23rd Coaching Oct 14th and 31</p> <p>The Centre October 11th and 12th Coaching Oct 17th and 26th</p> <p>Ballarat October 11th and 12th Coaching Oct 17th and Nov 17th</p> <p>Sunshine November 14th and 15th Coaching Nov 24th and Dec 5th</p>	<p>Youth Mental Health 1st Aid 2 day 900am to 430pm</p> <p>Mildura January 20th and 21st</p> <p>The Centre April 7th and 8th</p> <p>The Centre June 9th and 10th</p> <p>Ballarat June 23rd and 24th</p> <p>Shipperton July 14th and 15th</p> <p>The Centre August 11th and 12th</p> <p>August 25th and 26th</p> <p>Geelong October 20th and 21st</p>	<p>Supervision training for Residential workers 2 day 900am to 430pm</p> <p>The Centre March 21st and 22nd</p> <p>Shipperton May 16th and 17th</p> <p>The Centre September 12th and 13th</p>	<p>Working with young People with sexualised behaviours 1 Day 900am to 430pm</p> <p>Gippsland March 24th</p> <p>The Centre April 1st</p> <p>Mildura June 1st</p> <p>Geelong July 7th</p> <p>Ballarat 24th August</p> <p>Shipperton 26th October</p> <p>The Centre September 1st</p>	<p>Working with Aboriginal children families and support workers 1 Day 900am to 430pm</p> <p>VACCA April 5th September 20th</p> <p>*New Disability Training (ID user to be advised)</p>



RCLDS Training Calendar 2011 – Building residential skills through partnership