

21 September 2018

House of Representatives Select Committee on Intergenerational Welfare Dependence
PO Box 6021, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: igwd.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is pleased to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry, which we believe ought to be reframed as an inquiry into Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage. The focus ought to be on addressing structural causes of disadvantage, rather than an implied narrative of blame that the vexed terminology 'welfare dependence' suggests.

Our contribution is motivated by the well-known link between childhood vulnerability and lifelong disadvantage. We identify systemic factors that serve to entrench disadvantage across generations. We point to opportunities to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage that some children are born into, and sever the nexus between their family's socioeconomic circumstances, where they grow up, and their longer term outcomes. To support children, we need to support families and communities. We highlight factors that enable families to move out of disadvantage and poverty, and put children on a more positive trajectory. This submission draws on our practical experience of delivering a range of programs for children and their parents, families and communities; and on research by our own organisation and others. It suggests recommendations that the Committee could put to the Australian Government in its report.

The Brotherhood stands ready to assist the Committee further. Please contact me on (03) 9483 1364 or smallett@bsl.org.au or Nicole Rees, Senior Manager of Public Policy, 0407 337 940 or nrees@bsl.org.au, to discuss any aspect of our submission, request an appearance at future hearings or arrange a visit to see our programs that tackle child and family disadvantage—such as HIPPPY—in operation.

Yours sincerely

Professor Shelley Mallett

Director, Research & Policy Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence
Professorial Fellow in Social Policy, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne

The Brotherhood, young children and their families

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is an independent non-government organisation with strong community links that has been working to reduce poverty in Australia since the 1930s. Based in Melbourne, but with a national profile, the BSL continues to fight for an Australia free of poverty. We undertake research, service development and delivery, and advocacy with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating the understandings gained into new policies, new programs and practices for implementation by government and others. The Brotherhood works to prevent and intervene early to address disadvantage. Key projects for young children and their families include:

- The **Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)**: Now federally funded, HIPPY is delivered (via community partners) in 100 communities around Australia, half of which have high concentrations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This home-based parenting and early childhood learning program works with families with young children aged 4 and 5 years old in disadvantaged communities. A pilot of HIPPY Age 3 commenced in 2015.
- **Parents Next**: A federally funded pre-employment program for parents of young children. The Brotherhood participated in the pilot and is now delivering the service as part of the national roll-out.
- Founding partner in **Goodstart Early Learning**, the largest not-for-profit provider of early childhood education and care services in Australia. Goodstart is a social enterprise with a mission to raise the quality of early learning and improve social inclusion.
- Development and facilitation of **Integrated Family and Community Hubs** – in Fitzroy; Craigieburn; Mernda and Epping in partnership with local governments and community sector agencies.
- The **Growing Learners program** assists parents to support their (0-3 year old) children's learning and development through play. It incorporates parent-child learning groups, home visits and parent peer support group sessions.
- The **2Gen pilot** seeks to simultaneously support children and their families to move out of circumstances of disadvantage.
- The **Refugee Child Outreach** program as part of a suite of Family Support Programs for refugee and other newly arrived communities

Brotherhood of St Laurence
67 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy Vic. 3065
ABN 24 603 467 024
Ph. (03) 9483 1183
www.bsl.org.au



Submission to the Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare Dependence

The inquiry needs to address the causes rather than the symptoms of intergenerational disadvantage

The Productivity Commission's recent report *Rising inequality* found that many Australians experience economic disadvantage at some stage in their lives, but for most it is temporary. Persistent or recurrent poverty affects about 3%, with roughly 700 000 people living in poverty for at least the last four years. Single parent families (overwhelmingly female-headed), unemployed people, people with disabilities and Indigenous Australians are most likely to experience income poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. They are at heightened risk of entrenched economic disadvantage, which limits their opportunities to develop the skills to overcome these conditions. Critically, the Report found these risks are greatest for children living in households where parents are not in paid employment¹—which could be for a variety of reasons such as care responsibilities, disability or being unable to find work.

We urge the Committee to flip its terms of reference to focus on the structural drivers of intergenerational disadvantage and the enablers out of disadvantage: social assistance and support; the availability of decent work; access to early learning and schooling and training; the disadvantages and opportunities of location (place). The emphasis ought to be on positive and enabling, rather than coercive and conditional, measures to address inequality, and strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in Australia.

Disadvantage and vulnerability start early

We focus on children because their present and future are shaped by the circumstances into which they were born. Parents want the best for their children, and are typically highly motivated to do the best they can, with what they have, for their child's future. The right support, and the right opportunities at the right time can make all the difference.

A mother's education level, parenting style, the home learning environment, family income and parental health are among the most important determinants of a child's future success.²

The earliest years of a child's life are critical to brain development³ and set the foundations for their lives. Measures that nurture children's learning and development from the earliest moments are vital. The earlier the support, the greater the chance of improving a child's outcomes.⁴

¹ Productivity Commission, *Rising inequality? A stocktake of the evidence*, 2018.

² K Sylva, EC Melhuish, P Sammons, I Siraj & B Taggart, *Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3–16 Project (EPPSE 3–16+): how pre-school influences children and young people's attainment and developmental outcomes over time*, UK Department for Education Research Report no. RR354, 2014.

A coherent national response is needed

The Brotherhood calls for a substantial rethink of Australia's national early childhood and family policy and program landscape—which cannot be divorced from employment and social security policies.

The current policy response is piecemeal, with varied approaches across the nation. The interplay of federal, state and local government efforts, and the disconnect between Early Childhood Education and Care, child and family services, employment policies and programs, and place-based measures create a fragmented landscape that lacks an effective mechanism to connect families with the supports they need. In some instances this dissonance entrenches disadvantage (e.g. the Early Childhood Education & Care activities test is reducing access to early learning for vulnerable children who have the most to gain; low social security payment rates are plunging families into poverty; increasing welfare conditionality is marginalising some families or missing opportunities to support others (e.g. Parents Next is a limited offering).

A coherent national response to child and family disadvantage is needed at both population and place levels. It should rest on a strong system of progressive universalism that leverages universal services and recognises that some children, families and communities require different and greater support to achieve equitable outcomes. Measures that identify, prevent and arrest vulnerabilities and in turn support improved early learning and development outcomes must be in the frame. Mutually reinforcing supports early in a child's life, provided over a sustained period, are important.

There is significant opportunity to strengthen universal and other key platforms (regardless of which level of government funds them) and connect these with more intensive, targeted and specialist services to create a navigable continuum of supports. For example:

- Strengthening the universal platform of Maternal and Child Health, which is so variable across the nation, could better assist families in the earliest stages of their children's life.
- Early Childhood Education and Care and preschool could provide a crucial soft entry point to engage with families (e.g. an intentional approach to strengthening the capacity of parents as first teachers). It could also provide a platform from which to identify emerging vulnerabilities and connect families with additional supports.
- Measures to increase participation of vulnerable groups in early learning settings could support better transitions to school.
- Social security reforms could ensure adequate income support so that children are not living in poverty.
- The NDIS platform could be leveraged to support the development and wellbeing of children of parents with disability, and siblings of children with disability.
- Reframing Parents Next Program with an enabling and multi-generational approach could support families to move out of disadvantage.

³ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *The science of early childhood development*, 2017.

⁴ JJ Heckman, *Giving kids a fair chance: a strategy that works*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013.

Recommendation 1: A national strategy

Develop a coherent national strategy to address child and family disadvantage. It should connect employment, social security, child and maternal health, early learning, school and family support services to foster thriving families and communities.

Low social security allowances and high rents leave children of those reliant on working age payments in poverty

Social protection systems should provide support for the tough times that we are all likely to experience at some stage across our life. In the absence of adequate social security people fall through the holes of a frayed safety net, and this can have intergenerational impacts, trapping those with few resources and limited family support networks in poverty.

Australia's sub-poverty level income support payments, coupled with the severe lack of rental housing affordable for low-income households⁵ are critical drivers of intergenerational disadvantage. Inadequate social security is trapping families in poverty, rather than providing a springboard out of it. The low rates of Newstart and Youth Allowance operate as a barrier to employment, making it nearly impossible to meet costs related to work search, such as transport and phone/data usage. Low payments also present a barrier to participating in social and community life, which can push long-term recipients into deep economic and social exclusion.⁶

The Brotherhood is one of the many cross-sector voices calling for increases to Newstart, Youth Allowance and key supplementary payments, and future indexation along the same lines as pension increases. Social security rates are highly relevant for this inquiry given the serious consequences for families and children living below the poverty line. For example:

- **Sole-parent households** (overwhelmingly female-led) are the most impoverished family type in Australia.⁷ Many sole parents have been affected by being moved from Parenting Payment to the much lower Newstart Allowance. Poverty has intergenerational impacts: children in low SES households are at much risk of early childhood vulnerabilities, poorer educational attainment, and poorer employment and life outcomes.
- **People with disability** are overrepresented in the poverty statistics: 15.8% of adults with disability and 17.8% of people with a core activity limitation live below the 50% median income poverty line)⁸—with significant impacts for their children's life chances. Tightened eligibility

⁵ SGS Economics, *Rental affordability index*, May 2018, viewed 21 September 2018, <<https://www.sgsep.com.au/maps/thirdspace/australia-rental-affordability-index/>>; N Gurrán, R van den Nouwelant, C Gilbert, A James, K Gibb & P Phibbs, *Supporting affordable housing supply: inclusionary planning in new and renewing communities – inquiry into increasing affordable housing supply: evidence-based principles and strategies for Australian policy and practice*, AHURI & Sydney University, 2018.

⁶ P Saunders, 'New budget standards show just how inadequate the Newstart Allowance has become', *The Conversation*, 25 August 2017.

⁷ ACOSS, *Poverty in Australia 2016*, ACOSS & Social Policy Research Centre, 2016, p. 22.

⁸ ACOSS, *Poverty in Australia 2016*, pp. 34–35. Previous research suggests that as many as 45% of adults with disability live below the 60% median income poverty line (PwC, *Disability expectations: investing in a better life, a stronger Australia*, Thought Leadership Advisory Group, 2011, p. 11; OECD, *Sickness, disability and work: keeping on track in the economic downturn*, background paper, 2009, p. 35.

criteria have made it harder for people to access the higher paid Disability Support Pension; indeed around 24% of people on Newstart have a disability, with a growing number being diverted from the pension.⁹

For people surviving on Newstart and Youth Allowance, rents are severely unaffordable in all states, in both metropolitan and regional areas.¹⁰ At the extreme, a recent report into rough sleeping in Victoria found:

it is now a common occurrence that unemployed people who are without the support of family or friends are resorting to rough sleeping simply because of the inadequacy of the Centrelink income available to them. They are having to choose between adequate shelter and food, transport costs and other essential living costs ... their ability to look for work and meet all their obligations under Centrelink rules is seriously impaired by factors beyond their control.¹¹

Recommendation 2: Social security poverty traps

Increase social security allowances and supplements to enable people to live with dignity and participate in social and economic life.

Quality early childhood education makes a difference, but children with the most to gain are participating at lower rates

While some children attend day care as infants, many do not engage with Early Childhood Education and Care until age three or four (if at all). By the time they start preschool and then school, they are already lagging behind their peers.

Children who attend preschool have a lower incidence of developmental vulnerability by the time they start school compared with those who do not. Significantly, children from low SES families enjoy the most benefit¹² but are at most risk of missing out. The Productivity Commission identified the following groups as disadvantaged when it comes to participating in ECEC: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally diverse backgrounds with limited English spoken at home, children whose parents are long-term unemployed, children whose mother has not completed high school, children in low-income households and children with a parent or sibling with a disability.¹³

Nearly two-thirds of three-year-olds are already attending some form of early education and care—albeit of variable quality and for different durations. Alarming, children from families experiencing

⁹ JACOSS, *Faces of unemployment*, ACOSS & Jobs Australia, 2018, pp. 4 & 7.

¹⁰ SGS Economics, *Rental affordability index*.

¹¹ T Nicholson, *Rough sleeping in Victoria: Situation appraisal – May 2017*, circulated for comment, DHSS, 2017, p. 47, viewed 21 September 2018, <<http://chp.org.au/services/rough-sleeping-situation-appraisal/>>.

¹² S Goldfeld, M O'Connor, D Cloney, S Redmond, H Badland, K Williams, F Mensah, S Woolfenden, A Kvalsvig & A Kochanoff, 'Testing a social determinants framework of child disadvantage', *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2017, pp. 223–9.

¹³ Productivity Commission, *Child care and early childhood learning*, Inquiry Report, vol. 1, no. 73, Canberra, 2014; Productivity Commission, *Child care and early childhood learning*, Inquiry Report, vol. 2, no. 73, Canberra, 2014.

disadvantage make up the lion's share of those not attending. Around two-thirds of three years olds not currently participating in early learning face barrier to access – financial and non-financial – they are principally children from low income families and key equity groups. Lower levels of participation in four-year-old preschool also persist among some vulnerable groups, despite universal access.¹⁴

Common barriers to participation identified by families we work with include cost, availability, transport, housing transience, poor inclusiveness practices (especially for children with disability), lack of awareness of services and a reluctance to engage for cultural or personal reasons.

Recent Australian Government child care reforms have explicitly prioritised workforce participation over early learning. In particular, the new 'activity test' is adversely impacting participation of children from families not in paid employment, or reliant on insecure employment, in early learning.¹⁵

This move is at odds with comparable countries overseas, which have adjusted their policy in recognition of the benefit of children—particularly those from low SES households or experiencing other forms of disadvantage—taking part in formal early learning for an extended and sustained period. We note that the United Kingdom has introduced 15 hours of free preschool education for children from their third birthday, and has recently extended this to two-year-olds from low-income or disadvantaged households.

Greater investment in early learning for Australia's youngest generation will pay long term dividends. The Brotherhood has been urging the Australian Government to relax the activities test for ECEC and supports calls to extend universal preschool access to three-year-olds in Australia, with funding prioritised to those children missing from or disadvantaged in the current system. There is a strong social and economic case for doing so, as set out in the Mitchell Institute's report.¹⁶

There is also a systemic need to grapple with the inherent challenge of engaging harder to reach families. Significant gaps remain in effective outreach for ECEC, early readiness programs, building cultural safety, strengthening inclusion and eliminating financial barriers for those with low means. While some programs exist—such as the Brotherhood's Refugee Child Outreach—they are few and far between.

Recommendation 3: Participation in early learning

- Relax the child care activity test and invest in measures to build the sustained participation in early learning of children experiencing disadvantage
- Invest in universal preschool for three-year-olds to ensure all children in Australia have access to two years formal early learning before commencing school
- Invest in measures (e.g. outreach; readiness programs; inclusive practices) to increase participation and engagement of vulnerable groups in early learning

¹⁴ S Fox & M Geddes, *Preschool – two years are better than one: developing a universal preschool program for Australian 3 year olds – evidence, policy and implementation*, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper, no. 03/2016, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2016.

¹⁵ 99,000 families are expected to be worse off as a result of the activity test, Senate Estimates QON SQN908

¹⁶ S Fox & M Geddes, *Preschool – two years are better than one: developing a preschool program for Australian 3 year olds – evidence, policy and implementation*, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper no. 3/2016, Melbourne.

The home environment is pivotal to child outcomes

Research shows that while preschool participation is important, it alone does *not* bridge the substantial ‘equity gap’ in learning and developmental outcomes according to socioeconomic status.¹⁷ To reduce this gap, additional measures are needed before, alongside and after ECEC.

A child’s most powerful and earliest learning comes from their family. Work by the Parenting Research Centre highlights the gap between expert and public understandings of effective parenting: parenting skills are learned and learnable—they can be practised and improved, which is contrary to a common belief that parenting is innate and therefore cannot be influenced. We echo their call for better support for parents.¹⁸

The OECD has reported that the most effective way to boost a child’s later achievement is to support their parents to actively engage in learning activities at home.¹⁹ Bringing an intentional focus on early education into the home enables parents to build skills as their child’s first teacher in a way that is responsive to their surroundings. This empowering approach offers the chance to strengthen parenting capacity and confidence and enhance family relationships. Home learning programs can give children and families the extra assistance needed to narrow the gap in developmental outcomes. They also provide a much-needed avenue to engage families who might not otherwise participate in early years education programs, encourage engagement in formal early learning programs and improve school readiness.

Importantly, home-based options offer a cost-effective and nimble approach that does not rely on physical infrastructure. They also provide a window into the home environment, which can provide the trigger for families to be linked to other services.

Family interactions can influence a child’s outcomes, even if it is not possible to have a major impact on the family’s socioeconomic resources; a supportive and nurturing home environment can help to counteract the effects of poverty.²⁰

¹⁷ C Tayler, D Cloney & F Niklas 2015, ‘A bird in the hand: understanding the trajectories of development of young children and the need for action to improve outcomes’, *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 51–60.

¹⁸ For example: Parenting Research Centre, *Evidence review: an analysis of the evidence for parenting interventions in Australia*, prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2012; M Macvean, *Updated evidence review: an analysis of the evidence for parenting interventions in Australia*, Parenting Research Centre for the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2017.

¹⁹ OECD, *Encouraging quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC): parental and community engagement matters*, research brief, OECD, Paris, 2012, p. 4; C Desforges & A Abouchaar, *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review*, research report, no. 433, UK Department for Education and Skills, London, 2003; A Harris & J Goodall, *Parental involvement in education: an overview of the literature*, University of Warwick, Coventry, 2006.

²⁰ KE Kiernan & FK Mensah, ‘Poverty, family resources and children’s educational attainment: the mediating role of parenting’, *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 317–36.

Existing preventative programs that focus on helping parents and children learn together and equipping parents as their child's first teacher include supported playgroups, instructional programs (e.g. Families as First Teachers); home visiting and home learning (e.g. HIPPO profiled in Attachment 1, but are only available to a small number of families in a small number of locations. There is opportunity to entrench these approaches to ensure they available national wide for families and communities that would most benefit.

Recommendation 4: Equipping parents as their child's first teacher

Expand evidence-based programs that support parents to nurture their child's learning, wellbeing and development. These should be accessible to families who could most benefit.

Achieving economic security is increasingly challenging, particularly for mothers

Australia is experiencing significant social and economic change. Four interrelated megatrends are impacting the labour market and the future of work: globalisation, climate change, demographic change, and technological change. Major structural issues, which impact most heavily on people experiencing disadvantage, include:

- **Employment precarity:** The rate of underemployment is the highest since records began in 1985²¹ and growing. Australia's rate of part-time employment is the third highest in the OECD²² and has increased from 18.9% of employment in 1986 to 31.6% in 2016.²³ Part-time and casual workers are increasingly confronted with unpredictable and irregular weekly rosters.²⁴ Many underemployed jobseekers are trapped in temporary work, which does not provide economic security. Marginal self-employment is growing, particularly among part-time, unincorporated, solo entrepreneurs.²⁵ Even for those who are currently employed, there is a decline in perceived job security.²⁶
- **A shortfall of entry-level jobs:** In May 2018, there were eight underemployed or underemployed people for every job vacancy. When employed people changing jobs are added to the figure, the number applying for each vacancy doubles.²⁷ Entry-level jobs have therefore become less

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour force, Australia, September 2017*, cat. no. 6202.0, table 22, ABS, Canberra, 2017.

²² OECD, *Part-time employment rate (indicator)*, OECD, 2018, viewed 21 September 2018, <<https://data.oecd.org/emp/part-time-employment-rate.htm>>.

²³ J Borland, *Part-time work in Australia: a second look*, Labour market snapshots, University of Melbourne, 2017, p. 1.

²⁴ ABS, *Labour force, Australia, June 2018*, cat. no. 6292.0, table 22, ABS, Canberra, 2018; OECD, *The future of social protection: what works for non-standard workers?*, policy brief, 2018, viewed 21 September 2018, <<https://www.oecd.org/social/Future-of-social-protection.pdf>>.

²⁵ T Carney & J Stanford, *The dimensions of insecure work: a factbook*, Centre for Future Work, The Australia Institute, 2018.

²⁶ J Foster & R Guttman, 'Perceptions of job security in Australia', *Bulletin (Reserve Bank of Australia)*, March quarter, 2018, pp. 80–99.

²⁷ ACOSS, *Faces of unemployment*, ACOSS & Jobs Australia, 2018, p. 5.

common, creating more competition for limited positions.²⁸ The vast majority of new jobs created in Australia now require a vocational or university qualification. Jobseekers with the lowest qualifications (secondary education to Certificate II or III) are the least attractive, from an employer perspective.

- **Shortage of affordable, flexible childcare; family (un)friendly work practices and conditions:** Australia's rate of employment for mothers with a child under 15 years is slightly below the OECD average²⁹, in part reflecting persistent gender divisions in caring responsibilities and other unpaid work. Australia also has one of the lowest employment rates for sole-parents³⁰, the vast majority (83%) of whom are single mothers³¹.

Access to affordable and good quality child care enables women's workforce participation. Caring for children is the main reason women report for not looking for a job with more hours.³² Among those with children, some 51% of females and 37% of males report that financial assistance with childcare costs and access to child care places as very important incentives to join or increase participation in the labour force³³

Casual employees with intermittent work are excluded from two of the 10 National Employment Standards (NES) entitlements which are critical for worker-carers: access to parental leave and the right to request flexible working arrangements.³⁴ An evaluation of the paid parental leave scheme found that 5% of mothers (and 12% of single mothers) eligible for PPL were not eligible for statutory unpaid leave under the NES on the basis of their work history³⁵, which means that these women had no right to return to their pre-leave job. They do have the right to request flexible work, but this request can be declined on reasonable business grounds.

Although work is becoming more flexible with the rise in part-time, casual and contract jobs, flexible work is often low-paid, with unpredictable work hours. There has been some progress:

²⁸ Anglicare Australia, *Evidence base for State of the Family 2016: the lived experience of jobseekers*, Anglicare Australia, Canberra, 2016, p. 8.

²⁹ OECD, *Connecting people with jobs: key issues for raising labour market participation in Australia*, OECD, Paris, 2017, p.25.

³⁰ OECD, *Doing better for families: Australia*, 2011, viewed 1 August 2018, <<http://www.oecd.org/els/family/47700941.pdf>>.

³¹ ABS, *ABS shows changes on International Families Day*, 2017, viewed 21 September 2018, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/mediareleasesbyCatalogue/5E4BABA5BD22D73DCA2581210009D3D8>>.

³² Selected by 23.9% of female respondents: ABS, *Barriers and incentives to labour force participation, Australia, July 2016 to June 2017*, ABS, cat. no. 6239.0, Canberra, 2017, Table 5, viewed 21 September 2018, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6239.0>>.

³³ ABS, *Barriers and incentives to labour force participation*, 2017, Table 13. Questions about incentives were asked of persons aged 18–75 years who were not in the labour force (excluding those permanently unable to work or retired), unemployed or usually worked less than 35 hours.

³⁴ Parental leave and flexible work hours can only be accessed where there is an expectation of ongoing work for a casual and the casual has been employed regularly and systematically for at least 12 months.

³⁵ B Martin, B Hewitt, M Baird, J Baxter, A Heron, G Whitehouse, M Zadoroznyj, N Xiang, D Broom, L Connelly, A Jones, G Kalb, D McVicar, L Strazdins, M Walter, M Western & M Wooden, *Paid parental leave evaluation: phase 1*, report prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs by the Institute for Social Research, University of Queensland, 2012.

according to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, in 2017, 49.5% of employers in all industries had a *policy* aimed at supporting employees with family or caring responsibilities but only 18.3% had a *strategy* to do so.

- **Discrimination:** This excludes people from employment opportunities, compounding poverty and disadvantage. Half of mothers surveyed in 2013 by the Australian Human Rights Commission reported experiencing discrimination as a result of their pregnancy, parental leave or return to work.³⁶ In a report on disability and mature age discrimination, the Commission found that employment discrimination was ongoing and systematic, with bullying, inaccessibility and exclusion having a substantial negative impact on workforce connection and participation.³⁷ And discrimination in employment remains a live issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a study of non-Indigenous Australian attitudes found 31% had witnessed employment discrimination against Aboriginal people.³⁸
- **Job polarisation:** Technological change is expected to continue. The types, distribution and quality of jobs are shifting. Greater polarisation between low and high-paid will mean fewer mid-range jobs.³⁹
- **Increasing inequality:** Both wealth inequality and income inequality in Australia are growing.⁴⁰ This adversely impacts economic growth, social cohesion and trust in our institutions.⁴¹ Declining union membership and the erosion of the standard employment relationship and the industrial awards system have all contributed to a reduced share of income for workers. Minimum wages have declined from 50% of average full-time wages in 2000 to 44% in 2015.⁴²
- **Social security subject to increasing conditionality:** Access to welfare payments is less certain and more conditional than 20 years ago.⁴³ The current compliance focus in employment services is causing providers to divert resources away from front-line assistance, eroding the satisfaction of staff and jobseekers alike. Many jobseekers express a lack of trust in the system, and perceive

³⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Supporting Working Parents: Pregnancy and Return to Work National Review – report 2014*, AHRC, 2018, p. 26, viewed 21 September 2018, p. 26p.https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/SWP_Report_2014.pdf >.

³⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Willing to work: national inquiry into employment discrimination against older Australians and Australians with disability*, AHRC, 2016, pp. 12 & 38, viewed 21 September 2018, <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination>>.

³⁸ Beyond Blue, *Discrimination against Indigenous Australians: a snapshot of the views of non-Indigenous people aged 25–44*, Beyond Blue & TNS, 2014.

³⁹ T Balliester & A Elsheikhi, *The future of work: a literature review*, working paper no. 29, Research Department, International Labour Office, 2018.

⁴⁰ M Fletcher & B Guttman, 'Income inequality in Australia', *Economic Roundup*, no. 2, 2013, pp. 35–54; OECD, *In it together: why less inequality benefits all*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015.

⁴¹ ACOSS, *Inequality in Australia 2018*, ACOSS & University of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁴² OECD, *Minimum relative to average wages of full-time workers*, OECD Statistics, 2017, viewed 12 July 2018, <<https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIN2AVE>>.

⁴³ Saunders, *New budget standards, 2017*; D Arthur, *Extending mutual obligation—court-ordered fines and arrest warrants*, Parliamentary Library, 2018, viewed 21 September 2018, <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201819/ExtendingMutualObligation>.

it as being about compliance rather than meaningful interaction.⁴⁴ Coercive activation measures have generally failed, however, to improve outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers.⁴⁵ Future employment services should instead move towards 'positive' activation that focuses on motivation, incentives and rewards.

- **Working age payments reducing in real value:** Discussed above
- **Increasing housing unaffordability:** Discussed above

These challenges undermine the link between employment and economic security and cast doubt on the assumptions on which systems are based: that people can sustain themselves on Newstart while looking for work; that stable employment is available for all who want it; and that those in work will have adequate means to live.

The Brotherhood recently made a [submission to the Australian Government's review into the future of employment services](#), which the Committee is welcome to refer to for our extensive recommendations about reforms to improve employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed workers.

Intergenerational disadvantage is best tackled by a multi-generational approach

Emerging evidence demonstrates that, for vulnerable families, bringing together supports to address the needs of children and their parents (and even grandparents) at the same time (a multigenerational approach) has a multiplier effect and is more effective than working in isolation on particular aspects.⁴⁶ Key components are intensively addressed over time, and not as a short term, one-off fix. Critical elements that help a family overcome disadvantage include:

- high quality early learning and care for the child
- building pathways to economic participation/financial stability for the parent(s)
- enhancing the parent's capacity as their child's first teacher
- enhancing the family's positive community connections and social participation.

Some families experiencing disadvantage can already access some of these supports (depending on where they live), but they are typically delivered in isolation.

The Brotherhood is currently delivering programs that take a multigenerational approach:

- **HIPPY** supports parents as first teachers, supports child school readiness and engagement with formal early learning settings; employs parents as program tutors and supports their next steps into further training and employment; and intentionally builds capacity in the local community. Outcomes are outlined in Attachment 1.

⁴⁴ A Randrianarisoa & D Bowman, *On the front line: employment services staff perspectives on working with mature age jobseekers*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic., 2018.

⁴⁵ J Borland, M Considine, G Kalb, & D Ribar, *What are best-practice programs for jobseekers facing high barriers to employment?* Melbourne Institute policy brief no. 4/16, 2016.

⁴⁶ Annie E Casey and Aspen Foundations (USA)

- Our **2Gen pilot** (running in three Melbourne locations) connects children to early learning and brings together family and parenting support; economic participation support; financial programs; and a focus on building civic engagement and community connections. The pilot is delivering promising early results, but is yet to be evaluated.

Recommendation 5: Multigenerational approaches

Invest in multigenerational approaches that bring together mutually reinforcing supports: early learning; family and parenting supports; economic participation assistance; and positive social connections.

Parents Next could be reshaped to address intergenerational disadvantage

Parents Next is targeted at some of Australia's most vulnerable families with young children. While the national roll-out of Parents Next is very new, we believe there is opportunity to broaden its remit from a pre-employment program to a platform from which to address intergenerational disadvantage.

We recommend it bring together complementary interventions to change the trajectory of families experiencing disadvantage. Key elements include:

- support to engage children in quality and affordable early learning and child care
- support for parents as first teachers, so they are well equipped to nurture their child's development
- connections with relevant child and family supports
- strengthening families' community networks
- building parents' skills and work readiness through offers including pre-accredited and accredited training, work tasters, work experience and volunteering;
- strengthening families' financial capabilities
- assisting parents to access decent jobs that help them meet their family commitments *and* build their economic security
- collaborating with employers to vary their recruitment, induction and retention strategies, and redesign jobs to enable family-friendly work practices.

Recommendation 6: A dedicated program to address intergenerational disadvantage

Reframe Parents Next as an enabling program to support families and address intergenerational disadvantage. In addition to providing pre-employment assistance, it would equip parents as their child's first teacher; link children to early learning and care; foster positive community connections; and engage employers in flexible work arrangements that support parenting responsibilities.

But punitive compliance measures are counterproductive

Consideration should be given to exempting Parents Next from the compliance and demerit points framework. Early indications are that the compliance focus is presenting barriers, particularly for parents with low English skills and/or poor digital literacy.

Our direct delivery experience reveals that initial appointments are lasting up to two hours and are taken up with assisting participants to understand self-reporting and the demerit points system.

Information for parents on self-reporting is not available in community languages. And rigid rules are leading to inadvertent breaches. For example, attendance must be self-reported by 9 pm on the same day. For parents juggling attendance at a compulsory activity and caring for young children, it is easy to overlook this and accrue a demerit, with the alarming consequence of payments suspension.

Focusing on compliance, rather than the goals and aspirations of parents, jeopardises the program outcomes. Emulating the disempowering effect of Australia's current employment services system should be avoided. Instead, an approach that gives people agency and choice is intrinsically motivating. Evidence on motivation shows that people are more engaged, and more persistent in their pursuit of a goal, if they have chosen the goal and it is linked to their interests and aspirations.

Recommendation 7: Reduced focus on compliance

Disconnect Parents Next from the targeted compliance framework and associated demerit points system to make it a positive, enabling program

Location matters

Child vulnerability correlates closely with place-based disadvantage, with children in the most disadvantaged areas more than four times as likely to be developmentally vulnerable as their peers in the least disadvantaged areas. One-third of children living in disadvantaged postcodes are developmentally vulnerable when they start school.⁴⁷

Australia's most disadvantaged communities require a highly focused approach to change key metrics so that children can get a better start in life. While we note there are existing federal government – funded place-based investments and programs (e.g. Communities for Children and the previous Rudd/Gillard Government's Better Futures Local Solutions initiative), combined efforts (e.g. Logan Together), state-based efforts (e.g. the Go Goldfields initiative (Maryborough Victoria) and philanthropic efforts (e.g. Opportunity Child), commissioning a range of demonstration projects to tackle intergenerational disadvantage should be considered. These could trial and evaluate the impacts of different approaches, including integrated and enhanced service offerings in locations of

⁴⁷ S Goldfeld, M O'Connor, D Cloney, S Gray, G Redmond, H Badland, K Williams, F Mensah, S Woolfenden, A Kvalsvig & A Kochanoff, 'Testing a social determinants framework of child disadvantage', *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2017, pp. 223–9.

disadvantage, and would need to focus on agreed outcomes and be supported by data collection, research and accountability.⁴⁸

Recent policy work by the DSS, to which the BSL has contributed, includes sound principles for place-based approaches. The *Dropping off the edge* report provides one starting point for identifying locations of entrenched disadvantage.⁴⁹ Additionally, specific consideration ought to be given to communities living in the outer areas of our major cities. Many of these communities are experiencing early warning signs of disadvantage—which is amplified by distance from jobs, lagging social and economic infrastructure, and social isolation.

Recommendation 8: Addressing locational disadvantage

Prioritise investment in place-based approaches in areas of locational disadvantage. Intervention should be matched to community readiness and designed to strengthen community capacity to mobilise for change.

Alignment of efforts and resources would yield better outcomes

Early childhood and family systems are currently siloed, uncoordinated and complex to navigate. The interplay of federal, state and local government programs and the disconnection between early learning programs, Early Education and Care, child, parent and family services illustrate this complexity. There is no effective gateway to connect families with the supports they need, or a systemic approach to identify and reach out to families who are missing out.

There is enormous potential to better leverage universal early years services (maternal and child health; playgroups; early education & care; pre-school; schools) to prevent, identify and address early childhood vulnerability. They provide a crucial soft entry point to engage with families and a springboard from which to access other supports.

Significant opportunity also exists to better align investments of federal, state and local governments, together with local community efforts to improve outcomes for children and their families.

Integrated family and community hubs services – a possible way forward

Establishing Integrated Family & Community Hubs would provide an opportunity to strategically align resources and efforts—federal, state, local and community—with the purpose of preventing and tackling developmental vulnerability in children living in locations of disadvantage.

A variety of early years and family hubs already exist across Australia, which could be built on and their reach and impact strengthened by leveraging multiple funding streams, taking a multigenerational approach and incorporating strong community engagement in their design and operation. Some promising innovations include Doveton College and Tasmania’s Child & Family Centres (see Attachment 2).

⁴⁸ BSL, *What next for place-based initiatives to tackle disadvantage? A practical look at recent lessons for Australian public policy*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Vic., 2015.

⁴⁹ T Vinson, M Rawsthorne, A Beavis & M Ericson, *Dropping off the edge 2015*, Jesuit Social Services & Catholic Social Services, 2015, viewed 21 September 2018, <<https://dote.org.au/findings/full-report/>>.

Future Integrated Family & Community Hubs could be underpinned by the following objectives:

- Children make a successful transition to school and are engaged at school.
- Families are engaged in their child’s learning and development.
- Parents are in or have pathways to education and/or paid work.
- Families are able to manage household budgets and access available financial supports .
- Strong social networks connect individual members of the community.
- Community members are developing local responses that meet their aspirations and needs.

The Hubs would provide an integrated and coordinated gateway into a range of universal, general, specialist and targeted supports, making it easier for families to connect with the assistance they need. Hubs would also have an intentional approach to identify and engage harder to reach families.

They would operate using a place-based methodology, with their efforts tailored for local circumstances.

The table below maps some of the existing resources that could be brought together and re-oriented to support the operation of Integrated Family & Community Hubs.

Integrated Family & Community Hubs: capacity to harness existing resources and efforts			
Federal government	State government	Local government	Community
<i>Child Care Subsidy</i>	<i>Capital contribution</i>	<i>Capital contribution</i>	<i>Potential capital contribution</i>
<i>Preschool funding</i>	<i>Preschool funding</i>	<i>Community Rent</i>	<i>Community investment</i>
<i>Parents Next</i>	<i>Specialist child and family support</i>	<i>Child & Maternal Health</i>	<i>Philanthropic funds</i>
<i>Family Support Program (including CfC & HIPPY)</i>	<i>Community Health</i>	<i>Council services</i>	<i>Community capacity building</i>
<i>Child Care</i>	<i>Schools funding</i>		<i>Volunteer effort</i>
<i>Community Fund</i>			
<i>Medicare</i>			
<i>Child Dental Health</i>			
<i>Financial Wellbeing</i>			
<i>Schools funding</i>			

Hubs could be delivered through a Community of Practice approach, with one organisation resourced to lead and support a connected network of local providers.⁵⁰ This would ensure model fidelity across sites, underpin consistent data collection, evidence gathering and reporting, drive collaborative work practices and quality assurance, as well as sharing of learning. The Hubs would also strengthen local agencies, including by supporting local leaders with tools and professional development.

In the short term, a network of Integrated Family & Community Hubs could be established as demonstration projects and evaluated to inform further design. They could either enhance existing

⁵⁰ The Brotherhood has experience in these approaches through programs such as HIPPY, Saver Plus, Transitions to Work and Work and Learning Centres (in Victoria).

efforts or be established as green-field developments. A focus on outer growth corridor communities and communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage is recommended. In the medium term, consideration ought to be given to re-orienting significant federal resources (e.g. Parents Next contacts will run to June 2020, Communities for Children funding runs until June 2019) and policy settings (e.g. access to early learning, along with re-shaped ECEC subsidies, use of schools funding) to support a wider roll-out of integrated Family & Community Hubs.

Recommendation 9: Integrated family and community hubs

Develop funding models that support integrated early years hubs that engage with the circumstances of families and their local community.

Attachment 1: The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

Overview

HIPPY is a transformative early childhood and parenting program managed by the Brotherhood for the Australian Government, and has a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The two-year structured home-based program for four and five-year-olds empowers parents, grandparents and other carers to be the child's first teacher. While preparing children for school it also puts many parents, especially women, on the path to employment.

The first program in Australia was seeded in 1998 and, in the 20 years since, the HIPPY network has grown to 100 communities across Australia. In 2018 alone, HIPPY will be delivered to over 4500 vulnerable families and provide 560 local jobs for HIPPY Coordinators and Home Tutors.

A key to the program's success is that HIPPY is deeply embedded in the communities it serves. The Brotherhood acts as the 'principal provider', and sub-licences to 65 local HIPPY providers – all of which are community organisations with strong ties in the area. Sixteen of our providers are Aboriginal organisations.

The mode of delivery is unique, evidence-based and cost-effective: it involves Home Tutors who are employed to teach a structured, 60-week curriculum of educational activities over two years to parents in the family home. Parents also attend group meetings which connect them to a network of peers and support in the community. Importantly, HIPPY employs parents engaged in the program to be Home Tutors.

Of the 100 sites HIPPY is established in, more than half are focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These complex communities include Kununurra in the Kimberley, Kalgoorlie, Mowanjum–Derby (WA); Palm Island, Northern Peninsula Area (Cape York), Doomadgee, Cherbourg (Queensland); Nambucca and Broken Hill (NSW); Alice Springs and Tennant Creek (NT); Port Augusta (SA), Mildura (Victoria) and Brighton (Tasmania). Other communities include Midland, Rockingham (WA); Elizabeth and Salisbury (SA); Logan and Cairns (Queensland); Cabramatta, Fairfield and Orange (NSW); and Geelong, Frankston North and East Gippsland (Victoria).

Why HIPPY?

One in three children living in Australia's most disadvantaged communities starts school behind in one or more key areas of development, such as language and cognitive skills, communication skills or social competence. The Australian Government has targeted HIPPY into 100 such communities where HIPPY local providers make a profound difference to a family's life opportunities. HIPPY achieves impact by nimbly embracing the evidence on the benefits of early learning, good parenting and employment.

Specifically HIPPY works by:

- Developing the capacity of the parents (usually the mother) to engage with their children through reading and interactive educational and behavioural activities.

- Helping the parents develop warm parenting styles that nurture their children and contribute to an enriched home learning environment.
- Providing parents with the knowledge they need to understand their child's development and support it as their child enters school.
- Targeting those families who are not accessing early learning and care programs due to cultural and social issues or the unavailability of quality services.
- Bridging the gap for families from non-English speaking backgrounds such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and newly arrived groups, ensuring both the parent and the child are school ready.
- Providing parents with the confidence to undertake training and gain employment. HIPPY gives many unemployed mothers their first job and links them to the labour market.
- Strengthening a family's connections into their local community through group meetings, and linking them to services as family issues arise. HIPPY is embedded in the community, supporting local people.

HIPPY families

HIPPY engages a highly diverse range of families, many of whom are experiencing significant challenges and complexities in their lives. HIPPY families come from over 75 culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in a wide range of community environments, such as islands, small country towns, the rural/urban fringe and suburbs. The HIPPY families' profile shows 63% of mothers are unemployed and hold a health care card; 27% of HIPPY children are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; 33% of HIPPY parents were born outside of Australia; 8% of children were living in out-of-home care or were the subject of a court order; 23% of children are diagnosed with one or more physical or psychological health conditions.

HIPPY outcomes

The HIPPY model is unique in combining outcomes for children, families, local employment pathway and in strengthening communities. In 2017, 1700 families graduated from HIPPY after 2 years and the outcomes were:

Children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 65% of children enrolled graduated after 2 years. • 89% of parents observed their child had improved language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge after completing HIPPY. • 98% of parents reported an improvement in their interaction and relationship with their child. • 97% were more confident in communicating with the school and teachers
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIPPY employs 560 Tutors and Coordinators, creating local jobs for local people: 33% will gain an accredited Certificate III or IV. • 70% will go on to jobs or further training after two years in HIPPY. • 30% of the HIPPY workforce identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. • 75% of parents report that HIPPY gave them confidence to start or continue employment
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of HIPPY parents report that they are more connected in their community • 23% of children in HIPPY are linked and subsequently diagnosed with one or more physical or psychological health conditions. These could otherwise go undiagnosed. • Estimated return on investment is \$2.53 for every dollar spent.

The evidence: rigorous evaluation of HIPPY

HIPPY is an international program that was developed in the 1960s, so an impressive body of evaluation research exists on the program's effectiveness in a variety of contexts and cultures. The International evidence-base for HIPPY demonstrates it has an immediate and long term impact on a child's behaviour, language and maths and improves parent's self-esteem and behaviours such as reading to their child and reducing abuse (Goldstein 2017)⁵¹. Notably, in a recent effort to identify evidence-based programs appropriate to qualify for federal funding in the USA, HIPPY is one of only seven approved home interventions programs.

There have been many studies of HIPPY in Australia since it began in 1998. Three independent evaluations have been commissioned by Australian Department of Social Services: Liddell (2011)⁵²; Urbis (2013)⁵³ and, most recently Acil-Allen (2018)⁵⁴. Results have consistently shown improvements in all outcome areas: children were better prepared for school, parents were more confident and engaged in their role as a parent and their child's first teacher, strong employment and training outcomes and utilisation of community services and resources were increased. The most recent evaluation (Acil-Allen) found "HIPPY is generally effective in achieving its intended outcomes – including school readiness ... and provides a positive return on investment."

More Australian evidence will become available through the new HIPPY Longitudinal Study, which started in 2016 and will continue to 2021 tracking the children's NAPLAN and AEDC results. Over 650 families have been surveyed at 45 sites, the interim findings are:

- HIPPY is enrolling disadvantaged families who are highly engaged in the program including 24% are single parents double the national average;
- parents are identifying improvement in their home learning environment and developing their capabilities as the child's first teacher; and
- the 'Who am I?' developmental assessment tool found that HIPPY children's learning outcomes improved relative to the age-graded normative scores for children of the same age. This is consistent with earlier studies.

Three-year-old HIPPY

The evidence for structured early learning and parenting at Age 3 is growing both in Australia and internationally. BSL undertook action research Age 3 pilot at HIPPY Inala that supports International research in Canada and US that the earlier HIPPY is delivered the stronger the impact on parents and children (Goldstein 2017). An Age 3 HIPPY is consistent with the recommendations of an Australian

⁵¹ K Goldstein, *Five decades of HIPPY research: a global meta-analysis of significant outcomes*, HIPPY International, Research Institute for Innovation in Education, 2017, viewed 21 September 2018, <<http://www.hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au/research>>.

⁵² M Liddell, T Barnett, F Diallo Roost & J McEachran, *Investing in our future: an evaluation of the national rollout of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011.

⁵³ Urbis Consulting, *The viability and effectiveness of 50 HIPPY sites*, Department of Social Services, unpublished report, 2013.

⁵⁴ Acil-Allen Consulting, *Evaluation of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters*, Department of Social Services, unpublished report, 2018.

Independent Review commissioned by State and Territory governments of early childhood education for all three year olds. (Pascoe and Brennan, 2017).

The HIPPY Age 3 pilot found that:

- nearly 80% of families were retained to graduation over the 2.5 years of the program
- parents and children were extremely satisfied with their participation in the program
- no families exited early from the program due to dissatisfaction with the program
- children willingly engaged, took ownership and pride in the activities, and achieved the learning objectives of the program
- tutors valued the opportunity to deliver the Age 3 program, and gained considerable early childhood knowledge and skills.

The is in discussions with the Department of Social Services about bringing HIPPY forward to start when the child is age 3.

Attachment 2: Inspirations for Integrated Family & Community Hubs

Doveton College

Overview	Doveton College is an exciting example of a state government school that also operates as a vibrant community hub. Opened in 2012, it was the first government and philanthropic school partnership of its kind in Australia. The college is seeking to respond to a complex range of community issues in an area of entrenched disadvantage. Founder Julius Colman (a refugee) has a vision for the College as a vehicle for community transformation and as a place that can engage the whole community. The model is being replicated in five additional locations.
Funding	The Colman Foundation helped plan, build and operate the facility, along with the Victorian Government, and has pledged annual financial support for programs and community facilities at the college.
Services and supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Learning Centre • Prep to Year 9 school • A large wellbeing team focussing on local circumstances e.g. trauma impacting humanitarian entrants • Parent support services • Daily supported playgroups • Child and family health services, including immunisation programs and maternal and child health sessions and home visiting • Family drop-in facilities • Adult career guidance, work preparation, job search, accredited and non-accredited training programs • Community leadership training • Adult activity groups – language classes, sewing, cooking • Connections and partnerships with other local supports
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is active engagement with a wide range of community members, many of whom do not have children attending the school: newly arrived migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum, sole parents, long-term unemployed, mature-aged jobseekers and Aboriginal people. • The strong focus on volunteering is backed by a structured recruitment process: resume preparation; interview; matching; induction. People volunteer in all kinds of areas, depending on their interests, skills and career aspirations—from helping in playgroup, to sporting activities, to English language conversations. • There is strong demand for education, training and employment assistance. Innovations include an on-site social enterprise that sells takeaway meals and provides catering services - coupled with training to build the vocational and English language skills of the workers; design of employment pathways with local partners (e.g. a health services program with work placements at local hospital yielding excellent employment results); and a schedule of complementary pre-accredited training and activities developed with the local Neighbourhood House to respond community needs.

Tasmanian Child & Family Centres

Overview	<p>The Tasmanian Government has progressively opened 12 Child and Family Centres (CFC) since 2009 in communities with high service needs. The Centres provide a single entry point to universal, targeted, and specialist early years services and supports for parents and children from pregnancy through to age five years. The Centres are located at or near primary schools to support smooth transitions to school. A Strategic Framework guides local priorities for the CFC community and their service partners.</p> <p>Strong community engagement, underpinned by the Family Partnership Model (Davis & Day, 2010), was central to the design and implementation of the CFCs and the provision of all interventions to families. Dedicated training equips staff and community members to authentically partner and work together. The Framework of engagement employed in the development of the CFCs viewed parents and community members as co-workers; co-designers; co-researchers; co-producers with the intention of bringing lived experience and practice wisdom together.</p>
Funding	<p>Each Centre has approximately three full-time staff funded by the Tasmanian Department of Education: a centre leader, a community inclusion worker and an early childhood specialist (areas with a higher concentration of Aboriginal families also have an Aboriginal engagement worker).</p>
Services and supports	<p>Services and supports in the Centres are provided by state and local government, non-government organisations and community members. While they vary according to local needs, they typically cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • early learning programs (e.g. early literacy programs, supported playgroups, toy library, adjunct care, Early Education & Care services are co-located at 3 Centres); • support for transition to formal schooling through partnerships with schools and Launching into Learning; • child health and early childhood intervention services (e.g. speech pathology, community paediatricians at some sites); • family health services (e.g. Child Health & Parenting Nurse, family planning, midwifery services, antenatal programs); • parenting programs; • adult education (e.g. literacy education, art workshops, Get Active programs); • family support services (e.g. outreach services, counselling, transport to appointments); and • pathways to employment <p>A part of the approach includes seeking opportunities to engage with families in different places (including home visits), which helps build a broader picture and deeper understanding of their circumstances.</p>
Impact	<p>While each Centre has experienced different successes and challenges, key findings of a 2015 report were that the Centres had a positive impact on parents' use and experiences of services and supports for young children. Parents found the Centres welcoming, respectful and inclusive places that were helping them develop positive child, family, school and community connections. Further research is underway. Promising observations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding and confidence to access local services (increased service networks) • Enhanced parenting skills • Increased employability • Parents in work at Centres e.g. Empowering Parents Empowering Communities

	<p>program facilitated by parents and supervised by practitioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective use of volunteers e.g. workers and community volunteers co-visiting families visitors to CFCs are welcomed and met by a community members• Progress towards breaking down silos between different services with the aim of partners such as Child Health & Parenting Nurses seeing themselves as part of a transdisciplinary team at the Centre.
Governance	<p>A Local Enabling Group (comprising community members and service providers) informed each Centre's design and transformed into a Local Advisory Group to provide ongoing operational and governance support.</p>