



PLACE-BASED APPROACHES: THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

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OUTLINE

- Why we need to rethink how we support families
- What has been tried so far
- How effective these efforts have been
- What we need to do
- Place-based and whole-of-community models
- Some Australian initiatives
- Evidence of efficacy and key features
- Resources
- Implications and conclusions



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WHY WE NEED TO RETHINK SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

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RETHINKING SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES

The recognition that we need new forms of service has emerged in response to a range of factors:

Social and economic changes

- Over the last 50 or so years, developed nations have experienced dramatic societal changes as the result of a range of interconnected factors – economic, demographic, social and technological – at globalised, national and local levels.
- In general, these advances in prosperity, technology, mobility and interconnectedness have been enormously beneficial, but have come at a cost we are just beginning to understand
- One result is that there have been significant changes in communities, families, and in the conditions under which families are raising young children

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RETHINKING SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES (cont)

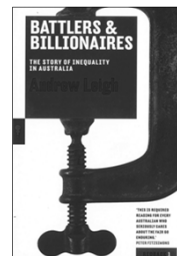
Impact of social change

- These changes have had a significant impact on children, families, communities and services: many children and families have benefited greatly from these changes, but a significant minority have not
- There is evidence of worsening or unacceptably high levels of problems in a minority of children across all aspects of development, health and well-being
- Significant numbers of children are arriving at school poorly equipped to benefit from the social and learning opportunities that schools offer, and schools struggle to make up the gap between those children and their peers
- There is also an increase in the numbers of families with complex needs, and more pockets of intergenerational disadvantage, underachievement and poor health and developmental outcomes
- In addition, there is evidence of widening gaps between the rich and the poor

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WIDENING INEQUALITIES



Since the 1980s, inequality in Australia has been growing.

While inequality can fuel growth, it also poses dangers to society. Too much inequality risks dividing us into two Australias, occupying fundamentally separate worlds, with little contact between the haves and the have-nots.

And the further apart the rungs on the ladder of opportunity, the harder it is for a kid born into poverty to enter the middle class.

Andrew Leigh (2013). **Battlers and Billionaires: The Story of Inequality in Australia**. Collingwood, Victoria: Redback.

RETHINKING SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES (cont)

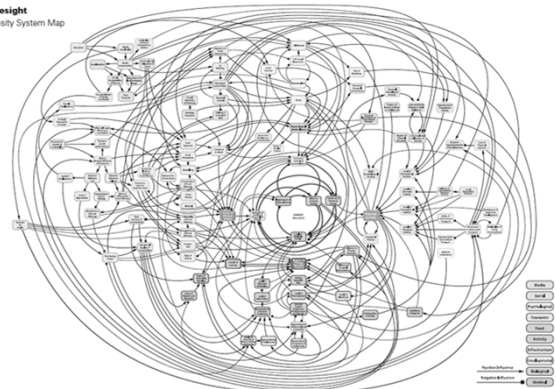


Changes in the nature of the problems

- The nature of the social problems facing society and governments have altered – they are now more likely to be ‘wicked’ or complex problems that are not able to be resolved through traditional service-driven approaches
- Wicked issues include climate change, poverty, indigenous disadvantage, child abuse, family violence, obesity, crime, and natural resource management
- The nature of the problems we faced have changed partly because many of the simpler health and other problems have been successfully addressed over the course of the last two centuries through public health interventions etc.
- But problems have also changed as an outcome of the social and economic changes that have occurred: these changes are interconnected in complex ways, and we do not know exactly how they interact with one another to produce the effects they do or what we need to do to ensure that they have more uniformly beneficial

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Foresight
Obesity System Map



RETHINKING SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES (cont)

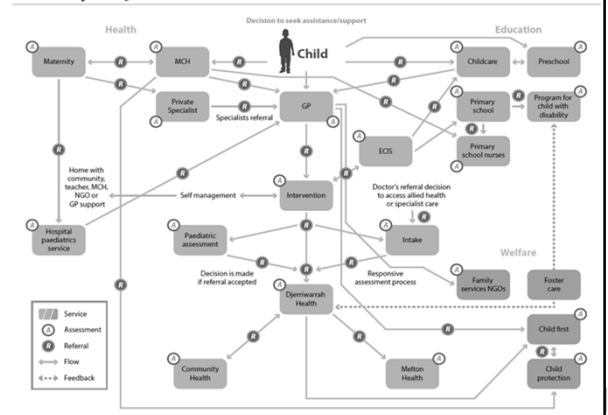


Impact on services

- The services systems that support children and their families have not changed significantly over the past 50 years, and are struggling to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged groups
- As a result, many children are not receiving the additional help they need
- There is evidence that a minority of vulnerable families make little or no use of existing services and are hard to engage
- It is often those with the greatest need that are least likely to be able to access available services, and there is also a tendency for disadvantaged areas to receive fewer services.
- The planning and delivery of services continues to be heavily segmented, with government departments and their funding streams operating autonomously as ‘silos’, making it difficult to conduct the joint planning needed to develop and implement a cohesive approach to supporting families of young children.

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Blue Sky Project



RETHINKING SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES (cont)



New knowledge about child development

- There has been a steady accumulation of new knowledge about the impact of prenatal and early childhood experiences on health, wellbeing and development in later childhood and over the life-course
- This has changed how we view the early years. It is now becoming apparent that it is no longer sufficient to think of this period as being about keeping children healthy and safe while allowing development to take its course until they become old enough to educate formally
- Instead, we need to be taking steps to ensure that children are provided with early childhood environments and experiences that build competencies and skills from birth

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RETHINKING SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES (cont)

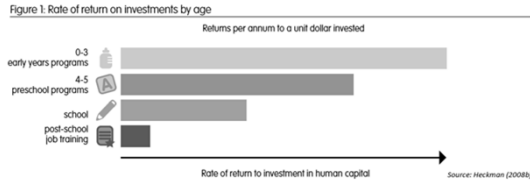


Arguments for investments in the early years

- In this changed world, the stakes have risen: national prosperity is seen as dependent upon the productivity of its citizens and workforce, and improving productivity requires people to master more complex skills.
- It is no longer acceptable to have children arriving at school poorly equipped to benefit from the learning and social opportunities schools provide, and therefore at risk of not developing the skills and qualities needed in a modern economy.
- Moreover, economic analyses by James Heckman and others show that investments in the early years are more cost effective and beneficial than later investments

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INVESTING IN THE EARLY YEARS



In short, to foster individual success, greater equality of opportunity, a more dynamic economy, and a healthier society, we need a major shift in social policy toward early intervention, with later interventions designed to reinforce those early efforts.

James J. Heckman (2013). *Giving Kids a Fair Chance (A Strategy That Works)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

WHAT'S BEEN TRIED

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WHAT'S BEEN TRIED

In Australia, governments at all levels have developed policies and funded initiatives designed to address these problems, including:

- National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG, 2009)
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (COAG, 2009)
- National Early Years Learning Framework (COAG, 2009)
- National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (COAG, 2009)
- Increasing investment in early childhood education and care (DEEWR, 2010)
- Funding the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

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WHAT'S BEEN TRIED (cont)

These have a number of features in common:

- finding more effective ways of reaching vulnerable children and families,
- extending provision of early childhood education services
- ensuring that all children arrive at school ready to learn,
- reducing child protection rates,
- monitoring children's development and well-being more effectively,
- improving the quality of early childhood services, and
- increasing the use of evidence-based practices.

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WHAT'S BEEN TRIED (cont)

- To date, governments have focused most effort on building better coordinated and more effective services and service systems, with less effort focused on building more supportive communities, and improving the interface between communities and services.
- Governments have tended to place more reliance upon 'killer' programs – preferably evidence-based – that address the presenting problems, rather than looking at the systemic (ecological) conditions that lead to the problems in the first place.

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HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THESE EFFORTS BEEN?

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HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE WE BEEN?

So far, these various initiatives have not had a major impact on child and family outcomes. There are a number of reasons why this is the case, including

- they have not been sustained for long enough,
- *they are not comprehensive enough,*
- they are not sufficiently well integrated,
- *they have not involved families and communities in planning, service delivery and evaluation,*
- they have not been based on a clear understanding of why problems occur and how they can be remedied,
- *they have been unduly reliant upon services (particularly evidence based programs) as the major tool to achieve change, and*
- they have failed to address the underlying causes of the problems.

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WHAT WE NEED TO DO

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In order to reduce the likelihood of poor long-term outcomes for children experiencing significant disadvantage, a multilevel, ecological approach to early intervention is required that involves programs, community and service system level changes as well interventions to address the structural (e.g. government policy) and wider social factors (e.g. societal attitudes and values) that impact either directly or indirectly on children and families.

Moore, T.G. and McDonald, M. (2013). *Acting Early, Changing Lives: How prevention and early action saves money and improves wellbeing.* Prepared for The Benevolent Society, Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, The Royal Children's Hospital.



WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

To achieve better outcomes for children and families, we need to take action on three levels:

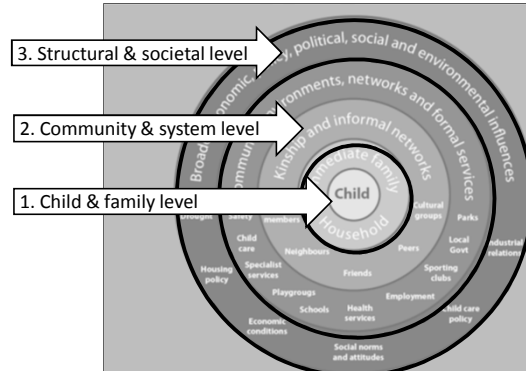
- ECEC and early intervention service level
- Community and system level interventions
- Societal and structural level interventions

Interventions targeted at one level only are unlikely to be successful at achieving significant and sustainable change amongst children and families experiencing significant disadvantage – we need to intervene at multiple levels simultaneously.

Moore & McDonald (2013)

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Three levels of intervention



Reference: Bronfenbrenner (1979).

ECEC AND ECI SERVICE LEVEL INTERVENTIONS



Early childhood service level interventions can take six forms:

- Provide high quality inclusive ECEC services for all children
- Blend early childhood care and education services
- Provide integrated child and family centres
- Create family-friendly early childhood service environments where parents can stay
- Design and run services in partnership with those who use them
- Provide evidence-based interventions for those with additional needs

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COMMUNITY & SYSTEM LEVEL INTERVENTIONS



Community and system level interventions can take four forms:

- neighbourhood and community-level interventions
- service system interventions
- place-based approaches
- whole-of-community or 'collective impact' initiatives

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SOCIETAL & STRUCTURAL LEVEL INTERVENTIONS



There are three general forms of intervention at the 'macro' level:

- Address the conditions under families are raising young children
- Develop new ways of working in partnership with communities and services
- Raise public awareness regarding the nature and importance of the early years

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PLACE-BASED AND WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY APPROACHES



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PLACE-BASED APPROACHES



- Place-based approaches involve collaborative efforts to address complex issues experienced within a geographic area such as a neighbourhood or district
- Many different terms have been used for this process, including comprehensive community initiatives, collective impact initiatives, collaborative environmental management, community economic development, complex adaptive systems, and systems-level change
- Place-based approaches been applied in a wide variety of fields, including economic development, environmental management, public health, poverty alleviation, public safety, community planning, homelessness, and Indigenous poverty
- In this presentation, we focus on the use of place-based approaches to improving outcomes for young children and their families
- At this stage, there is no definitive best-practice form of place-based approach

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RATIONALE FOR PLACE-BASED APPROACHES



Place shapes people's wellbeing

- Children's environmental wellbeing – their daily experience of living and learning in the environment around them – affects their overall wellbeing
- Growing up in a neighbourhood characterised by general community neglect negatively affects children's outcomes over and above the effects of family socioeconomic status

Feeling connected and having social networks matters for people's wellbeing

- Children's welfare and family functioning are crucially dependent upon the social support available within local communities, and social isolation is a risk factor for both child development and family functioning.
- Social support is also linked to a number of child and family outcomes, including low birthweight, child abuse and neglect, maternal adjustment, mental health and physical health

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RATIONALE (cont)



Some communities trapped by locational disadvantage

- Despite Australia's recent strong economic growth, some communities remain caught in a spiral of disadvantage such as low school attainment, high unemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse
- When social disadvantage becomes entrenched in a particular locality, a disabling social environment can develop, leading to intergenerational disadvantage

The economic collapse of certain localities

- Neighbourhoods that were reliant on the old economy have been devastated by globalisation, economic rationalism, restructuring and closure of manufacturing industries.
- Some of these neighbourhoods have become almost entirely dependent on welfare benefits and publicly funded services.

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FORMS OF PLACE-BASED APPROACHES (cont)



These different forms of place-based approaches share certain features in common but also differ in significant ways.

Core shared features include

- a focus on a defined geographic area
- coordinated efforts to address agreed goals
- actions adapted to local conditions and needs
- a governance mechanism to facilitate joint planning

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FORMS OF PLACE-BASED APPROACHES (cont)



Features on which the forms of place-based approaches differ include:

- the size and nature of the geographic area
- the age span – focusing on the early years only or 'cradle to career'
- the extent to which the process is controlled by government and/or the service systems rather than involving community engagement and partnership
- the extent to which the focus is mainly on coordinating the service system rather than adopting a more comprehensive approach that also address the need for community support.

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AUSTRALIAN PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES



Place-based collectives

- Go Goldfields
- Blue Mountains Consortium
- North Sydney Community Investment Collective
- Children's Ground
- Tasmanian Child & Family Centres

Place-based research projects

- Blue Sky Research Project
- Creating the Conditions for Collective Impact

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GO GOLDFIELDS ALLIANCE

<http://www.loddonmallee.com.au/regional-priorities/go-goldfields>



- Go Goldfields is an innovative alliance of organisations in the Central Goldfields Shire, Victoria, created to deliver locally relevant responses to social issues that are too complex and too long-term for previous solutions.
- The aim is to ensure people in our shire, particularly children, youth and families, can participate fully in social, economic and physical opportunities.
- Supported by the Victorian Government in the amount of \$2.5 million over three years, it has developed a series of shire-wide, community-driven approaches to improve social, education and health outcomes for children, youth and families.
- The strategic, place-based approach targets the whole community and gives the community ownership of the plan, so ensuring the plan's sustainability.

STRONGER FAMILIES ALLIANCE

<http://www.strongerfamilies.co/>

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSORTIUM

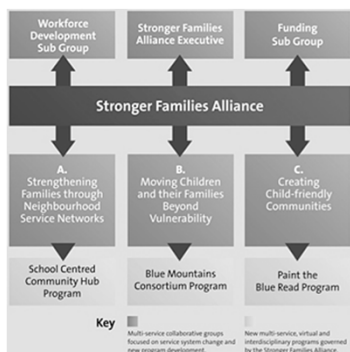
<http://www.strongerfamilies.co/blue-mountains-consortium.html>



- The Stronger Families Alliance is a network of government, non-profit and voluntary organisations working together to support to families across the Blue Mountains.
- One of the service networks operating under the Stronger Families Alliance is the Blue Mountains Consortium, a group of organisations committed to providing the best possible support for children and families in the Blue Mountains, particularly those that are considered vulnerable because of their circumstances.

Our network is powered by 'discretionary energy'. We are like-minded professionals willing to go beyond our job descriptions to find new ways to create a resilient and supportive Blue Mountains community for children.

STRONGER FAMILIES ALLIANCE Governance structure



STRONGER FAMILIES ALLIANCE Child and Family Plan



Launched in 2010, the Child and Family Plan has three parts:

- Part A: Strengthening families through neighbourhood service systems**
- Part B: Moving children and the families beyond vulnerability**
- Part C: Creating child-friendly communities**

NORTH SYDNEY COMMUNITY INVESTMENT COLLECTIVE

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1Ju6j92xoU>

- A newly established group that arose from the efforts of senior departmental executives to build effective cross-departmental planning and service delivery.
- The group has established a multi-agency *Community Engagement Board* for the District as well as a cross-district *Community Investment Collective* and *Thought Leadership Group*.

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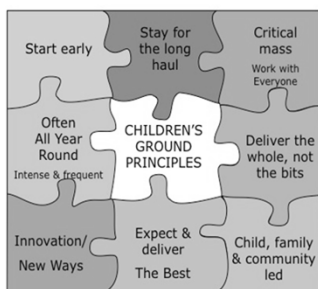
CHILDREN'S GROUND

www.childrensground.org.au



- Children's Ground is a locally-led and designed place-based approach for working in Australia's most disadvantaged communities.
- It starts pre-birth, and provides a complete integrated system of high quality services in learning, wellbeing and development for children and young people from 0–24 years and their families and their communities.
- Children's Ground's first partnership has been established with the Mirarr people in the Northern Territory, through their organisation the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Organisation.

8 Key Principles of Children's Ground



A safe place for children to learn, grow and thrive; based on local knowledge and leading evidence and practice

TASMANIAN CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRES

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

- The Tasmanian Child and Family Centres (CFCs) aim to improve the health and well-being, education and care of Tasmania's very young children by supporting parents and enhancing accessibility of services in the local community.
- They have been established in 12 disadvantaged communities across Tasmania through an extensive process of community engagement and empowerment.
- The process of community engagement has been guided by a Learning and Development Strategy, funded by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and delivered by the Centre for Community Child Health
- The Learning and Development Strategy emphasises genuine engagement with the local community in the visioning, planning, design, implementation and functioning of the CFCs.

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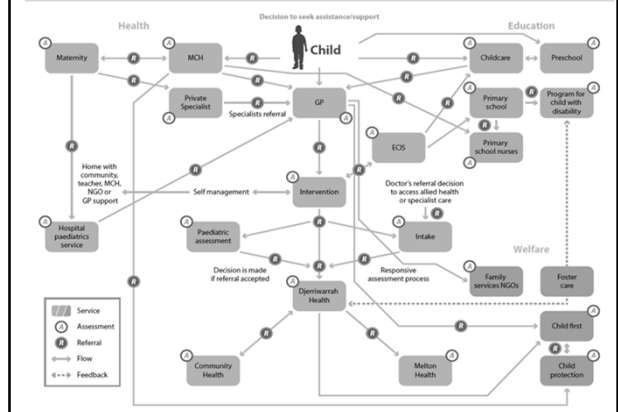
BLUE SKY RESEARCH PROJECT

Centre for Community Child Health and Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

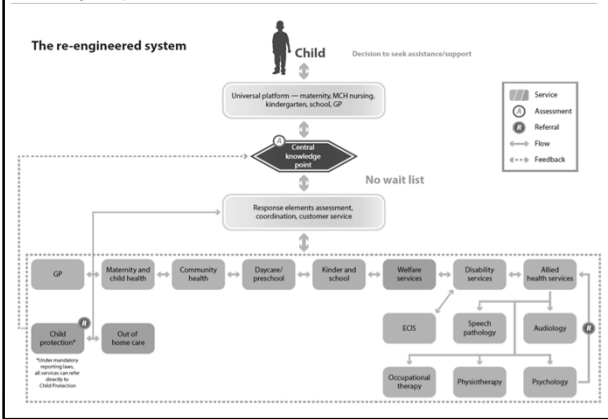
- This place-based project explored how a revised service system that focused on young children (0 to 8 years) and that addressed inequalities early could actively and positively shift children's developmental trajectories
- A key focus to view the child's journey through services from the family's perspective and to develop a revised model of service delivery that placed the child and family at the centre
- The project was based in Melton South, a suburb in the outer west of Melbourne

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Blue Sky Project



Blue Sky Project



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CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT: Transforming the Child-Serving System in Disadvantaged Communities

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/criminology-law/key-centre-ethics-law-justice-governance/research/prevention-developmental-pathways/creating-conditions-for-collective-impact>

- This project, which is being undertaken in six Communities for Children sites in New South Wales, is built on the CREATE Model (Homel et al., 2013) for building community capacity.
- The research team is based at Griffith University in Brisbane, and partners include the Prevention Research Centre at Pennsylvania State University, three government departments, and five non-government agencies.
- The project aims to build a *set of structured processes and resources* - a Prevention Support System - to strengthen the developmental system in socially disadvantaged communities to make possible sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of children

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EVIDENCE REGARDING THE EFFICACY OF EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THESE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

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PROGRAM LOGIC FOR PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES

If we build a partnership with all stakeholders and gain a collective commitment to an agreed set of goals for the community,

... and if we develop an action plan that improves the conditions under which families are raising young children, and provide families with direct services that address their needs,

... and if we implement the action plan in partnership with the families themselves and in a way that continuously adapts to emerging child and family needs,

... and if the strategies succeed in building the capacity of families and early childhood services to provide children with the care and experiences they need to flourish,

... then we will see improved outcomes for children.

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES



- What this program logic makes clear is that building a place-based collaboration is only the first step, and the efficacy of the partnership-building process and the efficacy of the action plan need to be determined separately
- The evaluation of complex community-based initiatives is more suited to developmental evaluation and realist evaluation methodologies than to randomised controlled trials .

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED PARTNERSHIP BUILDING



Benefits of effective partnerships

- Building effective interagency and community partnerships is a challenging task, and is not inherently a good thing: it is only helpful if implemented well, and may make matters worse if done poorly
- However, where evidence for the impact of interagency working does exist, it is mostly positive: positive changes have been reported
 - for service users (such as improved access to services and a speedier response);
 - for professionals (such as enhanced knowledge and skills, better understanding of children's needs, greater enjoyment of their work and more opportunities for career development); and
 - for agencies (such as greater efficiency, less duplication and greater involvement of service users).

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED PARTNERSHIP BUILDING (cont)



Benefits of effective partnerships (cont)

- Some negative impacts of interagency working have also been reported, such as
 - increased workload (at least in the initial stages), and
 - increased demand for services as a result of needs being identified earlier.
- Thus, there is promising evidence that interagency and community partnerships improve professional practice and ensure better support at an earlier stage for children and families who need it

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED PARTNERSHIP BUILDING (cont)



Features of effective partnerships

Analyses of US collective impact initiatives have identified the following core elements that contribute to successful collaborations:

- shared vision and agenda
- effective leadership and governance
- alignment of resources toward what works
- shared measurement
- continuous communication
- sufficient funding
- dedicated staff capacity and support structure

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED PARTNERSHIP BUILDING (cont)



Features of effective partnerships (cont)

- CCCH's Blue Sky Research Project found that an essential requirement for collective efforts to revise the service delivery system was supportive governance.
- Communities need to adopt a governance approach that will ensure a better authorising environment for collaboration and enable service providers to transcend the traditional program boundaries to improve local child and family services.
- In Australia, local government can play a role in ensuring that local issues for children are addressed.

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED PLANNING AND INTERVENTION



- At yet, there is limited evidence that interagency and community partnerships improve outcomes for children and families
- This is partly because we are still at an early stage in our use of this strategy, and it is too soon for any meaningful benefits to become apparent
- It is also a reflection of the difficulty of knowing how best to address complex social problems
- Problems such as child abuse, family violence, and obesity are notoriously complex and multicausal, and place-based partnerships find it challenging to articulate how their action plans will address this complexity.

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EFFICACY OF PLACE-BASED PLANNING AND INTERVENTION (cont)



- The response of governments and services to the challenge of complex problems has often been service-based – seeking to increase the streamline service systems, or improve the efficacy of the actual services
- These are in effect efforts to tame wicked problems by simplifying them and making them more manageable
- What place-based partnerships describe as their theory of change is often a general description of what the primary funders and implementers intend to do, rather than a hypothesis about how the planned interventions will achieve their effects and lead to meaningful changes

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CONCLUSIONS



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CONCLUSIONS



- Many of the problems currently faced by society, services and families are complex or wicked problems: under these conditions, traditional evidence-based programs are not capable of making sustained changes in outcomes for children and families on their own.
- What is also needed is a realignment of resources, services and policies to address the conditions under which families are raising young children, and the informal and formal resources available to them - place-based approaches offer a way of doing this.
- Although we have much to learn about how to implement these and other forms of place-based approaches effectively, they show much promise as a means by which we may be able to concentrate and coordinate the services and supports needed to strengthen child well-being and improve family outcomes.

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WEBSITES



- **Collective Impact Australia**
<http://collectiveimpactaustralia.com>
- **ten20 Foundation**
<http://www.ten20.com.au/>
- **FSG - Collective Impact Forum**
www.collectiveimpactforum.org

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http://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/TGM_Key_work_areas_and_publications_2000onwards.pdf

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