

## **THINKING LEADING CARING- YWCA NSW's Unique Service Delivery Model**

Since 2004 YWCA NSW has been implementing a strategy for social service delivery that focuses on collaboration with communities and service providers. The purpose is to ensure that services are coordinated, effectively targeted and achieve optimum results for clients and communities.

Expected long term outcomes include diminishing intergenerational disadvantage and revitalized, harmonious and prosperous communities made up of confident individuals contributing to the social and economic well-being of their region.

The strategy, called Y It Takes A Village (YITAV), was designed following an extensive period of research undertaken by YWCA NSW in 2003. The research project investigated the socio-economic needs of NSW families and current provision of social services in NSW. Leaders of more than seventy government departments, non-government and community organizations were interviewed to determine how they saw the needs of Australian families and where they were focusing their energies and resources.

YITAV subscribes to the view that 'families [are] units within broader communities, including extended family and neighbourhoods, with responsibilities for children resting at both the family and community levels'<sup>1</sup> and that, therefore, support interventions must be directed to increase capacity within the family and within the community.

The findings of the social services research carried out by YWCA NSW echoes findings from research within Australia and internationally, which contributed to the YITAV strategy. Review and evaluation of the processes, outputs and outcomes of YITAV will provide information to amend, enhance and further improve activity.

### **Key findings from YWCA NSW research**

1. Service provision is fragmentary and delivered by a range of organisations and agencies. This leads to duplication of services in some areas while overlooking gaps in others.

*The YITAV response:* coordinate service provision across the community in response to community needs; identify gaps and duplications; work collaboratively to meet needs throughout the lifetime of an individual and their family.

2. A mix of interventions is required to successfully tackle situations of disadvantage because the traditional silo approach to service provision is ineffective in achieving long-term improvement for clients and communities.

*The YITAV response:* take the lead in breaking down barriers between service provision silos so that a mix of resources can be applied to address complex needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley, Children of the Lucky Country, 2005

3. Emphasis on the early developmental years is crucial as is ongoing support for vulnerable people particularly in critical life transitions.

*The YITAV response:* provide services that assist babies and young children to make the best start in life and also provide services that increase the capacity and wellbeing of parents and vulnerable people as this will have positive and sustainable impacts upon children.

4. A collaborative approach builds social capital and recognises the vital role of the community and service provision clients as more than passive recipients of services.

*The YITAV response:* consultation with and engagement of the community in program development is underpinned by guidance from an Advisory Committee representative of the community.

### **The research knowledge base that underpins the YITAV strategy**

#### **1. Coordinate service provision across the community in response to community needs.**

There are two key aspects to the coordination of service provision. One is the coordination of service providers and the other the coordination of actual services, particularly across traditional service sectors, targeted to the diverse needs of clients.

Client needs will most likely change over time as each moves through critical transitions which have been identified as being times of risk for all people but particularly for the disadvantaged and vulnerable.<sup>2</sup>

As noted in a collaborative paper by Mission Australia and DFACS 'non-government organisations are adept in brokering relationships and have the potential to unite small community organisations to work towards a common purpose. They are also able to assist small organisations to develop organisational capacity by providing leadership and vision, management and planning, fiscal planning and practice, and operational support.'<sup>3</sup>

Coordination and collaboration has benefits for the organisations, for clients and for the community. An investigation into collaborations of community-based organisations focused on workforce development carried out by Cordero-Guzman in 2001 found that 'the most effective Community Based Organizations are those that are good at, and assign a high priority to, networking across organizations and territorial boundaries' <sup>4</sup>.

His study identified a number of benefits for collaborating organisations including improved processes, better utilisation of skill and expertise, and more efficient use of resources. Collaborations also facilitate more effective planning for service development and provision across a community<sup>5</sup>. A coherent, comprehensive approach to service provision contributes to the development of social capital<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia, National Crime Prevention, 1999

<sup>3</sup> Leech and Lewis, Communities for Children: A new approach to Policy and Program development and delivery, 2005

<sup>4</sup> Cordero-Guzman, Interorganisational Networks Among Community-Based Organisations, 2001

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Coordination naturally assists in identifying duplication of services and gaps in service provision so that a comprehensive, targeted and integrated range of services can be provided to better tackle complex and inter-related issues.<sup>7</sup>

While collaboration between service providers would improve service provision and better address complex needs, it is not always easy to achieve. Competitive tendering for funding, expectations of positive outcomes within time frames of a year or two, questions of accountability and major structural changes within the non-government sector are some of the factors that must be negotiated to develop coordinated service provision<sup>8</sup>. In spite of these obstacles, 'local decision makers must take bold actions to design and implement coordinated infrastructures to reduce the long-standing fragmentation of policies and programs'.<sup>9</sup>

OECD research supports coordination and collaboration through local partnerships and also reveals that partnerships improve local governance because '...partnerships stimulate the uptake of public programmes in a way that is consistent with locally shared priorities. Second, partnerships combine public programmes with local initiatives, and in so doing, support the development of these initiatives. Third, there are many instances in which partnerships have influenced the targeting of public programmes better to meet local needs.'<sup>10</sup>

Just as ARACY, in relation to research, was established so 'that stronger links could be made across sectors to better harness capacity to identify critical areas for attention, frame the right questions and find answers to inform effective policy and practice',<sup>11</sup> coordination and collaboration across sectors and organisations can improve processes and outcomes at the local level.

The current Family and Community Services, Communities for Children initiative specifically requires a coordinated approach to the development and implementation of each site's strategic plan via a brokering organisation working collaboratively with the community and local organisations and agencies.<sup>12</sup>

Cohesive support for families will only be possible when services are well integrated and targeted to client needs over time.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. Break down barriers between service provision silos**

Vitally linked to the coordination of service provision is the need to work across traditional service sector silos. A holistic approach to service provision is widely

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<sup>6</sup> Cordero-Guzman, citing Keyes et al (1996), Interorganisational Networks Among Community-Based Organisations, 2001

<sup>7</sup> PM Youth Homelessness Taskforce, Putting Families in the Picture: Evaluating Early Intervention into Youth Homelessness, Supplementary Report, 1998

<sup>8</sup> Craig, Building Better Contexts for Partnerships and Sustainable Local Collaboration: A review of core issues. Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, Issue 23, Dec 2004

<sup>9</sup> Shonkoff and Phillips, From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: the science of early childhood development – and introduction, 2001

<sup>10</sup> OECD, Local Partnership for Better Governance, 2001

<sup>11</sup> Stanley, Investing in our children, 2002

<sup>12</sup> Stronger Families and Communities Strategy – Communities for Children, Community Strategic Plan, DFACS guidelines

<sup>13</sup> Moore, Towards improved support for families of young children: The role of communities. Presentation at the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 2005

supported in recognition of the complex range of issues that contribute to a particular socio-economic indicator. As Fiona Stanley writes, 'research, policy and practice has been developed in silos – health, education, welfare, employment, justice, housing and family services – and yet decisions made in each of these areas will have profound effects on the outcomes in development, health and well-being.'<sup>14</sup>

'Multidisciplinary collaboration means that families do not experience ... fragmentation and duplication...'<sup>15</sup>

This viewpoint reflects an OECD finding that 'often the expectation is that one policy intervention can achieve multiple positive outcomes but the research does not, perhaps cannot, document this'<sup>16</sup> and leads to the 'strong finding that child poverty and disadvantage are the consequences of multiple factors ... A second finding is that just as multiple factors are responsible for high (or low) child poverty rates, no one policy alone can solve the child poverty problem'.<sup>17</sup>

'To mount an effective preventive response ... to inequality, poor education and unemployment [we need to coordinate] responses across various domains'.<sup>18</sup> We need to recognize the connection between individuals' problems and the influence of the wider social context.<sup>19</sup> As Jennifer Bowes notes 'no matter how good programs are they cannot counteract the effects of poverty on families...wider social policies will ultimately have the greatest effect on parenting.'<sup>20</sup>

In addition, an effective holistic approach requires services and programs to consider not just preventive measures which address and eliminate problem circumstances and behaviours but also to consider activity to promote positive, life managing strategies. Interventions that build 'protective factors'<sup>21</sup> increase resilience and personal capacity and serve to counteract the risk factors that face disadvantaged individuals. Specific risk and protective factors in relation to antisocial and criminal behaviour have been identified, making it more feasible to consider ways to minimise risk and build resilience.<sup>22</sup>

### **3. Provide services that assist children to make the best start while also providing services that support vulnerable people through challenging life transitions**

International and Australian research has identified the efficacy of early intervention on children's development and the subsequent social and economic advantages. As Sue Richardson notes 'children inherit differences in basic capacities. This is unavoidable.

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<sup>14</sup> Stanley, Investing in our children, 2002

<sup>15</sup> Sykora, Off to a Better Start: What we know about early intervention services, Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, Issue 26, 2005

<sup>16</sup> OECD Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in selected OECD countries. 2003

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> Stanley, Children of the Lucky Country, 2005 and Tomison and Wise, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

<sup>19</sup> NSW Child Protection Council 1995 as referenced in Tomison and Wise, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

<sup>20</sup> Bowes, Limits of Family Support Programs, paper delivered at the AIFS Conference 2000

<sup>21</sup> Tomison and Wise, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

<sup>22</sup> Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia, National Crime Prevention, 1999

But these differences can be amplified or moderated by the experiences of childhood<sup>23</sup> and ‘become increasingly difficult to alter as time passes’.<sup>24</sup>

A long term study of a preventive program targeted at families with babies in high risk situations for child-abuse and neglect in the USA calculated that for every dollar invested in prevention, seven dollars were saved in other intervention costs over the fifteen years of the review.<sup>25</sup> This level of cost-effectiveness is confirmed in other studies.<sup>26</sup>

‘Child poverty imposes enormous immediate and future costs on our nation, and it robs us of talent and skills.’<sup>27</sup> A Canadian study found that one in four children are ‘going into adulthood with a multitude of problems – behavioural, social, physical, academic – that require services to survive.’<sup>28</sup> No country can afford to have children whose optimum progress through life is hampered by circumstances beyond their control and responsibility.

Further evidence of long term benefits arise from OECD research which found that ‘adolescents who as children participated in high-quality, intensive early care and educational programs for disadvantaged children have fewer pregnancies and births than those who were not enrolled in such programs.’<sup>29</sup>

However, what is also apparent from research is that intervention strategies to increase the capacity of parents to better care for and nurture their babies and children, as well as programs for the children themselves, are also influenced by the ‘ecology’ in which they operate. Specific interventions are influenced by the immediate family environment, the services and institutions in the community, the parent’s workplace, broader societal policies and the social values of society.<sup>30</sup>

Services that positively take into account the ecology affecting family functionality contribute to improvements that positively benefit children. Services that assist parents to increase skills, become employed, provide stable home environments, including prevention of domestic violence and abuse, and services or processes that increase social capital and connectedness are essential to creating an optimum environment for the delivery of early childhood interventions.<sup>31</sup>

The Pathways to Prevention project includes the Family Independence Program ‘that operate[s] on the principle that the goal of improving lives of children is inseparable from improving the lives of their parents, families and communities.’<sup>32</sup> It is clear that ‘no program can enable children to develop optimally when their larger child rearing environment is not conducive to healthy development’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richardson, Investing in Our Children, 2002

<sup>24</sup> Moore, Towards improved support for families of young children: The role of communities. Presentation at the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 2005

<sup>25</sup> Olds, USA research report (1986) referenced in Children of the Lucky Country, Stanley, 2005

<sup>26</sup> Ochilree and Moore, Best Start Evidence Base Project, Dept of Human Services, Victoria, 2001

<sup>27</sup> The Brotherhood’s Social Barometer: Children’s Chances, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2005

<sup>28</sup> Margaret McCain, Voices for Children interview, citing the Canadian national Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 2002

<sup>29</sup> OECD Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in selected OECD countries 2001

<sup>30</sup> Ochilree and Moore, citing Bronfenbrenner (1986, 1991) in the Best Start Evidence Base Project, Dept of Human Services, Victoria, 2001

<sup>31</sup> OECD Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in selected OECD countries 2001

<sup>32</sup> Homel et al, Pathways to Prevention Project, Overview and Preliminary Outcomes, 2003

<sup>33</sup> Tomison and Wise, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention 1999

Evidence of the benefits of parental employment, even that of mothers, is apparent.<sup>34</sup> Employment decreases poverty and has positive impacts on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of parents which spill over to improve family functionality. However, it is also essential that child care is available for the children and is of a high quality.<sup>35</sup>

The Pathways to Prevention research agrees with the efficacy and importance of early age interventions but also makes it clear that there are key transitions throughout life that are high risk for any person, but particularly those from challenged and disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>36</sup> Services to support clients and their families through these times benefit the children connected with the client and optimise their life circumstances.

#### **4. Consultation with and engagement of the community**

There is general agreement on the benefits of building capacity within the community and growing stocks of social capital. The increasing disconnectedness of members of communities contributes to the isolation and disaffection of individuals who become less skilled and able to communicate, and who become withdrawn and suspicious of others.<sup>37</sup> 'Considerable research has demonstrated the association of stressful, negative community conditions with maladaptive coping and social dysfunction.'<sup>38</sup>

Studies compare the activity and cohesion within 'connected communities' and those that are socially dysfunctional. The interplay and goodwill arising from community cohesion, which has a positive benefit spiral effect, is based upon sound stocks of social capital.<sup>39</sup>

Linked with social capital, and an apparent benefit, possible a prerequisite, to the development of social capital, is social connectedness which refers to the emotional and practical support that an individual gains and contributes to those most closest to them – usually family and friends but also, empathic and appropriate service providers. People with strong social networks have improved indicators of well being and capability with a positive flow-on effect to their children.<sup>40</sup>

Research has identified some of the ways that social capital is generated. A key factor is engaging the community in making decisions about its future, recognising that the community, however deprived, has strengths and assets to contribute and build upon. Community determination of key directions based upon community needs through a participative process enhances trust. All stakeholders gain a greater awareness of the

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<sup>34</sup> OECD Social Policies, Family Types and Child Outcomes in selected OECD countries, 2001

<sup>35</sup> Ochiltree and Moore, Best Start: Evidence Base Project, Dept of Human Services, Victoria, 2001

<sup>36</sup> Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia, National Crime Prevention, 1999

<sup>37</sup> Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, 2000 and Fegan and Bowes, Isolation in rural, remote, and urban communities, Children, Families and Communities: context and consequences, 1999

<sup>38</sup> Tomison and Wise, citing Jencks & Peterson, 1992 Garbarino & Kostelny 1991 Thompson 1995 Cox 1997, 1998 and others, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

<sup>39</sup> OECD, The Well-being of Nations: the Role of Social Capital, 2001

<sup>40</sup> Moore, Towards improved support for families of young children: The role of communities. Presentation at the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 2005

issues for each, identify skills and capacity to undertake initiatives and develop confidence and resilience. This leads to stronger families and communities.<sup>41</sup>

Collaboration and participation encourages the concept of 'civic mindedness or civic friendship that consists of giving and receiving in the wellbeing of one's social group or community. It promotes a process of 'self-actualisation [which] involves making the most of one's capacities, but also includes an ability to identify with and contribute to the welfare of others'.<sup>42</sup>

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of resilience in individuals, the family and the community. Where resilience is high, problems and setbacks, particularly in key transitions, are more likely to be overcome as positive coping mechanisms are drawn upon. 'These findings reinforce the importance of the socio-cultural context of the child's situation and the ecological nature of child development' so that 'programs focused solely on the individual seem destined to failure if they do not take into account community context.'<sup>43</sup>

However, it is essential that the collaboration and engagement of the community is carried out sincerely as 'communities are becoming turned off by ineffective involvement processes which encourage them to learn more about their problems without necessarily delivering solutions.'<sup>44</sup>

## **Conclusion**

YITAV is a bold experiment. It is an experiment that must be undertaken to enable lives to turn around and communities to become proud and strong.

Based upon solid research and expert advice, YITAV is the starting point for programs developed by the YWCA of NSW. It is taking on complex matters that have been on the agenda for decades. The approach is long-term. It will see incremental improvements at first with solid change visible over years.

The success of YITAV is, in part, dependent upon the good-will, social commitment, expertise and professionalism of government and non-government organisations who are also engaged in changing lives. This will sometimes be a challenge<sup>45</sup> but, as organisations start to embrace the current and emerging studies on effective service provision, there will surely be an increasing desire and capability to work collaboratively while maintaining organisation strengths and expertise.<sup>46</sup>

Our children deserve a society that respects and nurtures them. Our society can help families and communities do the right thing for every child.

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<sup>41</sup> Ryan and Burke, So what does constitute a strong community? Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 00 – 04 Community Capacity Building Issues Paper, report for DFACS and Silberberg, Searching for Family Resilience, Family Matters No 58, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2001

<sup>42</sup> Stanley, Children of the Lucky Country, 2005

<sup>43</sup> Tomison and Wise, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

<sup>44</sup> Mackie, Dancing while Standing Still, article in Partnerships Online, 2004

<sup>45</sup> Tomison, and Wise, citing content and discussion in the Pathways to Prevention report, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

<sup>46</sup> Tomison and Wise, Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment, Issues in Child Abuse Prevention, 1999

## Key theory and practice platforms

**Community-centred practice featuring participation through consultation and collaboration:** ‘work with communities to identify and build on community assets and strengths to help communities develop solutions to their own problems.’

Tim Moore, Towards improved support of young children: the role of communities, 2005

**Holistic, coordinated processes:** ‘a better integrated service system that is easy to access and flexible enough to respond holistically to the emerging needs of children and families’

Tim Moore, Towards improved support of young children: the role of communities, 2005

**Community capacity building, social capital and civic capability:** ‘whole of community approaches designed to enhance the health and wellbeing of children via the development of healthy communities, which attempt, in part, to counter some of the structural societal forces that negatively impact on families and child rearing.’

Tomison and Wise, [Community-based approaches in preventing child maltreatment](#).

**Ecological model of human development:** interventions that focus on the broader ecology of the child’s environment including the family, ‘the services and institutions in the community, the parent’s workplace, and the broader societal policies and social values of society.’

Gay Ochiltree and Tim Moore, referencing Uri Bronfenbrenner. Best Start Evidence Base Project 2001 Dept Human Services, Vic

**Developmental Prevention through life pathways support interventions:** at strategic life transitions vulnerable people can more readily slip into situations of greater disadvantage.

Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia

**Intergenerational interventions:** interrupting negative patterns of living by providing opportunities to learn new approaches, new skills and new behaviours.

**Attachment theory:** sound emotional and behavioural development is dependent upon a strong and supportive connection between the baby and the primary care-giver.

**Strengths-based Perspective to promote resilience:** a focus on qualities, skills and assets that already exist as a basis of capability within an individual, a family or community which can be used as a positive starting point to address problems. It is the opposite to a deficit, pathologising approach.

Simone Silberberg, Searching for Family Resilience

**Social Capital and Connectedness:** ‘is built out of innumerable relationships and through connectedness and trust that develops out of formal and informal networks’ which can be used to ‘generate useful community structures and forms of self-reliance in communities’.

Gay Ochiltree and Tim Moore, Best Start Evidence Base Project 2001 Dept Human Services, Vic; Anthony Giddens on the Third Way, Goodman Charity Lecture, UK 1999

**Culturally appropriate service provision and consultation:** recognising that cultural difference does not necessarily mean a parenting deficit and that services need to be tailored to the distinctive strengths and needs of different cultural groups.

Gay Ochilree and Tim Moore, Best Start Evidence Base Project 2001 Dept Human Services, Vic; Shonkoff, J and Phillips, D (2001) From Neurons to Neighbourhoods

**Risk and protective factors linked with socio-ecological theory:** ‘The interaction of risk and protective factors occurs at each stage of child development and ... is affected by a child’s or parent’s internal characteristics, aspects of the family, and of the wider social environment.’

Tomison and Wise, Issues Paper 11; Tim Moore, Towards improved support of young children: the role of communities, 2005

**Community cohesion and emergent complexity theory:** explores the formation and evolution of social (and other) structures and behaviours that ‘emerge by a kind of tacit consensus’.

Johnson, 2001 cited by Tim Moore, Towards improved support for families of children: the role of communities

**Local Governance:** bringing accountability into the community through collaborative actions engaging federal, state and local government, service providers and community initiatives.

OECD, Local Partnership for Better Governance; Local Strategic Partnerships, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, UK

**Employability skills and employment / income generation:** assisting people to develop ‘skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions.’

Employability Skills, Final Report, Development of a strategy to support the universal recognition and recording of employability skills, DEST (2004)