Local Government Perspective on Best Practice and Challenges in Collaboration

Bernie Harrison, Greater Dandenong
Chris Widdicombe, Greater Shepparton
Kim Howland and Karen Kerr, Bayside
Ann McNair, Hume City Council
"Children are the priority. Change is the reality. Collaboration is the strategy."

Judith Billings Washington State Superintendent
**Relationship to other government strategies and frameworks**

This framework has been developed within the context of other plans, frameworks and strategies that are in place or currently under development, including the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020, An Outline of National Standards for Out-of-Home Care.

![Diagram showing related government plans, frameworks and strategies](image)

**VICTORIA’S VULNERABLE CHILDREN STRATEGY**

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving quality of teaching the key to improving education outcomes</td>
<td>Seven priority areas including:</td>
<td>Better opportunities in education and early childhood development services</td>
<td>Strong focus on improving outcomes for vulnerable children</td>
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<td>Effective professional development</td>
<td>Responsiveness to needs</td>
<td>Improved housing and accommodation services</td>
<td>Strengthening prevention and early intervention through Maternal Child Health Reform</td>
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<td>Build leadership at school and system levels</td>
<td>Improving health status</td>
<td>Improved service, workforce and system capacity</td>
<td>Trialling new initiatives to better support vulnerable families</td>
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<td>Expanding service, workforce and system capacity</td>
<td>Financial sustainability and productivity</td>
<td>Expansion of targeted early intervention services</td>
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**Figure 5: Related government plans, frameworks and strategies**

- **Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013–2018**
  - Key target: by 2023 the gap in the rate of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child protection will be reduced by 75%

- **Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria’s plan 2013–2017**
  - 15 point plan to tackle alcohol and drug misuse
  - Sets new directions in treatment services

- **A new Mental Health Act for Victoria**
  - Patients are involved and supported to make treatment decisions
  - Improved patient, family and carer experience of compulsory treatment

- **Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children**
  - Early intervention when risk of violence
  - Supporting women and children and tougher on perpetrators

- **Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011–2015**
  - Providing support early so people don’t become homeless
  - Flexible service provision to meet needs of individuals
A definition of ‘vulnerability’ was adopted by the Victorian Government, and set out in the *Victoria’s Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility Strategy 2013–2022* as:

‘Children and young people are vulnerable if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long-term development and wellbeing is limited’.
Collaboration and improving outcomes for vulnerable families and children - between the universal, secondary and tertiary services

5 minutes

4 Successes, 1 challenge!

Chris Widdicombe
MCH Team Leader Greater Shepparton City Council
MCH Conference October 2015
Success 1 - MCH Outreach and joint visits

Enhanced Best Start ChildFIRST Data Collection Report September 2013

Percentage of children 0-6 yrs who were up to date with MCH

- Up to Date
- Not Up to Date
- No information
Success 2 – Child and Family Vulnerability Guide

- Communication tool for discussing child vulnerability and protective factors
- Annual data audit stimulates review of vulnerability status – contact with other agencies, use of FamilyCare protocol
- Tracking vulnerable families who have not enrolled for kindergarten
- Plan to extend use of this Guide to child care and supported playgroups
Success 3 – Stronger collaboration

- Vulnerable Children Meetings
- Best Start Early Years Partnership and Workgroups

Early Years Reference Group current focus on:
- information sharing and communication
- Child social and emotional wellbeing
- concept of progressive universalism
Progressive Universalism – a continuum of child needs and service integration

Children with additional needs
- Targeted support
  - Single practitioner
- Integrated support

Children with no identified additional needs
- Universal services for all children and young people

Children with complex needs
- Integrated support from universal, specialist and statutory services

Original concept: www.everychildmatters.gov.au – now archived
Adapted by the Greater Shepparton Best Start Team November 2014
Success 4 – Integrated Practice Training

- Professional development resource developed by Greater Shepparton Best Start Program
- Key concepts of family centred practice, understanding child and family vulnerability/protective factors and professional relationship building
- Core training for all Council early years staff
- Offered annually over 2 days and delivered by local senior practitioners
- Co-ordination and ongoing development is a collaboration between Council, FamilyCare (ChildFIRST) and Berry St
1 Challenge – improving connectivity with Child Protection

MCH Interagency Relationships 2014

- Strong relationship
- Effective relationship
- Weak Relationship
- Problematic relationship
It takes a systems approach

Circle of System Change
Circle of Learning
Circle of Communication
Circle of Support

Every child enjoys the best possible start in life
Children Services Coordinator is responsible for allocating priority places through Kindergarten Central Enrolment for vulnerable children and Networking with Kindergarten Committees of Management and other Early Years Service providers.

Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Nurses work with vulnerable families and visit Public Housing Estates regularly. They also work in partnership with Family Life facilitating Supported Playgroups.

Library Services visit Supported Playgroups and facilitate activities for children. Outreach Service is provided to Public Housing Estates fortnightly in the Estates community rooms. Link families into Early Years Services, Maternal and Child Health, Kindergarten and Child Care.

Family Life and Bentleigh Bayside Community Health work closely with Child First and Child Protection providing Parenting Support, allied health services and counselling to families identified as “At Risk”. Provides for interorganisational referral practices to other Early years Services.

Community Partnerships Coordinator engages families through organising events on Public Housing Estates and building relationships with Office of Housing and Family Support Agencies.

What’s the beauty of collaboration and Council led Community Development Working Groups?
We first met 3 year old Megan at the Family Fun Day

**Community Partnerships Officer** working with the **Coordinator Children's Services** received permission from **The Office of Housing** to hold an event at Kenneth St Housing Estate. This is where we met Megan and her family.

**Family Life**

Family Life were at the event and linked Megan's younger sister and her mother into the Community Bubs Parenting Support Program and made a Child First referral. Megan and her family also have started attending the Keith St Playtime Buddies Supported Playgroup, co-facilitated by Family Life and Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service.

**Maternal and Child Health and Immunisation**

Megan had missed her 2 year KAS visit, wasn't up-to-date with her immunisations and was not attending any child care or kindergarten services. The Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Nurse was able to organise an outreach visit to immunise Megan and her little sister and complete the Key Ages and Stage Assessment.

**Libraries**

Megan loved the story time activities run by libraries at the event and Mum was given some books and some guidance on reading to her children

**Coordinator Children's Services**

Megan wasn't attending any Child Care Service or Kindergarten Program. We were able to assist Megan's mum in applying for Early Start Kindergarten and she was provided with a priority place at a local Kindergarten
Working Together Initiative

Casey, Cardinia &
City of Greater Dandenong

- Improve participation in early childhood services
- Build capacity of professionals to work with young children
- Foster links with early childhood services

Working Together

Child First

Family Services
A resource was developed for each service:

- Outlining the service provision
- Roles and responsibilities
- Referral pathways and guides

Workforce exchange project:

- Professionals working together for a day
- Improved understanding
- Better Communication
- Collaborative partnerships
Thank you!