

# COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN, ARMADALE EVALUATION REPORT

Conducted by  
Dr Susan Young  
Assisted by Antonia Hendrick  
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ACFC	Armadale Community Family Centre
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
AR	Action Research
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CfC	Communities for Children
CfCA	Communities for Children Armadale
CP	Community Partner
CVCF	Centre for Vulnerable Children and Families
DCD	Department for Community Development
FaCSIA	Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FaHCSIA	Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FP	Facilitating Partner
GIS	Geographical Information System
LE	Local Evaluator
NGO	Non government organisation
PEP	Parents Empowering Parents
RA	Research Assistant
SCFS	Stronger Families and Communities Strategy
SEEDS	Supporting Engagement in Early Development Service
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas

*“People matter – it is the people in places with the skills to build relationships and bridge services towards greater collaborative and community engagement”*

## **SUMMARY**

This Evaluation reports on the activities and successes of the Communities for Children (CfC) in Armadale from 2005 to 2009.

Awarded the funding in the second round of the Initiative, Communicare was appointed the Facilitating Partner (FP) and engaged five other agencies to provide CfC services for early childhood development.

This report documents the background to the choice of Armadale as a CfC site on its identification as a disadvantaged area using SEIFA and other data, its growth rate and its high percentage of young children. The methodology of the evaluation is outlined, focusing on a Theory of Change framework suited to a project which was originally conceived under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) as a strengths based activity using Action Research processes.

Achievements of the Initiative are provided addressing each of the involved Community Partners’ projects:

ARMADALE COMMUNITY FAMILY CENTRE	<i>Parents Empowering Parents</i>
COMMUNICARE	<i>Supporting Engagement in Early Development Service, Parenting Party Plan (SEEDS)</i>
GOWRIE <sup>1</sup>	<i>It’s the little things</i> <i>Network Exchange</i> <i>Thriving Communities</i>
PARKERVILLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH CARE	<i>It’s the little things</i> (later renamed <i>Young Parenting Programme</i> )
THERAPY FOCUS	<i>Communication Capers</i> <i>Preparing the Path</i>
WANSLEA FAMILY SERVICES	<i>Network Exchange</i> <i>Thriving Communities</i>
UNITINGCARE WEST	<i>Our Mob, Our Kids, Our Communities</i>

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<sup>1</sup> The Gowrie initially provided three projects which were later taken over by two other agencies

Other activities such as those implemented by the Facilitating Partner in partnership with other agencies are also reported. Particular successes have been raising awareness of child and family needs in relation to the early years extending to the way businesses and other service providers now pay greater attention to families and children; the inclusion of some families who previously had not accessed particular services, such as young parents and young Indigenous parents in service access; networks of service delivery working together; and services for particular needs areas, such as speech therapy, becoming adopted into schools with more widespread understanding and support. Others are detailed in the Achievements section.

Some considerations from the feedback, documentation and observations are provided which raise issues of sustainability and ongoing provision of service as well as comments on the CfC model and suggestions for improvement. Among these are the adequacy of resources and the need for associated resources such as local infrastructure, provision for training and supervision, attention to individual as well as community needs, and the adequacy of the consultation processes to ensure local considerations are included. Importantly the issue of local identification and implementation of local solutions was raised to include more of the resident agencies and to focus on a strengths approach. Challenges have been experienced throughout the life of the Armadale CfC, not least the delayed funding resulting in corresponding delays in some of the projects.

The overall view of the CfC in Armadale has recognised its achievements and encourages the continuation of the development and provision of services focusing on the early years. Suggestions for the future include greater attention to reducing the perceived stigma of mental health, the greater inclusion of fathers, and the engagement of more local community groups and agencies.

Other considerations are more extensive than can be addressed by the Facilitating Partner or the efforts of the Community Partners. These however, have affected the performance of the CfC in Armadale, as they have likely affected other locations and could well be fed back to the funding agency FaHCSIA for inclusion in future funding programmes to ensure that the local community development aims support the desires, energies and abilities of the local people.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This evaluation report from the Centre for Vulnerable Children and Families (CVCF) accounts for the work of the Armadale Communities for Children (CfCA) and was conducted during the last eight months of the current funding period. It includes material drawn from the archives of the four years of the project's implementation as well as observations, interviews and documentary analysis. It was undertaken by the Local Evaluator (LE) with the assistance of a Research Assistant (RA) and the invaluable cooperation and assistance of the Facilitating Partner, Communicare staff and all other participants.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN (CfC) INITIATIVE**

In 2001 the federal government launched a strategy to address what was becoming recognised as a serious challenge for the development of children in Australia. Research findings were beginning to show the importance of early years development and significantly the long lasting effects of deprivation in those years leading to poor health and lack of social competence; reduced educational attainment and subsequent employment performance; and ongoing poverty. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) sought to put in place a variety of programmes designed to reverse this growing trend in Australia's most disadvantaged areas. The CfC Initiative was one of the strands of the strategy, and was launched with the first seven sites in 2004 and another thirty eight in 2005.

Communities for Children is a place-based response to program management and service delivery focussed on children up to five years old and their families. It links service providers under a lead non-government agency that oversees broad community consultation to develop bottom-up solutions that address locally identified needs. Local non-government organisations are considered to have the skills, resources and governance structures to deliver whole-of-community responses to improve outcomes for children and families (Lewis & Taylor 2005 p. 1).

One of the key features of the Initiative was the perception that previous attempts to provide services for children and their families were negatively affected by the seeming inability of the relevant agencies to work together to provide all the services in concert and in a coordinated way. The Initiative would avoid duplication of services, over-servicing and result in less stress on already stressed families having to deal with many different jurisdictional authorities all with their different administrative requirements.

The initiative responds to the need to continue to improve the coordination of the public, private and community sector

activity, particularly in areas experiencing high levels of economic and social disadvantage (Lewis & Taylor 2005 p. 2).

Of particular significance for this Initiative was its locality based involvement of the people who were its targets. This was premised on the belief that participation in service design and delivery would eventually lead to local community control over individual and collective futures, thereby enhancing outcomes in the recognition that government provision can only ever be of limited duration and at best of minimal support.

Under Communities for Children, community participation is viewed as an essential component and the driver of its capacity building agenda. It recognises that money, skills and good intentions will not work if communities are not successfully engaged in the community development process (Lewis & Taylor 2005 p. 10).

The Initiative sought to engage local and state authorities and used statistical data to identify the most relevant sites.

Rather, Communities for Children services are in addition to or an expansion of services that currently exist. State and territory governments have been involved in the Communities for Children site selection process and consulted in the development of Strategic Plans. The service-mapping component of the Strategic Plans also helps to minimise the possibility of duplicating services (Lewis & Taylor 2005 p. 12).

To try to ensure the best possible results the Initiative design was considered to be innovative, using a Facilitating Partner (FP) model which sought tenders from appropriate Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to implement the Initiative. In order to do this in the case of the first seven sites many of the FPs were hand picked. Implementation would follow the engagement of an Advisory Committee to oversee the development of a Community Plan, and contract local Community NGOs to deliver the identified required services.

... potential challenges that have been identified include incompatible models of service delivery, uncertain financial resources and bureaucratic rules and regulations. The probability of these issues impacting on the Communities for Children initiative is minimised by the leadership role of the non-government organisation, input from the community, advice from experts in the early childhood field, guaranteed funding for four years, and a framework that integrates the three tiers of Australian government at national, state/territory and local government levels (Lewis & Taylor 2005 p. 13).

The extent to which these principles, while admirable in intent, have been successful forms part of this evaluation report. Enacting them has proved to be more challenging than perhaps anticipated, coupled with possibly unforeseen circumstances in the initial design.

## *The Selection of Armadale*

Armadale was among the second round of selected sites for the CfC Initiative being nominated for funding in 2004. The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) data which showed high levels of disadvantage in many of the Index items, such as low levels of employment, correspondingly low income and education levels, high teenage pregnancy rates among others, along with the anticipated population growth and relatively high proportion of young children satisfied the criteria for selection.

Communicare was the successful NGO to act as FP in 2005. The Armadale Communities for Children Initiative, as managed by Communicare, was charged with the support of early childhood services development in the communities of Armadale, Brookdale, Forrestdale, Kelmscott, Champion Lakes, Seville Grove and Mount Richon.

## *Agencies selected for participation*

The agencies eventually selected to participate in the CfCA were subject to a tendering process following the formation of the CfCA Advisory Committee which assessed the particular needs of the area and designed the Community Action Plan. Of the six successful original Community Partners (CPs) (including Communicare as a CP, contributing one project) five of these agencies continued throughout the period and provided a total of eight projects. One of the original agencies left the Initiative during the second year to be replaced by another. Only one of the six agencies was an already locally based agency, all the others, including Communicare, were new to the area or provided services from bases outside the area. This point is significant as local knowledge and relationships formed by locally located services attribute to effectively working with community while organisations new to the area were required to develop these local knowledges as well as take the time necessary when establishing relationships: time that was often not sufficient to undertake this task effectively. This will be discussed more in **Some Considerations**.

## **Armadale Community Family Centre (ACFC)**

The Armadale Community Family Centre runs many activities and programmes for children appropriate to the different developmental stages, their families and community members. ACFC have programmes targeting the 0-5 year cohort and are proactive in addressing many of the issues as identified by the CfC Initiative given its 5 key aims. The programmes, which differ each term, offer a variety of activities available to children, their parents, whole families extending to the whole community. ACFC has as a core aim the building and nurturing of community through networking and

making connections with and across the diverse groups within the Armadale community.

This agency was the only one of those providing CfCA projects to have existed in Armadale prior to CfCA. ACFC's longer term association with the communities surrounding and including Armadale is reflected in its membership, as one of the original members, and support of the Early Years forum, or Network. This forum, continuing today, is host to a great many agencies involved in early years development within the Armadale area. Other strong collaborative relations and connections have formed between the community groups including Indigenous groups and in particular the Champion Centre and other agencies with ACFC since its establishment in October 1991 providing education for 4 year olds.

The *Parents Empowering Parents* (PEP) programme had originated prior to CfCA and was piloted by the Department for Community Development (DCD) for one year pre CfCA. The CfC Initiative enabled funding to implement the PEP programme past the piloted stage and ACFC was successful in its tender for operating the PEP programme. PEP provides free parent supported playgroups for families who are isolated from the larger community as well as a toy library. Structured activities are designed for these playgroups with the aim of building capacities of parents to operate and continue to run the playgroups. A PEP Playmobile is an additional resource with activities offered for isolated parents and children in their own parks and open public spaces.

Some of the CfCA agencies were contracted on a yearly basis rather than for the full CfC term. ACFC was one of these.

## **Communicare**

Already offering a range of specialised programs in family, children's and employment services, Communicare was well placed to be contracted, as well as to be the FP, to deliver the specialised project, known as *Supporting Engagement in Early Development Service* (SEEDS), supporting and counselling families with children ages 0-5 years as identified under the CfC Initiative. In operation for more than 25 years, Communicare has offered many programmes and has demonstrated an ability to work closely with different groups across different projects. The agency's main base is located in Cannington and neighbours the suburbs listed for inclusion in the CfCA site. This close proximity enabled Communicare an understanding about these areas.

## **Gowrie**

The Gowrie was initially one of the agencies contracted to provide three services; *It's the Little Things*, a parenting support programme for young parents; *Network Exchange*, a programme to assist in coordinating local

agencies; and *Thriving Communities*, a programme to advocate for more attention to be paid to making Armadale a child and family friendly community. The Gowrie was located nearby in Bentley and had a lengthy history in family support and children's services. The Gowrie's involvement lasted for two years after which time its programmes were contracted to Parkerville and Wanslea.

### **Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc.**

Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Parkerville CYC) operates under the auspices of the Anglican Church, and has been providing care and protection to children and youth in need since 1903. Since this time Parkerville CYC has expanded its programmes and services considerably to include accommodation, cottage parents for resident children and young people, education and employment training programmes, therapeutic care, as well as more recently developing a Child Advocacy Centre and Residential Programme within the Armadale precinct. This expansion of interest coincided with the CfC Initiative and Parkerville CYC took over the programme *It's the Little Things* which was later renamed *The Young Parenting Programme*.

### **Therapy Focus**

Therapy Focus works with families, teachers and communities to help children who have a disability or learning disadvantage. Therapy Focus supports and builds capacities of children, teachers and families in providing skills and resources to improve educational outcomes. The services offered draw upon the expertise of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech pathologists and psychologists with a multidisciplinary approach to intervention in the early years of a child's life. With Therapy Focus's attention to improving educational outcomes and early pathways to school it was well positioned to undertake the aims and objectives of the CfC Initiative. Furthermore, and importantly, as there are currently no speech pathologists attached to schools, unlike in the Eastern States, Therapy Focus provides a significant contribution and service where currently, without its services, a gap exists within Western Australian schools. They provided two projects: *Communication Capers*, focusing on speech therapy services and support, and *Preparing the Path*, encouraging parents and teachers to contribute to children's school readiness.

### **Wanslea Family Services**

Wanslea Family Services was successful in its bid to continue on with two of the projects commenced by Gowrie, *Network Exchange* and *Thriving Communities*, which later merged into one. Founded almost 60 years ago Wanslea Family Services is a Western Australian organisation offering many

services to children and families which also considers a whole of community approach as an important component of reaching out to families. New to the area of Armadale, Wanslea Family Services brought to the CfCA site a long history of experience in collaboratively working with government and non-government services in the children and family area.

### **UnitingCare West**

UnitingCare West is part of the mission of the Uniting Church in Australia and the UnitingCare national not-for-profit network. UnitingCare West is relatively new, commencing in July 2006 as the result of a merger and provides home-based services for people with alcohol and drug use problems, parenting skills programmes and support towards the wellbeing of the whole family, among others. UnitingCare has a lengthy history of working with Indigenous people, affording a knowledge and strength of expertise in this area which suited them to provide the *Our Mob, Our Kids, Our Community* programme to the local Indigenous young mothers.

## **EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS), under which the CfC operated as an Initiative, originally specified an Action Research (AR) process to be used in its strategy. Given the principles of AR this should have included the evaluation process. However, the implementation documentation of the later SFCS and CfC did not include reference to this requirement, suggesting only that AR might be useful in participant training and as a framework to consult. Nevertheless, in the spirit of the original intention, a modified approach to evaluation which includes participant reflections on 'what worked' and 'what could be improved' is adopted here.

This evaluation uses an Evaluation Framework considered to be appropriate for the reporting. Figure 1 shows the areas under which this report is discussed.

### ***Service Linkages***

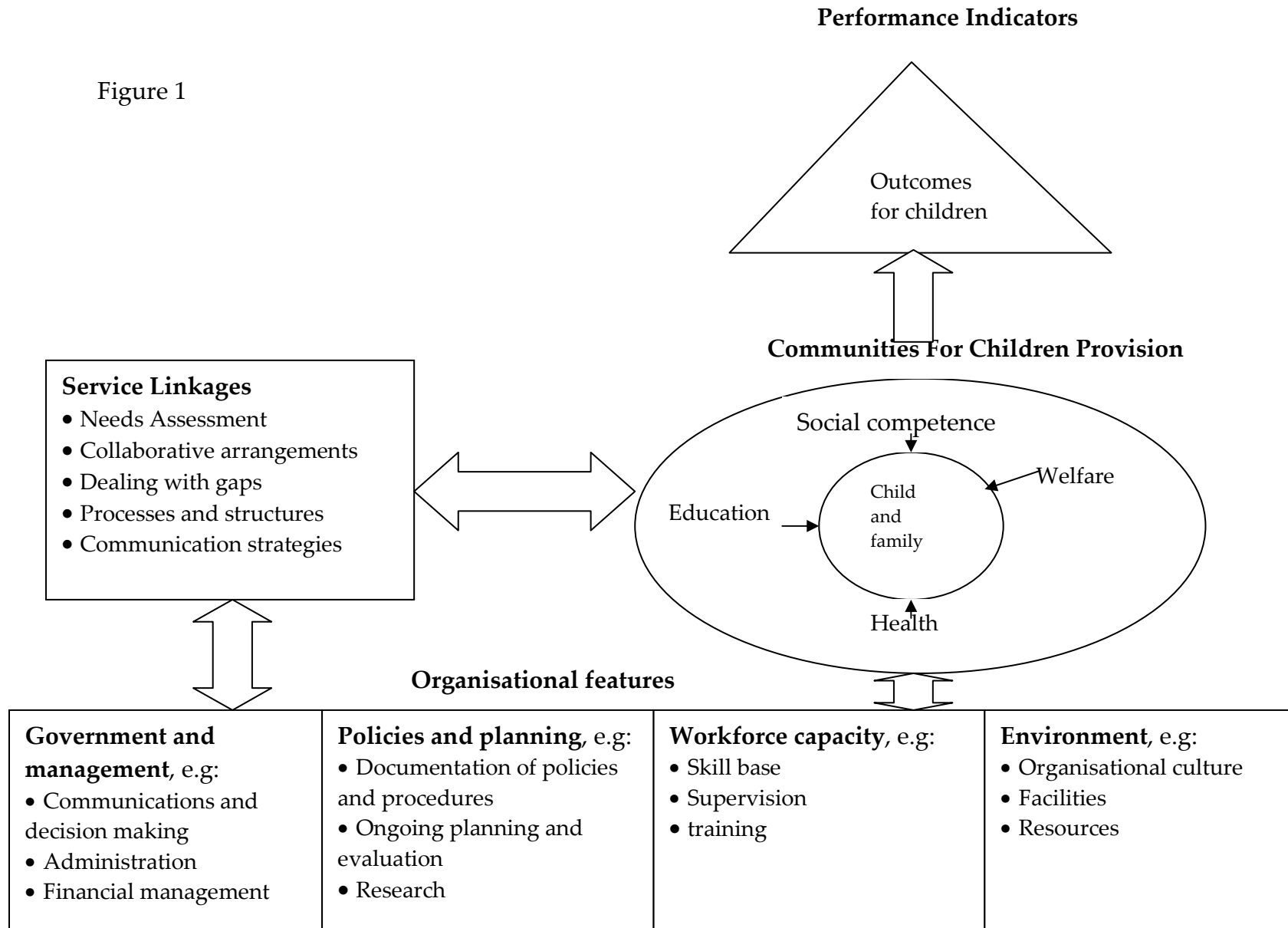
This heading refers to the purpose for the CfCA and the sets of relationships between the stakeholders in Armadale.

### **Needs Assessment**

The CfC Initiative was essentially part of a federal government strategy and as such designed and implemented with some very clear guidelines and purposes in mind. These have been adequately described and critiqued elsewhere. Statistics identifying locations of need across select indicators to further the aim of enhancing the early years capabilities were used to allocate funds and were largely decided at a federal level, despite some acknowledgment that the local jurisdictions should be consulted. Armadale met the statistical criteria as an identified area of disadvantage and was allocated funding. The selection of Facilitating Partners (FPs) to manage the process was conducted through a competitive tendering process. Communicare won the tender for Armadale.

Once the contract commenced and with clear aims for the performance of the CfC, Communicare was required to work with the local area and its agencies to identify the specific needs for the locality that would form the basis of services to be provided and the potential Community Partners (CPs) to deliver these services. Communicare was appointed FP in 2005 and received \$3.5 million for four years. With a head office in Cannington, a suburb proximate to Armadale, it could be expected that, unlike some other

Figure 1



FP agencies, Communicare had knowledge of the locality and its circumstances.

The CfC model was premised on local community agencies being those best able to assess and determine programmes to meet the identified needs. Ideally, a Place Based Strategy, such as was the CfC intent, should have relied heavily on local identification of need, but this was a responsibility undertaken by FaCSIA<sup>2</sup> leaving the responsibility of deciding the actual services to meet need to the FP and CPs.

## **Collaborative arrangements**

The CfC model required an Advisory Committee comprising relevant stakeholders from Government and Non-Government to develop a Community Action Plan and Service Delivery Plans and to report to the Communicare Board of Management. Originally the CfCA had 22 members including 3 which were appointed from Communicare and the local Department of Family and Community Services; 9 were selected from local agencies such as the DCD,<sup>3</sup> City of Armadale; 10 with an ability to represent the local community and the various stakeholder groups were nominated from the community.

By late 2008 committee members attending meetings appeared to have been reduced to 12 with two of the original members still on the committee, although some of the organisations represented had remained the same. This change in personnel is a constant theme throughout the life of the CfCA, as it is in most non-government operations.

The other committee which was developed later was the Community Partners Committee comprising the agencies which provide the selected services. This committee, once started, changed little in substance, with one agency leaving to be replaced by another. Staff, however, did change with only two of the original agency staff remaining.

## **Dealing with gaps**

The first Community Plan was put forward in July 2005 and identified the types of activities that CfCA anticipated would be appropriate. (See Appendix 1) Despite the later review that showed Armadale had many services (Katz 2007), the identification of Armadale as a CfC site and the experience of the agencies strongly suggested that the needs for families in the

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<sup>2</sup> FaCSIA is now the Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). However, when referring to original funding and programmatic arrangements FaCSIA will be used. Later in the report when referring to current circumstances, FaHCSIA will be used.

<sup>3</sup> This government department which had responsibility for the protection of children and community development was later split into two departments, the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and the Department for Communities (DfC).

locale were concentrated in the areas of school readiness and social development for children; support particularly for young parents; improved information exchange in the community leading to better coordination and attention to filling the gaps; and support for the businesses and agencies in the community to be more family and child friendly in their environment and service provision.

Of particular note is one of the services contracted filled a significant gap that had not until this point occurred in WA; Therapy Focus provided speech pathology services through Communication Capers, recognised to be the first of its kind in WA.

## **Processes, structures and communication**

The CfC process, despite the policy recognition of the importance of the local community knowing its needs best and being the most appropriate means for providing solutions to local issues, is still highly structured, organised and ultimately accountable to external authorities. As such the Initiative operates according to specific and contracted structures such as mentioned above, the Advisory and CP committees. These have regular meeting times, quarterly and monthly respectively at which reports on progress and planning for future events and ongoing projects are made. Most of the information exchange has used email for meeting minutes, and agendas and other notices, with meetings being the prime means of planning events, such as the Parenting Expo. These formal structures are the main form of gaining assessments of need in the community.

These Service Linkages inform and are informed by the Organisational features of the Facilitating Partner.

## ***Organisational Features***

The organisational features to be discussed here are those of the part of Communicare that manages the CfCA, even though Communicare itself is a larger organisation with other programmes. While the diagram identifies several associational aspects which could potentially influence how a 'parent' organisation relates to and manages a contracted service, these do not form a dedicated discussion. Rather they are to indicate the scope of features which should be considered when providing an evaluation of a contracted service and forms part of the discussion in **Some Considerations** later in the report. Notably Communicare has over twenty years experience in providing contracted services for governments, such as Skillshare and the Job Network and have formed close connections with the communities in which they operate. As such Communicare has been able to demonstrate its capabilities in administration, financial management as well as its ability to manage relatively large projects. In engaging the local community agencies and

organisations Communicare has had to employ specific project leaders to manage the CfCA, provide them with support and, where necessary, training in project management and other related processes; provide premises and related facilities such as the House in Armadale; form relationships with organisations that previously it had little formal partnerships with, such as the City of Armadale; as well as set up separate accounting and reporting procedures for the contract with FaCSIA.

As will be referred to later, the CfCA project managed by Communicare was not immune from the staff turnover that appears almost universally throughout the period of CfCA in all the associated partners. Only one or two original staff remain in the partner agencies. This is not unusual for non-government agencies and for some government or business services, but it does mean that continuity, historical knowledge, practice wisdom, a specific skill set that has been deliberately chosen or for which training has been provided all are affected by staff movements.

### *Communities for Children Provision*

The policy direction for the CfC Initiative of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is well known and does not need to be repeated here, except to foreshadow some of the coming discussion by locating some of the common considerations of the CfC Initiative. Concern for early child development which is considered to be negatively affected by disadvantaged circumstances led to the focus for the Initiative. A belief in the appropriateness of local communities firstly knowing best what their needs are and secondly being well placed to provide solutions to meeting those needs drove the design of the model which incorporated the Facilitating Partner arrangement with Community Partners. Neither of these two premises, the focus, or the underpinning value reflected in the design is faultless. Criticisms of these policy/practice aspects of the CfC Initiative generally are also able to be made of some of the aspects of its implementation in Armadale, and will be discussed in **Some Considerations**.

Without question, most participants in the CfCA acknowledge the importance of providing good and widespread services for children and to engage both families and the local community in providing these services in an ongoing and sustained way. Even given the very positive light in which CfC generally is viewed, whether or not the model is the most appropriate, or the particular services and the way they are or have been delivered are the correct ones is open for discussion and certainly there are views which suggest that the CfC is by no means the only model or that the services in their current form are the most effective. Comments on both of these parts of the CfC provision are contained in the remainder of this report.

## *Theory Of Change Framework*

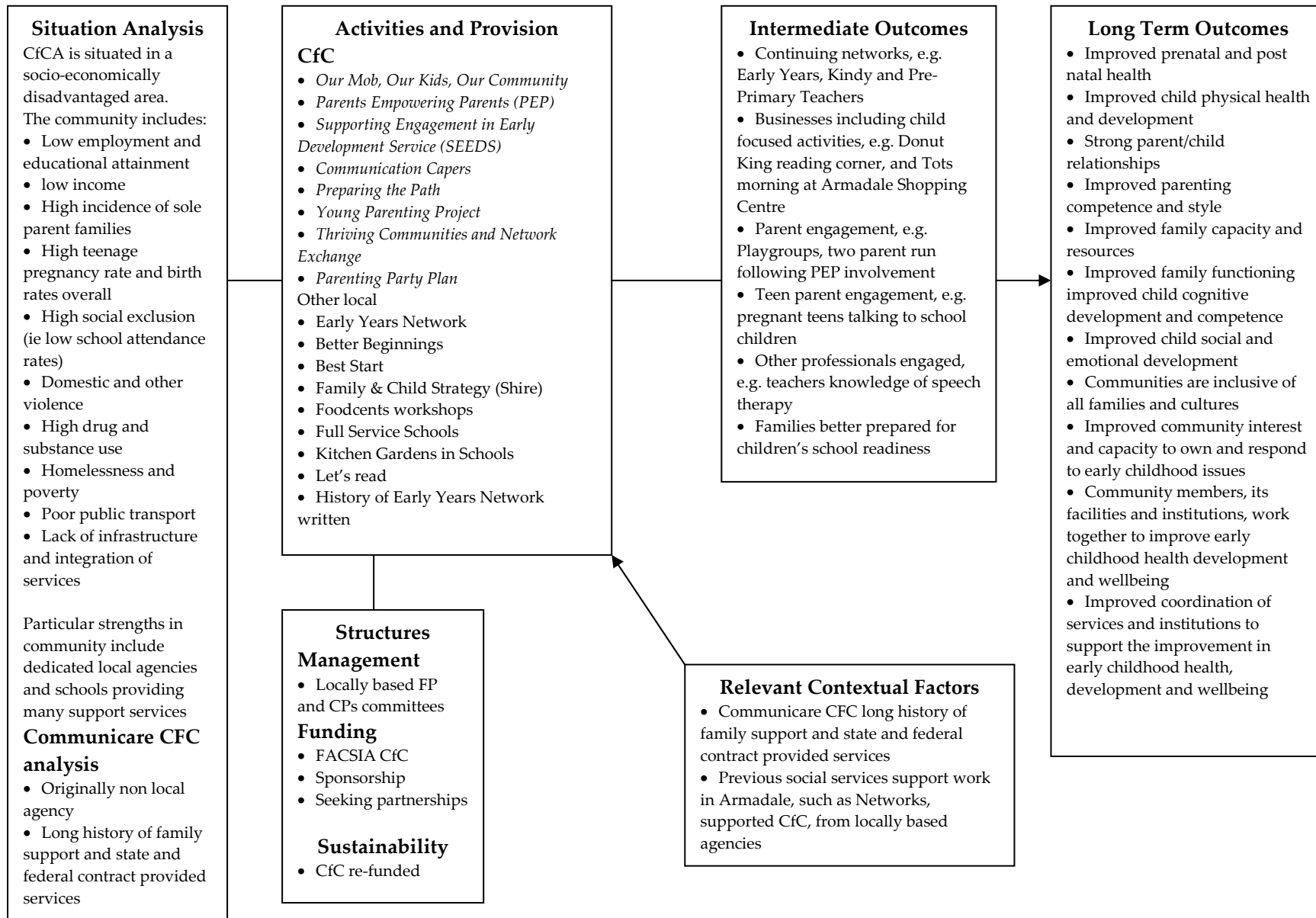
The CfC Initiative is a multifaceted programme which does not readily lend itself to some of the more traditional evaluative frameworks. It occupies a complex environment and seeks to assess some of the subtleties of outcomes which may not necessarily be observed in the standard evaluations. Additionally, as the CfC originated with Action Research in mind, an evaluation which seems to incorporate aspects at least of change oriented action would appear appropriate. An Evaluation Framework constructed by the Aspen Institute and known as the Theory of Change Framework (Connelly 1995) encompasses components appropriate to answering the 'what works' and 'what could be improved' questions and focuses on the expected changes that small activities may bring rather than assessing success or otherwise on the outcomes specified at the outset of the Initiative. While necessarily a summative evaluation, given the timeline, this evaluation of the CfCA still meets the AR requirements of assessing how the various projects and activities undertaken in Armadale are considered to lead to change and how those changes contribute to the expected outcomes of the Initiative. As noted by the National Evaluation it is still too early to provide a conclusive assessment of expected outcomes, given the timeframe and the target groups for the CfC, but it is here considered that using a Theory of Change enables assessments to be made of progress towards achieving outcomes. As such the report will comment on the relative aspects of the framework as they contribute to the ongoing work of the CfCA. It may well be that future projects may consider a Theory of Change evaluation useful as a template for their action in engaging people in the assessment of their own actions and planning for future ones.

The Theory of Change commences by undertaking a mapping exercise of the projects that comprised the CfCA and providing a diagram representing the situation including actions activities and provision, details describing the structures, some comment on the contextual factors and the intermediate outcomes leading to the hoped for long term outcomes. This can be seen to be particularly pertinent to the CfCA, or any of the CfCs as they are widely acknowledged to need a greater time span than originally allotted to achieve the desired goals. While this mapping exercise is being provided at the conclusion of this part of the project, it is hoped it may be useful for future planning. Figure 2. provides more details.

Included here is a summarised description of the situation in Armadale, which, while it notes the serious disadvantage, also acknowledges the strengths present. In fact these and the noted contextual factors such as social services support work prior to the CfCA Initiative are likely to have assisted CfCA's achievements. Activities include both CfCA and local provision separate from but associated with CfCA. These are distinguished by

Italicisation. Intermediate outcomes are particularly interesting as they indicate the milestones towards achieving specified outcomes which can not be expected to be fully achieved in a short period from a disadvantaged area.

Figure 2



## METHODOLOGY – EVALUATION POINTS

The Evaluation has gathered qualitative data to supplement the collection by the Facilitating Partner of quantitative data and the report of the National Evaluation, and has used a number of opportunities and processes to assess progress against the five Priority Areas:

- Healthy young families
- Early learning and care
- Supporting families and parents
- Child friendly communities
- Family and children’s services working together as a system.

### *Qualitative Data Collection*

In-depth information was collected through a number of means: interviews with interested and relevant people; observations of activities and public events; participation in meetings; and documented material in the form of meetings minutes, Quarterly reports and other reports (published and unpublished), feedback from Student activities, information sheets and pamphlets, and other supporting material.

### **Interviews with relevant/interested people**

A total of 15 people were interviewed. Most were attended by the LE and RA, although some involved either one or the other. Most interviews were recorded to aid memory and notes were taken of all interviews. These are all in safe keeping in the Centre for Vulnerable Children and Families (CVCF) and will be destroyed on completion of the evaluation.

All current **Community Partners** (CPs) were interviewed. Some representatives of CPs who were no longer participating, either through taking other roles with other agencies or through the cessation of the CP contract, were also interviewed. These people were able to provide useful background and history, as there has been considerable staff turnover in all areas of the Initiative in Armadale since its inception, including the Facilitating Partner and the Local Evaluator. This has meant continuity has been weakened with a corresponding loss of history and practice wisdom relating to the original vision for the Initiative. This will be discussed more in **Some Considerations**.

Members of the **Advisory Committee** were interviewed.

Staff from local **Primary Schools** were interviewed. These were relevant given their connection with some Early Years activities prior to the Initiative, their need for some CfCA activities such as Speech Therapy and their provision of related activities such as some play groups.

**Other** interested people were also interviewed.

All interviewees were asked to respond to the broad questions of:

- What has been your experience of participating in/with the CfCA?
- What has worked well?
- What could have been done differently? And
- What would you like to see in the future?

## **Observations**

Observations also formed an important part of the collection of qualitative data and these were made by the LE and RA, together and separately, at a number of community events and activities, as well as at meetings and launches/presentations.

## **Parenting Expo**

A Parenting Expo was held on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2008 forming a major activity for promoting the CfC Initiative and the importance of early years health and wellbeing in the Armadale area. Held in conjunction with Parkerville CYC (as also Community Partner) and with sponsorship from a number of local businesses its aim was to showcase parent and family support services. Included in the event were: stalls, providing information about children's childcare and recreational opportunities, nutrition, health, parental support and development programmes; workshops, including storytelling, stimulating early language, family rhyme time, drumming, information on 'being a father'; and entertainment, incorporating children's craft activities, puppet shows, dancing, singing and magicians.

The Parenting Expo was evaluated by a team of students from the Social Work and Social Policy Department, UWA. Participant and exhibitor surveys, comprising a brief survey instrument rating questions and using open-ended questions, alongside observations made by the researchers were used to evaluate this event. Their PowerPoint presentation of the evaluation is attached at Appendix 2. Findings are included in the later sections on **Achievements, Some Considerations and The Future.**

## **Children's Week**

CfCA participated in a park-based activity during Children's Week during **18 to 24 October 2008.** This also showcased activities of the CfCA as well as other services in the area and was in partnership with the City of Armadale.

## **Other Events**

Others events occurred which were not attended by the current LE and RA but were reported on separately through Meeting Minutes and other forms. These included Kelmscott Show held in October 2008 where approximately 150 information bags were handed out to families (minutes 6<sup>th</sup>

November 2008) and also the Minniwarra Festival was an identified event by CfCA. Forrestdale on Show was a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary fair for Forrestdale Primary School at which another 150 information bags were recorded as being given to attendees of the event. It was noted that many fathers attended this event. Blue Sky Day, focusing on mental health services, an event noted in C4C minutes, was not so well attended. Data from these events are also included, and will be identified where used from publicly available documentation.

## **Participation in Formal Meetings**

The LE and RA, separately and together, attended and participated in a number of Formal and semi-formal meetings. These included the:

- Community Partner Committee Meetings
- Advisory Committee Meetings
- Early Years Network meetings
- Armadale Kindy and Pre-Primary Teachers Network Meeting

## **Documentary Analysis**

The policies and procedures, including meeting minutes and other documents such as student reports (see below) provide valuable information.

## **Student AR processes**

An important source of data, especially covering a relatively early period in the life of the CfCA, was a University semester-long involvement with the CPs. Final year Social Work students were engaged by the previous LE to work alongside the CPs to provide active support in their design of evaluative frameworks.

Students were engaged with the understanding that Action Research was both a guiding principle of the project design and implementation and for the evaluation. This expectation emanated from the early CfC FaCSIA documentation and the previous LE's understanding of the process with projects being anticipated to use AR in their engagement with community members, in the design of the project activities and their implementation to reflect the needs and concerns of the participants in an ongoing planned reflective approach (Stringer 1999). In the event, AR was eventually omitted from the FaCSIA documentation and project workers generally were unaware of the AR expectations nor were they necessarily familiar with AR processes. Despite finding in earlier policy initiatives such as Reconnect and the early Stronger Families and Communities Strategy that AR contributed to programme outcomes (2003; Ryan 2003), this aspect of the Initiative seems to have been discontinued.

Students worked alongside projects in the CfCA for a full semester; familiarising themselves with the Strategy and Initiative as well as the CfCA; providing resources such as literature, journal articles and other potentially useful material; acting as 'critical friends' in matters of planning and implementation of activities; and finally providing a report to both the University and the project leaders of their own reflections of the semester.

This activity could have provided more benefits than it probably did as the CfCA was still in its relative infancy. Some of the projects had moved from the original host agencies; some staff were new; FaCSIA had yet to decide on its evaluative mechanisms; students and workers needed to familiarise themselves with each other and the purpose of student involvement, and importantly; the use of AR for any or all of the implementation was looking increasingly unlikely leading to misunderstandings between project workers and the students. Reflections from students on these activities will form part of the reports on projects.

Where material presented for the evaluation is drawn from public documentation it will be acknowledged as such. Otherwise, to protect the identity and anonymity of the people providing information, no such acknowledgement of data sources will be made.

### *Quantitative Data*

While most CPs provided quarterly reports the amount of quantitative data is small, reporting mostly on activities or satisfaction surveys and includes very little in the way of data able to be meaningfully analysed quantitatively. These data are available from the FP.

Probably the most meaningful set of quantitative data is the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). Additionally are the data from the evaluation of the Parenting Expo.

### **The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)**

An Australian government initiative, this index incorporates assessments from teachers on children's development on five domains: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development and communication skills and general knowledge. These are intended to indicate how well children have been prepared and supported prior to formal schooling. First started in the early 2000s, the AEDI now has comparative data on which to judge progress.

There are acknowledged difficulties with relying too heavily on the Index, for, as is acknowledged by AEDI, some data collection differs across domains; some numbers of children in specific locations are very small resulting in unreliable comparative statistics; assessment of children is based on teacher reports who may differ in experience of teaching and child

development or be new to the school and its children; areas are not uniform in their advantage/disadvantage characteristics thus skewing results favourably or unfavourably; subjective accounts are also possible and the movement of teachers/children can cause skewed results, amongst others.

However, the AEDI remains a useful additional tool to provide some snapshots of development of and trends in areas. Individual schools find the Index useful to consider the particular needs and circumstances of children entering their school, but these results are rightly not made public and unless the CfC programmes have good relationships with the schools, they are unlikely to have access to these results.

The analysis is discussed below.

### **The Parenting Expo**

As mentioned above this activity was a major feature in year three of the CfCA. It was evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative data which will be reported separately under **Achievements**.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

The CfCA has sought to enact the federal government's aim to be responsive to community needs and provide access to those most in need.

All projects were required by FaCSIA to include in their quarterly reports their assessments of success against specified milestones and agreed outputs. They are also expected to conduct their own evaluative processes, including assessments of user satisfaction.

### **The Community Partner Projects**

This section reports on the projects contracted to be delivered from the CPs including material from CP Quarterly Reports. CP meeting minutes, interview data, observations and student reflections.

#### **Communication Capers**

Therapy Focus was contracted to provide a variety of support processes for speech-developmentally delayed children in four target schools. This increased to service 8 schools and approximately 80 plus educators. Their support included assessment of children, professional development for teachers, materials for use in the classroom and support for parental and community involvement. While direct service for children in the Pre-Primary and Kindergarten classes of four schools (with one exception) was specified, note was made of the fact that schools did not appear to have been informed of the type and extent of service and that this and budgetary constraints may affect availability of staff for professional development.

Of all the projects funded under the CfCA, Therapy Focus appeared to be that most assiduous in their evaluative strategies and results, conducting pre and post assessment results for all children and evaluating the changes in teacher knowledge and skills. As mentioned earlier it is the only programme of its kind in WA. Therapy Focus nominated for a Promising Practices Profile in recognition of the innovative design, and especially noted the way schools have embraced the model, with teachers developing skills and using the resource packs effectively, leading to hoped for sustainability.

The final available full quarterly report (December 2008) notes that post evaluation of selected children outcomes is continuing and that various outputs are being effected. Perhaps most telling is the 'good news story'.

### *'Good News' Example<sup>4</sup>*

#### **Child**

During the playgroup session – child unable to say “f” words substituting it with “b”. Feet>beet – therapist worked with the child and parent to model strategies. In the next playgroup session – child said “fish” – showing emergence in saying “f words” - reinforcing that demonstrations in the session are really useful to provide early stimulation to help children with building language and literacy.

#### **Teacher**

*“We are really lucky to have the program. It has really made a difference with the children.”*

*“The Teacher PD and Resource Manual was really good. It’s great we get to keep the manual. It helped me review and refreshed what we have been practising.”*

*“wow – it’s simple – we can change the words in the song and model the actions to help the children learn language”*

#### **Parent**

At the initial session – parents stood/sat in the background or around the edges of the circle and observed. As the weeks progressed – they started to join-in. They now sit together with their children and participate together in the session – actually engaging with their child in the activity and interacting with their children. They really enjoy it.

### **It’s the Little Things/Young Parenting Programme**

This programme was initially called *It’s the Little Things* and commenced under the banner of The Gowrie. It was intended to reach young parents who did not currently access mainstream services through the provision of information and group activities.

As with several of the projects, appointing workers was not as straightforward as might have been thought and delays in staffing have affected the development of the project. Additionally young people who have been identified as not generally accessing mainstream services might also be expected to be hard to reach and engage, and the first and second year reports support this. Although referrals were made, group attendance tended not to continue. An extract from the Third Quarterly report of Year 2 illustrates some of the potential problems.

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<sup>4</sup> All ‘Good News’ Examples are drawn from the Quarterly Reports

Client was always difficult to talk to via phone and had problems with meeting face to face, discussed the option of home visit but client was not favourable to this request. Arranged face to face meeting client did not attend. Talked via phone as to what the reason for not attending meeting was, client suffers from low self esteem and decided not to turn up to meeting as she felt she had nothing to talk about, advised client that both myself and group is available if needed. Discussed situation with co-worker decided to not contact client for a week.

Group work is a specialised activity with the need for high levels of skill and planning for populations who exhibit the hesitations the Report identifies. The difficulty in engaging staff may have affected the planning necessary for these groups, or the workers may not have had experience in running and planning such groups.

By mid year of the third year the name of the project and its host agency had changed. Parkerville CYC now operated the programme under its changed title *Young Parenting Programme* and included at least one worker very experienced in group work and in working with young people.

Irrespective of worker skills in group work, the decision was made to re-focus to a case management approach to ensure young parents would receive the individual support and learning they needed. As pointed out by the student group working with the project during 2007, that while education, training and information services are important to enable young people to access the services they need, another important factor which often mitigates against people accessing services is their socio-economic circumstance. As Armadale was selected for its disadvantaged status it could be expected that income poverty along with being other resource-poor affects how well people are able to avail themselves of the services provided. Finance, transport, understanding of the importance of some of the services are just some of the likely contributors to keeping young people away from the services they need.

The other comment made from observations made by the student group reflected the identification by policy makers of a need without necessarily engaging fully with the local community and community members, of which young parents are likely to be amongst the least consulted group.

By December 2008 *The Young Parenting Project* had extended the project to link with the Armadale Variety Units to provide housing for homeless young parents as well as to continue a re-juvenated group and the provision of individual services.

The 'good news' story indicates the success of this programme.

### *'Good News' Example*

One of the clients had her baby hospitalised over Christmas and New Year as he needed surgery for ongoing medical problems.

The client was upset that they would need to spend her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday along with Christmas and New Years Eve in the hospital rather than with family and friends as planned. The client's mother arranged for a small surprise birthday afternoon tea at the hospital and invited her daughter's closest friends.

The friends that came were all members of the Young Parent Group and the client was very happy to have the support of these friends whom she had met through the group.

The Young Parenting Project staff were also invited and felt privileged to be part of this special occasion.

### **Network Exchange and Thriving Communities**

This programme initially incorporated two separate activities: encouraging the development of child friendly businesses and facilities, and a network development and support process. Originally located in The Gowrie, it was transferred to Wanslea in 2008.

On its establishment, the *Network Exchange Coordination* provided an extensive mapping of services and facilities in Armadale linked with some of the statistical information relating to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) designation of the locale. The project used a Geographical Information System (GIS) and produced detailed information on request to organisations, which, in 2007, included two primary schools who had expressed particular interest. It was thought that the detail provided in this information would be useful for services to apply for funding. Additionally, although not specified in the CfCA specifications, the student group working with Wanslea in late 2007 considered this to be able to contribute to the Asset Maps (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993) which form an essential part of a strengths approach. This, however, did not appear to continue to be part of the focus for the project.

Interestingly, as part of the National Evaluation activities a Baseline Report was issued in 2007, in which it was noted that Armadale was by far the best serviced of the areas surveyed with a total of 227 services including

education, health and support networks (Katz 2007). While a field work assessment, such as was conducted for several other of the sites, may have elicited additional information to counteract the perception that Armadale was over-serviced, the fact remained that there are indeed many services in the area. This was one of the realisations for service providers from the Parenting Expo. The GIS mapping married the SEIFA data with the services, indicating that Armadale was selected because of its socio-economic status, but that possibly coordination of service delivery was a need to be addressed by the allocation of CfC funding.

By the time the student group became involved the two projects had become merged into one. The students provided an analysis of the use of GIS to enhance its use in Armadale, and included identifying some of the potential drawbacks such as the possibility of the information being used as a surveillance mechanism. However the mapping exercise ceased a little while later, with the Thriving Communities aspect of the project taking on more of a profile.

Among the lasting activities of the Network Exchange was its participation in the Early Years Network and the Kindy and Pre-Primary Teachers Networks.

The Thriving Communities project was intended to raise awareness of families and children in the local area and have planners and businesses consider families and children in service provision and planning. It is this aspect of the project which has continued and has extended beyond the change in personnel.

Towards the end of Gowrie's involvement in the Thriving Communities part of the project it had become evident that the outputs required were not able to be delivered with the existing resources as noted in the final Quarterly report.

Clarification of outputs and outcomes is vital in a project such as this that is not simply delivering services to an identified population. Had commitment been made early in the project to clarify what was required and achievable with available resources, and necessary amendments been made to the project, more may have been achieved. The learning around this is that this project in particular requires the facilitating partner and the responsible community partner to work very closely together and be in agreement as to what is desired from the project, how work will be informed and what is reasonable to set as expectations for the project. If continued in year three, it would be valuable if this could occur and that the contract be reviewed quarterly to ascertain if any changes need to be made as a result of headway made in the previous quarter (Quarterly Report April-June 2007).

Feedback from CfC projects in other locations support these comments of a general lack of clarity concerning what was required and how programmes were to be enacted.

The contract for this project was awarded to another agency, Wanslea. By the fourth year and with a change of personnel, Thriving Communities was reporting the launch of a Child Friendly Website, strategies to encourage businesses to implement family friendly policies and participation in the networks of support.

### **Our Mob, Our Kids, Our Community**

The programme called **Our Mob, Our Kids, Our Community** was designed to provide health information and support to attend health services for Indigenous Mothers through:

- developing peer educators from the local Indigenous community
- facilitating the delivery of antenatal and post natal education in a culturally appropriate way manner (Quarterly Report December 2006)

The project really only started in 2007 and towards the latter half of the year efforts to engage mentors to provide education information to young women had met with little success. The principal reason was transport with few families having access to reliable transport and the distances needing to be covered requiring more than was possible to cover on foot. The issue of transport continued to be a problem as was noted in the final Quarterly Report in 2009.

A group of students appointed during the latter half of 2007 to work alongside the CfCA projects also noted the ongoing difficulties reported by the 'Our Mob' workers of the CfCA requirements as identified federally not necessarily being the most suited to the on the ground needs. This was also an issue mentioned in other projects. While not necessarily disagreeing with the broad focus for the CfCA in the need for antenatal and other paediatric information for young women, the programme workers believed that the time frame for implementation did not take into account the deep distrust the Indigenous community had towards mainstream health providers nor did it allow for other events occurring in the Indigenous community. Overall, the view was that needs had not been sufficiently canvassed with the community, rather only with some identified leaders in the community. In Indigenous communities it is often difficult to identify 'leaders' who fully represent all of the community.

By the first quarter of 2009 this service had moved to a central Hub for Indigenous activities and services thereby enhancing access to a range of services for Indigenous mothers.

Other outcomes included an increase in numbers attending the activities as well as the training of women to be mentors, which was an initial focus for the programme and which had been very slow to attract people to participate. Additionally,

significant partnerships were cemented with other support agencies such as the local public health centre, Derbarl Yerrigan and the Boodjarri Yorgas midwife. Young pregnant women and mothers are now accessing services in greater numbers. Perhaps more importantly the relationship with the state Department for Child Protection (DCP) has been strengthened through easier access to courses run at the Champion's Centre such as Domestic Violence and Protective Behaviours. Co-location has facilitated attendance when perhaps the young women may not have chosen to attend previously, but this choice to attend speaks to a greater level of trust that the DCP is not an agency to necessarily be feared as much as it has in the past when it was viewed as being primarily interested in removing children to ensure their safety rather than as being willing to work with families to ensure healthy and protected children (Quarterly Report).

Other advances include young pregnant teens speaking to school groups about teenage parenting.

#### *'Good News' Example*

In late January one of the mothers, who attended Our Mob for some years tragically died during a domestically violent episode. This event sent shockwaves through the community. Staff and other mums attending both Our Mob and Best Start programmes found it difficult to comprehend such a tragedy.

One of the Outreach Workers was contacted to give initial support and counselling to the deceased mothers children (13 children) other family members and close friends. More recently, the Outreach Worker was approached for counselling and emotional support by a family member who witnessed the crime and was having difficulty coping. The Outreach Worker has also found herself counselling mums whose families have both in the past and more recently experienced the trauma of family feuding.

The outreach Worker was also contacted by an Indigenous woman in the community who asked her to facilitate yarning with a grieving family and other community members using her counselling skills to help overcome their

grief and loss. This action was appropriate with Indigenous ways of working among women who traditionally support and encourage each other during major life events.

It is this type of engagement, which demonstrates clearly the trust that has been established between the indigenous women of Armadale and the workers at 'Our Mob'.

### **Parents Empowering Parents**

This programme was funded for delivery by the ACFC, and focused on supported playgroups with the intention of developing more playgroups and having parents providing support to each other and learning appropriate play and child engagement strategies through their involvement.

By January 2007 a playmobile had started, taking play information and toys to central locations. By early 2009 four sessions were being run each school holidays with the additional provision of specialised activities concerning the library, child health, and nutrition. Additionally family support advice and referrals were being made. This activity was to prove enormously popular being accessed by many different sections of the community including people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and fathers. For example in the third quarter of year two (in 2007), there was recorded a total of 26 Males (just under 10%) to 269 Females, as compared with only one man (3%) attending a playgroup in that period compared to 27 women.

The student group which worked alongside the PEP project in the latter half of 2007 reflected that some of the issues inherent in the four year CfC funded programme, with its expected outcome of self-sustainability, were problematic. This was particularly from their observation that parents were not necessarily aware that they were participating in a federally funded project with the expectation that they would be taking it over at the end of the funded period. While the CfC projects, including CfCA, were very clear in their promotions that theirs was a time-limited federally funded project, participants in projects and indeed recipients of services do not necessarily take note of the procedural or jurisdictional components of the services they access even when it clearly stated. But this observation by the student group reflects a more deep seated issue, which again can be associated with projects designed for groups and communities by people who are not themselves of those groups or communities. FaCSIA was responsible for the design and although an underpinning principle was that local communities were those to be engaged as they were best placed to provide the solutions to local issues, this did not necessarily mean that the people who would use the services

would recognise that they had a role to play in design, implementation, on-going planning and change. Much developmental work needs to be done with groups of people whose main interaction previously with services has been as recipients, but who are now expected to take active roles in the provision. That CfC generally and CfCA here had the time or resources to undertake this work as an essential part of developing sustainable community involvement was not part of the overall plan or, perhaps, understanding of the CfC designers in Canberra. This leads to the comment by an independent observing group, that developmental processes had not been put into place to engage people with the result that there was a certain amount of resistance exhibited by participants.

An added complication with the PEP was that it was designed prior to it being funded under the CfCA scheme and so engaged parents on quite different premises from those which were then required after the funding.

However, by 2009, while the third Quarterly report notes the reluctance of playgroup members to 'transition', that is to become self-supporting, there was one playgroup which took on the challenge with vigour. The main successful activity, though, continued to be the Playmobile where it was evidenced that parents were starting to take on leadership and other roles as well as engaging more with their children. In particular more fathers utilised this service than anticipated. This is a considerable achievement.

### *'Good News' example*

<p>Two parents, both from the Philippines originally began talking at a Playmobile session in the park and through that realized they had been studying at the same university at the same time in the Philippines. They linked up and now connect outside of the group. On another occasion two mothers, who both worked in Dubai at the Hilton found each other on Facebook and realised they lived in the same locality. They used the Playmobile as the meet point to catch up and reconnect as they both have children of a similar age.</p>
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### **Preparing the Path**

This project was another operated by Therapy Focus and was intended to work with child care centres to provide resources assisting children considered to be developmentally vulnerable to be school ready. Services included visiting families with children beginning kindergarten and providing information about how to prepare children for school: this project eventually reaching approximately 50% of all kindergarten families. Early activities included visiting Child Care Centres and Family Day Carers to engage their interest and collaboration in the project.

By March 2008 (the last available report) the PP project had increased the number of child care workers being made more aware of the importance of Early Brain Development, relevant strategies to encourage parents to assist in their children's school preparation and other information sessions such as the importance of Attachment.

### ***'Good News' Example***

*Two days after sending home the activity one parent came back told of how she had used the play dough with child, squeezing it, rolling it, and patting it. The child was then playing on his own rolling the dough while the parent began to prepare dinner. He asked his mother if he could go outside. His mother asked him to pack away his dough first to which he replied No not yet I am not finished I need to get something from out side. The parent watched as her child went and collected flowers and leaves from the garden to use with the dough. The parent then sat back at the table and chattered with the child asking what they were doing. The child then demonstrated how to make the patterns of the flowers and leaves in the dough by pressing gently. This activity progressed with a discussion of the appearance of each item, its colour, size, weight and texture. This led to the parent and the child going out to the fish pond to see if flowers and leaves would float or sink. The parent commented that they had had a lovely time even though it meant that dinner was served later than usual.*

### **SEEDS**

The *Supporting Engagement in Early Development Service (SEEDS)* differs from the other funded projects, in part that it is a *Communicare* project, but more that it originated primarily as a counselling service. However, in order to keep in line with the funding agreements, a group based activity was also developed to engage parents in learning parenting skills through a process called the *Parenting Party Plan*, which sought eventually to meet the sustainability outcomes required by the funding agreement with parents running the learning activities themselves. Both of these activities report throughout the period, constant numbers of parents and children booking counselling sessions and participating in *Party Plan* learning activities. While this work continues, the need for individual counselling is high, taking most of the available time, with little left to undertake some of the required networking and parent information tasks. This is particularly evident in the growing waiting lists for these services.

Reporting for both of these activities occurs through the *Community Partner Meetings* and, as at April 2009, when there was still uncertainty about on-going funding and the future of projects, the counselling arm of SEEDS was reluctant to take on new referrals, and the *Parenting Party Plan* were preparing further educational modules for parents to use.

## Parenting Expo<sup>5</sup>

Most people in the Armadale area became aware of the Parenting Expo through the Newspaper. Other people were informed of this event through community health nurses, people's own networks (friends and family) and workplaces, with many attendees and participants motivated by wanting information on parenting.

The Expo exhibitors and stall holders were surprised at how much interest there was across the community and even more surprised about the many people not aware of their services. Exhibitors noted the willingness of attendees to approach stalls requesting information. The messages and values conveyed in promotional material (brochures, pamphlets etc) provided by some services was an aspect highlighted by attendees, as conveyed by a service provider: "We have noticed a lot of negativity around putting children into childcare and need to address this in our literature". How information is provided, in what format and what subliminal messages are portrayed was an unintentional outcome but one which illuminates the need for dialogue between service providers and service users. The majority of exhibitors agreed they would again attend, or demonstrate, at another Expo.

Addressing CfC Initiative Aim 3, the focus of early learning and development, there was a wide range of activities for children and information available to caregivers. The stalls and workshops also acted to generate practical and activity based ideas for parents to take away and apply with children at home. Aim 4, evidence that Armadale is a child and family friendly community, was evident in the enactment of the Expo itself. Approximately 800 people attended, collaborative efforts of 75 agencies and support from the local business community is testimony to services and the broader community working together towards 'a child and family friendly community'. Interagency collaboration as an Aim while difficult to measure was again evidenced with the collaborative efforts of different organisations, agencies and businesses working together to organise, promote and then successfully run the Expo.

Recommendations for future Expo events from respondents was to encourage greater participation of the various Indigenous groups by including more Indigenous representatives, agencies and services as well as have Indigenous representatives involved in the overall organisation and decision making. This point is further emphasised by participants of the UnitingCare West run programme of *Our Mob* who strongly recommended that people affected by these projects have a say in the decision making processes.

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<sup>5</sup> Presentation of the statistical data is to be found under that heading

It was also suggested by attendees and organizers that the Expo finish at the advertised time with the possibility of having the event run on a Sunday. Stalls were packing up earlier than the advertised finishing time which prevented some participants, especially fathers, from benefitting from their services and information. Finally, feedback on improving future Expo's included the need to provide information on the workshops in the advertising of the event. The Expo event itself could also promote the workshops over a speaker system throughout the day.

Of most surprise was the realisation by many exhibitors of the range of services provided to Armadale, albeit many from outside the area, and most pleasing was getting to know these services and their providers. As a networking event it excelled.

Overall the Parenting Expo was a great success addressing the five aims of CfC. It is also an evident contributor to the development of human capital and potentially social capital.

## **Networks**

One of the main achievements reported almost across the board has been the way agencies which had previously perhaps not known of the work each other does, or worked together on projects had been able to form collaborative partnerships. This informal and formal networking aspect of the CfCA has been widely acknowledged.

### **Early Years Network**

The Early Years Network is counted as being one of the major achievements of the CfC programme, and certainly it continues to attract active membership. However, the network itself was started before CfC by School Principals and other Agency personnel concerned that children were attending schools little prepared for the more formal learning environment. Now coordinated by the CfC Facilitating Partner, the Network was one of the activities which needed to consider its future after the cessation of the current CfCA programme. By the final meeting before the end of the 2009 financial year the meeting recorded discussions about how to 're-invigorate' the Network, suggesting it had to re-focus to meet the needs and expectations of the members. Highly valued by many, yet no longer attended by some of the original members, it continues to provide a meeting place and exchange of information.

### ***Statistical data suggesting change***

The predominant statistical data comes from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). The Parent Expo yielded some statistical data as did some of the projects.

## AEDI

Bearing the concerns mentioned above in the Methodology section in mind, the most recent results for Armadale present the following ‘snapshot’.

<b>Armadale Summary</b>	<b>Number (%)</b>
Total number of children surveyed	736
Average age of children at completion	5 years and 5 months
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	134 (18.2%)
Children with English as a second language	20 (2.7%)
Number of other languages spoken by children surveyed	23
Children with special needs status (chronic physical, intellectual and medical needs)	17 (2.3%)
Children identified by teachers as requiring further assessment (e.g. medical and physical, behaviour management, emotional cognitive development, developmentally advanced tracking)	92 (12.5%)
Gender	Male 49% Female 51%

(AEDI 2009)

Of the total of 736 children, 80.8% had been in early education and care, ranging across the formal care types such as Day Care Centre, Kindergarten, Family Day Care (79.3%), and informal care such as in the care of grandparents other relatives or Nanny (8.3%).<sup>6</sup> However, it is also useful to look at the locations in which children tend more than in others to attend some form of formal early education, and typically the higher numbers are to be found in the more relatively advantaged locations.

Overall, 54.4% of children in the Armadale area generally are performing well on one or more domain compared to the national average of 67%, and 37.7% of children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain compared to the national average of 25%. Further, 19.9% are vulnerable on two or more domains compared to the national average of 12.6%. The considerations above taken into account, nevertheless these results suggest Armadale’s children and their families are still in need of specific support (AEDI 2009).

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<sup>6</sup> Some categories include others and so figures do not total 100%.

Some assessment has been made between the 2005 and 2008 figures and identified according to suburb, and so there are some indications of more positive changes in some places and areas where much still appears to be needed. For example Armadale itself was classified as a disadvantaged area on the SEIFA scale and seemed to retain a relatively high score from 2005 to 2008 on vulnerability on one or more domain, with a corresponding performing well on one or more domains improving slightly over the period.<sup>7</sup> However, when considering the vulnerability measures over two or more domains, Armadale has improved its position, but shows a slight reduction on performing well on two or more domains. The various other localities themselves will be analysing these figures to decide on appropriate strategies, but it seems clear that there is still considerable need for specific attention to one or more of the domains.

## **Parent Expo**

Another activity for which statistical data were collected was the Parent Expo.<sup>8</sup>

The overall response to the surveys indicated that the Parenting Expo greatly met the community's expectations with 27% of attendees and participants stating that the event exceeded their expectations. Community Health Nurses were awarded as being the most informative while 7% of respondents claimed that "they (agencies/stalls) were all good". Unfortunately, the workshops on offer were under utilised as most participants were unaware of these. In the future it is suggested that workshops be more widely advertised and information made available prior to the event.

In answer to whether the Expo increased peoples' knowledge on parenting skills 53% agreed with 28% strongly agreeing, 13% were not sure while 6% did not feel further informed. Half of the respondents said they would recommend the Expo to another person while just under half (47%) strongly supported recommending the Expo to others for future events. Again this same number (50%) supported the idea of an annual Expo while 47% strongly agreed. All participants who filled in the survey agreed they would again attend an Expo.

A significant finding was the high percentage of respondents who suggested they would attend a parenting programme as a result of the Expo: 36% agreeing, 23% strongly agreeing and 32% not sure. Only 9% were not in favour of attending a parenting programme. Overall people responded that the Expo provided them with a 'one-stop-shop' where lots of information was

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<sup>7</sup> Again, as data collection differs slightly across the indices, totals are more than 100%.

<sup>8</sup> The presentation slides are at Appendix 1

available with many brochures offering information and various 'experts' willing to speak with them.

The findings of the Expo were matched against CfC Initiative's 5 Aims.<sup>9</sup> Related to the first aim, 46% of respondents of the Expo were able to name an agency connected to recognising the importance of pregnancy and the overall health and wellbeing of children 0-5 years. The supporting parents and families aim resulted in 22% of participants attending the Expo to obtain information, with 15% gaining information to help in parenting. Over half of the participants (53%) agreed that their knowledge and skill base had increased as a result of the Expo with a further 28% who strongly agreed that they had gained information that further developed their skills. Of significance is the 59% of participants who stated they would follow up a parenting programme as a result of their participation and/or attendance at the Expo, as mentioned above.

## **Project Data**

While some of the projects collected data either in the form of numbers or which could be converted into numbers, for the most part this was not statistically significant enough for it to be valid as qualitative data, and was more useful to be analysed alongside the qualitative data.

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<sup>9</sup> Aims 2-5 are reported in the Parenting Expo section in Achievements.

## **SOME CONSIDERATIONS**

This section will reflect on some of the concerns reported and observed through the evaluation period.

### ***High Turnover of Staff and Others***

As has been mentioned, the CfCA has evidenced a very high level of staff turnover, within the projects, the Facilitating Partner and the Local Evaluator. Some feedback from people who have observed the process over the CfCA lifespan suggests that this had consequences for continuity as well as the loss of collective histories, wisdom and some skills and knowledge. It is unavoidable that there should be turnover; it is a well recognised part of the non-government sector, and measures to avoid it entirely are unlikely to succeed. Nevertheless, it is a consideration and could be included in policy designs, particularly in relation to adequate handovers, training and supervision.

Staffing has been shown to be a concern for some projects; engaging the appropriate staff with the appropriate skill level at the time needed. Unfortunately with time limited projects and funding provided from an agency without a good understanding of the particular locality, there is a heavy reliance on the local agency, in this case the Facilitating Partner, to be responsible for ensuring the projects funded do indeed have the required staff with the skills. This raises the issue of undue interference in Community Partner agencies, and the ongoing potential for unwanted surveillance and could sour local relationships. This has not been found in this case, but the issue of staff turnover has led to a lack of clarity and understanding of the projects, the processes to be used and resulted in delays which could affect the performance of the overall CfCA.

The FP can rightly point to a possible delay in achievement of the Initiative in some parts being due to the on-going turnover of staff.

### **Skills**

Having, maintaining and developing the necessary skills for the work required has been shown to be an issue in employment for some of the staff of the projects. This is especially crucial in these areas where staff have to work with some of the most challenging of circumstances. The non-government sector is acknowledged as not paying as well as counterparts in government and therefore attracting skilled staff is always going to be difficult. While many very skilled workers choose to work for less pay because they want to work in the non-government sector, funding, which will be mentioned later, needs to be sufficient to attract skilled staff.

## **Training**

Training of staff is related to high turnover, with the skill level required possibly affecting performance. The skill level required for some of the processes has already been referred to and the need for attention to this is also included here. However, of additional importance is how training and ongoing learning is ensured when staff turnover is so high. There has been little provision for ongoing professional development for staff in the projects and this is a matter of great importance and need. NGOs usually have little resource capability to ensure that their staff receive the necessary professional development and this should be built into future project funding.

## **Adequate and ongoing professional supervision**

Professional supervision is also usually not built into project funding, but, as with training, supervision is essential for good practice, especially with the nature of the CfC Initiative which deals with some highly vulnerable children with complex needs. This is another of those matters which should be built into such programmes as the CfC.

## ***Clarity of purpose and process of the CfC***

It has been widely reported elsewhere that the CfC initiative has not been fully understood by those participating in it as Community Partners and especially by those who are its targets. This should have been addressed by the consultative process and community engagement that is hailed as its innovative design. However, these comments also apply in the case of the CfCA. We have seen that for some people, no matter how well advertised the project might be, their engagement with its services are on their terms which may or may not include seeing the purpose or aims of the programme. This was particularly so for some parents using playgroups and for Indigenous users of services.

One of the reasons for lack of clarity and some confusion existing can be related to the issue of changes in staff. Another reason could be the perceived lack of inclusion in the consultative process of both staff and service users.

The CfC initiative is a complex design and may not readily be understood by those people who are the targets. The most often cited outcome of the Initiative in Armadale has been the exchange of information between agencies and learning what each other does. In this policy age of specialisation and competition, this is a great achievement. This focus, while vital, does not necessarily engage the hardest to reach people in taking on the leadership roles required to advance inclusion and self-determination in the development of sustainable social capital. Many service users often remain on the fringes of service delivery and are disengaged from agencies, sometimes for reasons of mis-trust, others for lack of knowledge. While the

CfCA has had great success in numbers of flyers and pamphlets distributed, this does not necessarily result in active engagement with clear explanations of design and these are the next processes for programmes such as this.

An associated matter is the question of what constitutes community. As already mentioned, locations were selected on the basis of disadvantage and then understood as communities, when, in the case of Armadale, the areas included contain very different sections of the population. Even within disadvantaged areas, different needs exist requiring very different strategies. An example may be found in the Parenting Expo which tended in general to attract people who already had parenting as a recognised value – it doesn't attract people for whom 'parenting' is not acknowledged as being of first importance and these may be the hardest but most important of families to reach.

A final matter in this section relates to the perception in the community and by agencies of CfC. It has been reported that the primary association made is with programmes and the agencies who run them without necessarily knowing or recognising their association with CfC and the Facilitating Partner. While CfC has ensured every event is 'badged' a CfC event, this does not necessarily extend to a recognition factor. Agencies, for very good reasons, wish to be recognised as being their own entities and to be able to demonstrate, especially to past and future funders, the work they are doing and the achievements made. This can directly oppose the intent of CfC which is to present a collaborated coordination of services. Ownership and primacy are difficulties to be faced and solved.

### *Inconsistency of design and process*

There is a fundamental disparity between the stated processes of the Initiative's design and how communities were selected in the first place. Disadvantaged communities were identified and expected to perform their own needs identification, yet, clearly this needs assessment was conducted by agency representatives, some of whom were not local in the sense of having been in a prolonged relationship in and with the community. It is one matter to deliver services to an area, and quite another to live in the locale. In the case of Armadale, only one of the Community Partners 'lived' in the area prior to the CfCA, even though others had had a presence in the form of service delivery. The design, while having merits, is inconsistent and could be re-thought for future programmes to either provide a social development (Muirhead 2001) purpose, that is a universal set of programmes to address needs ascertained by experts, or to engage community members in truly identifying their needs and the processes they want used to have them met. If FaHCSIA's forward plan is to engage in community development not social development, then better involvement of local people to define their needs is necessary. There is also inconsistency with purportedly taking a 'strengths'

perspective when the entire focus of community identification and needs identification is from a 'deficit' approach. This is not a criticism of CfCA which fulfilled the requirements of its contract, but a criticism of the Initiative as a whole, which unfortunately could not be changed by the actions of one FP in one place.

## **Strengths Approaches and Action Research**

As referred to earlier one of the issues which confronted the student group in working with the projects in 2007 was the seeming lack of knowledge of both a strengths approach and Action Research, when these were clearly principles underpinning the original SFCS and indeed a strengths approach still appears in its documentation. Some of the CPs had been made aware of the desire for AR as it appears in their evaluation plans. However, it was clear that AR had not been part of the Community Planning or the engagement of CPs. One result of this is that in the designation of locations to receive CfC funding, the only criteria which are perceived to be important are those that list the deficits. The existing strengths of the communities are not acknowledged or used as part of the strategies for change. Communities themselves are not encouraged to think of themselves as anything other than failures and in need. This denies the reality in Armadale which did evidence considerable strengths prior to the CfC Initiative identifying it as a location. The Early Years Network was strong before the Initiative, providing good groundwork for the establishment of the CfCA; some schools had started to reframe their service delivery and people in the community had shown interest and participation in activities for change.

FaHCSIA could well be encouraged to return to these principles for inclusion in future funding, especially as evaluation reports elsewhere, particularly of the Reconnect programme show the positive effects of both a strengths approach and Action Research.

## **Community and individual needs**

The comments above also relate to the design emphasis on collective and community services, support and eventual provision as sustainable activities. However, some individual needs overshadow collective and community activities, as have been indicated by some of the projects. The programme is an important recognition of the need for community support, but the reality of individual provision by welfare agencies, especially government and government funded, is bound by strict criteria, there are long waiting lists and some of the intermediate 'needs' fail to gain service. Services for the area do not necessarily either reach all the people or do not meet the needs of the most disadvantaged. In the long run these needs surface in other forms, such as

those for which the CfC was designed to address as a preventive measure in the first place, social disengagement, poor health outcomes, low educational performance and so on. The CfC design in general is always going to be confronted by this paradox unless other forms of resourcing are addressed, necessitating ongoing and deliberate policy agreements with the relevant jurisdictions. In particular infrastructure from other jurisdictions is an essential issue, such as transport and other infrastructure in disadvantaged areas.

### *Adequacy of Resourcing*

CfC is a federal resource directly made to local communities, and as has been mentioned above, other resources are needed to address many of the associated unmet needs. Questions could also be raised about the adequacy of the resources, which are modest for the outcomes they expected over the specified time period. Resourcing is not only a matter of direct payment for delivery of service, which may only translate into part time workers, semi or non-professional staff, restricted hours of service, etc, but also does not provide for those matters raised earlier of training, ongoing professional development and supervision. Some comments in the community suggested that for the amount of funds perhaps a decision to fund well one or two services might be preferable to the funding of many but inadequately. These are matters for consideration by FAHCSIA.

### **Funding**

A final issue related to the general matter of resources is that of direct funding and the time it took to provide the CfC funds to both FP and thereby the CPs. These funding arrangements meant that the CfCA was expected to meet its deadlines and outcomes over a period of two and a half years instead of the four it had expected. This seriously affected the ability of CPs to meet their outcomes. As has been mentioned earlier, some sections of the community take a considerable while to become involved. Some sectors, such as the Indigenous sector, although this is by no means the only one, have had previously difficult relationships with authorities and do not necessarily differentiate between government and non-government as authoritative.

The design of the CfC Initiative supposed that agencies selected to be CPs would already have good relationships with the community, which is only partly evidenced. Many agencies do not yet have a working relationship with the group of people who are most likely the most hard to reach and the most disadvantaged. This takes a great deal more time than was available in the Initiative, even had Armadale been able to function fully for four instead of two and a half years.

Additionally and as an extension of this concern, funding was also sometimes delayed to the CPs, thereby severely affecting their ability to function. Some agencies were contracted for the whole period of the Initiative, enabling them to plan around unforeseen events, whereas others were on yearly contracts, restricting their planning abilities.

Funding is a general issue with many consequences. FaHSCIA needs to reconsider how this is provided in the future to avoid these issues.

## **Other Resources**

Other resources include other service providers and the surprise shown by agency personnel at the Parenting Expo suggests that not only did they not know the resources available to them, these resources could be better coordinated to collaboratively provide targeted services for families and children. A concerted effort to follow up on all these other agency resources could be a focus for the Networking activities under the auspices of an Armadale based Network.

## ***Consultation***

Consultation is another of those terms widely used but subject to a variety of meanings generally making it a vexed and vexing process. Some reports suggest that consultation is really providing information with little two way dialogue and this was a perception of some of the CfCA Initiative. It is acknowledged that the overall design and the process originally required by FaCSIA left little room for the sort of lengthy consultation that communities and community people often would like, especially given the specific target of the Initiative on the early years. People who would like attention paid to school children would necessarily be disappointed. However that may be, more attention is needed to ensure community people believe themselves to have been sufficiently consulted through a number of mechanisms. Relying on community 'leaders' and agency personnel is only one form. Importantly, and this invokes the earlier discussion concerning staff skills, consultative processes themselves are not inherent, they have to be learned and practiced to become skilful. Training and development in these skills could well be a focus for the future. This is particularly so for working with different cultural groups and Indigenous people whose communication and decision making processes may differ considerably from the hierarchical formal processes some groups adopt.

## **Previous Work in Armadale**

While it is clear that the CfCA has many achievements, it also needs to be acknowledged that some of these are less new achievements or newly created activities, but have built on existing work in Armadale. The Early

Years Network is one of these. The raising of the profile of the needs of young children and their families also built on work that started from the state government prior to the federal initiation of the SFCS and subsequent CfC initiative. Prior to the commencement of the CfCA, the WA government had an Early years policy 2003-2006 covering ages 0-8yrs, which sought to provide services to this group and their families. Building on acknowledged strengths and abilities not only meets the 'strengths' component of the original SFCS and CfC Initiative, but it is also an invaluable engagement tool.

## **THE FUTURE**

As part of the interviewing process, a question was asked of respondents, what could be done differently? and what could be done in the future? This section summarises those responses and draws from the above discussion on Some Considerations.

### ***Suggested changes or services***

#### **Extend the age range**

Many people found the focus just on the 0-5 year olds to act against what might have been useful for the rest of the family and suggested extending the age range. This has now been done with regard to extended funding for the next phase of the programme, but it is worth noting that services for families and encouraging their inclusion in support services will be more developmental if at least other siblings, if not other family members can have their concerns addressed in some way, perhaps such as adequate referral, and initial provision of information, if not ongoing service provisions.

#### **Ensure individual needs are serviced**

Of great concern was the tendency to overlook individual needs in favour of collective and community supports. Social capital can only ever develop out of the adequate development of human capital. The future conditions of poor educational and employment outcomes, poor health and inadequate social competence in particular that CfC was intended to address will continue to occur if individual needs are not addressed.

#### **Promote good mental health**

Mental health and wellbeing is at the foundation of the CfC Initiative, yet Mental Health as a term almost always invokes negative responses being reframed as Mental Illness and as such carries with it a stigma which deters many people from accessing services they think carries that interpretation. Overcoming this requires extensive education and information campaigns, especially in areas where the culture is suspicious or mistrustful of any authority or mental health authorities.

#### **Greater attention on fathers**

While there were specific programmes targeting fathers, many people believed greater attention could be made towards including fathers and encouraging their involvement.

## **Local activities, building on local knowledge by local people**

The feedback almost uniformly advocated a strengths approach in which it was recognised that local resident agencies have the knowledges, skills and energy to provide the necessary programmes and services. In particular there was a call to reframe a model to reduce the potential for entrenching a hierarchy of control, favouring much more a collaborative model of equal partners.

### ***Continue the focus***

Above all, the overwhelming feedback was of support for programmes which addressed the needs of young children and their families in coordinated and collaborative ways. It is important therefore that this does not become considered as an achieved goal and the policy direction move onto another area.

### **Continue the support for networks**

While networks generally were one of the most acknowledged successes of people's involvement in and with the CfCA, all respondents recognised the amount of work that is needed to ensure they continue and that they meet the needs of those who participate. They should be democratic and participative, but can run the risk of only meeting the agenda of those who run them. Agencies generally do not provide the resources within their funding to manage networks and rely largely on volunteer labour. People who value networks therefore tend to be overworked, or the networks cease. Yet, almost all of the respondents stated how valuable the network meetings were or have been with sharing information, learning new strategies or activities and meeting new service providers. Where networks start to fail, such as not meeting the needs of members, or being seen as vehicles to promote the interests of only sections of the membership, members will then abandon them.

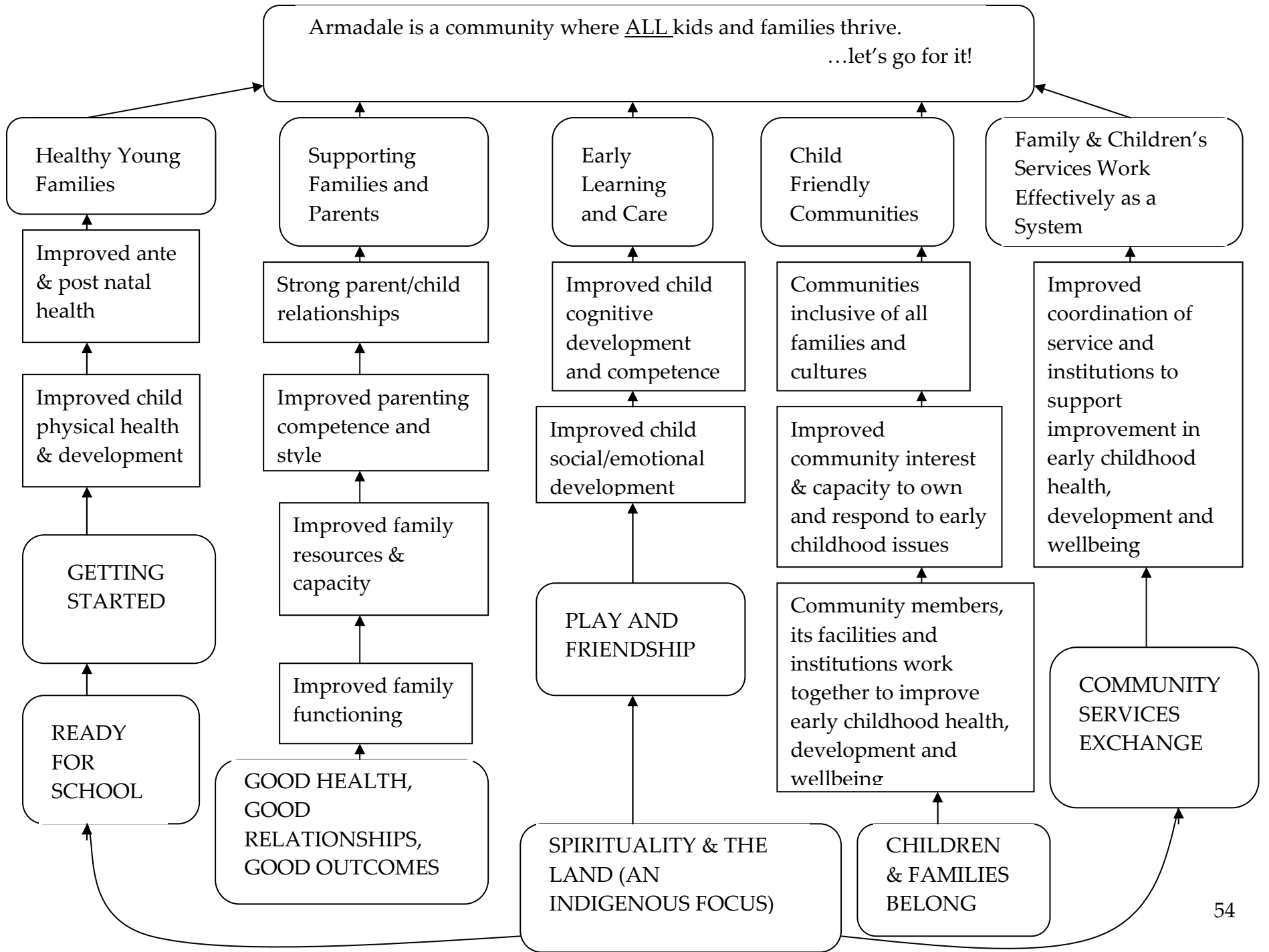
### **Continue to resource projects which have worked**

While the model of CfC has mixed reception, there was overwhelming support for many of the projects which are considered to have worked. These include those which target young children but which have not been officially part of CfCA. Some of the programmes at schools are examples as are those offered by non CfCA agencies such as libraries and the Shire.

## **APPENDICES**



*Appendix 1. First Community Plan 2005*



*Appendix 2. Parenting Expo, presentation slides*



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