



Integrating Responses To Needs and Risk Of Cairns South Children and Families

Summary of findings and key forward strategies

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Cairns South Collective Impact Project

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Building a village to support children and families in Cairns South

The Cairns South Collective Impact (CI) Project aims to improve outcomes for children living in Cairns South (aged 0-12 years). The Project has identified **building integration around responses to need and risks** associated with children as a priority area of reform. 'Need' in this context refers to a child's (and sometimes also a parent's) need for some level of additional support. Risk refers to the risk of substantively negative outcomes, including entry into the child protection system.

The overarching goal of the **Needs/Risk Strategic Change Project** is to ensure better integrated identification and assessment of, and response to need/risk for younger children living in Cairns South (0 to 6-years). To achieve this, the CI Project has consulted through interviews and focus groups with (mainly Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) community members and a broad range of stakeholders. Participants were asked to share their views on (i) elements of effective integration in identification of and responses to need and risk; along with (ii) how well integrated current responses to need/risk are, what's working well and how we might monitor and evaluate responses to need/risk in a Cairns South context. This work will inform development of a *Framework for Integrated Child and Family Needs Assessment for Cairns South*.

Defining integration and associated problems

The definition of integration used in this work has four interdependent elements, as follows:

- A. responses to need and risk distributed across time, with a strong focus on early intervention;
- B. casting the net as wide as possible in terms of who responds to need/risk, with families, community, service providers, business and all levels of government working together;
- C. cohesion and coordination within and across universal, secondary or tertiary levels organisations responding to need/risk; and
- D. cohesion and coordination *across place*: ensuring that local needs and perspectives influence decision-makers (including funders) sitting outside of, and building stronger collaboration across Cairns South.

Early intervention/prevention requires stepping in as early as possible in a child's life, or in the life of an issue impacting on a child. There are currently significant problems of service integration in an early intervention/prevention context, including continued over-resourcing of tertiary interventions and difficulties within universal services' responses to need/risk. Also problematic is the exclusion from understandings of early intervention/prevention of the important role of families and community. Community cohesion and connection between families and between family and the broader community, family and community empowerment – these are essential to increased child wellbeing. Common drivers of risk within families and community level (such as unemployment, homelessness) may also be overlooked in current responses.

Problems of service delivery integration occur at points of identification/assessment of and subsequent responses to need/risk. Integration between universal and secondary services and Child Safety is impacted by a lack of consensus around or understanding of the latter's role and responsibilities. Family and Child Connect (FACC) is not being accessed to the degree it might be to assist with responses to need/risk. Assessment of and responses to need/risk are also often siloed. For e.g., problems arise in case coordination and referral processes. Inconsistency or instability of funding can lead to 'piecemeal' service delivery and decisions about funding and policy are generally made outside of and in many instances without the participation of those living and working in Cairns South.

What's working well

Existing initiatives identified as working well include population level and early childhood programs (including child care, Nurse Family Partnership, parenting programs). Initiatives that respond to family unit issues, along with tertiary level initiatives targeting higher-risk children and young people (preventing escalation of issues) are highlighted as beneficial. Initiatives and strategies that recognise and build capacity of families and community as responders to need/risk are also identified as positive. These effectively engage families (for e.g. through soft entry and no wrong door policies), work from a strengths-based perspective (for e.g., Child Safety's Family Led Decision Making, Aboriginal Community Control in health spaces focused on family and child wellbeing) and also encourage collaborative practice across organisations. Community hubs, local playgroups and outreach services are all highlighted, along with initiatives sitting outside of formal service provision (e.g. men's groups). In terms of integrated service delivery, infrastructure (e.g. a hub for co-located service provision), collectives of organisations (for e.g., Early Childhood Community Networks) and panel-type structures that bring together stakeholders to work with individual children/family units are all identified as worthwhile when well implemented. In terms of integration across place, some organisations are collecting local perspectives from community members and local stakeholders (e.g. on what is needed in service provision) to inform policy and practice, also seen as great practice.

Emerging strategies and an integration framework

Early intervention/prevention should be targeted at key points in time and place: where there is more opportunity to connect with larger groups of parents, where risk is higher and/or intervention is going to make the most positive difference. To build community and family responses, more initiatives focused on parental wellbeing are required. At a community level, strategies to increase awareness about what children need and how to family and community respond to this is also required. There is a very strong focus on setting up a community hub, both to increase access to services and to build connection for community.

Also suggested is the need to integrate service delivery through mapping of services and of most effective service provider responses to need/risk, improved coordination of case management, upskilling of universal services and more effective collaboration between the latter and secondary services.. The need for a common agenda and shared measures centred around improved outcomes for children have also been identified as essential, as is increased or re-aligned resourcing to better respond to local priorities (focused on early intervention/prevention) and to ensure stronger levels of integration. There is support for exploration of use of a shared tool for assessment of need/risk.

Key integration strategies for improved outcomes



Key Forward Strategies (continued)

A: Integrating responses for children at high risk

- Development of stronger, shared and collaborative proactive assessment and coordinated response mechanism focused on high risk children in all sectors that report/respond to risk.
- Development of a strong third-party but place-based oversight of response coordination and success monitoring within a collective mechanism established.

B: Prioritising effort to support high needs children

Implementation of the #Whatever it Takes (#WEIT) program within a case school prepared to trial new approaches to responding to high needs children. Development of a stronger and shared wellbeing assessment tool and its trial in a host (early years) school environment. Development and trial of a school-hub like response mechanism for proactive assessment and coordinated responses focused on high needs children. Bolstering of the presence and role of key early years universal capacity support services.

For both [A] and [B]

- The development of shared definitions of high risk and high needs and shared underpinning support data.
- Aligned economic cost analysis of reduced costs and benefits arising from the above actions.
- Strong ethical/data privacy safeguards established and refined to underpin these actions.

C: Increasing indigenous voice and indigenous support hub

- Strategic support for emergence of the Cairns South Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Families and Youth as a strong local voice coordinator
- Prioritise and support the emerging community hub proposals being established.
- More Indigenous leadership positions within organisations such as Child Safety.

D: Role of families and wider community

- Continue to deliver a wide-ranging information/promotion campaign about adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and build a collective approach to raising childhood resilience across the Cairns South Community;
- Co-design and progress a *Local Champions* approach to drive this messaging deeply within the community.
- Build on existing initiative (Benevolent Society) to regularise a Children's Services Fair in Cairns South

E: Early intervention/prevention: integration across place/organisations

- Build on annualised CI Project process (Governance System Analysis) to review and test new preventative service delivery options, and to test whether they require a budgetary response and/or enhanced community access to and engagement with existing programs/services.
- Progress and regularise an annual cycle of budget, program and service (coordinated) influence, through the CI Project Backbone.
- Increase capacity and connectivity of existing service organisations in Cairns South (particularly for universal and secondary services).

F: Integrated governance for Collective Impact

- Maintaining a place-based and integrated focus on achieving needs/risk reforms by way of independent and focussed leadership provided by the CI Project Backbone (\$250,000 per annum for five years minimum) and ongoing CFC (Communities for Children) support for Mission Australia to operate the required Collective Impact governing structures.