



Children and Families Strategy 2010 – 2013

Children are precious and need to be nurtured; they have a right to contribute to the present and of course are our future.

(Endorsed by Council on 12 April 2010)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The City of Armadale is committed to identifying opportunities and creating settings to optimise the development of our children and to support families with this vital task. The term ‘Children and Families’ is very broad as it relates to children (aged 0 -12), parents, carers, siblings and grandparents, and applies to families of all structures. This includes single parent families, two parent families, foster families, grandparents caring for grandchildren and same sex couples with children.

This Children and Families Strategy provides a broad framework to guide the City’s efforts in engaging and supporting children and families over the next three years. While there are some specific projects outlined, many strategies require a community-based approach in which the City’s role will vary depending on the capacity of external agencies to respond. In essence, the Strategy sets out a mechanism where by:

- Issues are clearly identified;
- Community-wide responses are developed;
- The City’s role in those responses is clearly defined.

Consistent with the City’s approach as the service provider of last resort, officers will always look to capacity in the community for responses before considering taking on direct service delivery. There are many benefits in this ‘Maximum Outcome with Minimum Intervention’ approach including:

- Building capacity in local organisations;
- Creating an environment of collaboration between stakeholders;
- Engendering ownership of issues and solutions;
- Far greater pool of expertise to consider issues and responses;
- Significant advocacy power to other levels of government.

Most significantly, this approach works towards creating a stronger, more resilient and sustainable community.

2. CONSULTATION

In order to identify specific needs of children within the community various consultation methods have been and are utilised by the City of Armadale. These are:

- Parent’s Survey in September 2008
- Key Stakeholders and Children’s Service Providers Forum in September 2008
- Child Care Needs Analysis in October 2008
- Ongoing consultation with service providers through the Armadale Early Years Network since 2004 – monthly meetings
- Ongoing partnership with Department of Health for the Immunisation Program and venue availability for Child Health Nurse services
- Ongoing consultation with schools
- Ongoing partnerships with community organisations for various projects

- Population growth forecasting through i.d Profile program based on Census data

3. NATIONAL CONTEXT

The Australian Early Development Index

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a measure of how well the community has supported the development of their children before school. It can provide communities with a tool to help understand what seems to be working well and what may need to change in their community to support families.

Using this evidence-based tool to underpin programs and services developed and implemented in Armadale means that families can be assisted in the areas where they need it the most. The purpose is to help parents to provide the best opportunities for their children to reach their full potential, thus starting the process of these children growing up to be the best parents they can be and improving the life prospects of future generations.

The AEDI is based on the scores from a teacher-completed checklist. The AEDI Checklist consists of around 100 questions and measures five areas of child development:

- Physical health and well-being – Child is healthy, independent, ready each day.
- Social competence – Child plays, gets along with others and shares, is self confident.
- Emotional maturity – child is able to concentrate, help others, is patient, not aggressive or angry.
- Language and cognitive development – child is interested in reading and writing, can count and recognise numbers, shapes.
- Communication skills and general knowledge – child can tell a story, communicate with adults and children, articulate themselves.

The AEDI is conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.

Between May and July in 2009, the AEDI data was collected for over 261,000 children, representing 98 per cent of all Australian children in their first year of full-time school. Each year the study will be carried out nationally.

In 2005 the City of Armadale was one of the first communities in Australia to undertake the AEDI and consequently is also one of the first geographical regions to have repeated the AEDI.

4. LOCAL CONTEXT

The AEDI data has provided a credible framework on which to base the City's Children and Families strategy, as it provides an accurate picture of the development of Armadale's children and an indication of the specific areas of need requiring attention.

Along with being cognisant of what the current AEDI results are and the implications of those results, initiating and maintaining partnerships with other organisations whose core business it is to support children and families is a key approach underpinning the City's Children and Families Strategy.

Within the municipality are a dedicated group of children's service providers and key stakeholders from state government, federal government, locally based community organisations and larger community organisations that operate in Armadale. In varying degrees the City partners and works with many organisations and services providers, including:

- Challis Child Development and Parenting Centre
- Parkerville Child Advocacy Centre
- Communities for Children (Communicare)
- Armadale Early Years Network
- Department of Education - Primary schools
- Armadale Community Family Centre
- Department for Child Protection
- Department of Health
- Department for Communities
- Minnawarra House
- Centrelink
- Crossways Community Services
- Australian Red Cross
- Playgroup WA

The local knowledge and expertise of many of these service providers, along with others, was captured at a Children and Families Service Provider's Forum hosted by the City of Armadale in September 2008. A Parent's Survey was also conducted during the same month, with the following information collected:

- Majority of respondents cared for children aged 5 years and under, with most families containing 1 – 3 children
- The top 3 current issues facing respondents were childcare (needing affordable, good quality care, including out of school hours care), health (ie long waiting lists for services) and education (concerns about appropriate schools and quality of curriculum)
- The top 3 known available services were Child Health Nurses, Speech Therapists and the School Dental service.
- The top 3 areas that respondents believed would make a difference in their lives as parents were better parks and playgrounds, more children's activities/programs and good quality, affordable child care services.

- The 3 top future opportunities requested were an indoor pool/jungle gym centre, more children’s activities/programs and better parks and playgrounds.

Based on the information provided from the Parent’s Survey, and the discussion and recommendations generated at the Forum, a draft action plan was developed focusing on the key areas of Health, Out of School Hours Care, Education, Safety and the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). Programs and activities that have been implemented to address the key areas include:

- Nutrition Education programs in the community
- Nutrition in Schools Grant
- Child Care Information Forum
- AEDI Presentations
- Children’s Week events
- Drama Programs
- Intergenerational Playgroup

Other initiatives and programs implemented to benefit children and families across the City of Armadale’s departments include:

- 11 Parenting and Literacy Programs for children aged 0 – 12 at the City’s Libraries
- Immunization program implemented by the City’s Health Department and the Department of Health
- Indigenous Children’s Program implemented at the City’s Indigenous Development Centre, the Champion Centre
- Children’s Fitness Programs (both for toddlers and older children) at the City’s Recreation Centre, the Arena.
- Community Grants Programs to assist School P & Cs, Playgroups and Toy Libraries
- Playground Strategy to ensure safe, accessible, imaginative playgrounds are built and maintained in the City of Armadale
- External children’s service providers are based in the City’s facilities ie; Child Care services, Child Health services, and Family Day Care services.
- Planning for future facilities for children and families (ie shared use school sites) based on population growth forecasts

5. KEY FOCUS AREAS

This Children and Families Strategy takes a holistic community-wide approach incorporating the issues previously described in a framework with four key focus areas:

- **Physical health and wellbeing (AEDI Domains)**
- **Language and Cognitive Development and Communication Skills and General Knowledge (AEDI Domains)**
- **Strengthening networks;**
- **Identifying the City’s role**

6. PRIORITIES

While there are many areas in which the City will continue to support children and families, there will be a need to focus significant resources, including staff time, on the following emerging issues:

- Monitoring the Australian Early Development Index results annually, as the data collected on each of the 5 AEDI domains will influence the direction of programs and services implemented and supported by the City.
- Identifying funding opportunities and key stakeholders to support the progress of community hubs on school sites to provide maximum accessibility of services to families in the familiar environment of the local school.
- Planning for an appropriate number and type of services and facilities relating to families and children to be available and accessible to the communities residing in high-growth areas, while ensuring that existing services and facilities are maintained and reviewed in the established areas of Armadale.
- Identifying and developing strategies to engage with and to respond to the needs of the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) community.

7. STRATEGIC PLAN LINKS

This strategy aligns with the City's Strategic Plan in the following ways:

2. Building Our Community.

Aim: Encourage community participation and responsibility.

- Foster a supportive and caring community.
- Deliver a range of services to meet community needs.
- Improve the overall well-being and safety of the community.

CITY OF ARMADALE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STRATEGY 2010 – 2013

Focus Area 1 PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Aim

To promote quality childhood nutrition, physical activity and access to health services to the community

Strategies

- Promote and support Nutrition in Schools programs: work with primary schools and the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Community Health to identify priority areas and develop initiatives to address these
- Promote and support Nutrition and Physical Activity Education: work with local community organisations to identify priority target groups and develop appropriate programs
- Promote physical activity programs to parents/carers in the community via events such as Children's Week and through staff working with the community directly such as Child Health Nurses
- Liaise regularly with junior sporting clubs through the City's Club Development Officer.

Key Success Factors

- Higher number of schools including nutrition programs in their daily curriculum
- Ongoing attendance of community members at Nutrition programs
- Wide distribution of health promotion materials at events and through agencies

Focus Area 2 LANGUAGE AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT (AEDI Domain) and COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE (AEDI Domain)

Aim

To promote and support childhood literacy and language development in a community context

Strategies

- Support and promote literacy, language and learning programs at the City's libraries for children aged 0 -12
- Coordinate drama based programs to encourage language and communication skills for children aged 8 -12
- Support community-supported playgroups (including the intergenerational playgroup supported by the City and Dale Cottages) to encourage language development communication skills in the 0 -5 age group

- Facilitate Community Forums about early brain development and the importance of communicating with and reading to children from birth
- Incorporate literacy and reading activities and distribution of resources at community events

Key Success Factors

- Attendance numbers of children and parents/carers at Library programs, drama programs and playgroup
- Community interest and attendance at Community Forums and reading activities at events

Focus Area 3 STRENGTHENING NETWORKS

Aim

Free flowing communications between organisations concerned with children and families and agencies to ensure a shared understanding of issues; identify opportunities for collaboration, funding opportunities and advocate key messages to decision makers.

Strategies

- Maintain an active involvement in sector forums such as the Armadale Early Years Network
- Maintain strong links with schools through joint development of initiatives such as nutrition programs and community art projects
- Ensure children and families organisations have a profile at the regular contact lunches held for community groups, agencies and service providers.
- Develop and maintain strong links with the business sector to identify opportunities for their involvement in providing a family friendly environment for children and parents
- Convene special forums to discuss and workshop specific issues, such as the annual results of Australian Early Development Index for Armadale.

Key Success Factors

- High attendance at forums indicating interest, relevance and motivation.
- Partnerships and joint initiatives are developed as a result of the networking effort.
- The main focus of the City's role in children and families initiatives is in facilitating outcomes rather than directly coordinating projects.

Focus Area 4 THE CITY'S ROLE

Aim

The best community outcomes are achieved with minimal intervention by the City.

Strategies

As one of many stakeholders with a focus on children and families the City can:

- help build capacity in local service providers and children-focused organisations to develop and implement programs.
- facilitate partnerships between external organisations to develop initiatives.
- where no other options exist, consider the role of lead agency, particularly in relation to initiatives addressing priority issues.
- continue the development of the Champion Centre as a ‘one stop shop’ for the effective delivery of services to Aboriginal people including Aboriginal children and their families
- continue its ongoing family-focused initiatives including:
 - direct funding to children-focused organisations and projects through the community grants and annual contributions programs.
 - continued support for junior sporting activity including planning for adequate quality open space for organised sport in the City’s growth areas.
 - develop partnerships to coordinate children-focused events such as elements of festivals, school holiday programs, community art projects, drama programs and literacy programs.
 - develop partnerships to coordinate children-focussed activities and programs at the Armadale Arena, Aquatic Centre and the City’s libraries.
 - Assisting external children-based organisations to promote their services, programs and events to families and in the broader community.

Key Success Factors

- Development of the Champion Centre as a one-stop shop for the delivery of services for Aboriginal people.
- The City takes a leading role in bringing stakeholders together to address specific issues as they arise.
- The City proactively engages with agencies and other levels of government to forecast potential changes to the demographics of families and related services.
- The City’s program of ongoing initiatives for children and families is successfully implemented.

Accountability

MONITORING, REPORTING AND REVIEWING

The City’s Community Development Department is the custodian of the Children and Families Strategy and is responsible for monitoring its progress. The effectiveness of the strategies in achieving outcomes will be tested using the key success factors and reported on a six monthly basis to stakeholders through the Community Development department’s Operational Plan.

It is proposed that the Children and Families Strategy, in the form proposed, has a three year life and is reviewed in the second half of 2013 to ensure that it remains relevant beyond that period.