

Building Stronger
Communities
with Children
and Families
(2nd Edition)

Building Stronger Communities with Children and Families (2nd Edition)

Edited by

Karl Brettig

Cambridge
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(2nd Edition)

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A Place Based Approach

If it takes a village to raise a child should it be a cyber-village,
an urban village or should we all go back to the country?

About the Children Communities Connections Learning Network

The Children Communities Connections Learning Network is a network of child and family practitioners, service providers, researchers, family and community groups who are learning together to build stronger communities for children. This book has developed out of engaging with the challenges of families and communities, conversations, conferences, meetings, interactions and reflections on facilitating place-based collective impact with children and families.

Cover photo: Sarah Wieszyk

CONTENTS

Endorsements	xii
List of Illustrations	xvi
Foreword	xviii
Acknowledgements	xx
Preface to the Second Edition.....	xxii

Introduction	1
<i>Karl Brettig</i>	

Chapter One	7
Building Stronger Communities with Children and Families	
<i>Karl Brettig</i>	

We are living in a time of accelerating change. How are families coping with the rapid social changes in urban environments brought about by new technology, infrastructure and modern lifestyles? What is the perspective of children in all this? Can we recreate the kind of village that effectively supports children and their families in the urban sprawl?

Chapter Two	23
Reaching Out to Millennials and other Digital Natives	
<i>Lesley-Anne Ey</i>	

Does electronic social media networking represent new way of connecting in place of the decline of other community organisations? How do child and family services engage with these new ways of connecting? We know that social networking sites can become a haven for anti-social behaviours but can they be used to build the kind of community interaction that supports good parenting practices and enhances child development?

Chapter Three..... 41
**Integrating Practice across Substance Abuse, Family Violence
and Mental Health**

Karl Brettig with Michael White

Many children who are in ‘out of home care’ are there because their parents have significant substance misuse, domestic violence or mental health issues or more likely a combination of these. How might we go about developing a more holistic, whole of family, integrated approach to working with children and families impacted by these issues?

Chapter Four 57
Breaking Down Barriers to Integrated Service Delivery

Karl Brettig

If we are to optimize child and family support services so that families most in need of them receive the kind of support that will bring about better outcomes, then we need break down the barriers that stand in the way of this happening. We need to develop child and family friendly services in ways that engage those who need them on a scale and intensity that addresses barriers at every level. In Australia Communities for Children is a model that attempts to do this and this chapter looks at how it has been implemented in one of the sites.

Chapter Five 81
Using a Whole of Family, Government and Community Approach

Karl Brettig

The debate about universal and targeted support for families has continued because both are important. Whole communities, service providers and families need to work together in an integrated way in order to raise children effectively. This is particularly important in preconception care, in utero and in the first three years of life. Building on from the previous chapter we look at some encouraging developments in terms of implementing a whole of family, government and community approach.

Chapter Six 106
Closing the Gap and Engaging with Cultural Diversity
Karl Brettig with Robert Taylor

How do these principles work when viewed through the lens of other cultures? What do they say about working towards closing the outcomes gap for Aboriginal families? How do we work with differing cultural approaches to raising children? What have we learned and how do we move forward with this?

Chapter Seven 123
Embedding Wellbeing and Creating Community in Classrooms
Elsbeth McInnes, Victoria Whittington, Alexandra Diamond and Bec Neill

Without a doubt developments in neuroscience are changing the way we think about child development. Working with children in classrooms needs to be trauma informed if the kind of support that will optimise learning is to take shape. This chapter looks at how the education sector can implement changes in the way we go about facilitating learning experiences that include social and emotional learning as well as achieve academic progress. Research looking at outcomes of the initiative including social-emotional learning and bullying behaviour is included.

Chapter Eight 150
Family Centre Evaluation: Past, Present and Future Learnings
Jane Swansson with Margaret Sims and Ted Evans

Implementing a whole of community approach presents us with a significant challenge in terms of how we measure the outcomes? This chapter looks at how we can incorporate principles that inform service delivery into our evaluation process. We also consider measuring resulting population outcomes using the Salisbury CfC journey as an example. How can a developmental evaluation approach be used to map a way forward together with communities?

Chapter Nine 165
Pathways to Collaboration – Facilitating Strategic Governance
Yvonne Parry and Craig Bradbrook

This chapter looks at models of multi-level governance working with a multiplicity of stakeholders in implementing place-based initiatives. It includes findings from an evaluation of the Facilitating Partner Model that has been used over 15 years of the Communities for Children initiative in Australia. How can you design and implement an effective whole systems approach reliant on collaborative pathways? How do you establish an authorising environment that fosters legitimacy in decision making processes?

Chapter Ten 193
Developing and Implementing a Community Strategic Plan
Karl Brettig

What are the practical steps involved in implementing family support in local areas using a community development approach? This chapter goes through the steps used in planning and implementing the Communities for Children model, including some of the challenges likely to be encountered and examples of how they might be overcome.

Chapter Eleven 213
Integrating Multi-Agency and Trans-Disciplinary Services
Karl Brettig

How do we work across services? How do we go about implementing integrated services that incorporate a range of agencies and disciplines? Can governments really work together effectively with NGO's, families and community groups? Do integrated service models really work? This chapter looks at some of the major challenges being encountered by those who are attempting to redesign the service system.

Chapter Twelve..... 227**Tribes to Togethering: A Transpirational approach to Thinking about Place-Based Leadership***Geraldine Harris and Jennifer Cartmel*

Working with a multiplicity of stakeholders in implementing place based initiatives requires a multifaceted style of leadership. Leaders from within a model of central governance or lead agency simultaneously manage and lead change as they mobilise emergent place-based movements of early intervention and prevention. This in turn shapes their own leadership as they move towards a relational process of co-creating a movement of collective leadership that facilitates collective impact.

Chapter Thirteen..... 254**Growing a Community of Practice***Michael White*

Communities of practice develop shared practice when practitioners interact around problems, solutions and insights. What are some of the key elements that make communities of practice work? What is needed for an effective interagency and interdepartmental consultative committee to function well?

Chapter Fourteen..... 271**Building Child Friendly Communities***Karl Brettig*

This chapter draws together various strands from previous chapters and outlines some of the changing characteristics of rural, urban and cyber communities. We look at child friendly urban planning and consider some key elements in need of development to build stronger communities with children and families.

List of Contributors..... 293**Index**..... 297

ENDORSEMENTS

“I have been hugely impressed by ‘Building Stronger Communities with Children and Families’. Addressing the laudable goal of its title, overall the book adopts a strong evidence-based approach through its various chapters that cover a wide range of contexts and situations from a variety of perspectives (such as the child, parents, local educators, health workers) and lenses of analysis (such as social functionality/dysfunctionality, cultural diversity and economic situation etc.). My work over many decades in a variety of roles both local and international through the aegis of both government and non-government positions has led me to an awareness of the primary need for a community-focus approach to the tasks of overall development of community along with the meaningful empowerment of its members; and to the recognition that such goals require the locus of agency to be the very community which external stakeholders seek to help. In addition, the various chapters reveal the benefits of moving from proprietorial professionalism not only to better collaborative arrangements but to integrated approaches between external stakeholders in engaging with the communities where they work.”

Hon Rev Dr Lynn Arnold AO

Former Premier and Minister of Education in South Australia, Chief Executive of World Vision Australia and Chief Executive of Anglicare SA.

“The Building Stronger Communities concept of using a whole of community approach to supporting families is to be commended. The increasing destabilization of community networks, emerging variety in family formation and the changing face of society as a whole, often leave individuals and groups isolated, without basic support networks and feeling alone and hopeless in the face of life challenges. Add to this the evolution of technology and its impact on communication both personal and corporate and it’s time to create new and strengthened avenues of understanding and engagement for response to community need.

How does today’s community educate children for the age they live in?
How does a community rigorously create safe environments and respond

to need; where a healthy, sustainable, cohesive, emerging culture and where the capacity to live life to its fullest is not a dream but a distinct possibility? The writers of this work provide some strong concepts for consideration. A challenge to present thought and process.

I commend this thought provoking work for your reflection and response. Bravery is needed to inhabit a changing and demanding world with confidence and integrity. A willingness to evolve but not haphazardly - instead with wisdom and intentional strategic response to demand. These writers are showing us reason and possibility. How brave are we?"

Geanette Seymour, Colonel
Director, The Salvation Army, International Social Justice Commission

"There is a Chinese proverb that states, "A peaceful house will generate a million of happy returns". From my experience working across diverse communities, I believe those wise words to be true because when a person has a greater sense of connection to their family, with shared values, cultures and trust – individuals, children and young people can feel a strong sense of belonging and inner worth which helps them to build resilience, confidence and pride at home and within our community. This book provides a great resource for policy-makers and stakeholders working with children and families. I commend all the authors for their remarkable work and furthermore, for challenging us to work together to ensure the children of our next generation are better than the one before. Thank You!"

The Honourable Jing Lee MLC,
Assistant Minister to the Premier of South Australia

"An amazing book I have enjoyed much more on the second reading perhaps because my own practice, awareness and understanding of the national and international literature and trends has greatly increased. Chapter twelve is the most exciting thing I have read for a long time. I truly hope that the government, corporates and other key stakeholders take heed."

Jenni Brodie
Executive Officer, Swan Alliance Communities for Children

“Implementing the Wellbeing Classroom as a whole of school approach has been successful in supporting our students to identify and regulate emotions and develop character strengths including resilience, perseverance, creativity and bravery. This approach, evaluated in chapter seven, builds on and further develops what the students bring rather than being a programme focussed on “fixing up” the gaps. The Wellbeing Classroom transfers across all areas of the curriculum and has created significant shifts in our school culture.”

Carol Scerri
Principal, Salisbury Primary School

“*Building Stronger Communities with Children and Families* clearly highlights the need for a collective response in the development of lasting social change given the complexities of modern life. This publication provides us with an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the efficacy of whole of community, coordinated and collective approaches to build family friendly communities. I commend the authors of this book in the documenting of the practice journeys of a number of organisations and services in the early intervention/prevention arena as a valuable tool which shares learnings, practice wisdom and evidence to support the critical importance of “working together” to improve outcomes for communities and the families and children who reside in them.”

Jenny Chaves
Program Manager, Mission Australia Communities for Children Inala to Ipswich and Circles of Care

“Over many years as a licensed family therapist, I have become increasingly concerned about the breakdown of family and community and am convinced that this is the source of many personal and social problems. I have read this publication with interest and excitement. I see in this book a real working blueprint to build healthier families and communities. I especially like the emphasis of diverse groups within the community working together as a team. This can make things happen by using the ‘power of we’. Our children need this!”

Dr. David J. Ludwig
Professor, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, NC. USA

“Overall, from Communities for Children lenses, this book gives great insight and depth of detail into the role, the processes and the success of CfC. Well done. The whole book is a mammoth achievement.”

Annie Adams, Team Leader,
Advancing Families and Community,
Communities for Children, Uniting Country SA

“Reading this book made my heart sing. The book both challenges and inspires thinking around possibilities for the child, family and community. Parents strive to provide the best for their child however there are times when this is tough and a struggle. Having a person to talk with is crucial in times like this. Universal programs provide spaces for families to strengthen their social network without stigmatisation. This book provides service providers and practitioners with information to become stronger advocates for co-producing services with children, families and communities”.

Joan Gilbert
President Early Childhood SA,
Director Education and Care, Café Enfield Children’s Centre

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

- 1-1 Challenges identified by families with young children
- 4-1 AEDI 2009, 2012 & 2015 results for the number of children vulnerable on one or more domains
- 4-2 Substantiated notifications data for Ingle Farm 2011 - 2015
- 4-3 Comparison NAPLAN data for Ingle Farm & similar schools
- 4-4 Australian Early Development Index vulnerability in one or more domains in Australian suburbs with family activity centres developed between 2004 and 2009
- 4-5 Ingle Farm & comparison suburb data 2006- 2018
- 4-6 Activity in the kitchen at FamilyZone
- 4-7 2007 FamilyZone End of Year Celebration
- 5-1 Partnerships developed to deliver integrated services
- 5-2 The Family Place at Logan in Brisbane
- 5-3 Redesigning and implementing an integrated family support system using a whole of family, government and community approach
- 8-1 Percentages of children found to be vulnerable in the two amalgamated groups of suburbs in 2009 and 2012
- 9-1 Multilevel Governance: From individual participation to political accountability
- 9-2 A multilevel decision making process with input legitimacy
- 9-3 Measures of output legitimacy
- 12-1 Mapping the ecological systems of children with place-based leaders
- 12-2 Transpirational leaderful practices of everyday decision-making
- 14-1 Parent and child oriented learning gradient and key elements
- 14-2 Factors contributing to literacy development
- 14-3 Changes in characteristics of rural, urban & cyber communities
- 14-4 Critical periods for development of neural pathways

Tables

- 8-1 Principles for FamilyZone
- 8-2 FamilyZone Evaluation and Annual Reporting relating to population results

8-3 Developmental Evaluation

9-1 Collective Impact & Multilevel Governance

13-1 Types of Community of Practice Structures

13-2 Principles to support flourishing Communities of Practice

FOREWORD

Possibly the most impressive aspect of Communities for Children is the fact that it has persisted through many political and economic climates and continues to grow and to learn about what works for young children and their families. This knowledge that has been gathered over time, continues to help families to enjoy their children and feel more confident as parents, and this accumulated wisdom is available here, in this book and is presented in a very readable way.

It is particularly relevant to have this updated account of what works at a time when many other similar initiatives with similar good intentions are struggling and the challenges for all Australian families are getting greater, trying to navigate our children through a world which seems strange and even threatening for many of us as adults as well. The whole initiative has worked so well because of the unwavering vision and commitment of all those involved: those who continue to develop and assess the programs, the volunteers and the other contributing services from the local community who share the families, and of course the contribution of the families themselves. This all makes it a true Community Hub.

This book is a practical and very readable account, derived from experiences, of what we all could do to make our own involvement with young children and their families and other people in their lives more effective. Importantly, it does it in a truly child-curious way – looking beyond the necessary reporting measures and statistics to realise the certainty that our efforts now are already ensuring these young children are enjoying more positive, loved childhoods as they grow, supported by their own “village” of people who care. All this is at a time where families are struggling, whatever their life circumstances, in their efforts to give their children the best childhood they can. They have this commitment whilst struggling with their own increasingly complex lives and in a world which treats children more as an “encumbrance” interfering with adults’ more important lives – a problem that has to be dealt with – rather than the key factor to ensure our well-functioning future world.

All parents dream of their children becoming successful adults, who have friends, work and the opportunities to enjoy being alive. The world and the future have always been uncertain, but if children can grow up, certain of being loved and with an unwavering knowledge that they are important and listened to within their families, and knowing that their family is firmly supporting them as they grow and venture out, first to school and then into the big, wide 21st century world, then we, as a community can feel we have accomplished what should be the goal for all of us.

As human beings, we will always need a secure base, a sense of belonging, even though we might end up living far from that base. The new and emerging technologies, which are more often seen as a negative influence on our lives, particularly our children's lives, also offer new hope into the future to help us maintain these necessary connections, this sense of belonging. This book also offers a useful contribution considering this place of technology in our lives.

I thank the authors for all the inspiration and knowledge contained in this modest book and trust that it will enable their accumulated knowledge to be used to improve the lives of our young children.

Dr Sue Packer AM
2019 Senior Australian of the Year

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A publication like this would not be possible without the contributions of many inspiring people who have shared our Communities for Children journey. Special thanks to the teams at the Salvation Army Ingle Farm and FamilyZone Hub, in particular Alan Steven, Kathlene Wilson and Jacquie Dell who have contributed unstintingly. Also to Jane Swansson, Lisa Wynne, Naomi Thiel, Robert Taylor, Susan Lynn, Katrina Shephard, Sarah Wieszyk, Sarah Green, Michael White, Janet Pedler, Mark McCarthy, Cathie Bishop, Michael Edgecomb, James Lenigas, Liesl Shipard, Shonah Wright-Jones, Mary Fewster, Janet Kilford, Cathy Lawson, Joanne Menadue, Mario Trinidad, Carol Perry, Shirley Hallion, Kaye Conway, Paul Madden, Kirsty Drew, Lisa Osborne, Margaret Hunt, Helen Whittington, Rosemary Forgan, Angela Jolley, Geoff & Kalie Webb, Paul & Wendy Hateley, David & Kylie Collinson, Stuart Foster, Dale Holman, Heather Coleman, Meryl Zweck, Paul Regan, Leonie McConachy, Lynette Caruso, Mira Zivkovic, Karen Stott, Susan Lane, Helen Lockwood, John Haren, Rohan Feegrade, Leigh Goodenough, Yvonne Schultz, Greg Were, Helene Schulz, Percy Henry, Robyn Richter, Alexandra Segura, Cathy Haakmeester, Lindsay Mayes, Kylie John, Elizabeth O'Connor, Grant Pearson, Elaine Nitschke, Janet Muirhead, Chris Jukes, Melissa Ruthen, Craig Heidenreich, Kendall Crabtree, Dijana Karaahmetovic, Allyson Ions, Sonja Hood, David O'Brien, Gerry Dillon, Hon Lea Stevens, Bev O'Brien, Kathryn Jordan, Nadia Caruzzo, Kerry Bowering, Tracy Buchanan, Rebecca Pressler, Carol Scerri, Karen Mulyono and Vanessa Mortimer who have all made significant contributions. Also thanks to organisations who have partnered with us including the Department of Social Services, Lutheran Community Care, Relationships Australia, Australian Refugee Association, Centacare, Save the Children, the Schools Ministry Group, the City of Salisbury, UniSA, Flinders University and the Department for Education. Thanks also to South Australian C4C colleagues Helen Francis, Jan Oliver, Sue Christophers, Jan Chorley, Fiona Dale, Annie Adams, Teresa O'Brien, Craig Bradbrook, Sam Haskard, Janine Carger and Ted Evans who have made the communities of practice ethos a productive reality. Thanks to the many other contributors from the national C4C community including Nell Kuilenberg, Debbie Miscamble, Stacey Milbourne Charmaine Stubbs,

Holly Rynsent and Elise Parker. Some of their activities are documented in this book though there are many more that could have been. Thanks to Margaret Sims, Elspeth McInnes, Alexandra Diamond, Victoria Whittington, Gerry Redmond, David Ludwig, Wilma Gallet, Wayne Maddox, Anne Jurisevic, Gabrielle Kelly, Dorothy Scott, Margy Whalley and Tim Moore and to all the contributors and those and who have reviewed chapters and provided suggestions and feedback. Thanks to Dr Sue Packer for her many years of tireless childhood advocacy and finding time to write a foreword during a very busy year. Finally special thanks to Ruth, Daniel, Trish, Joel, Emma, and all the families who work together for the benefit of children, their families and communities.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This second edition includes new chapters on aspects of the challenging issues of leadership and governance of place-based approaches to supporting children and families. Co-designed integrated services with a focus on prevention and early intervention have a lot of potential to change the cycles of intergenerational trauma and poverty. This is not easily facilitated. It requires a new style of leadership, skills and principles if government agencies and non-government organisations, business, education, families and community groups are to become more effective in bringing about systemic change through collective action. It also requires multilevel governance to establish pathways to sustainable collaborations including political, regional, backbone organisational, community and family accountability to the vision of building stronger communities. Thought leaders who have experienced the challenges of implementing place-based approaches, both in the Communities for Children initiative in Australia and Sure Start in the UK, and researchers have developed new material addressing these challenging issues.

Also included is some new research on impact of the Wellbeing Classroom approach to social and emotional development. Additions have been made to other chapters reflecting more recent evidence and promising strategies. Some new data being used to inform early intervention and prevention approaches to service system redesign is also included in this edition.

While theories of change, program logic, vision and strategies map the logic, evidence base, parameters and processes of community transformation, effective innovators and change-makers are also guided by principles derived from values, beliefs, knowledge, evidence and context. An approach to leadership, governance, implementation and evaluation that includes a principles focus offers an important key to building communities that have the best interests of children and their families at heart and in mind. It is our hope that this edition will inform and inspire families, service providers, institutions, governments and community groups to work more productively together to build thriving communities with children and their families.

INTRODUCTION

KARL BRETTIG

There can be little doubt that the early years of a child's life are critical in relation to the kind of outcomes they will experience in later life. Evidence continues to accumulate that adverse childhood experiences, particularly in the first one thousand days from conception, have a huge impact on the lives of children in their later years.

There is now an expanding body of literature on the determining influence of early development on the chances of success in later life. The first 1,000 days from conception to age two are increasingly being recognised as critical to the development of neural pathways that lead to linguistic, cognitive and socio-emotional capacities that are also predictors of labour market outcomes in later life. Poverty, malnutrition and lack of proper interaction in early childhood can exact large costs on individuals, their communities and society more generally. The effects are cumulative and the absence of appropriate childcare and education in the three to five age-range can exacerbate further the poor outcomes expected for children who suffer from inadequate nurturing during the critical first 1,000 days (Atinc & Gustafsson-Wright, 2013, p1).

The USA and Australia ranked 24th and 28th respectively in an Economist Intelligence Unit 2012 report on benchmarking early education across the world (EIU, 2012). In Australia 75% of child wellbeing indicators were in the middle or bottom third of all the OECD countries (Stanley, 2014). The UK ranked 4th while the Nordic Countries were rated at the top of the index. Nordic countries are prepared to pay higher taxes because they understand the significance of investing in the early years. Other countries are also beginning to translate what neuroscience is telling us about child development into policies that effect significant change in early childhood education. The differences between what western countries are doing in this space makes interesting reading.

The development of the current Finnish system began in the 1960s and has progressed to its current emphasis on outdoor education in the preschool years and away from computer games and screen time. Their

class ratios are low with an average of eleven students per teacher and their teachers all have a three or four year bachelor's degree in education. The proportion of male teachers is also significantly larger in Nordic countries. This is not an accidental statistic but rather an intentional policy based on an understanding of the significance of male and female role modelling. They only start formal schooling at age seven, believing that children need time to be children before we begin to 'educate' them to become citizens often 'made in our own image'. In terms of early years policy, Nordic countries invest significantly in family centres. They are free of charge and offer multidisciplinary services including educational support, and health and social services for families. In Sweden they are a key part of family welfare services and play a central role in the ongoing national strategy for developing family support (OECD Report, 2015).

The UK saw the implementation of over three thousand children's centres between the launch of the Sure Start initiative in 1998 and 2010. They represent a bold attempt to recreate a child friendly 'village' environment in every urban community that provides the kind of support families need in the crucial early years. Despite some cutbacks resulting from the global financial crisis and the change to a conservative government, much of the initiative remains intact.

The US began its Headstart initiative back in the sixties, however its impact has been limited perhaps by its tepid embrace of the social and emotional development domains in comparison to its focus on the physical and cognitive domains. The development of a population measurement tool in Canada that includes all of these domains, the Early Development Index (Janus and Offord, 2000) has contributed significantly to our ability to better determine if real progress is being made.

Australia has contextualised this instrument in the form of the Australian Early Development Census and implemented this nationally as it sets out to achieve a turnaround in terms of the levels of vulnerability of its children. It is lagging behind other countries in delivering improved outcomes for children (McKenzie et al, 2014) being somewhat hamstrung by having three levels of government which contributes to fragmentation in relation to service provision. An Education Indicators in Focus report rated Australia as having the lowest expenditure on early childhood educational institutions as a percentage of GDP of all the OECD countries (OECD, 2013). The states are seen as the providers of universal services for children but it is the commonwealth that realistically has the level of

resources needed to make the kind of investment in early childhood that should make a significant difference. The Communities for Children initiative is one significant federal investment, reliant on genuine partnership with the states, which aims to take up the challenge of converting community services into community centric services (Fitzgerald, 2012).

Communities for Children (CfC) was initially funded in 2004 to work with families with children 0-5 years of age. In 2009 the age range was extended to 0-12 years without additional funding which meant a reduction on services for the 0-5 group. While an initial evaluation showed significantly less hostile parenting, higher levels of parenting confidence and improved coordination of services, a phase 2 study conducted in 2010–2012 found that some of these changes were not statistically significantly sustained over a longer period. The study concluded, “It is not known whether a different model, a more intensive version of CfC, or an evidence-based suite of direct programs would have had greater influence on outcomes” (Edwards et al, 2014. p71).

At the end of the day the case for a more evidence-based suite of programs option won out. While evidence-based programs are important, a more intensive version connects families at risk of vulnerability with the kind of relational support they need. Improvement in outcomes is what should be expected but research has been unclear about the nature and level of intensity of services needed to bring this about. We have not been very good at evaluating complex environments. As suggested at the Melbourne Collaboration for Impact 2019 Conference on Complexity & Evaluation, rather than getting a good enough answer to the right questions, our old world evaluation models have been giving us precise answers to the wrong questions. Because complex systems are difficult to evaluate as precisely as programs, governments have been reticent to fund the infrastructure needed to deliver integrated family support. Quality relationships are not easy to measure.

Michael Patton suggests we have been missing evaluating an important element in our efforts to bring about change.

Change efforts are typically organised and implemented as carefully planned standardised models aimed at achieving specified program goals. Principles-driven initiatives in contrast, typically operate in dynamic environments striving to meet and serve the diverse needs of diverse participants. A common mantra of such programs is ‘one size doesn’t fit all’. Services are matched to

participants' situations. Processes vary by participant. Outcomes vary for different people. Diversity demands responsiveness. Responsiveness generates variability based on determining what's appropriate, possible and relevant. What is the anchor in the midst of such dynamic adaption? Principles. (Patton, 2018).

We need to identify and evaluate principles that provide guidance on what we do, think and value if we are going to effectively scale up what works and avoid the expensive soft option of a continuous cycle of pilot initiatives.

The lack of political will of governments to invest more seriously in early childhood development has been challenged by the adoption of the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development at the 2018 G20 Buenos Aires Summit. It affirms that while the family is the natural and best environment for growth, home, centre or community based ECD interventions need to be provided to give children the best possible start in life (G20, Argentina 2018). Interventions need to be based on principles that support engagement with the service system for families at risk as well as 'warm referrals' that maintain relational connection.

Preparing for parenthood begins with preconception health, education and care (Sher, 2016). The capacity of parents to raise physically and emotionally healthy children begins with their own conception and continues to develop throughout their life course. The Communities for Children initiative was developed with a view to implementing a whole of community, family and government approach to supporting families. It has attempted a system redesign offering agile and responsive support to families at key developmental stages of life.

Complex early childhood trauma often leads to ongoing problems for generations with very significant economic implications if there is no effective intervention. The current 'merry-go-round' of services risks the re-traumatisation and escalation of symptoms of those seeking help. If those who seek support encounter an uninformed, fragmented service system that attempts to shunt them from one service to another, they can become more at risk of being re-traumatised than actually getting help.

Experience is now known to impact brain structure and functioning and in the relational context of healing this includes **experience of services**. Neural integration is not assisted – indeed is actively impeded – by unintegrated human services which are not only compartmentalised but which lack basic trauma awareness (Kezelman & Stavropoulos, 2012).

While the political arm wrestling around the globe continues, we also need to be listening to what children and families would like to see happening in their communities. Too often they are the neglected voices that fail to be heard amongst the noise being generated by the agendas of other stakeholders. Community led and driven initiatives need to be responsive to the whole of community. Can we build stronger communities by also listening to what children and families have to say about what they would like to see?

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CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

KARL BRETTIG

A forum with representatives from a range of disciplines including early childhood, local government, community services, town planning and architecture was convened in South Australia in 2012 to take a collective look at building child-friendly cities. Participants were asked to bring something with them to the workshop. It involved taking time to remember a place we loved to visit as a young child and think about what it was that made this place so attractive. That simple exercise profoundly affected my view of the world from the perspective of a child as it did that of many others who participated in the experience.

For me it had to be our quarter acre backyard in Lobethal. There were two places consisting of a couple square metres that were particularly important. The first one was a heap of sand about five metres from our back door. The second one was the crusty little dirt patch between the house and the shed. My memories about the heap of sand are a bit vaguer than the vivid memories of the dirt patch. I was about 2 years old when mum was quite happy to let me go outside the door to play in that sandpit. I know that because she often told me later that I was quite happy to play there for hours on end and that was highly acceptable for a mother with four children.

The dirt patch was something else. The earth was much better to work with than the sand. You could use a makeshift grader and build roads. You could add water to dirt to make mud and introduce some sticks to build houses and sheds. You could build whole communities if you had enough time there before one of your brothers or parents came along and implemented their alternative plans for the site!

At a time when many families are imploding and communities are becoming increasingly chaotic we do well to reimagine the kind of childhood environment that might enable children to flourish when they become adults. This is particularly so in the light of what recent neuroscience is telling us about the importance of the early years as is summarised by the maxim ‘give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man’.

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children. He also wrote about why we need to listen to what they are saying.

The truthfulness of a child towards their parents is essentially different from that of the parents towards their child. The life of the small child lies open before the parents and what the child says should reveal to them everything that is hidden and secret, but in the converse relationship this cannot possibly be the case (Bethge, 1955, p326).

Very young children have an honesty that renders them able to make hugely important contributions to the development of strong families and communities. How many of us take time to listen to what children are telling us? How well do we accommodate their needs in terms of planning community architecture and the daily schedules of families? How well does our legislature take their needs into account? What values in relation to them do our workplace practices reflect? How well are our communities designed to support the needs, interests and rights of children?

There is a village in Italy where a bell rings out across the valley every time a baby is born. The chimes announce to every member of the community that they all have a new responsibility. Each member of the village is reminded to think about what they can do to support the new arrival at the time of birth and as they grow and become mature members of the community (Pritchard, 2010). Strong communities are built around healthy child development and social planners recognise that children have the inherent capacity to bring people together.

Most mixing across social groups takes place between children. It is these contacts - in nurseries, playgroups, schools and in public spaces – that provide opportunities for adults to meet and form relationships. Children provide a common ground and shared interest between people in different tenures. Moreover, people with children tend to be among the most active in community groups” (Silverman et al, 2005).