



childaware
LOCAL INITIATIVE

The future of CALI

The key to ensuring the ongoing sustainability of CALI is to embed a commitment to 'child awareness' into day-to-day community operations and practices. It is hoped that the initiative be continued in existing sites and expanded to other sites where potential and enthusiasm can be identified, including those that have begun to develop community-based plans for engaging children.

Future goals are to:

- build on existing knowledge and skills
- harness local passion
- enhance and grow skills and resources that contribute to the prevention of violence against children
- focus more effort on engaging children
- continue to promote place-based child and family sensitive practice.

Promoting
Child Safety
and Wellbeing
through Local
Community
Solutions



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FamiliesAustralia



Australia's children
deserve a safe, healthy
and happy childhood¹

» **childaware.org.au**



Could promoting local solutions and community action enhance child safety and wellbeing in Australia?

What is the Child Aware Local Initiative?

Child Aware Local Initiatives¹ are community-led, innovative and practical grassroots actions to keep children safe and well.

This Initiative is an integral part of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020², Australia's first national plan to address child abuse and neglect. The National Framework is significant in the international context for its hallmark collaborative approach between the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments, Non-Government Organisations and local community members.

The Child Aware Local Initiative is based on early intervention and prevention evidence and a public health approach. A key element involves service integration and collaboration and engagement of the local community in identifying and tailoring local solutions. The Initiative also builds on previous national projects and activities such as *Protecting and*

*Nurturing Children: Building Capacity Building Bridges*³, Child Aware Approaches Grants⁴, *The Good Practice Guide to Child Aware Approaches*⁵ and the Child Aware Approaches Conferences⁶.

International evidence suggests that helping families to forge social networks and strengthen ties within the local community can provide protective factors to address child abuse and neglect. Evidence suggests that assisting services to work in less siloed or targeted ways, can help build trust and community capability, which may also improve protective factors for children and their families.⁷ The Australian Government provided funding in 2013 to trial Child Aware Local Initiatives in seven local community sites over a two year period. Each site identified a local lead agency, who collaborated across multiple and diverse systems to create a community-led plan to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and their families.

Key messages of the Child Aware Local Initiative include:

- Protecting children is everyone's business.
- Children have a right to be safe, valued and cared for.
- The best way to protect children is to prevent abuse and neglect from happening in the first place.
- Governments, communities, organisations and individuals can work together to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families.
- Children and families should have a 'voice' in decisions affecting their lives.
- Children are usually best supported within their families.
- A 'one size fits all' approach does *not* work across Australia's diverse communities.
- Local solutions are required for local problems.
- Culturally diverse groups need culturally sensitive responses.

How sites worked with national lead agencies

The seven trial site leaders were supported by Families Australia and the Australian Centre for Child Protection to develop locally-based, innovative solutions aimed at addressing early warning signs of vulnerability for children and their families. Facilitation was provided to:

- build local partnerships
- identify resource needs
- enhance communication and collaboration
- identify community capabilities and strengths
- support action research and learning tools
- record progress and map the journey.

Outcomes for children improve in CALI sites

In sites where the Child Aware Local Initiative planning and activities were initiated, there are vital signs of improved local community capacity to respond earlier to children and their families when they experience episodes of vulnerability. There is also evidence from the trial sites that child safety and wellbeing can be addressed by harnessing existing infrastructure and community support. A number of sites have implemented strategies to enhance children's 'voice', which is subsequently being used to inform local area planning for children's services and supports.

The Initiative has demonstrated that local communities are passionate about supporting children to thrive. Further, that they are willing to confront local issues to create supportive environments for all children and families. A list of achievements can be found on the Child Aware website: childaware.org.au

'We need time, good people, relationships and resources.'

'You can't actually develop anything without knowing what the clients want, even if the clients are five.'

1 <http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/publications/pubs/cali/caliinitiative.pdf>

2 <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business>

3 http://www.unisa.edu.au/Research/Australian-Centre-for-Child-Protection/Publications_Presentations/container/Pubs-Pres-and-Featured/Publications/

4 <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/grants-funding/child-aware-approaches-one-off-grants-open>

5 <https://www3.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/good-practice-guide-child-aware-approaches-keeping-c>

6 <http://www.childawareconference.org.au/index.asp?ntCatId=14>

7 *Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal Vol 37, Supplement, December 2013*. ISPCAN. (NB: Members only)