A THEORY BASED APPROACH TO BUILDING A 'COMPETENT SYSTEM' FOR STAFF IN INTEGRATED SERVICES

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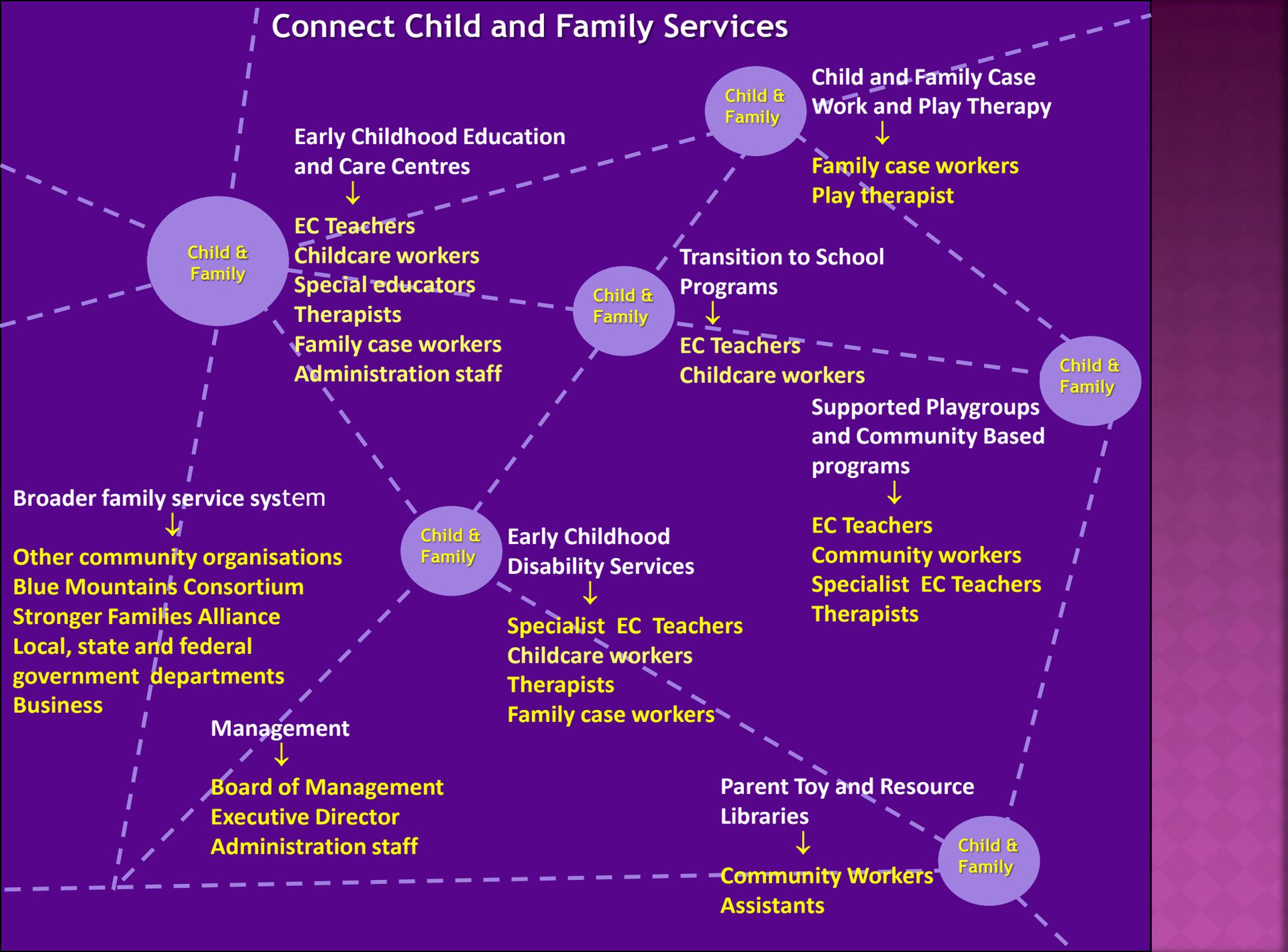
OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

❖ **Contextual information about Connect Child and Family Services (CCFS)**

❖ **'In practice'**

❖ **The challenge of building a 'competent organisational system' for our work with families**

❖ **Research informed - Theories and models of practice that promote a competent organisational system**

CONNECT CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

❖ **Inter-disciplinary, early childhood focused NFP working across 9 LGA's outer western Sydney- state and federal funding**

❖ **4 centre-based and 52 outreach sites**

❖ **Staff employed across early childhood, social welfare, allied health and community development domains**

❖**Service provision includes:**
   ➢**ECEC centres**
   ➢**Extensive transition to school programs in schools**
   ➢**Early childhood disability services**
   ➢**Home visiting programs**
   ➢**Community development programs**
   ➢**Family case work/Brighter Futures**
   ➢**Play Therapy**

Connect Child and Family Services

Child & Family

Child and Family Case Work and Play Therapy
↓
Family case workers
Play therapist

Early Childhood Education and Care Centres
↓

Child & Family

EC Teachers
Childcare workers
Special educators
Therapists
Family case workers
Administration staff

Child & Family

Transition to School Programs
↓
EC Teachers
Childcare workers

Child & Family

Supported Playgroups and Community Based programs
↓
EC Teachers
Community workers
Specialist EC Teachers
Therapists

Broader family service system
↓
Other community organisations
Blue Mountains Consortium
Stronger Families Alliance
Local, state and federal government departments
Business

Child & Family

Early Childhood Disability Services
↓
Specialist EC Teachers
Childcare workers
Therapists
Family case workers

Management
↓
Board of Management
Executive Director
Administration staff

Parent Toy and Resource Libraries
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Community Workers
Assistants

Child & Family

Effective practice for children, requires the successful interplay and integration of complex relationships among children, families, staff, professional colleagues, organisations and the human service system that supports them e.g. Community Services, Education, Health, Housing

'In practice'

"I wouldn't have any friends with babies if it wasn't for [playgroup]… [playgroup] has like saved S's [child's] life… If I hadn't gone to [playgroup], God it was bad… But going to [playgroup] and seeing all the other mums and watching how they interact with their children as well and seeing all the other kids and S was able to play with other kids her age, it was so much of a saviour… Yeah, if I hadn't gone to [playgroup] and gotten involved with other parents and other children, S would have probably gone to someone else long ago… she would've been fostered out which I would have hated. So it's so much [playgroup] saved us".

(Young parent)

SO WE KNOW...

Creation of social spaces for parents with an emphasis on positive relationships and provision of opportunities for social interaction

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Enables the development of significant friendships and social networks

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Assists in the reduction of social isolation

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Contributes to parents' sense of wellbeing, confidence and ability to support one another

(Jackson, 2010)

"There's always the risk that people will come and actually be harmed because the interactions are negative towards them, and they actually go away feeling less well off than when they came. So because of that risk, I think it's quite important to keep an eye on the overall dynamic…"

(Supported playgroup facilitator)

"Maybe just realising that what had happened was going to be taken seriously and we were going to try and work it out. It was kind of finding that balance between kind of smoothing over the surface and brushing it under the carpet a bit on one hand but also saying it was important to work this out for the future".

(Community Hub Coordinator)

SO WE KNOW...

Enhancing social connectedness among parents sometimes required staff to manage difficult group dynamics

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Mediation processes need to be used to address challenging issues or behaviours when they arise

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This furthers the positive development of relationships within programs

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Enables parents' continued participation and continued access to other formal support services

(Jackson, 2010)

"And sometimes it would just be, 'I've had a horrible night, I've been up all night and I need a break'. And they would be fine after an hour or two, someone making them a cup of tea, having a chat, and then you'd see gradually they'd be more engaged with their child and afterwards of course they'd be fine when they left… but there's those moments that if they were at home isolated and didn't have anyone, or didn't speak to anyone, maybe it wouldn't have been all right".

SO WE KNOW...

➢ The development of NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS among parents and among parents and staff is an extremely important aspect of service provision

➢ Experiencing nurturing behaviours ASSISTS PARENTS IN PROVIDING NURTURING CARE TO THEIR CHILDREN

➢ Especially important in cases where parents are known not to have experienced many nurturing relationships outside the groups

➢ NURTURE IS AN EXPERIENCE not a skill that is taught (Munford & Sanders, 2006, Jackson, 2010)

"I think just watching how the things that the workers do with the kids, and watching what they're… the interactions that they have with the kids gives you ideas on what you can do at home with the kids. Whereas normally you just go, Oh go away, I've had enough of you. Go away".

(Parent)

SO WE KNOW...

Creating NON-JUDGMENTAL services in which parents are UNCONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED AND RESPECTED affirms their roles as the most important people in their children's lives

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We need to create safe environments where positive behaviours are modelled and gentle guidance in relation to child development and parental expectations is provided

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Under these circumstances parents can gain positive insights that might be reflected in changes in their relationships with their children

(Jackson, 2010)

THE CHALLENGE

➢Constant and welcomed interface with families with complex and multiple needs, often in universal settings – result of successful 'soft entry', 'joined up', 'right door' policy implementation

➢Staff in universal or 'soft entry' service settings are often the first point of contact with children and families and the first critical relationship of trust – and are often underprepared for this role

➢Needed to develop responsive and effective organisational practice, culture, ongoing professional training and support – 'A COMPETENT SYSTEM' as well as competent practitioners (Vandenbroek et.al 2011)

➢Needed frameworks and models that enabled the successful interplay and integration of complex relationships among children, families, staff, professional colleagues, organisations and the broader service system

RESEARCH INFORMED - THEORIES AND MODELS OF PRACTICE THAT PROMOTE A COMPETENT ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEM

- ❖ Pedagogy of Encounter (Vandenbroeck et.al 2009)

- ❖ Family Partnership Model (Centre for Parent and Child Support, UK)

- ❖ Systems development for supervision and ongoing professional support (CoRe Report Competence Requirements in Early Education and Care (Vandenbroeck & Urban, 2011)

PEDAGOGY OF ENCOUNTER

❖ Drawn from European research by Vandenbroeck et.al 2009, Vandenbroek & Geen, 2010; Ramaekers, 2010

❖ Based on "ethics of the encounter" (Levinas,1969) - attempting NOT to grasp the 'other' by making him/her the same

❖ Emphasis on:
  – creating places that enable encounter (both positive and negative) between children, parents and professionals

  – Creating reciprocal processes where individuals, family and the community all shape one another

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The creation of inclusive environments of practice where parents and children are considered and treated as potentially powerful social agents

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MODEL (FPM)

- ❖ Developed in UK at the Centre for Parent and Child Support, Michael Rutter Centre.

- ❖ Focuses on the relationship between a staff member and a family member

- ❖ Teaches strategies for staff that enable the most useful relationship with families

- ❖ Applicable to all levels of staff – at Connect all staff from e.g. Administration and all staff across all disciplines

- ❖ Applicable to all relationships e.g. professional/child, professional/parent, professional/peer, professional/manager

SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT FOR SUPERVISION AND ONGOING PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

❖ Recommendations drawn from the *CoRe Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care report* (Urban, Vandenbroek, Lazzari, Peters et.al. 2011)

❖ Commissioned by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture included:

➢ Comprehensive literature review – broad Range Croatian, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian and English

➢ A survey to explore competence profiles in 15 European countries

➢ A set of in-depth case studies in seven European locations (Italy,Belgium,France,England,Denmark,Poland, Slovenia)

CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The quality of service – and ultimately the outcomes for children and families – depends on well-educated, experienced and 'competent' staff.

❖ But what exactly makes a competent practitioner?

❖ How can *competence* be understood, and its development supported, in the highly complex and demanding field of working professionally with young children, families and communities?

COMPETENCE

❖ 'Competence' has to be understood as a characteristic of the entire early childhood and family system.

❖ The *competent system* develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio-political context.

❖ A key feature of a 'competent system' is its <u>support for individuals to realise their capability to develop responsible and responsive practices that respond to the needs of children and families</u> in ever-changing societal contexts.

COMPETENT SYSTEMS

❖Becoming a 'competent' practitioner is a continuous process that comprises the capability and ability to build on a body of professional *knowledge*, *practice* and develop and show professional *values*.

❖Practitioners and teams also need *reflective competences* as they work in highly complex, unpredictable and diverse contexts.

❖A 'competent system' requires possibilities for <u>all staff</u> to engage in joint learning and critical reflection. This includes sufficient *paid* time for these activities.

❖A competent system includes collaborations between individuals and teams, institutions (pre-schools, schools, support services for children and families) as well as 'competent' governance at policy level.

PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION OF STAFF

➢ Recommendations from CoRe and the Family Partnership Model now provide the basis of a system of professional staff supervision and support at Connect Child and Family Services

➢ All staff have the opportunity to reflect and talk confidentially with another senior staff member about their work with families and to get professional support and advice.

➢ This strategy also looks after the emotional needs of staff dealing with difficult situations in their work

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SUPPORTED AND SKILLED STAFF

RESPONSIVE AND EFFECTIVE WORK ALONGSIDE COMPLEX AND VULNERABLE FAMILIES

CONCLUSION

➢ Inclusive and responsive work alongside vulnerable families is becoming increasingly complex, particularly in integrated service contexts

➢ Requires recognition of workforce implications and the development of relational solutions among all stakeholders – 'competent systems'

➢ Ongoing professional development and supervisory support for all staff in universal and targeted practice should form an <u>integral part of organisational culture</u>.