Child Awareness and the National Framework: What does putting children at the centre mean?

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The National Framework

A principled approach within a systemic frame...

- Children’s rights are upheld and participation is promoted
- Responsibility for child wellbeing is broadly interpreted and responses extend across formal and informal systems
- Policies and interventions are supported by a strong evidence base
Nested and interacting systems in child protection...

Multi-layered systems aimed at primary prevention as well as more targeted secondary and tertiary prevention (Barlow & Calam 2011; Jack 2010; Munro 2009)

Opportunities for mobilizing community and neighbourhood action to support the interests of children – engaging with media, business and community leaders.
This systemic frame supports elements of a principle-based public health model...

- Agencies working toward what is best for the child
- Protection of children’s rights to: participation; care; protection; information; privacy
- Respecting the rights of families
- Respect for language, religion and culture
Nested and interacting systems in child protection...

Opportunities for mobilizing community and neighbourhood action to support the interests of children – engaging with media, business and community leaders.

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A Preventative, Child-Centred Lens

Understanding how being in the world impacts on a child’s resilience and vulnerability…

As part of a multi-layered response, a preventative public health approach helps us to understand the scope of the issues confronting us, helps to identify risk indicators at the individual, family and community levels, and supports prevention strategies that are informed by evidence.

(Jack, 2010)
A Preventative Child-Centred Lens

This can take us beyond our disciplinary comfort zone...

Take, for example, the rise and fall of violent crime...

- Steady increases in violent crime rates, followed by an unpredicted sharp decline in the 1990s
- Social scientists failed to predict the decline – in fact a further surge was predicted rather than a retreat
- Researchers suggested the decline was due to increased policing, changing patterns of drug use, bulging prisons
Yet research within the environmental sciences were looking elsewhere for explanations.

Childhood exposure to increased lead levels correlates closely with increased levels of violent crime two decades later…

Sources: Rick Nevin, USGS, DOJ
Australian data…
Preventative Child-Centred Lens

Working across disciplinary boundaries can better promote prevention strategies that are informed by evidence.

A public health model aims to shift norms associated with child maltreatment so that harsh parenting or abusive or neglectful treatment of children is less common across the whole population.

The prohibiting of physical punishment of children is an example of a public health response – it is also fundamentally about children’s rights.
One-size-fits-all responses are not child-centred responses. Take the example of child abuse and child neglect – used synonymously in professional language, and often in terms of practice response.

Child neglect and child abuse look different through a child’s lens.

Yet we continue to approach neglect in the same way we approach child physical abuse.
Rethinking neglect responses

- Professional responses to child physical abuse is designed to control adult behaviour that is often impulsive in nature. Interventions target contributing factors.

- These strategies may not be the most useful in combating neglect.

- Neglect responses need to:
  - Focus on family engagement
  - Understand the type of neglect
  - Provide ‘hands-on’ services that supports, teaches, and build routines
  - Work with children
Rethinking neglect responses?

(AIHW, 2012 p.49)
Child-Centred Reforms

The reform of child welfare systems occurs within a dynamic and quickly changing environment.

- Are reforms child-centred?
- Do they make things better or worse for children?
- How do we know the impact they may have on the lives of children?

In attempts to make child protection more accountable the “bureaucratization” of child protection (Tomison, 2004) and the adverse effects of some managerial practices have created challenging environments for service providers.
Child-Centred Reforms

Need to be:

- Knowledge-based, incorporating what we know influences good outcomes for children
- Ethically-informed supporting strong engagement with families and reinforcing longer term safety and security for children
- Discriminating well the needs of the children and families coming to statutory notice
- Creating responsive regulatory frameworks where services work collaboratively in response to need
- Ambitious for children coming to statutory attention cognisant of the fact that we wouldn’t all be there otherwise
- Courageous and strategic in ways that withstand political change
Whose lens are we using?

Sometimes, no matter how hard we try, the lens just won’t fit.
Child-Centred Policy and Practice

Using tools that are easily understood…

[Diagram with three sections labeled: Worries, Strengths, Hopes & Dreams]
Child-Centred Policy and Practice Lens

Insights from CREATE’s 2013 Report Card...

- How do we ensure that children and young people have a say?
- How do we form meaningful relationships with children and young people that involve them in decision-making?
- What can we do to improve stability for children and young people?
- How do we strengthen meaningful networks?
- How do we make sure children are culturally connected?
- How do we value education and academic achievement?
- How do we ensure that children and young people are well prepared for life?
You know, she (the worker) was good to me, but I suppose I had to grow up to realise that people were trying to help. And she was definitely out there for me. If I wanted something, she was there for me... (Yates 2001)