Harnessing the potential outside the child and family sector to transform the lives of children

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Why does the Centre exist?

To bridge the gap between what we know and what we do to transform the lives of children who have experienced, or who are at risk of experiencing, abuse and neglect.
What new knowledge do we have?

• An understanding of the scope of risk factors (AOD, MH, FV, homelessness, populations)
• A much better understanding of their impacts (neurobiology, data linkage, studies involving children, the voice of parents who have had their children removed)
• Theories of change (how to prevent or ameliorate the impacts)
• Models of intervention (emerging Australian evidence base)
• Cost effectiveness
How are we applying that knowledge?

• A national commitment from COAG – the National Framework
• Children and families as the focus of policy, workforce development, practice and research initiatives (e.g., Protecting and Nurturing Children - Building Capacity, Building Bridges; Centre for Excellence)
• Specific Funding (e.g., Child Aware Approaches)
• Innovation in program development and service design
• Emerging focus on quality of implementation
Unintended consequences

• Expansion of the remit of child protection system
• A large body of knowledge to incorporate into practice, policy and program design; proliferation of practices
• Service fragmentation as we focus on individual problems rather than children and their families
• Complexity makes it difficult to convey the message (why, what, how and who) to others (it depends...)
• Focus on risk factors rather than determinants of risk factors (hurt, pain, isolation, emotional regulation)
Assumptions and opportunities

• That the general public “see” children (other than their own) – using children’s voices and the role of the National Children’s Commissioner

• That adult focused services are not interested in or unable to work with their clients around parenting strengths and stressors – channelling the capacity and intent that exists in the sectors
Assumptions and opportunities

• That more resources and more programs are necessarily the answer to the problem – engaging the services that do exist for local planning and using clear theories of change to develop a “system of care” for children
• That workers have skills in engaging children and caregivers – building on initiatives which develop and support these skills, and sharing information directly with parents
Assumptions and opportunities

• That families in chaotic and complex situations want to just survive and get through – using frameworks of hope, excellence and aspiration to support families to reach their goals

• That any service will be a good thing and that families should want to use it – co-design of services to develop relevant programs which unlock the potential within families and communities
Conclusion

• Our knowledge base about the impact of risk factors on children and families is rapidly expanding
• As is our practice knowledge regarding practice in complex social environments
• Unanticipated consequences of this expansion in knowledge
• Assumptions that if not supported actually present opportunities for future policy, practice and service design
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