

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

NT Royal Commission Response Background Paper

2.4 A child-centered and development-focused system

Issue

A child's early years of life are fundamental to their physical and emotional health, including social and cognitive development, later educational achievement, and more long-term life outcomes. Children who grow up experiencing neglect or abuse are significantly more likely to come into contact with the justice system (Anda, 2012).

Data from the Australian Early Development Census reveal that on average, 37% of children in the NT are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains and 23% across two or more domains - significantly higher than the national average of 22% and 11% respectively (Australian Early Development Census, 2015).

Importantly however, it has been demonstrated that early intervention, through evidence-based programs, can break the cycle of disadvantage and trauma which leads to these adverse outcomes (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child).

Investment in the early years will not only reduce the impact of poor life outcomes for individuals and society, but will also add to the productive capabilities, skills and competencies of the next generation of Territorians.

Preferred approach

A reformed child protection and youth justice system must prioritise the child's wellbeing first, and support policies and programs that nurture healthy childhood development. It must also recognise that child health and wellbeing is contingent on the health of the community as a whole.

Evidence shows that investment in early childhood development, parenting and family support programs is the most cost-effective way to reduce detention and imprisonment rates among young people (McGinness) (Farrington and Koegl, 2015). Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has advised that investing in early childhood is the single most important thing Australia can do to grow its economy and be competitive in the future (Hutchens, 2016)

A commitment to long-term ongoing investment in early childhood development, parenting and family support programs is therefore needed. These programs must be strength- and evidence-based and, where possible, developed and implemented by Aboriginal community-

controlled organisations (ACCOs). They should also be based on the principles of trauma informed care and an understanding of the resilience and strength of Aboriginal culture and the centrality of culture in raising families.

References

ANDA, R. F. F., V. J. 2012. Adverse Childhood Experiences and their Relationship to Adult Well-being and Disease: Turning gold into lead." The National Council Webinar, August 27, 2012 Retrieved 22 March 2016, 2016, from <http://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Natl-Council-Webinar-8-2012.pdf>.

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2015 Data Explorer. An Australian Government Initiative.

<https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer?id=61968>. *The National Council Webinar*.

AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS. 2015. (AEDC) 2015 Data Explorer. An Australian Government Initiative.

<https://www.aedc.gov.au/data/data-explorer?id=61968> [Online]. [Accessed].

FARRINGTON, D. P. & KOEGL, C. J. 2015. Monetary Benefits and Costs of the Stop Now And Plan Program for Boys Aged 6–11, Based on the Prevention of Later Offending. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 31, 263-287.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD. *Harvard University Center on the Developing Child 2016, Gene environment interaction*

[Online]. Available: <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/deep-dives/gene-environment-interaction/> [Accessed].

HUTCHENS, G. 2016. OECD: G20 commitment to boost GDP by 2 per cent in doubt. . *The Age*.

MCGINNESS, A. M., T Review of Effective Practice in Juvenile Justice: Report for the Minister for Juvenile Justice. , . Manuka ACT: Noetic Solutions Pty Limited.