



Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

## Expert Community Forum 2007

### Evaluation Report



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## Executive Summary

The Tasmanian Early Years Foundation was officially launched by the Minister for Community Development the Hon Michelle O'Byrne MP on 19 November 2007 at an Expert Community Forum in Hobart. Almost 100 participants attended the Forum, representing 44 government and non-government organisations. The official launch represented a culmination of the activities undertaken by the Foundation's Board since its operations began in April 2007.

A key principle of the Foundation is to encourage a consultative, collaborative and cross-sectoral way of working and the official launch commenced this important task. The Forum was a day of sowing a new vision for the future in the way the community may work together, thinking creatively and send a strong message that children should be in the centre of government and non-government thinking. The Forum allowed the opportunity for the sector not only to articulate but visualise a shared vision and purpose, and the creativity displayed during the day through words and pictures raised some important considerations for all participants.

Many ideas surfaced during the day, such as the idea of developing children and family hubs with children and family services together, a one stop shop, that would make access to services seamless with clear pathways for help and guidance. Key messages from the day also included the need to work across silos, the advantages of pooling of resources, while respecting and communicating respective values and principles.

The Forum highlighted the importance of a shared vision for the future. With this connectedness and working together it will be possible to improve the outcomes for Tasmanian children.



It was an inspiring day that provided much food for thought for the Foundation's Board, a majority of who attended and participated in the Forum, to hear from those directly involved in helping and working with Tasmanian children and their families.

A key message from the Forum (and keynote speaker Professor Hilton Davis) was the importance of selecting the right staff and allowing them the opportunity to build important skills that are needed to work with children and families. In meeting this challenge, the Foundation has since established a Learning and Development Committee. The committee will focus on professional development needs for key staff across sectors, including early childhood health, education, care and advocacy. The committee will also look for partnerships with government and non-government providers to develop a staff leadership program in support of integrated service models for children and families.

The Forum reinforced the important role the Foundation has to play, as a catalyst and advocate, in bringing the sector together and supporting both government and non-government agencies in the delivery of services to assist children and their families in Tasmania. The Board is looking forward to meeting this challenge and in working with the sector to meet our vision of giving every Tasmanian child the best possible start in life as a foundation for a healthy, happy and positive future.

## **I. The Workshops**

Janine Combes from Community Focus facilitated three workshops to start the early years conversation. Janine has a background in Social Work and has worked as a consultant for 16 years, facilitating training workshops, strategic planning sessions and public forums. She has worked with many non-government and government organisations that focus on supporting children and families in Tasmania to evaluate their programs, train staff or develop a forward plan.



### **Workshop One**

Workshop One required each group to envisage Tasmania as a world leader in utilising an effective, partnership approach to support children and their families during their early years to be well, healthy and to learn. Participants were asked to think about the ingredients involved in creating this success and to record their responses in pictures and/or words using craft supplies and butchers' paper.

### **Workshop Two**

Workshop Two challenged participants to consider how the sector moves toward the ideal future articulated in Workshop One. Groups were asked to identify the issues and barriers to overcome and key areas requiring activity. Each group then ranked what it perceived to be the top three issues in order of priority.

### **Workshop Three**

Workshop Three explored the roles involved in developing the ideal future discussed in Workshop One. Participants were asked to consider the potential roles of the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation; Tasmanian Government; Local Government; Australian Government; non-government sector; interested individuals and communities; and the business sector.

## **2. Workshop Outcomes**

### **Workshop One**

Some colourful and insightful posters were created to illustrate the linkages, collaboration and resources needed to reach best practice standards across Tasmania's early childhood sector. Common ingredients and pathways identified in the written responses to the workshop included:

- Whole of community and whole of family approaches
- Integrated services
- Shared responsibility
- Acknowledgement and awareness of the importance of the early years
- Recognition of the economic benefits of investment in the early years
- Shared vision and values

- Communication across all services and levels of Government
- Prevention of service duplication and competition for resources
- Respecting and valuing children, families and practitioners
- Universal service model
- Sustainability
- Easily accessible services and family support

Each group presented their responses to the group at the conclusion of the workshop. A PowerPoint summary of the presentations is attached (Annexure 1).

## **Workshop Two**

The issues and barriers associated with reaching best practice in the early childhood sector were summarised in a PowerPoint presentation on the day (Annexure 2). The recurring themes that emerged during the workshop were:

- The need for a cultural and attitudinal shift toward the early years
- Reducing the complexity involved in accessing services and making referrals
- Raising the profile of the early years and obtaining commitment from all levels of government and all non-government organisations
- The use of “service hubs” to provide easy access to services
- Investing in the infrastructure needed to bring services together; and
- Eliminating silos in service provision and operation.

A number of issues were identified for high priority action. Creating a shared vision and addressing the need for leadership in the sector were among the activities rated highest in priority, followed by empowering the community, service mapping, funding issues and creating localised solutions.

## **Workshop Three**

Leadership, advocacy, research, communication, education and promotion were all perceived to be roles for the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation. The non-government sector was perceived to have a role in community engagement, capacity building, consultation, service provision and relationship building. Local Government was seen to have similar responsibilities, such as partnership building, in addition to identifying local needs, planning issues and developing infrastructure to support early childhood initiatives.

The development of policy and standards, support for education and training and the provision of services and service referral points were suggested roles for the Tasmanian Government, while national consistency for policy development, child care and maternity/paternity leave were considered to be issues for the Australian Government.

It was suggested that interested individuals and the community could assist through volunteering, mentoring, capacity building and importantly, participation. Local business could also support the early childhood sector through promotion, sponsorship and collaboration. The benefits of implementing flexible, family friendly employment policies were also raised.

The Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, non-government organisations and the State Government were perceived to have roles in monitoring the effectiveness of early childhood initiatives, while all stakeholders were believed to have an advocacy role.

The responses from Workshop Three were collated into a PowerPoint presentation on the day (Annexure 3).



### **3. What the Foundation is doing**

The outcomes of the Expert Community Forum will guide a number of key activities for the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation.

The Foundation has already established a Learning and Development Committee, which will aim to build capacity in Tasmania for the development of integrated services for young children and their families. It is envisaged that the Committee will consider approaches to professional development and staff leadership; identify resources to support capacity building, networking and advocacy; and promote networks and learning and development opportunities to the sector.

In addition, the Foundation will explore opportunities for more forums and/or create linkages with national conferences and visiting professionals in the field.

The outcomes of the Expert Community Forum will also assist the Foundation's work in promoting research in relation to the wellbeing, development and learning of Tasmanian children and establish a research base for the early years in Tasmania.

The Foundation's Research Committee is currently developing an outcomes based framework with indicators that will assist the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation prioritise and target projects and initiatives funded by the Foundation so that available resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The information, comments and sentiments from the Expert Community Forum will assist the Research Committee to identify new areas for research and will be considered as part of the Foundation's evaluation of its annual grant program.

Information and updates on the Foundation's work will be made available at [www.earlyyears.org.au](http://www.earlyyears.org.au) .



## 4. Forum Feedback

### Method of Evaluation

Participants were asked to evaluate the day by filling in an Evaluation Form (Annexure 4) which was provided to each person. Participants were asked to indicate whether they found aspects of the day useful by answering “yes” or “no” to three questions and were given the opportunity to provide additional comments to support their answers. Participants were also asked to suggest topics for discussion at future early childhood forums. All participants were assured that the information provided would be treated as confidential and only used to inform the Foundation’s activities.



The Foundation received 47 completed Evaluation Forms.

### Venue

All participants who completed the Evaluation Form were happy with the venue. Despite finding the venue suitable, 3 participants suggested that being seated at large round tables made it difficult to hear during group work. Four participants suggested either more variation or healthier catering options were needed and one participant did not support a venue associated with gambling.

### Workshops

43 participants who completed the Evaluation Form found Workshop One useful. Two participants suggested that more focus was needed on *how* to make change happen. Two participants did not answer this question.

39 participants who completed the Evaluation Form found both Workshops Two and Three useful. Comments included that the workshops needed more focus; the information gathered could have been gained in better ways; more time was needed and, similar to Workshop One, more focus was needed on how to make change happen.

Two participants did not answer this question.

### Additional Workshop Comments

39 participants who completed the Evaluation Form found all 3 workshops useful. 9 of these participants provided additional comments, including more time for the workshops, the difficulty of keeping workshop groups focussed, and the need to know what the next step is to resolve the issues identified. Other suggestions were:

- An increased focus on the role of the Foundation and communication mechanisms for “people on the ground”
- The need for those responsible for decision making and budget allocation to understand how services are working and developing funding models that do not result in competitive funding

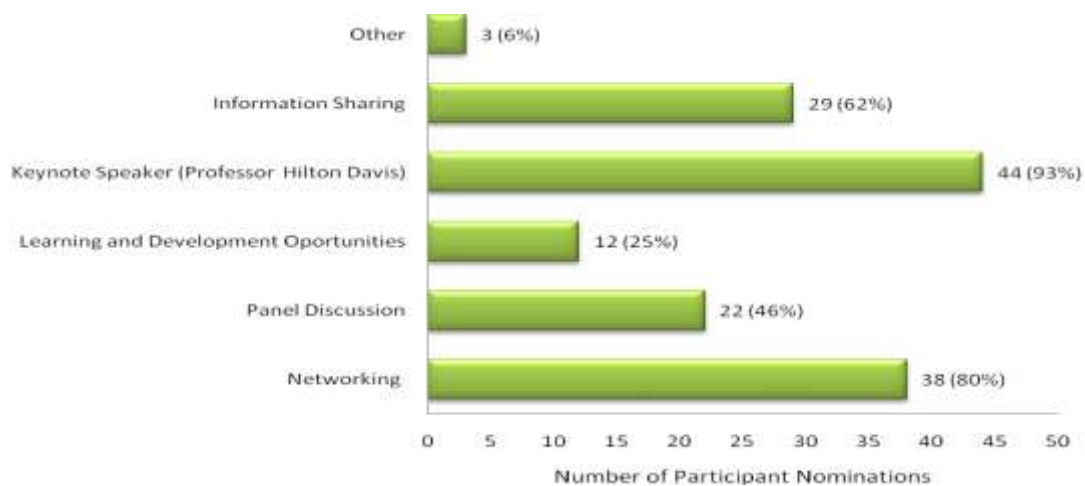
- The general need for more respectful discussions around these topics
- Receiving workshop questions before the Forum to allow time for full consideration; and
- Removing the word “expert” from the title of the Forum would encourage a broader range of people to attend.

## 5. Most Valuable Aspects of the Forum

Participants were asked to nominate which aspects of the Forum they believed to be most valuable. 6 categories were provided: Networking; Panel Discussion; Information Sharing; Learning and Development Opportunities; Keynote Presentation by Professor Hilton Davis; and Other (allowing participants to nominate an alternative). Participants could nominate more than one aspect of the Forum.

44 of the 47 participants (93%) who completed the Evaluation Form nominated the keynote speech by Professor Hilton Davis as the most valuable aspect of the day. Networking and Information Sharing also rated as very popular, with 80% and 62% of participants nominating these categories respectively. These results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Most Valuable Aspects of the Expert Community Forum – Nominated by Participants



## 6. Topics for future forums

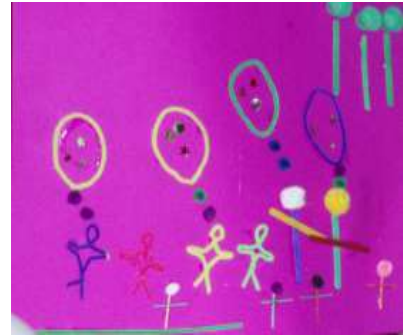
Participants were asked to nominate topics for future early childhood forums. The topics suggested fall within four categories: service provision; research; Tasmanian Early Years Foundation; and General Issues. Examples included:

### Research

- Information on trends, programs and research in early childhood
- Early brain research (including impact on later life)
- Research scoping – what do people want to know about our community?
- How to implement research in practice

## Service Provision

- Providing quality child care in the current regulatory environment
- All of agency responses to 0 – 18 year olds and strategic planning
- Parenting support services
- Developing partnerships
- Models of practice, best practice and innovation
- Standards, QA and sharing tools for assessment and reporting
- Effective management
- Improving education of those working with pre-school age children and addressing the skills shortage
- Collaboration practices for children under 5 (similar to Inter Agency Support Teams)



## Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

- Role of the TEYF and commitment from Government
- Updates on TEYF projects
- Reflection on progress of the TEYF toward meeting its goals
- Results of today's workshop and plans to progress issues raised

## General Issues

- Indigenous child issues (i.e. improving service delivery to meet the needs of indigenous children).
- Support for stay at home mums
- Issues impacting families – substance abuse, mental health, family violence
- Social innovation – leadership, promotion, implementation
- Leadership (i.e. promotion of early childhood issues)
- Legislative reform

# Annexure I

## Summary - Workshop One



# CREATING OUR FUTURE

Workshop I




# Creating Our Future

- Common Vision - Outcomes
- Effective Staff Selection
- Combining Pooling Resources
- Children & Family Hubs
- Community Ownership – Our Problem
- Scope the Issues
- Seek other support e.g. business



# Creating Our Future

- Ongoing Funding After Pilots
- Not Competing for Funds
- Working in the same direction – different contributions
- It's do-able
- Minister focussing on early childhood and care
- Engagement at all levels – Gov. and non-gov.
- Find ways of hearing children and families – needs and feedback



# Creating Our Future

- Centre of excellence – build skill base
- Systems need to change
- Everything is connected
- Effective use of existing resources
- Establish partnerships
- The importance of referral
- Bottom up approach
- Agree on a small set of key goals




# Creating Our Future

- Series of community forums up to 2012
- Champion for children
- Policy provision at the top
- Capacity building for all families
- Coordination

## Annexure 2

### Summary - Workshop Two



# STEPPING STONES TO THE FUTURE

Workshop 2




## Issues and Barriers

- Shared vision and goals
- Not sharing information
- Very little collaboration
- Govt. Departments working in partnership
- Short term policy funding
- Funding and resource allocations create silos
- Invisible divide between departments - have client at centre
- Client has to navigate complex system



## Issues and Barriers

- Lack of leadership
- Commonwealth / state divide in terms of funding / policy
- Decisions should be made in light of how they affect children
- Decision making is separate from community
- Structural issues e.g. parenting, leave, childcare
- Risk averse , decision makers
- Forming effective partnerships



## Issues and Barriers

- Skilling staff/attracting the right workers
- Funding models – competition for funding
- Current funding program – Department specific
- Experts take over / 'we are here to help you' concept
- Process becomes complex
- Not reaching people who need help
- Tasmania – regional approach is a barrier
- Territorial issues



## Issues and Barriers

- Communication between agencies and limited resources
- Current resources target the critical end not the preventative end
- Gaining trust of families
- Ensuring valuing early years is kept on political agenda
- Reduce number of children notified to the department because of care and protection issues
- Resistance to change
- Fragmented services / lack of universal services



## Key Areas for Action

- Dialogue and communication
- Model development
- Information sharing
- Consultation with community about their needs
- Recruiting and training of the existing staff
- Looking at community facilities
- High level of supportive focus e.g. Minister
- Look at poor funding

## Key Areas for Action



- Invest in evidence based research
- Gain longer term funding agreements
- Connect services into a model
- Revolution in thinking
- Legislative reform
- Service location
- Support for young parents
- Service mapping

## Priority One



- Vision, leadership
- Focus on early intervention
- Clear model
- Long term funding
- Shared language and training
- Use and share existing research that supports investment in early years
- Minister for Children / Early Years

## Priority Two



- Service mapping
- Funding issues
- Empowering the community
- Priority regardless of change of government
- Marketing strategies around parenting initiatives i.e. raising profile of parenting
- Creating infrastructure for service integration

## Priority Three



- Localised solutions
- Local level platform for interagency collaboration for under 5s
- Sustainable funding – fund less programs but at higher level
- Fund programs linked to long term goals for change in society for future
- Professional development

## Annexure 3

### Summary - Workshop Three



# OUR ROLE IN BUILDING THE DESIRED FUTURE

Workshop 3



## Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

- Advocacy / peak lobby body / leadership / vision / communication
- Research – promotion, mapping, funding, evidence based
- Building partnerships
- Ministerial liaison
- Longer term funding for pilots
- Bringing key speakers
- Training



## Tasmanian Early Years Foundation

- Working across age groups
- Fund social innovation
- Support attitudinal change
- Build measurement system into TEYF strategic plan
- Facilitate community education
- Children's champion



## Non Government Sector

- Community focus
- Informing and linking government and each other, creating relationships and partnerships
- Services on the ground for local families – innovative
- Appropriate training
- Advocacy
- Human face to a program / community development
- Produce resources



## Non Government Sector

- Support children to stay within their own community
- Support capacity building
- Be active in policy development
- Build relationships outside square e.g. business and local government
- Measuring outcomes and effectiveness
- Part of the decision making at all levels
- Research and evaluation



## Non Government Sector

- Identify overlaps e.g. Government and non-Government
- Co-ordinate regional early years groups

## Local Government



- Participate in one stop shop
- Providing infrastructure support, including transport
- Encourage local partnerships
- Advocacy
- Planning issues, i.e. housing, childcare, parks, community services, creating child friendly communities
- Identify local area needs and map services
- Services and events provision
- Community development, including funding and support

## State Government



- Policy development including whole of Government approach
- Support upgrading skills, education and training
- Provision of services, entry referral point
- Measure progress against child KPI
- Break down silos
- Address public transport issues to increase accessibility
- Leadership role in setting the vision
- Collaboratively develop standards and monitor implementation
- Legislative reform

## Australian Government



- Funding services – avoid competitive funding model
- Policy - keeping election commitments
- National consistency – form partnerships with State Govt.
- Ministry for Children
- National Child Protection Framework
- Universal maternity and paternity leave; revisit childcare processes / availability
- Support training for staff in children's sector
- Childcare workers – wages and conditions

## Interested Individuals and Communities



- Engage service clubs (i.e., Lions, Rotary etc)
- Act as volunteers and mentors
- Capacity building – creating child friendly communities
- Community houses – connection, information and support for parents
- Advocacy and promotion
- Participation

## Business Sector



- Media – getting the message out
- Sponsorship
- Collaboration and partnerships with Local Government and service providers
- Family friendly employment policies
- Be involved

## Annexure 4

### Evaluation Form

# Expert Community Forum EVALUATION FORM

Thank you for attending the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation Expert Community Forum. We would appreciate you providing us with your views to help plan and improve future forums. **The feedback you provide is confidential.** Your comments will be used to inform the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation's activities, your name and organisation will not be published.



**Organisation (optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Were you happy with the venue? Yes  No**

If no, please let us know what was not suitable and how it could be improved:

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**2. Did you find the following workshops useful?**

Workshop 1 – 'Creating the future' Yes  No

Workshop 2 – 'Stepping stones to the future' Yes  No

Workshop 3 – 'Our role in creating the future we want' Yes  No

If no, please let us know why the Workshop was not useful and how it could be improved:

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**3. What were the most valuable aspects of today's forum?**

Networking  Panel Discussion  Information Sharing

Learning and development opportunities  Keynote Presentation by Professor Hilton Davis  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Can you suggest topics that you would like to see discussed at future early childhood forums?**

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