Submission to Department of Social Services about Stronger Outcomes for Families

September 2018

About the Submitter

JFA Purple Orange is the social policy arm of the Julia Farr Association Inc. We are a non-government, social profit organisation that conducts research and engages in dialogue with people with lived experience of disability to develop policy and practice. Our work is anchored on the principles of Personhood and Citizenhood.

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1. Summary and recommendations

While most Australian families are cohesive and their children have the opportunity to thrive, there are still many Australian families that experience poor outcomes, despite governments investing heavily in services for this group. Looking at different ways to invest this money to drive better outcomes is a step in the right direction, however it is essential that the focus of this reform is about making a stronger impact, not just system efficiencies.

We have focussed our comments on people living with disability, and in light of this, make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

Universal design principles should be incorporated into the future design of programs for families and children across Australia.

Recommendation 2

People living with disability and their families should be involved in the design of programs for families and children through co-design processes.

Recommendation 3

Organisations funded to deliver programs for families and children should be required to ensure that these programs are inclusive of people living with disability. The government should work with the disability sector, including people living with disability, to determine how to achieve this.

Recommendation 4

Organisations delivering families and children services should be required to comply with mandatory accessibility requirements and adherence to this needs to be monitored.

Recommendation 5

Future programs for families and children need to work alongside the NDIS information, linkages and capacity building resources, including LACs.

2. Introduction

JFA Purple Orange welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Stronger Outcomes for Families consultation.

JFA Purple Orange is the social policy agency of the Julia Farr group, a trio of social profit, non-government organisations based in South Australia, working to improve the life chances of people living with disability. JFA Purple Orange and its predecessor organisations have been involved with the disability community, older people and other vulnerable groups for more than 130 years.

We are an independent, non-government organisation that fosters innovation, shares useful information, and promotes policy and practice that support and improve the life chances of people living with disability.

JFA Purple Orange is not a service provider – we deliver research, evaluation and information services anchored upon the stories and experiences shared by people with a lived experience of disability and others in their lives. As such, we feel we are well-positioned to offer comment.

3.   Background

The Department of Social Services (DSS) is seeking feedback from the sector, academia, state and territory governments, and families and children on the future of family and children services.

As detailed in the Stronger Outcomes for Families Discussion Paper, DSS delivers a range of activities under the Families and Communities Program to support families, improve children's wellbeing and increase participation of vulnerable people in community life to enhance family and community functioning.

The Program encompasses seven activities that support the Australian Government's priorities and responsibilities, one of which is the Families and Children's (FaC) Activity. Under the FaC Activity, the Department of Social Services (DSS) invests approximately $217 million annually in the following programs, which are in-scope for this engagement process:

- Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CFC FP)

- Family and Relationship Services (FaRS)

- Children and Parenting Support

- Intensive Family Support Service, and

- Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY).

These programs deliver a range of early intervention and prevention services to improve child, youth, adult and family wellbeing, increase economic engagement and support more cohesive communities. The majority of grant agreements for these programs expire on 30 June 2020. It is therefore timely for DSS to discuss how they can work with the sector to ensure programs continue to achieve positive outcomes for families and children across Australia.

4.   Overarching principles

As detailed in the consultation background paper, there is clear and persuasive evidence that prevention and early intervention to support positive child and family outcomes is more effective than remedial responses.

We are very supportive of programs designed to focus on early intervention, however we have a concern about the terminology. The word intervention implies the removal of personal control from people and families, with professionals taking over. If the goal of intervention is to grow a person or family's capacity, resilience and life chances, then the word intervention is ill-suited. No one would routinely describe learning, accepting a living-waged employment opportunity, joining a club, buying a car, taking a vacation, starting a family, and so on, as interventions. Good lives, good life chances, are not characterised by intervention, but by investment. Therefore, the phrase "early investment" will be used for the remainder of this submission.

JFA Purple Orange's work on early investment includes a conceptual framework which encompasses the following process characteristics[1]:

- a Radar (timing) – effective mechanisms for early detection of emerging issues/circumstances where a family is likely to need assistance
- a Compass (orientation) – a values framework that ensures that mechanisms are orientated towards 'front-foot' capacity-building or capacity-recovery in the context of ordinary valued life roles and milestones
- a Map (strategy) – an early investment technique/ methodology needs to give detailed measurable guidance on how to move a family's circumstances from A to B
- an Engine (resource) – an early investment technique needs adequate competent resourcing to get the job done.

Importantly, this early investment framework is further underpinned by JFA's Model of Citizenhood Support.[2] The Model presents four main outcome areas against which an early investment initiative may be measured for its effectiveness in capacity-building, capacity-recovery or capacity maintenance. The four 'content/outcome' areas are:

- Personal Capital
- Knowledge Capital
- Material Capital
- Social Capital

Personal Capital refers to the family's characteristics, strengths, and outlook. Applied to the topic of early investment, endeavours that increase personal capital would include clinical investments that create a lasting change, but would also include endeavours that build a child or family's outlook on their own strengths and what might be possible in their life.

Knowledge Capital refers to the presence of information that can assist the person and family to make informed choices towards a good life. Early investment endeavours that support this

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[1] Robbi Williams, Julia Farr Association.

[2] Williams, R. (2013), *Model of Citizenhood Support, 2nd Edition*, Julia Farr Association Inc. Adelaide.

include, for example, the provision of information to families about programs, or the work of a well-informed case coordinator who can pass on a wealth of practical relevant information to a person or family.

Material Capital refers to the presence of tangible material resources that are demonstrably helpful to the person and family. Early investment endeavours that support this include schemes focusing on aids and adaptations, home and transport modifications, accommodation support, and direct personal supports arranged through case coordination. Critically, it also includes access to public resources that most people will take for granted – public transport, public buildings and spaces, education, and health.

Social Capital refers to the connection (the opposite of isolation) and fellowship (the opposite of loneliness) that deliver natural supports and a sense of belonging to a person and family. Throughout human society it is easy to find examples of people with common interests or concerns coming together for mutual support and advancement. Early investment endeavours that support social capital include family/carer supports that build peer support networks for people with a common experience of disability, where people can gain hope, knowledge, practical support and fellowship from others on a similar journey.

The model can be used to consider how best to shape an investment in a family's life chances, and what types of return on that investment one might then look for. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss in more detail how a model like Citizenhood might be used to map future work and investments in programs for families and children.

5.   Disability and mainstream services

Through the National Disability Strategy (NDS), all levels of government in Australia have committed to a national approach to supporting people living with a disability to "maximise their potential and participate as equal citizens in Australian society".[3] Importantly, the NDS aims to improve the accessibility of mainstream services for people living with disability. Access and inclusion are key to people living with disability and their families taking up valued membership of community life as contributing citizens.

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[3] COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009), *National Disability Agreement,* p 3, Canberra.

Like all Australians, people living with disability face challenges with relationships and parenting and need to be appropriately supported through the mainstream programs funded by government. As stated in the NDS, governments must ensure that "universal personal and community support services are available to meet the needs of people with disability, their families and carers." [4]

There is a risk with the focus on the NDIS that mainstream service providers and the community more broadly may feel that people living with a disability are already "looked after" and adequately funded through the NDIS, and therefore don't require support through mainstream services. All levels of government need to take active steps through program design and implementation to ensure that the vision of the NDS is brought to life.

As detailed in the NDS, taking a universal design approach to programs, services and facilities is an effective way to remove barriers that exclude people living with disability. Government should be looking at ways to incorporate universal design principles into programs and policies in order to reduce barriers for people living with disability. The current redesign of programs for families and children provides an ideal opportunity to do this.

Furthermore, involving people living with disability and their families in the redesign of programs through co-design processes is a powerful and effective way to ensure that mainstream programs are designed in a way that is accessible to, and inclusive of, all people.

Recommendation 1
Universal design principles should be incorporated into the future design of programs for families and children across Australia.

Recommendation 2
People living with disability and their families should be involved in the design of programs for families and children through co-design processes.

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[4] COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009), *National Disability Agreement,* p 49, Canberra.

5.1. Inclusion

People living with disability are often socially isolated and many need assistance to build community connections. They are often separated by the creation of groups specifically for people living with disability, that do not enable interaction with people in the community in general. As a result, a person living with disability is less likely to engage in personal pursuits with others who share the same interests. There is often an unconscious belief that people living with disability don't belong in regular and typical community events and are better off with their 'own kind'. [5]

While programs currently funded through the FaC Activity do not exclude people living with disability, there isn't a strong sense that they are inclusive for all. Upon looking at the Communities for Children information for programs in Adelaide, there is no obvious inclusive element. There are a few activities that are specifically designed for children living with disability, which implies that the other programs are not available for these children.

The vision of the NDS is "an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens". [6] In order to achieve this, there needs to be a community-wide shift in attitudes towards people with disability. By increasing understanding that disability is a natural part of human diversity, communities are required to fully include people with disability in all aspects of life. Being socially inclusive is about the deliberate actions taken by an organisation to remove or reduce barriers to inclusion and to create opportunities that facilitate and encourage full participation.

As part of the future design of services for families and children, consideration needs to be given to how inclusion is made a priority for funded organisations. Developing inclusion plans and providing inclusion training for all staff are examples of ways that organisations can take active steps towards inclusion. There has been a lot of work done in this space with the Australian Local Government Association, which has developed a Disability

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[5] Resourcing Inclusive Communities (2017), *Developing Community Connections, Strategies for assisting a person with disability to connect with people around shared interests and experiences.*
[6] COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009), *National Disability Agreement,* p 22, Canberra.

Inclusion Planning Guide[7] to assist local councils to develop disability access and inclusion plans for their communities.

> **Recommendation 3**
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> Organisations funded to deliver programs for families and children should be required to ensure that these programs are inclusive of people living with disability. The government should work with the disability sector, including people living with disability, to determine how to achieve this.

5.2.   Accessibility

In 2009, the Shut Out report explained that many people living with disability felt forgotten, particularly when it came to trying to access community.[8] The freedom to access and move around in one's community and other public spaces is a basic right that most Australians take for granted. For the last 50 years, various building codes have been developed and progressed in an attempt to build an inclusive society accessible to all. However, despite the introduction of Australian standards[9], we are still witnessing the building and refurbishing of buildings which are not providing universal access to all – particularly people living with disability.

We undertook research last year around this issue and over 75% of our survey respondents believed that they would have the capacity to contribute to their community if there was better access. [10] Most respondents spoke about the issues of inaccessible communities and how they believed it should be compulsory for all buildings to be made fully accessible. Despite Australia having the Disability Discrimination Act and Accessible Building Codes Standards since the 1990s, our survey revealed a multitude of access issues.

Society should no longer see accessibility as an aspirational goal, but as an achievable reality that can be insisted upon now. In addition to the benefits this will bring in terms of human rights and social inclusion, it will also bring economic savings by avoiding the need for more

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[7] Australian Local Government Association (2016), *Disability Inclusion Planning – A Guide for Local Government,* Canberra.
[8] National People with Disabilities and Carer Council (2009), *Shut Out: The experience of people with disabilities and their families in Australia – National Disability Strategy Consultation Report*, p 52, Canberra.
[9] https://www.disabilityaccessconsultants.com.au/australian-standards-overview/ Cited August 29, 2018
[10] JFA Purple Orange (2017), *Submission no 57 to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs inquiry on the Delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities*.

expensive retrofits later on. As a society, we need to push for this at every opportunity. In the context of this reform, it is essential that new grant agreements make accessibility a mandatory requirement that is adequately monitored.

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Recommendation 4

Organisations delivering families and children services should be required to comply with mandatory accessibility requirements and adherence to this needs to be monitored.

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6.   Intersection with the National Disability Insurance Scheme

While the primary focus of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been the provision of funded supports to eligible participants, the scheme also has a broader role in raising community awareness of the issues that affect the social and economic participation of people with disability, and facilitating greater community inclusion of people with disability. [11] Genuine and meaningful community inclusion can only be achieved when people living with disability, government and community work together. The aim of the information, linkages and capacity building (ILC) program funded under the NDIS is to help bring people together to achieve that important goal.

The ILC has four activity areas, one of which is around capacity building for mainstream services. Activities funded under this area are designed to increase the knowledge and skills of mainstream services to meet the needs of people with disability.

An example of one of these activities is the Mainstream and Me project that was funded through the ILC National Readiness program in 2016/17. Inclusion Australia was funded to develop an approach to facilitate conversations between mainstream service staff and people with an intellectual disability, leading to improved inclusive behaviours and increased participation of people with intellectual disabilities. As part of this, Speak Out in Tasmania undertook work specifically targeted at connecting parents living with an intellectual disability with mainstream programs.

This is just one example of work currently underway to increase the capacity of mainstream services to support people living with disability. It is important that the outcomes of

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[11] *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* (Cth) s.3 (Austl.).

valuable pieces of work like this are taken into account in the redesign of mainstream programs.

NDIS Local Area Coordinators (LACs) have responsibility for linking people living with disability to information and support in the community, and also working with their local community to make sure it is more welcoming and inclusive for people with disability. Given LACs are already working in communities, they will play a valuable role in determining location-based investment needs and sharing good practice approaches to addressing these.

Recommendation 5

Future programs for families and children need to work alongside the NDIS information, linkages and capacity building resources, including LACs.

7. Conclusion

JFA Purple Orange appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on this important reform work. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to support the voice of people living with disability throughout this redesign process.

We also welcome any opportunity to meet with you to explore in more detail the themes raised in this submission.