

**Outcomes for Children in  
Early Childhood Services:  
A discussion paper for staff and  
services who work to support  
children's services**

**November 2006**

## 1. Introduction

This discussion paper has been written for staff and services who work to support children's services, including child care and kindergarten. It has been written to invite staff and services into a discussion about outcomes for children in Children's Services. *Can we agree on the outcomes we might expect for children from their participation in these services? Would a shared approach to outcomes be of benefit?*

As this paper has been prepared for the *Early Childhood Intervention Australia Victoria Chapter*, it has a bias. ECIA has a focus on children with disabilities. However there has been an enormous change in this field in the past decade, both in how we think about children with disabilities and developmental delays and in where staff work. Increasingly staff are working in community settings such as children's services.

Underlying this change is the understanding that children with disabilities or developmental delays are children first. Families of children with disabilities have more things in common with families of typically developing children than differences. Like all children, the foundations for children with disabilities emotional and social development are laid down in their early experiences.

Emotional and social development form the basis for future learning and relationships. All children's social development is enhanced by mixing with their peers. All children benefit from an environment in which they can explore diversity and similarity.

Just as children with disabilities are children first, it is our view that children's services should be for all children. Programs and policies that serve all children and families provide a better foundation for well being than targeted or segregated services. Given such a foundation, some children will require additional supports.

What is emerging is that the characteristics of services that are successful in including a diverse group of children are also the characteristics of high quality services that benefit all children. Services that are flexible and responsive to individuals are best able to meet children's needs. Where appropriate responses are made, most children with additional needs will make the same cognitive developments and achievements in mainstream children's services as they do in specialist settings.

## 2. Why focus on Outcomes for Children?

Why focus on outcomes? There are at least three reasons. If we are clear what experiences services are providing and what differences they want to make then:

- We have shared expectations
- It is easier to communicate to parents
- We know what we are supporting.

There are a range of services supporting children's services. These services include: *Preschool Field Officers, Inclusion Support Facilitators, FKA Multicultural Resource Centre, Inclusion in Kindergarten, Koori Early Childhood Field Officers*, to name some. If these services share a view about what outcomes we are seeking for children, then they will have similar expectations in working with children's services.

Our approach is influenced by the view that parents of children with disabilities often express - that the services are a maze. The extensive range of providers, funding mechanisms, programs and services can create confusion and complexity. If there are agreed outcomes then it is possible to communicate to parents the similarities in purpose that link the support services.

One of the challenges in supporting children's services to be inclusive is being clear about what they are trying to achieve in the first place. If we understand clearly what children's services are trying to achieve, then we can support this to occur for all children. Equally importantly, we will not expect children to achieve things in children's services that are not part of the focus of the Child Care or Kindergarten program.

The outcomes we want for children through children's services links to the broader outcomes we want for children as a community. It links to ideas of what childhood is and to debates such about education, care and quality. In inviting a discussion we are interested in finding out which debates, views, theories or approaches influence staff in other services that support early childhood services. Initially we are seeking to hold this discussion with staff from programs that support diversity in children's services. At some future point such a discussion, if it is productive, will need to include mainstream children's services staff.

The remainder of this discussion paper is a "first go" at a set of outcomes for children in children's services. It was developed after an initial forum (July 2006) which predominantly involved early childhood intervention staff and preschool field officers. It has been developed as a starting point for others to respond to.

### 3. Outcomes for Early Childhood Services

This Outcomes Statement is presented in terms of:

- Beliefs
- Outcomes
- Indicators
- Practices

#### 3.1 Outcomes for the Child

*Beliefs:* All children and families are unique.  
All children should be able to meaningfully participate in children's services.  
Families' choices regarding where their child participates should be respected.  
Children's services provide key social and learning opportunities for all children.

*Outcomes:* The child is more independent and able to use social support appropriately.  
The child's self esteem and sense of his or her own competence develops.  
The child is accepted as a member of the community and is able to meaningfully participate.  
The child develops functional skills that are utilised in a wide variety of settings.  
The child develops communication skills.  
The child develops independence.

*Indicators:* Children are confident and engaged.  
Participation is a pleasant and positive experience.  
Children have a range of opportunities to learn which reflect their interests and abilities.  
Children have a range of opportunities to participate socially, with support when required.  
Children are 'involved as much as they desire'.

*Practices:* Transparency – there is open discussion about flexible opportunities to participate and be included.  
Environments are flexible and adaptive.  
Children's services staff take responsibility for all children.  
Staff model acceptance of diversity, difference and develop a language for children to use to talk about differences and similarities.  
Services are easily accessible.

### **3.2 Outcomes for children in groups**

*Beliefs:* All children need the opportunity to develop strong relationships and ongoing allegiances as the basis for ongoing friendships.  
Children learn through playing with their peers.

*Outcomes:* The child has a sense of belonging to the group.  
The child develops mutual respect.  
The child develops meaningful friendships.

*Indicators:* Children like and help each other.

*Practices:* Development of a group culture where the group has a natural interest to explore, learn, interact and to acknowledge each member of the group.

### **3.3 Child – Adult Relationship**

*Beliefs:* Children should be able to learn in environments where they have trusting, open and respectful relationships with adults.

*Outcomes:* The child develops confidence in relationships with adults.  
The child is confident to explore growing independence.

*Indicators:* Staff respond promptly to each child's behaviour and identify his or her needs appropriately.  
Children interact easily with adults.  
Staff encourage children's growing independence.  
Staff and children have fun together.

*Practices:* Staff pay attention to children's behaviour and their needs.  
Staff practice a responsive adult-child interaction style.

### **3.4 Early Childhood Services relation to families**

*Beliefs:* All families should have the opportunity to participate in local early childhood services.

*Outcomes:* Families feel welcome and accepted. Children, parents, families and staff experience positive, trusting and flexible relationships. Parents learn and feel empowered.

*Indicators:* Parents form informal networks.  
Parents are mutually supportive.  
Parents articulate shared goals.

*Practices:* Staff are interested in the goals and aspirations of every family.  
Staff develop a culture based on respect, tolerance, acceptance, diversity, flexibility and being warm and welcoming.  
Family expectations are openly discussed in the context of inclusive approaches.

### **3.5 Early Childhood Services linkages to services**

*Beliefs:* Early childhood services have the greatest capacity when they can draw on the formal and informal resources in the community around them.

*Outcomes:* Staff feel supported by neighbourhood and visiting services.  
Staff are knowledgeable about local resources.  
Staff are confident in asking for assistance.  
Parents feel linked to the community.

*Indicators:* Staff provide advice about local services and resources.  
Visiting staff work collaboratively with service staff.  
People from the community come to and support the activities of the service.

*Practices:* Staff are interested in the goals and aspirations of every family.  
Staff develop a culture based on respect, tolerance, acceptance, diversity, flexibility and being warm and welcoming.  
Family expectations are openly discussed in the context of inclusive approaches.  
Staff develop a knowledge of local services and relationships with key services.  
Staff learn about the local community and develop relationships within it.

#### 4. Sources

This discussion paper was developed using the following sources:

ECIA(VC) *Starting With the End in Mind : Outcome Statements for Early Childhood Intervention Services*  
[http://www.eciavic.org.au/publications/ECIOutcomesPaper\\_Aug05.pdf](http://www.eciavic.org.au/publications/ECIOutcomesPaper_Aug05.pdf)

ECIA(VC) Consultative Forum : Community Inclusion in the Early Years Part 1: What are our desired outcomes? - July 2006 *Discussion Summary*

Gloria Harbin, Rebecca Kameny, John Palosi, Yuriy Kitsul and Randi Fox, *Identifying desired outcomes of early intervention: Interagency Outcomes Project Report (2002)* Frank Porter Graham Child Development Unit at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Danielle Z. Kassow, Ph.D., & Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D.  
*Relationship between parental contingent-responsiveness and attachment outcomes* Bridges, Volume 2, Number 4  
<http://www.researchtopractice.info/productBridges.php>