

Starting With the End in Mind:

**Outcome Statements for
Early Childhood Intervention Services**

August 2005

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victoria Chapter)

ECIA(VC) is the peak organisation representing early childhood intervention in Victoria.

ECIA(VC)s Vision:

A society, which provides the conditions and supports necessary to enable all families to nurture, protect and enjoy their children.

ECIA(VC)s Mission:

As a peak body, ECIA(VC) will promote and support a system of quality services for families with children who have special needs.

The work and activities of ECIA(VC) is made possible through the support of the Victorian *Department of Human Services*.

More information: www.eciavic.org.au

Acknowledgements

The ECIA(VC) Committee acknowledge the contribution of forum working group members and facilitators, in planning and implementing the forums and parent focus group.

The information and feedback from those professionals and parents who contributed to the forum discussions, or forwarded suggestions as a result of discussions at their own worksites has been of significant importance in developing this document.

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Foreword

The development of an outcome statement for early childhood intervention represents a historic achievement. Until now, there has not been common agreement among those working with young children with disabilities and developmental delays about what they are trying to achieve. As a field, early childhood intervention has been fragmented by many factors. Since its inception it has been divided according to different types of disabilities, by geographic inequities and by different professional backgrounds. More recently it has been divided by medical understandings of disabilities versus social understandings of the lived experience. In parallel, there have been debates about the value of specialist programs versus the benefits of inclusion in the community.

Some of these differences have been artificial. Specialist knowledge is essential, as is the opportunity for all people to participate in the community. A shortfall in resources has prompted some to champion or defend one approach at the expense of another. An absence of locally based evaluation and research has left services trying to extrapolate evidence from overseas studies undertaken in significantly different circumstances. The lack of local information has made it difficult to disseminate local practice wisdom and establish common understandings.

In producing this outcome statement *Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter)* has achieved three things. Firstly, through a series of forums, discussions and revisions over fourteen months, it can confidently be said that we have developed a statements that is representative of what services are trying to achieve in this field.

Secondly, it clearly articulates unifying principles and shared goals that apply for all aspects of the complex business of early childhood intervention, showing how services can respond to the specific needs of a child while supporting families to maintain social connectedness, and to participate, as they decide, in the community.

Finally, it challenges us to develop more comprehensive services into the future.

The directions identified in this document raise significant issues for our field, including funding levels, the fragmented nature of children's services, professional support needs and the challenges of truly working in partnership with families. However we now have a solid foundation from which to tackle these and other opportunities and barriers as we work to create better experiences for families and children.

John Forster
President
August 2005.

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1. Introduction

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victorian Chapter) - ECIA(VIC) - is the peak body representing those involved with early childhood intervention (ECI) in Victoria.

This booklet reports on the ECIA(VIC) activities to develop a common agreement regarding service outcomes.

Part 1 discusses the area of outcomes and describes the process by which the statements were developed.

Part 2 presents the Outcome Statements themselves.

Parts 3, 4 and 5 present more detailed background information and resources that were referred to in developing this document.

1.1 ABOUT OUTCOMES:

For ECI services to be effective, it is vital that families and service providers have a shared understanding about what outcomes they are trying to achieve.

Why do we do what we do? What are the critical results that should be achieved at the end of early childhood intervention services? What impact or changes are desired? What differences should services have made for children with additional needs and their families?

If families and service providers 'start with the end in mind' and are clear about what the desired outcomes are, it is more likely that those outcomes will be achieved. Families and service providers will be in a better position to choose the best strategies to meet those outcomes.

What is an Outcome Statement?

- It is a clear statement of what services intend to achieve.
- It lists expectations about what sort of benefits will be achieved.
- It is written in a way that allows the effectiveness of a service to be measured.

In this way, an Outcome Statement defines the ultimate, measurable standard of a service.

There are a number of reasons for reviewing this topic in Early Childhood Intervention:

- Families and service providers can become caught up in service provision, losing sight of the over-riding purpose of their activities.
- Definitions of early childhood intervention can be broad and reflect outcomes by implication. More definite statements can reveal explicit links between professional activities and the intended benefits for children and families.
- Outcome Statements must take the following into account:
 - (a) philosophical and theoretical foundations,
 - (b) the range of family situations,
 - (c) the practicalities and demands of individual agency conditions, and
 - (d) the constraints and requirements of funding bodies and management.
- Agreement on outcomes can result in more consistent approaches with benefits for families and professionals.
- Agreement on outcomes can lead to more effective evaluation and research in the field. Information regarding the efficacy of our services is crucial in ensuring accountability.

1.2 Development of the ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement.

In 2004-05, ECIA(VC) conducted a series of forums on the topic *Developing Outcomes in Early Childhood Intervention Services*. Parents and early childhood intervention professionals participated in these forums.

The forums were devoted to *defining desired outcomes* for those receiving early childhood intervention services. Proposed outcome statements were rigorously discussed and debated. Activities and discussion at these forums considered local and international examples and indications from a literature review.

The first forum (May 2004) focussed on defining outcomes, the second (September 2004) considered practice strategies, and the third (March 2005) explored evaluation methods. A parent focus group considered the proposed outcome statements in February 2005. Some regions and agencies also conducted their own activities and discussion about the proposed statements and provided feedback to contribute to this process.

On the basis of these activities, statements were drafted and revised with reference to State Government directions, World Health Organisation material, and a literature review of international outcome statements, evaluation methods and principles of best practice.

Professionals and parents were able to compare proposed statements with their own knowledge, experience and expertise. For parents, the over-riding outcome was being *'satisfied that they had used the maximum opportunities to achieve what they could for their children'*.

Particular references used in the forum and focus group are available on the ECIA(VC) website. The material on the website includes the Parent Focus Group Report and reading materials to do with outcomes in general, best practice principles and evaluation resources. More detailed discussion and information regarding the outcome topic and material used in the development of this statement is found in Part 3.

This document is part of an ongoing process. The forums and consultations are planned regarding service development and implementation of practices that are aligned to these outcomes. The statements raise implications in areas such as staff training and skill development, sustaining management, funding and community development regarding inclusion and collaboration in the early childhood sector. ECIA(VC) intends to use future forums to develop resources regarding pathways for success in adopting and evaluating strategies designed to achieve these outcomes.

The sequence of ECIA(VC) activities regarding the development of the Outcome Statement and best practice strategies is illustrated in Table 1.

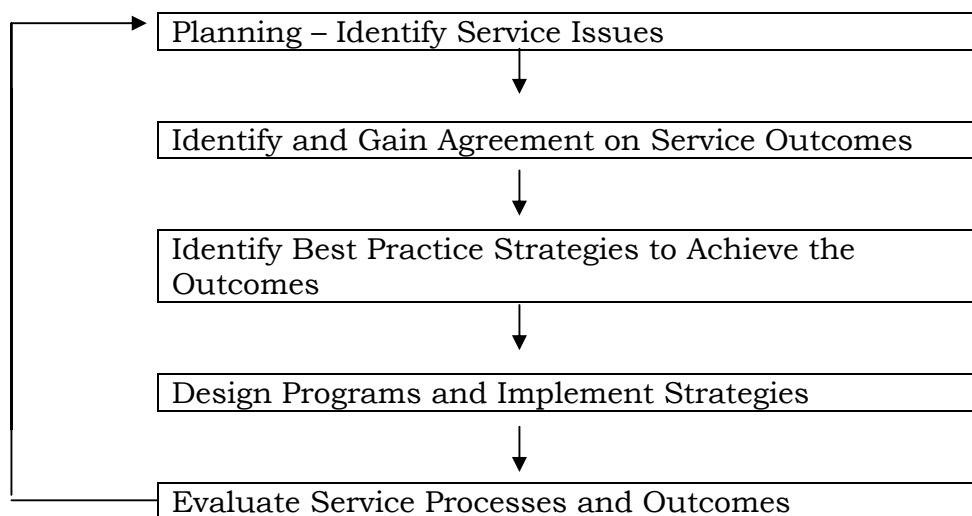


Table 1: ECIA(VC) process in developing outcomes and best practice resources.

2. The ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement.

Early childhood intervention services aim to make a positive difference for families with a child with developmental delay or disability. Service providers aim to support families as they respond to their individual circumstances, encourage their child's development, and participate in their local community.

The ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement:

- Lists the outcomes early childhood intervention services are seeking for children, families and communities;
- Is a table of Outcomes and Objectives listed under Function (knowledge and skills) and Participation (involvement with others, attitude, support and coping).
- Is designed to apply to any child, family and early childhood service;
- Is based on current outcome literature and evidence of best practice;
- Has been developed through consultation with professionals and parents;
- Is written in an active, results-driven style that enables them to be measured, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In summary this document is a Statement of Intent for parents and professionals to be clear about what *Early Childhood Intervention Services* are trying to achieve.

2.1 ECIA (VC) OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

	FUNCTIONING	PARTICIPATING
OUTCOMES	<p>Children will gain functional, developmental and coping skills that are appropriate to their ability and circumstances.</p> <p>Children will show confidence and enjoyment in their everyday life.</p>	<p>Children will participate meaningfully in home and local community activities to the extent of their ability.</p> <p>Children will experience and enjoy family life and community activities that are preferred by the family.</p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>Children will develop skills to perform everyday tasks and activities at home, either by themselves or with planned support.</p> <p>Children will develop skills to perform appropriate tasks and activities in community settings, either by themselves or with planned support.</p> <p>Children will develop interests and enjoy favourite activities.</p> <p>Children will develop confidence in their abilities and in their response to challenges.</p>	<p>Depending on each family’s choice and circumstance:</p> <p>Children will participate in a full range of home routines and family recreation activities.</p> <p>Children will participate in a range of community activities, both as an individual and with their families, either by themselves or with planned support.</p> <p>Children will enjoy participating in family and community activities.</p> <p>Children will gain self esteem and confidence through participating in family and community activities.</p>

RATIONALE – These outcomes reflect:

- the underlying principles of family centred practice, everyday learning environments and routines, and personal resilience.
- the educational, therapeutic and supportive role of professionals.
- children’s rights to education, social inclusion and quality of life.

2.2 ECIA (VC) OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES

	FUNCTIONING	PARTICIPATING
OUTCOMES	<p>Families will be able to nurture and support their child according to their values and preferences.</p> <p>Families will be able to identify and address the needs of their child(ren) and family.</p> <p>Families will be able to advocate for themselves and their family, to the degree they choose.</p>	<p>Families will participate in social and community activities to the degree they choose.</p> <p>Families will feel supported by personal networks and local communities.</p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>Families will identify their needs for information, support and resources.</p> <p>Families will know about the range of options and resources available to them, and will be able to think about and meet the needs of the family as a whole.</p> <p>Families will be able to help their child develop functional, developmental and coping skills, using everyday routines.</p> <p>Families will be able to establish routines that make life more manageable and less stressful.</p> <p>Families will be able to recognise and draw on their own strengths and resources to respond to their own needs and priorities, in a way that suits their individual circumstances.</p> <p>Parents will recognise the value of their own knowledge about their child and family, and will be able to express their views with service providers and people in their lives with confidence.</p>	<p>Depending on each family’s choice and circumstance:</p> <p>Families will participate meaningfully in a range of social and community activities.</p> <p>Families will enjoy participating in social and community activities.</p> <p>Families will feel supported by formal and informal networks.</p> <p>Families will have strong social support within the community.</p>

RATIONALE: These Outcome Statements reflect:

- Underlying notions to do with the style of help giving behaviour, a strength based, capacity building approach, and the longer term aim of parents as advocates.
- The professional roles of providing information, resources and support.
- Families’ rights to self respect and access to community activities.

2.3 ECIA (VC) OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNITIES

	FUNCTIONING	PARTICIPATING
OUTCOMES	<p>Communities will have a range of service options and facilities to respond to emerging needs of families in supportive ways.</p> <p>Communities will know how to, and be able to respond to the needs of all individuals and families.</p>	<p>Communities will value all members.</p> <p>Communities will be inclusive, providing for diversity, access and quality services for all families.</p>
OBJECTIVES	<p>Specialist and mainstream services will be part of an integrated network to support families and children.</p> <p>Specialist and mainstream services will have shared knowledge of the service system.</p> <p>Specialist and mainstream services will have knowledge of the range of differences in children and families.</p> <p>Specialist and mainstream services will work with children in ways that promote their development and participation.</p> <p>Specialist and mainstream services and other informal community based services will be able to provide integrated support..</p>	<p>Early childhood services will be accepting of children with disabilities and their families.</p> <p>Community facilities will be accepting of children with disabilities and their families.</p> <p>Early childhood services will have a common philosophy and common procedures regarding inclusion.</p>

RATIONALE: These Outcome Statements reflect:

- The underlying principles of diversity and inclusion, and the notions of an ecological perspective and a universal continuum of early childhood services.
- The role of all early childhood professionals in promoting community knowledge of the experiences and needs of all children and families, encouraging community response accordingly.
- Duty of care and the ethics of professionals to continually gain knowledge and be responsive to the range of children and families in the community.

3. More Information

Reference points that informed the development of the ECIA(VC) Outcome Statements include:

3.1 Literature regarding Defining Outcomes.

There has been a progressive expansion of expectations in the early childhood intervention field. Historically services were focussed on the child's development, and the prevention of secondary concerns (Bailey et al, 1998, 2002). The general outcome, *children will develop skills*, has been widely accepted in the sector, and is an expectation from families, referral agents and the general community. It is also an outcome that is more easily defined and measured.

As services became more aware of the role of the family, the literature extended outcome discussion accordingly. This is where defining measurable outcomes can be more complex, as services and families are diverse. Outcomes for families have been described in terms of:

- *family perceptions* of early childhood intervention services (ECIS). Suggested outcomes are in terms of satisfaction measures, reports of the differences ECI has made for the child and family, and having a positive view of professionals involved.
- *impact* of ECIS. This area looks at the extent ECI assisted the family to
 - (a) promote their child skills,
 - (b) form partnerships with services and advocate for themselves,
 - (c) build a strong support system,
 - (d) feel more optimism about the future and
 - (e) experience a better quality of life. (Bailey & Wolery, 2002).

There is a current international interest in ECI outcomes. One example is the Indiana First Steps program, which has developed a list of child and family outcomes and an exit questionnaire with questions corresponding to each outcome. Another example that defines outcomes at child, family and system levels is presented by Harbin and Kameny (2004).

Community building initiatives to promote access and participation have also extended the outcome discussion. Considering the results of ECIS at the community level is both a practice and system question. The community may be viewed at the early childhood system level, as well as the broader society level.

Outcomes can go beyond transition and inclusion activities for families, to the broader promotion of positive community attitudes. Advocating for quality services for all children and families can override the isolation and separation of specialist and generic services. This discussion allows a proactive approach to the planning of the universal system.

More information about developments in the outcome literature is available in the paper Tim Moore presented at the first forum in May 2004.

3.2 World Health Organisation (WHO)

A framework for defining outcomes is seen in the WHO *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*. This classification, released in 2002, presents a 'bio-psycho-social' perspective of disability. Reducing the effects of disability is presented as a combination of increasing the functional capacity of a person and modifying features of the person's physical and social circumstances (page 5). Any person's functioning is seen as a combination of health and personal conditions and environmental and contextual factors. Minimising any gap between capacity and performance is the goal of health related organisations.

The ICF is designed to apply to health and health related services – the classification looks at impairments (related to body function and structures), activity (ability to perform a task or action) and participation (involvement in society). (page 10). These concepts were used in the ECIA(VC) Outcome Statement, collapsed under the headings of *functioning* and *participation*.

3.3 State Government Directions

As part of the *Children First* policy (2003), The Department of Human Services has defined the vision and priorities for Early Childhood Intervention. The vision is for families to '*access flexible and responsive specialist supports within the universal platform of services to support them in raising their child within the family and community and enabling them to achieve their developmental, social and emotional potential*' (page 2).

The policy endorses the family centred and inclusion approach, listing a number of goals and strategies. Some goals relate to system planning; goal 3 reflects service outcomes:

Goal 3: The principles of family centred practice underpin ECIS delivery. Services will focus on building parent capacity to care for their child and promote independence and choice for families in navigating the service system, acknowledging the links between children's developmental outcomes and their immediate experience within the family (page 7)

More recent government documents also reflect the notions of a responsive universal system. The Premier's Children's Advisory Committee released its final report – *Joining the Dots* – in 2004. The Government's response – *Putting Children First...the Next Steps* (2004) – outlines proposals to improve outcomes for children and families by coordinating children's services in Victoria under a new Minister and a new Office for Children. *A Fairer Victoria* (2005) presents the state government's social policy with initiatives to address structural and systemic causes of disadvantage in a coordinated fashion.

3.4 Evidence Based Indicators of Best Practice.

The theoretical notions underpinning early childhood intervention are well documented in the literature, with evidence endorsing the ecological approach of *family centred practice, the use of natural learning environments, and inclusion*. These principles are taken as given in the early childhood intervention field.

These three notions unite into a family and community empowerment approach that reflects short and long term outcomes. Short term, immediate outcomes embed activities to encourage children's skills and confidence in their regular environments, as well as encouraging those involved with the child in their parenting and interactions. The research literature reflects long term outcomes of families being able to express their needs, form partnerships with a range of professionals, and negotiate current and future service system(s) with confidence. The main resource used in the second forum was the article by Odom and Wolery (2003). These authors conducted an extensive review of best practice research and compiled results into eight fundamental principles.

3.5 Potential Evaluation Procedures.

In the third forum, the proposed outcome statements were considered with regard to evaluation procedures. Discussion considered different methodologies, both formal and informal and different instruments. It is noted that many current instruments consider process rather than results, further highlighting the need to 'start with the end in mind'. There is a need to evaluate both the procedure and the results.

Statements were considered with regard to how well the different concepts raised could be measured. Some concepts were removed as being too complex to define or too subjective to measure. Some concepts such as confidence and enjoyment were retained as an important aspect for service providers and families to aspire to. The combination of qualitative and quantitative measures allows a range of methods such as goal attainment scaling, anecdotal records and informal and formal interviews and questionnaires. An annotated listing of evaluation instruments was presented at the third forum as a useful resource for the field, as well as a paper by Tim Moore (March 2005), which considered evaluation issues.

4. Concluding Comment

The aim of this document is to help service providers and parents reflect upon what outcomes they are seeking for children, families and communities. In considering the material, service providers and parents may also consider what strategies will achieve those aims more effectively.

The *ECIA(VC) Outcome Statements* will continue to be revised in the light of feedback from those using them in their work. ECIA(VC) will continue to work on identifying strategies and best practices, and develop resources to assist the achievement and evaluation these outcomes.

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