

Brimbank Communities for Children Facilitating Partner Community Strategic Plan 2015 - 2019

The Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (FP)

The Brimbank CFC FP project is place-based and develops and facilitates a whole of community approach to support and enhance early childhood development and wellbeing for children from before birth to 12 years. The project builds on local strengths to meet local community needs and create capability within local service systems, using strong evidence of what works in early intervention and prevention as identified by the Families and Children Expert Panel. The Brimbank CFC FP will collaborate with other organisations to provide a holistic service system for children and families. As the Facilitating Partner, The Smith Family (TSF) will fund other organisations (known as Community Partners) to provide services and activities that will support the improvement of outcomes in the key areas identified in its planning.

The Community Strategic Plan

The Community Strategic Plan supports TSF to set out a vision for Brimbank. It identifies the key needs and service gaps in the community, develops ways to better coordinate and collaborate and outlines priority areas and strategies to address need and improve outcomes for children and families. The Plan builds on the extensive knowledge that The Smith Family and the local community committees have gained in working with their communities, over the past 10 years. This new Community Strategic Plan presents an opportunity to critically reflect on what is changing and what continues to be the strengths and challenges for our local community.

The Plan also reflects the Australian Government's commitment to civil society and an acknowledgement that it is only through everyone in a community working together that true change in outcomes and trajectories can be achieved. This includes governments, non-government organisations, academia, business and community members.

The Community Strategic Plan has been developed with the aim of achieving the Families and Children Activity Outcomes and the Communities for Children FP objectives. The objectives of the Communities for Children FP are outlined below.

- To improve the health and well-being of families and the development of young children, from before birth through to age 12 years, paying special attention to:
 - Healthy young families — supporting parents to care for their children before and after birth and throughout the early years;
 - Supporting families and parents — support for parents to provide children with secure attachment, consistent discipline and quality environments that are stable, positive, stimulating, safe and secure;
 - Early learning — provide access to high quality early learning opportunities in the years before school; provide early identification and support for children at risk of developmental and behavioural problems; assist parents with ways they can stimulate and promote child development and learning from birth; and
 - School transition and engagement - support children and families to make a smooth transition to school and work with local schools to assist children and families with their ongoing engagement with school.
- To create strong child-friendly communities that understand the importance of children and apply this capacity to maximise the health, well-being and early development of young children at the local level.

The Plan includes the following sections:

1. Communities for Children Facilitating Partner's Details
2. Community Informed Service Mapping
3. Community Engagement
4. Service Area Vision
5. Priority Areas

The Brimbank CFC FP Community Strategic plan is informed by the following Australian government documents:

- Families and Children Guidelines Overview
- Communities for Children FP Operational Guidelines
- Your Families and Communities Programme Grant Agreement, especially Item B
- Families and Children Performance Framework
- Families and Children Programme Logic, and
- State, territory and local government policies, plans and services

1. Communities for Children Facilitating Partner's Details

Facilitating Partner Details

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Service Area Name | Brimbank |
| FP Name | The Smith Family |
| FP Contact Name | Felicity Tregurtha |
| FP Contact Title | Project Manager, Communities for Children Facilitating Partner |
| Address | 7/2 Devonshire Road Sunshine |
| State/Territory and Postcode | Victoria 3020 |

Community Strategic Plan

| | |
|---|---|
| Date Communities for Children Committee agreed to Community Strategic Plan | 20 March 2015 |
| Name of Facilitating Partner Authorising Officer | Sulabha Pawar National Manager – Government and Community Projects |
| Signature of Facilitating Partner Authorising Officer | SULABHA PAWAR |

DSS Use

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Date of Submission to DSS | |
| Date of DSS approval | |
| DSS Delegate Name | |
| DSS Delegate Position | |
| DSS Delegate Signature | |

2. Community-Informed Service Mapping

Brimbank is a western metropolitan local government area of Melbourne, Victoria. Brimbank is situated between 11-23 kilometres from the Melbourne GPO. Brimbank is referred to as the gateway of the Western metropolitan region of Melbourne, which is also one of Australia's fastest growing regions. The Communities for Children FP project started in Brimbank in 2005 and now covers the suburbs of: Ardeer, Albion, Cairnlea, Deer Park, Derrimut, St Albans, Sunshine, Sunshine North, Sunshine West and Sydenham.

Population:

The total population of Brimbank is 182,735 (Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS Census 2011) and is expected to grow to 193,590 in 2015. Population increases have been driven by a rise in the number of people moving into the municipality as well as increased birth rates. Increases in the 0-12 age group are particularly important for the CfC FP initiative and the wider child and family service sectors in Brimbank. This population increase has obvious implications for local health, welfare and education service provision. The main users of early years universal services are generally families who have the personal agency to source what they require to assist them and their families. Families and children with complex needs, who benefit most from accessing early years services, are the ones least likely to access them.

Diversity:

Considerable diversity exists within the City of Brimbank, including cultural, social, physical and economic differences throughout the municipality. Parts of the municipality such as Derrimut, Deer Park and Cairnlea have recently experienced high growth and this growth is predicted to continue in to the future. Gentrification is occurring in parts of the municipality, which is creating new local opportunities. The possibility of particular cohorts of the population missing out on these new local opportunities becomes a more of a reality. There needs to be clear strategies to increase the participation of vulnerable families and children in the Brimbank community functioning.

Culturally and Linguistically Diversity:

Historically Brimbank has welcomed new residents from all over the world and continues to do so, making Brimbank one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse local government areas in Australia.

From the ABS Census 2011, when compared to Greater Melbourne, the City of Brimbank was far more culturally and linguistically diverse, with almost twice the population of people born in non-English speaking countries - 46.2% compared with 25.6% (Greater Melbourne). There is also twice the proportion of residents who speak languages other than English 59.7% compared with 30.5% and more than twice the proportion of people having limited fluency in English – 12.5% compared to 5.0%. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of people born overseas increased by 11,431 or 15.7%, and the number of people from a non-English speaking background increased by 10,914 or 16.1%. The largest growth in countries of origin of the population in this period between 2006 and 2011 were for those born in India, Vietnam, Philippines and China. There is also diversity within the local CALD communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders:

In 2011 there were 205 children identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander descent, representing 0.7% of all children aged 0-12 years living in Brimbank. About 70% of the Aboriginal population in Brimbank reside in CFC FP suburbs. The age structure of the Indigenous population in Brimbank demonstrates a younger population profile compared to the non-Indigenous population. 33% of the Indigenous population in Brimbank is aged 0-14, compared with 18.1% of the non-Indigenous population.

Although the local Aboriginal and Torres Islander population is relatively small in Brimbank, complexities exist which are influenced by a number of elements.

These include:

- A high proportion of Brimbank's Aboriginal and Torres Islander population place of origin is not Brimbank or Victoria.
- Currently there is not a specific Aboriginal and Torres Islander centre or service in Brimbank.

Disadvantage:

The City of Brimbank is currently the third most disadvantage municipality in Victoria with a SEIFA Index of 926. Many children and their families living in Brimbank face complex and challenging realities. Their experiences include low household incomes, family violence, unemployment, unstable housing, limited family support and disconnection from extended family and culture, poor social connectedness and language barriers. This is underpinned by complex service systems and lengthy waiting periods.

Children in Brimbank:

AEDC results in 2012 indicated that there were greater proportions of children in Brimbank, who were developmentally vulnerable on all the AEDC measures, than children in either Victoria or Australia. Since 2009 the proportions of developmentally vulnerable children in Brimbank has increased. As a whole 27.7% of children were developmentally vulnerable or at risk in one or more domains compared to 19.5 for Victoria. In the CfC FP suburbs of St Albans, Deer Park, Sunshine West, Sunshine North and Cairnlea there is a higher percentage children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains of the AEDC. The areas of greatest concern were social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication skills.

The proportion of Brimbank children who did not participate in some form of regular non-parental care or early childhood education was higher than that for Victoria as a whole.

NAPLAN results indicated that for Years 3 and 5, on most domains, the majority of schools in Brimbank were either close to the average or below average.

Brimbank families:

Many Brimbank parents/carers seek out community and supported playgroups and broader universal services as a source of support and information. The Brimbank community is very proud of the 100 plus local playgroups and the playgroup culture which has evolved over the last ten years. (Brimbank CFC FP currently funds four supported playgroups). Brimbank playgroups have become a platform for increasing social connectedness, parental coaching, stimulating children's development through quality play experiences, linking families and children into other services and providing access to a range of information and resources. This is at a time when children's development is most rapid and investing in parents has a lasting influence on families. Beyond local playgroups, the CfC FP planning phase demonstrated that access to additional structured parenting education/support is limited, particularly for families considered to be vulnerable. There are identified cohorts of parents/carers and children in the CfC FP catchment, who for various and complex reasons are considered vulnerable and are not linked into universal services or seeking out community support. This includes; Parents/carers who have a child with a disability, parents with mental health issues, parents with AOD issues, and families in unstable housing.

Socio-demographic data summary

| | Brimbank | | Greater Melbourne |
|--|----------|------------|-------------------|
| Population | Number | Percentage | Percentage |
| Population | 182,735 | | (No. 3,999,982) |
| Population aged 0-4 years | 11,969 | 6.5 | 6.5 |
| Population aged 5-8 years | 11,308 | 6.2 | 4.9 |
| Population aged 9-12 years | 6904 | 3.8 | 4.7 |
| Cultural Diversity | | | |
| % residents NESB Born | | 46.2 | 25.6% |
| Arrived in past 2.5 years [% population] | | 4.0% | 3.4% |
| % Speak languages other than English | | 59.7% | 30.5% |
| % Population with Limited English fluency | | 12.5% | 5.0% |
| Disadvantage | | | |
| SEIFA Index (third most disadvantaged LGA in Victoria) | 925.8 | | |
| Equivalised Household Incomes | | | |
| Lowest group (\$0 - \$430) | | 31.7 | 22.9 |
| Medium lowest group (\$431 - \$753) | | 27.9 | 23.4 |
| Medium highest group (\$752 - \$1203) | | 24.8 | 25.5 |
| Highest group (\$1204 and over) | | 15.6 | 28.3 |
| Households & Families | | | |
| Families (two-parent) | | 48 | 47 |
| (with children younger than 15 years only) | | 17.4 | 17.1 |
| (with children younger and older than 15 years) | | 5.7 | 4.6 |
| Families (one-parent) | | 19 | 15 |
| (with children younger than 15 years only) | | 4.9 | 3.5 |
| (with children younger and older than 15 years) | | 2.1 | 1.2 |
| Employment | | | |
| Unemployment rate (%) | | 8.3 | 5.5 |

3. Community Engagement

The CfC FP initiative commenced in Brimbank ten years ago and during this period the project has developed many strong connections across the health, education and welfare sectors as well as the broader community. The project reaches an average of 1,270 families per year and approximately 1,400 children per year.

CfC FP CSP Planning Process:

The Community Strategic Plan was developed through consolidating and analyzing relevant socio-economic and service data, consultation with children, their parents/carers, service providers and community members, and assessment of relevant research evidence.

Community consultation:

Throughout the planning phase over 400 families and 200 professional and 94 children were consulted.

The methods used included:

Surveys and 1 – 1 interviews with Parents/carers, Surveys and 1- 1 interviews with professionals and service providers; Children's consultations with Year 1& 2 and Year 5 & 6 children; and consultations with parents at playgroups, kindergartens, schools and library story-time sessions.

To ensure that the consultations captured a broad range of views, survey tools were translated into five of the larger language groups in Brimbank. Bicultural workers were engaged to undertake surveys within the community settings. These strategies have enabled CfC FP to tap into a wider community perspective which is reflective of the local civil society in Brimbank.

A scoping document summarizing key available data about Brimbank, as well as the information from consultations, was prepared to inform the planning processes. The work for the scoping document was done in partnership with Brimbank City Council, who were consulting to revise their Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP).

During the planning phase there were new and emerging opportunities to strengthen local community engagement. Careful consideration was given to executing meaningful community engagement strategies.

The Smith Family promoted opportunities for input into the planning and implementation of the project by undertaking a number of strategies, including articles in local media, and distribution of information to parents/carers and professionals through service and school networks.

Ongoing Engagement:

There is new and sustainable ownership of the project from a broader range of stakeholders.

CfC FP Brimbank Advisory Committee:

Late 2014, as a direction from DSS, The Smith Family was required to establish a new CfC FP Advisory Committee which agenda focuses solely on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the CfC FP project in Brimbank. Previously the project's governance had been provided through the Brimbank Early Years Reference Group (BEYRG). BEYRG is a partnership with Brimbank Council and provided governance for both the CfC FP and Best Start program. BEYRG also provides advisory support to other collaborative projects and plans related to families and children in Brimbank. The newly established CfC FP Advisory Committee is made up of a targeted range of Brimbank stakeholders. Membership includes parents/carers, community members, and senior managers from relevant agencies delivering services in Brimbank and Local, State and Commonwealth government representatives. The committee has met regularly throughout the CSP planning phase and will continue to meet every month. Examples of future meeting agenda items include policy discussions, reporting on the progress of the project and seeking out media opportunities.

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*The local priorities were endorsed by the CfC FP Advisory Committee on Friday 6 March 2015.
The CSP was endorsed by the CfC FP Advisory Committee on Friday 20 March 2015.*

CfC FP Parent/carers Advisory Committee:

The CfC FP Parent/carers Advisory Committee was established in January 2015. The purpose of the Parent/carers Advisory group is to build the capacity of parents/carers to participate meaningfully in the planning and implementation of the delivery of the project in Brimbank. A number of representatives from the Parent/carer Advisory Committee are also members of the CfC FP Advisory Committee. The committee has met regularly since it was established in January 2015. To ensure the community conversations continue, the committee is planning on meeting monthly. Examples of future meeting agenda items include; seeking advice from local parents/carers, policy discussions, reporting on the progress of the project, and seeking out media opportunities.

The local priorities were endorsed by the parent/carer committee on Friday 6 February 2015.

The CSP was endorsed by the parent committee on Friday 13 March 2015.

Brimbank Early Years Reference Group (BEYRG):

From 2006 to 2014 CfC FP Brimbank was governed by the Brimbank Early Years Reference Group (BEYRG) which comprises of a number of representatives from a range of health, welfare and educational sector that provide services to Brimbank children and families. The Best Start program facilitated by Brimbank Council and funded by Victorian State government has worked closely with CfC FP in Brimbank for many years. For the last seven years both Best Start and CfC FP were governed by the Brimbank Early Years Reference Group.

The Smith Family continues to work in partnership with Brimbank Council to maintain the BEYRG as a key consultation and engagement mechanism for local services. The BEYRG informs the CfC FP initiative in Brimbank. Regular contact with the BEYRG has enabled The Smith Family to maintain strong sector engagement. This has also resulted in the provision of targeted and coordinated professional development and networking opportunities as well as ongoing assistance to develop new collaborative arrangements for the benefit of the local community.

Engaging businesses:

Currently the old township of Sunshine is undergoing a major redevelopment which is a part of a broader economic strategy aiming at attracting major business investors and property developers over the coming years. A part of this strategy is to create local employment and tertiary education opportunities. This broader economic strategy presents CfC FP with opportunities to engage local businesses. There are opportunities build links with the St Albans Business Group Association and Sunshine Business Association. Both Associations have broad representation from Brimbank businesses. Approaches have been made to local shopping centres, Brimbank City Council's Economic Development Manager and directly to local businesses

CfC FP Newsletter:

The project produces a fortnightly newsletter with the aim of ensuring information regarding local families and children programs and initiatives is distributed broadly. Professional Development opportunities are also listed. The newsletters distribution list reaches over 700 recipients.

ATTACHED: Brimbank CfC FP Advisory Committee Membership
Brimbank CfC FP Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

4. Service Area Vision

Brimbank children are safe and thriving in healthy families and participating in a vibrant, diverse and welcoming community.

This CfC FP vision communicates what the local community believes should be the ideal conditions for all Brimbank families and children. It conveys the community's aspirations for the future and how things would look if the important issues relating to children and their families were perfectly addressed.

We asked our stakeholders;

"If we could create the community of our dreams (for Brimbank children and families), what would it look like?"

Consistently throughout the CfC FP CSP planning phase, community members and service providers expressed a strong desire for Brimbank's cultural diversity to be viewed as an important community asset. They also conveyed an aspiration for all families and children to have opportunities to participate in community life and for services to work in harmonious partnerships with families. Children and their families also spoke about the importance of feeling safe in their local community.

This vision for Brimbank demonstrates the collective desire that:

- Brimbank children's opportunities are equal to that of children growing up in the most affluent areas in Victoria.
- Children and families feel safe living in Brimbank.
- Families and service providers work together.
- Multiculturalism in Brimbank is viewed as community strength.

Positive outcomes for children and their parents will be achieved through:

- The use of evidence-based practice
- The use of early intervention and prevention approaches
- Increased service integration and collaboration
- Improved access for vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals and families

Evidence-based programmes:

It is important that children and families have access to effective programmes that lead to sustained improvements in outcomes. The Smith Family is committed to evidence-based practice and actively supports the provision of services that will improve outcomes for children and families. A proportion of the funding (at least 30%), will fund services that will deliver high-quality and evidence based Programmes. <https://www3.aifs.gov.au/cfca/information-service-providers#communities>.

5. Priority Areas

Priority Area One:

Families have strong relationships.

Brimbank parents/carers are supported in their parenting role to grow and respond to their child's development and changing family circumstances.

Areas of focus:

- Parents/carers from CALD backgrounds are supported to parent in a multicultural Australian context, with a focus on enhancing family relationships.
- Local parenting support/education concentrates on supporting families during major life transitional points (early parenting, school transition, children in grade 5/6).
- Local and targeted parenting support/education is regularly available to vulnerable families.

Target groups:

Parents/carers who have a child with additional needs, young parents, families affected by mental illness, families with Child Protection involvement or referred to Child FIRST, families from a CALD background, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, families affected by AOD issues.

Overview and Rationale:

Parenting self-efficacy refers to the belief to which parents hold in their own parenting capacity. This includes their perception of their own ability to support their child's social and emotional development for optimum developmental success. It is universally accepted that parental efficacy levels are a strong predictor of parent and child outcomes. Community support is considered to be an important parenting resource that influences parenting efficacy. Research demonstrates lower levels of parenting efficacy are associated with living in disadvantaged communities. *Parenting efficacy: How can service providers help?* by Maggie Yu *Family Relationships Quarterly* No. 19

Parents/carers who experience positive initial interactions with local people, including health, welfare and education professionals, are more likely to access information about local services and to continue to engage with professionals and services, particularly during times of stress.

The information received and analysed during the CfC FP consultation and mapping process, and the Parent Advisory Committee, continue to identify common themes regarding gaps with local parental/carers support.

Through the community consultations, many parents/carers spoke about challenges in attempting to access local support. Some of these parents/carers stated they could not find local parenting programs. They also raised concerns about the length of time between MCH Key Ages and Stages scheduled visits, and they commented on the difficulty accessing a range of helpful information. Other parents expressed frustration around the lack of local opportunities to find support programs that enabled them to meet parents/carers in similar circumstances.

Local parents reported they wanted more support after the birth of their first child and felt the first parent groups were really important.

First time mothers comprise almost half (40.0%-49.9%) of all mothers in Brimbank

Source: id the population experts, from the findings of the 2011 Census

Young parents were identified as being particularly at risk of not accessing and engaging in local services. Consultation in December 2014 with Child FIRST and Child Protection professionals revealed that unless families were in crisis, there were limited local referral options available. Young parents spoke about how difficult it is to participate in groups when *'everyone is judging you and expecting you to fail'*.

Around one in seven (13%) mothers giving birth in Brimbank was younger than 24 years and around one in forty mothers were aged between 15 and 19 years.

Source: id the population experts, from the findings of the 2011 Census

Child FIRST, Child Protection, Integrated Family Services Workers along with staff from universal services also reported that there were limited referral options for parent/carers who needed additional parenting support in a trauma informed psychoeducational context. This included families with complex needs presenting with social isolation, families affected by mental illness, families affected by AOD, young parents, and families affected by family violence.

Local parents/carers from CALD backgrounds described their apprehension in attempting to make sense of the Australian Child Protection legislation and how this impacts the way they discipline their children. They describe the differences of the family unit in Australia, the impact of their past trauma and increase feelings of disconnectedness from their culture and family. They discussed their dreams and aspirations of coming to Australia and how this matches their new realities.

*In Brimbank 46.2% of the population was born in Non-English Speaking Countries
Source: id the population experts, from the findings of the 2011 Census*

Taking into consideration that community support is an important parenting resource that influences parents' efficacy levels, this local priority with the particular areas of focus, aims to targeted opportunities for families who are at risk of not accessing and engaging with universal services and local community programs.

Links to the Families and Children Activity's outcome:

Improved child wellbeing, increased parental capacity, increased service integration and collaboration, improved access for vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals and families

Links to the Communities for Children FP objectives:

Healthy young families — supporting parents to care for their children before and after birth and throughout the early years and Supporting families and parents/carers — support for parents to provide children with secure attachment, consistent discipline and quality environments that are stable, positive, stimulating, safe and secure.

Potential Strategies include:

Funded direct service delivery:

Supported playgroups, targeted evidence based parenting education programs, resource and development programs, parents/carers support groups, outreach parenting support programs.

Additional activities by the FP to support Priority One:

Providing local training opportunities to build capacity of local service providers to deliver evidence based programs, cultural awareness training, working with vulnerable families, Community Partner forums, and local expos.

Outcome sought through this priority

- *Parents/carers report increased confidence in the parenting role*
- *Parents/carers report increased capacity to cope with their family's circumstances.*
- *Parents/carers report increased knowledge regarding child development and early years services.*
- *Parents/carers report increased understanding of positive behaviour guidance strategies.*

Methodology to assess impact:

- pre and post parent surveys
- clinical observations

Key Stakeholders:

The Brimbank Community and in particular:

- Children 0-12 and their families
- Early years' service providers
- Brimbank City Council
- The Brimbank/Melton Child FIRST Alliance
- Services Connect
- Child Protection Services
- Settlement and refugee services
- CALD specific agencies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agencies
- Community Leaders

Priority Two: *Brimbank Pre-schoolers learn through quality play experiences.*

Local Early Years programs and learning opportunities are accessible to a wide range of families and services have the capacity to engage vulnerable families.

Areas of focus:

- Promoting the importance of play in the context of early childhood development and children's learning.
- Parents have access to a wide range of information about early development and services available.
- The community is skilled at identifying and responding to children who are developmentally vulnerable and parental concern.

Target groups:

Parents/carers who have a child with a disability, Young parents, parents with a mental illness, families with Child Protection involvement, families referred to Child FIRST, families from a CALD background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. .

Overview and Rationale:

Child development happens in the context of relationships. These relationships need to foster secure attachment and stimulate children's development. Parents/carers need to have confidence in the other adults in their child's life and confidence that programs are providing quality early learning experiences.

Research indicated that the children in Australia who are missing out on early childhood education are more often represented among disadvantaged families, and among children who are perhaps in greatest need of these opportunities. In particular, Indigenous children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those from socio-economically disadvantaged families were more likely to miss out on early childhood education. Consultations with the local community revealed that many families are not accessing early years programs prior to school entry. Reasons identified included families awareness of available programs, lack of transport, families not feeling welcome at services, and lack of services.

Official kindergarten participation rates in 2012 were 96.9% in Brimbank compared to the Victorian rate of 98.0% (DET). This data does not take account attendance at kindergarten, only enrolment in the program. A child maybe be enrolled but not attend frequently. The proportion of children who did not participate in some form of regular non-parental care or early childhood education was higher than that for Victoria as a whole (AEDC). Supported playgroups have been successful in reaching and engaging with a range of families. They have been successful particularly with the CALD community in Brimbank. Unfortunately they have not been successful in engaging with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families in any significant numbers. Overwhelmingly however, playgroups in Brimbank have been a valuable platform to provide information to families about early childhood development, parenting and local child and family services.

Parents/carers who are concerned about the development of their child need local timely, affordable and consistent support. Children with developmental delays need to have access to assessment, information and where appropriate therapeutic intervention programs to enable them to have the same opportunities as other children, to achieve their potential

In 2014 a study sponsored by The Smith Family CfC FP and Brimbank Council examined access to services for children with developmental delays who are living in Brimbank. The study found that the service system to support families who have preschool children with developmental delays, is complex, with multiple service providers spanning the private and public sectors. This is overlaid with referral and assessment processes that have developed to accommodate a range of eligibility criteria for funding and service access. Critically, the study found that there are insufficient resources to meet the current demand for services for Brimbank families.

Links to the Families and Communities Programme:

- support families,
- improve children's wellbeing and

- increase participation of vulnerable people in community life to enhance family and community functioning.

Link to CfC FP Objectives:

Early learning — provide access to high quality early learning opportunities in the years before school; provide early identification and support for children at risk of developmental and behavioural problems; assist parents with ways they can stimulate and promote child development and learning from birth.

Potential strategies include:

Funded direct service delivery:

Parent/carer engagement projects, kindergarten transition programs, supported playgroups, targeted evidence based parenting education programs, resource and development programs, parents/carers support groups, disability support programs, outreach parenting support programs.

Potential additional activities by the FP to support Priority Two:

Providing local training opportunities e.g. having difficult conversations with parents/carers, local referral options, developing cultural awareness, working with children with additional needs, working in a trauma informed framework. Community Partner forums, and local expos.

Outcome sought through this priority

- *Parents/carers report increased knowledge regarding child development.*
- *Parents/carers report increased understanding of play-based curriculum including the links between play and learning.*
- *Parents/carer and their child access developmental assessments*
- *Increase attendance at local Early Years programs from target group/s*
- *Early Years professionals report increase cultural understanding in the context of parenting and child development.*

Methodology:

- Clinical observations
- Professional surveys
- Parent/carers and surveys
- AEDC (participation in Early learning)

Key Stakeholders:

The Brimbank Community and in particular:

- Children 0-5 and their families
- Disability Services
- Early years' service providers
- Brimbank City Council
- Brimbank/Melton Child FIRST Alliance
- Brimbank/Melton Services Connect
- Child Protection
- Settlement and refugee services
- CALD specific agencies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agencies
- Community Leaders

Priority Three:

Brimbank children are active learners.

Parents/carers, early years services and schools work together to ensure Brimbank children have the best possible start to school.

Parents/carers and schools have strong relationships which support children's learning, engagement and well-being throughout their primary education.

Local areas of focus:

- Parents/carers are engaged in their child's learning during the school transition period and throughout their primary years.
- Children at risk of disengaging from formal education are provided with additional local support.

Target Groups:

Parents/carers who have a child with additional needs, families from a CALD background, children with behavioural/developmental issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children who have not accessed early years programs.

Overview and rationale:

Starting school is a major event for children and their families, and the process for a successful school transition starts long before the year prior to starting school. A positive school transition experience gives children a strong chance to be stay active and engaged learners throughout their primary years. The importance of children accessing a funded high quality kindergarten program is widely acknowledged. The relationships between Early Years Educators, parents/carers and schools play in the implementation of school transition programs is also vital. Families experiencing high levels of disadvantage or with complex care needs are less likely to have been exposed to experiences that support a positive school transition process.

Official kindergarten participation rates in 2012 were 96.9% in Brimbank compared to the Victorian rate of 98.0%. (DET) This data does not take account attendance at kindergarten, only enrolment in the program. The proportion of children who did not participate in some form of regular non-parental care or early childhood education was higher than that for Victoria as a whole.

Children with additional needs living in Brimbank can be hugely disadvantaged when starting school because of the lack of local resources including accessing developmental assessment services. These children often arrive at school without any formal assessments conducted and no additional supports in place.

The school entry survey asks parents whether their children have behavioural and emotional difficulties. Compared to Victoria, a higher proportion of Brimbank parents had these concerns.

The *Student Attitudes to School Survey* asked students whether they felt connected to their school. These data indicate that the proportion of children, who reported feeling connected to their school, was lower in Brimbank than across Victoria in all five years examined – 2009 to 2013.

There were greater proportions of children in Brimbank who were developmentally vulnerable on AEDC measures, than children in either Victoria or Australia as a whole. This was the case for those on one or more domains as well as on two or more domains.

Good mental health is vital for learning and life. Children who are mentally healthy are not just free from mental health difficulties but also learn better, have stronger relationships with teachers, family members and peers and are better equipped to meet life's challenges (World Health Organization [WHO], 1994).

The CfC FP's consultation process highlighted a number of systemic, cultural and service system strengths and challenges which hinder successful school transition and ongoing school engagement for Brimbank children. In some parts of the municipality early years educators and schools effectively work together ensure school transition program are implemented. However, historically there has been confusion between the early years sector and primary schools on what is considered to be the strongest school readiness indicators in an individual child.

Top surveyed parent responses included the importance of schools being welcomed places for families and their children's ability to get along with others as top priorities for them.

Links to CfC FP Objective:

School transition and engagement – support children and families to make a smooth transition to school and work with local schools to assist children and families with their ongoing engagement with school.

Links to Families and Children Activity's Outcomes:

- Increased personal agency
- Stronger family relationships
- Increased parental capacity
- Increased economic engagement

Potential strategies include:

Funded direct service delivery:

School transition programs, school based therapeutic programs to enable ongoing engagement with education, professional mentoring to work effectively with vulnerable families and children with challenging behaviour, school transition and engagement resource and development programs, parents/carers support groups, outreach parenting support programs.

Potential additional activities by the FP to support Priority Three:

Providing local training opportunities e.g. working in a trauma informed framework, cultural awareness, local referral pathways, Community Partner forums, and local expos.

Outcome sought through this priority

- *Parents/carers report increased understanding of the importance of the school transition process*
- *Schools report increase understanding of the Early Years Frameworks.*
- *Early Years Educators report increase understanding of school based curriculum.*
- *Parents/caers report increased understanding of how to support their child's learning.*
- *Children report feeling happy.*
- *Teachers report children demonstrate less challenging behaviours.*

Methodology:

- Pre and post parent surveys
- Clinical observations
- Children's surveys
- Professional surveys

Key Stakeholders:

The Brimbank Community and in particular:

- Children 5-12 and their families
- Disability Services
- Early years' service providers
- Brimbank City Council
- Brimbank/Melton Child FIRST Alliance
- Brimbank/Melton Services Connect
- Child Protection
- Settlement and refugee services
- CALD specific agencies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agencies
- Community Leaders

Priority Area Four

Dynamic Young Citizens of Brimbank

Children growing up in Brimbank are provided with many opportunities to participate in the local community. This increases their social connectedness and their sense of pride, and allows them to have meaningful input into local decisions that affect them.

Areas of focus:

- Brimbank children are regularly consulted about local economic, social and educational agenda's which affect them and their families.
- Brimbank children feel safe and have fun places to play and meet their friends.

This priority is informed by The UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative principles and by what the Brimbank community identified as important for Brimbank's youngest citizens. A child-friendly city is the embodiment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and at a local level, children's rights are reflected in policies, laws, programs and budgets. In a child-friendly city, children are active agents; their voices and opinions are taken into consideration and influence decision making processes. <http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/Australia-s-children/Child-Friendly-Cities.aspx>

Child-friendly communities benefit the whole community and have broad economic, social and cultural advantages. Communities that have children in mind generate constructive opportunities for children through diverse services and programs.

Overview and Rationale:

Recent years has seen the expansion of a range of diverse local community programs which are well utilised by Brimbank families and children. Many families regularly participate in local programs, events and festivals. Over the last 12 months, approximately 500 families participated in the 100 plus playgroups each week and approximately 3000 families participated in library activities over the last 12 months. Many of these activities are proudly reflective of Brimbank's cultural diversity. Development of numerous bike tracks and parks/playgrounds have undergone redevelopments through Council's Community plan.

Despite great community investment in the municipality, Brimbank children and their families face more challenges than most in Victoria. In the context of the principles of child-friendly cities, these challenges are underpinned by complex service systems, constraints on resources, and community perceptions of safety. Concerns regarding community safety perceptions have been reinforced by some recent local events.

In 2011, VicHealth conducted the Victorian Indicators Survey, which focused on exploring the social determinants of health. Brimbank recorded the lowest proportion of people who felt safe out in their community for any municipality in Victoria. Brimbank walking alone during the day: 89.6% compared to Victoria 97.0%. Walking alone at night: Brimbank 45.2% compared to 70.3% Victoria. *Source: VicHealth*

The same study indicated that a significantly lower proportion of people in Brimbank visited a green space at least once a week than people in Victoria as a whole. (Brimbank 36.5% Victoria 50.7%) *Source: VicHealth*

During the 2014 CfC FP community consultations over 240 parents were asked to respond to questions which sourced out their views and top priorities. 43.6% of parents considered feeling safe as their number one priority.

Children's views:

Consultations with Brimbank children occurred during May-June 2014 with kindergarten children, Year 1 and 2 children and Year 5 and 6 children. A total of 94 children participated, aged 4-12 years.

Kindergarten Children connected more strongly with animals and the natural environment and liked drawing and playing with toys. The six-seven year olds also said that animals and the natural environment made them happy, the biggest thing that made them happy was technology - playing with their iPads, using Xbox, Wii or watching TV. Things that make them happy were a mixture of

enjoying free/imaginative play equally with using technology. They also enjoyed doing things with family members at home. Nine to twelve year olds enjoyed being physically active and spending time or going out with family and friends. Playing sport was the most liked activity by this age group, closely followed by seeing or going out with friends.

Favourite Place to visit:

Kindergarten children and 6-7 year old children said their favourite place to visit was family member's homes, especially grandma's and cousins. Both groups liked going to friends' houses, whilst the Grade 1/2 children also enjoyed going to the shops.

Their responses reflect their developmental stages, the younger children learning new skills and connecting with nature through imaginative play. The older children who are more independent, active, social and enjoying being out in the world.

When asked what they didn't like doing the 8-12 year olds were able to relate this to situations that affected their feelings of safety and being safe. This age groups valued feeling safe, their natural environment, being close to services and their friends and having a quiet peaceful area.

Links to Families and Children's Outcomes:

- Increased personal agency
- Stronger family relationships
- Increased parental capacity
- Increased economic engagement

Links to Communities for Children FP objective:

To create strong child-friendly communities that understand the importance of children and apply this capacity to maximise the health, well-being and early development of young children at the local level.

Potential strategies Activities include:

Funded direct service delivery:

Local Children's Committee, children's recreational activities, parent/carer's and child programs focussing on recreation and sense of safety.

Potential additional activities by the FP to support Priority Four:

Providing local training and development opportunities, Community Partner forums, and local expos.

Outcome sought through this priority:

- *Parents/carers and children report increase feelings safety.*
- *Parents/carers and children report increase access to green spaces*
- *Children have increased opportunities to influence local planning.*
- *Parents/carers and children attend local community events*

Methodology:

- Pre and post parent surveys
- Clinical observations
- Children's surveys
- Professional surveys

Key Stakeholders:

The Brimbank Community and in particular:

- Children 0-12 and their families
- Disability Services
- Early years' service providers
- Brimbank City Council
- Child Protection
- Local businesses
- Settlement and refugee services
- CALD specific agencies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agencies
- Community Leaders
- Schools