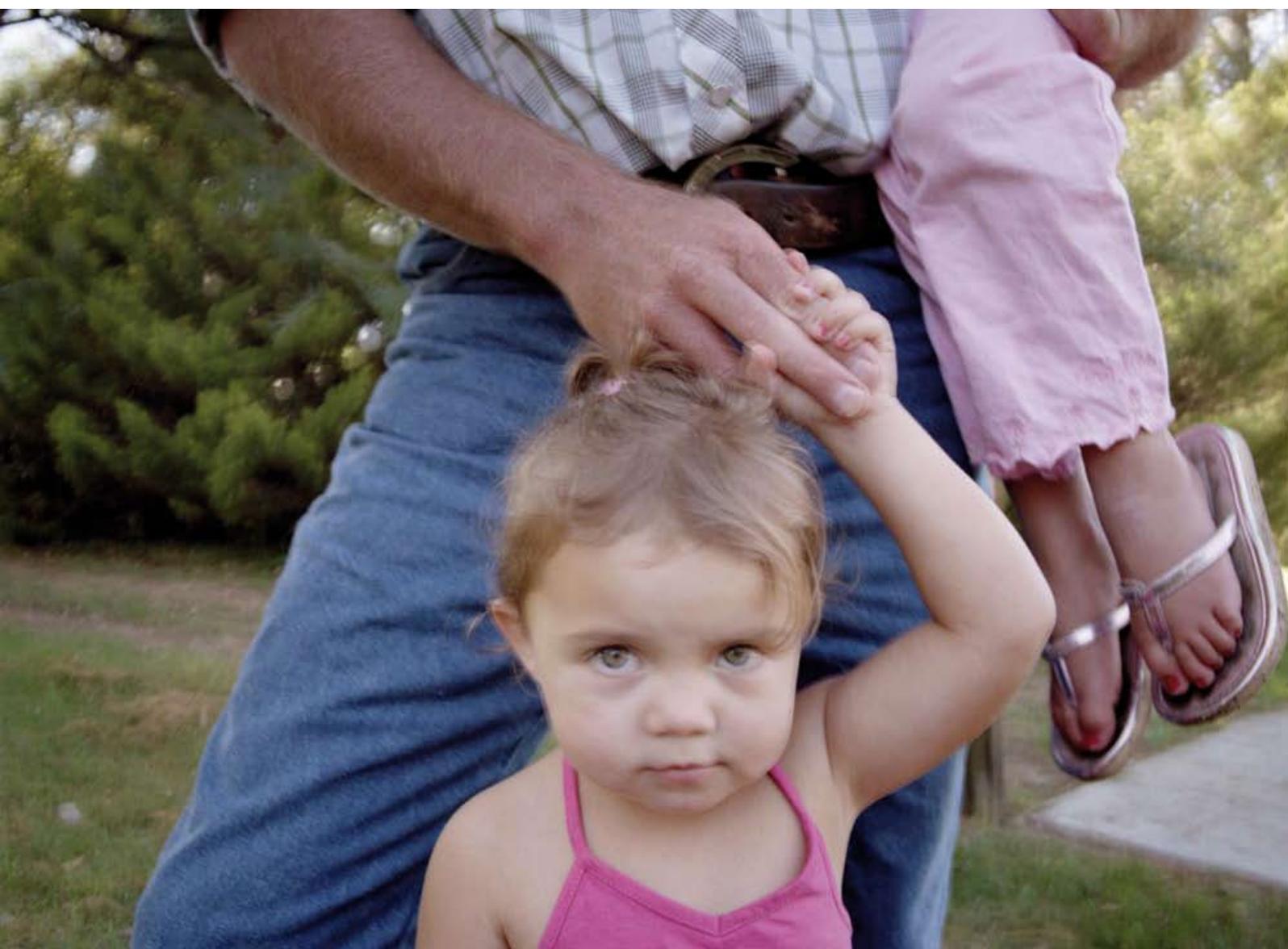


Background Paper



Our clients are your clients – bringing services together to tackle family joblessness



About The Benevolent Society

The Benevolent Society is Australia's oldest charity. Established in 1813 we have been caring for Australians and their communities for nearly 200 years. We are a secular, non-profit, independent organisation working to bring about positive social change in response to community needs. Our purpose is to create caring and inclusive communities and a just society.

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Executive summary

While Australia has a high overall level of employment compared to other developed countries, it also has one of the highest levels of joblessness among families with children of all rich countries.ⁱ A lack of paid employment is the most important cause of child poverty in Australia and is associated with problems like poor health, higher risks of disability and lower educational attainment, skills and raises the risk that children may grow up to be jobless. According to a 2007 report by UNICEF, between 12 and 15% of Australian children live in poverty.ⁱⁱ

Getting more people into secure, reasonably paid jobs is a critical step in breaking the cycle of poverty. There is a pressing need to help disadvantaged people overcome the multiple barriers they face and develop and maximise opportunities and pathways to education and employment.

This report was commissioned by The Benevolent Society to explore opportunities to promote pathways to education and employment. The report provides an overview of jobless families in Australia including key barriers to education and employment. It summarises current programs and policy directions of relevance, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as looking at the intersection between child and family services and job services sector.

In this report, child and family services refers to child welfare and family support services delivered by the not-for-profit and government sectors.

Unemployment is the greatest cause of child poverty in Australia

- There are 255,000 jobless families across Australia, 70% are sole parents and half have children under six and so are not obliged to seek work or participate in education/training.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children are three times as likely to be living in a jobless family and many jobless families are living in an urban area of locational disadvantage.
- Joblessness that persists for two or more years is particularly of concern in terms of children's outcomes – mainly due to the impact of poverty.
- A high proportion of clients of child and family services are also likely to also be jobless families.

Key barriers to employment and contributors to unemployment include: domestic violence, social isolation, and mother's low level of educational attainment.

Other findings:

- Compulsory participation in employment or education services is not necessarily the answer - 50% of jobless families already have obligations to look for work or undertake training, yet they are still jobless.
- While parents with children under six years of age aren't required to seek work or participate in training, those with younger children can volunteer for employment services. However there is little evidence that they do, possibly because these services aren't seen as appropriate.
- Individualised assistance is critical for jobless families but very rare. Mainstream employment and training providers have high caseloads, around 50 people each, even for the most disadvantaged jobseekers.
- There are currently only four small ongoing programs for jobless families which provide an integrated service for the entire family.
- The jobless family trials in 10 locations announced in the 2011-12 Federal Budget do not offer individualised case management which will compromise their success.

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- The Australian Social Inclusion Board Report has also expressed concerns that the main employment and training program (Job Services Australia) has weaknesses which reduce their effectiveness in serving jobless families. These include the highly prescribed and competitive system which inhibits flexibility in serving clients and discourages collaboration with other providers at a local level.
- Many mothers in jobless families need to build self-esteem if they are to compete successfully in the labour market, however there are few such programs on offer.
- Most jobless families need vocational training but quality provision is patchy. Only one third of courses are completed; there are concerns that some providers do not meet employer or jobseeker needs and the link between completing a training course and getting a job is weak.

Five strategies for child and family services to help improve pathways to education and employment for jobless families:

1. Reduce barriers to employment by addressing domestic violence and social isolation

Child and family services can and do reduce family joblessness by preventing and addressing many of the barriers to employment, and in some cases, the causes of joblessness. These include domestic violence and social isolation. Projects which focus on supporting women and their children experiencing domestic violence or leaving domestic violence are vital and understated in their impact on family joblessness. The national Communities for Children program not only reduces social isolation and supports

children's outcomes, but can also connect parents to education and employment.

2. Engage families via child and family services, especially those with children less than six with no compulsion to participate

Child and family services have extensive experience with outreach and engagement to jobless families and can offer pathways to education and employment. Their experience can also be applied to other services assisting jobless families return to employment.

3. Collaborate with integrated and co-located employment services

Child and family services can collaborate with programs which offer integrated services to jobless families. These should model their services on the effective employment programs operating to assist people with mental illness and refugee settlement. Key to their success is providing non-vocational and vocational assistance simultaneously. Co-located services, though not as effective as those which are fully integrated, are also exhibiting better outcomes for more disadvantaged jobseekers than stand-alone services.

4. Improve the education and employability skills of mothers

Educational attainment is a significant predictor of unemployment. More than half of families who were jobless at each interview in the *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* did not complete secondary education. As many jobless families are led by female sole parents with children under six years of age, the most effective education programs will improve skills at the same time as taking account of their roles as mothers of

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young children. Two programs – *Parent Mentoring Program* developed by Work Savvy Parents and *Strong Young Mum's* operated by Centacare Wilcannia Forbes are interesting examples of this approach. In addition, employment preparation programs which offer learning by doing, instead of replicating a traditional classroom setting are likely to be more effective with parents who have a poor history of success in school.

5. Directly employ jobless families (within services and social enterprises) and drive more effective employment and training programs for them

Child and family services are part of a large and rapidly growing workforce. A lack of Australian work experience (including an employer reference) is a major barrier to many jobless families, either because they have been outside of the labour market for long periods or they come from overseas. There are many opportunities for direct employment as well as transitions to employment (including work tasters, work experience, student vocational placement and employment in a social enterprise) that can be offered by child and family services. Many of the roles will require skills acquired as parents. Parents can offer valuable advantages to these services, including an opportunity to increase the diversity of staff to more closely match the background of the local community and clients.

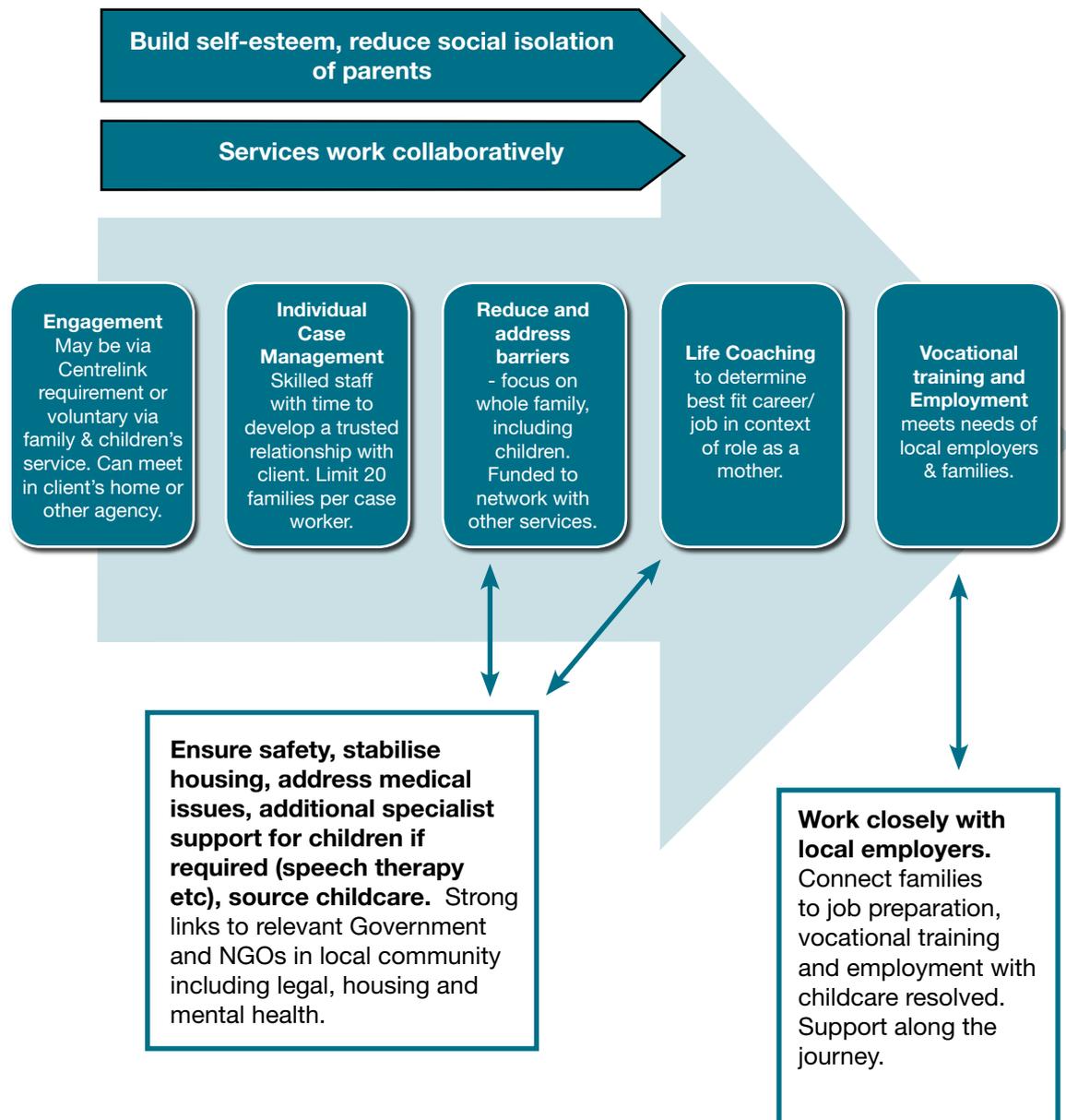
- Current jobless family projects need to be evaluated to determine what specific components generate success and how they can be delivered in a cost effective manner. These learnings need to be applied to other programs. Innovation Fund projects trialling new approaches for jobless families should also be evaluated.
- Pathways to education and employment for jobless families and other disadvantaged jobseekers need to build self-esteem, incorporate learning by doing, and work experience with local employers. The promise of a real job presented by a local employer is a powerful motivator for many job seekers.
- Child and family services should explore ways to offer life coaching and mentoring to build the self-esteem of jobless family clients.
- Jobless families need quality jobs with advancement prospects, not casual, short term or low paid positions. These will lift their families out of poverty and help protect them from cycling back into unemployment. Child and family services can offer these jobs and can help build effective pathways to them.

Some emerging policy implications:

- Further investment in programs that reduce domestic violence and social isolation is justified on the grounds they can also reduce family joblessness. They need to be valued for their economic as well as social policy returns.

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Jobless Family Pathways to Education and Employment: Summary of Promising Practice



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1. Background

The Benevolent Society has a long history of working with disadvantaged individuals and communities in NSW and more recently Queensland. It is a secular, not-for-profit organisation working to bring about positive social change in response to community needs.

Much of the organisation's work is with children and families experiencing multiple and complex problems including joblessness. They provide support to families along the child protection continuum to ensure children are safe and well. The Benevolent Society services range from long day care, through to more targeted support programs where children are at risk of abuse and neglect, to more intensive family support where abuse or neglect has already occurred. They also provide out-of-home care for children unable to remain in their home.

In 2010 The Benevolent Society commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to analyse the Growing Up in Australia longitudinal survey to determine the impact of unemployment on children's wellbeing.ⁱⁱⁱ This work was published in Anti Poverty Week in October 2010. In 2011 The Benevolent Society decided to extend this work to better understand the extent to which jobless families were also their clients and what could be done to improve their pathways to education and employment.

1.1 Jobless families – why are they important?

Australia has one of the highest proportions of children living in jobless families in the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD). In 2007, 14.8% of Australian children lived in a household where no one was working, compared with 8.7% average across the OECD. This is the fourth

highest in the OECD and is mainly attributed to the high prevalence of unemployment among sole parents. For two parent families Australia is at the OECD average.^{iv}

Professor Peter Whiteford's extensive analysis concludes that *"a lack of paid employment is the most important cause of child poverty in Australia, and is associated with problems like poor health, higher disability, lower educational attainment and skills, elevated financial stress and increased risk of violence for lone parents. In Australia around 70 per cent of poor children live in jobless families – the highest share in the OECD – making joblessness the main cause of childhood poverty."*^v

The Federal Government and the Australian Social Inclusion Board define jobless families as *"families with dependent children under 16 with no reported income from employment in the last 12 months."*

The Smith Family has stated that the many benefits of children growing up in households where the parents are participating in paid work include *"the increased achievable standard of living, reducing the likelihood of these children living in poverty, as well as the contribution of a role model in encouraging aspirations of workforce participation for children in a household."*^{vi}

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children released its 2010 Annual Report in August 2011. Since 2004, the study has been following the development of 10,000 children and families across Australia, providing insights into how a child's social, economic and cultural environments contribute to their wellbeing. Analysis of the survey results confirms that family joblessness is associated with poorer children's wellbeing. The report states *"The analysis should not be interpreted as showing*

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a causal impact of living in a jobless family on children's wellbeing. Other factors, such as low levels of parental educational attainment, are associated with an increased likelihood of living in a jobless family and also lower levels of child wellbeing." The researchers did not disentangle which factors primarily explain child outcomes, however financial hardship was identified as a crucial issue and their conclusion was that "regardless of why this occurs, children's wellbeing is significantly related to their experience of family joblessness."^{vii}

In 2010, The Benevolent Society commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to analyse Growing Up in Australia: *The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC) and estimate the impact of living in a jobless family on New South Wales children. That research found that *"living in a jobless family increases the probability that a child will have behavioural problems (overall measure) by 13.0 percentage points, conduct problems by 13.4 percentage points, peer problems by 7.6 percentage points, emotional problems by 7.5 percentage points and hyperactivity by 7.2 percentage points."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Persistent joblessness

Extended periods on income support can lead to significant barriers to future workforce participation, and entrenched disadvantage. The Australian Social Inclusion Board cited Pech & McCoull 2000 research that *"it is clear that children of jobless families have a significant risk of reduced labour market attachment and income. Children's outcomes are largely determined by parents investment in their human capital and children's ability to seize educational opportunities. Children born into welfare dependent families are more likely to leave school early; have children at an early age; or become homeless."*^{viii}

At June 2010, 52% of all jobless families in Australia were persistently jobless for the previous three years – i.e. they had no income from employment over this time. Once families were jobless for one year, about half remained jobless for the next two years. The Smith Family and National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) analysis of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) data set conclude that the proportion of children living in persistently jobless households (defined as no income from employment for more than two years), constitutes around three quarters of all children living in a jobless household.^x

The Growing up in Australia report found that overall 14% of children were living in a jobless family at the time of at least one interview. Only 3-4% of families where data was collected at all three points (2004, 2006 and 2008) were jobless at the time of all three interviews. It is this group which is of particular concern, because longer periods without any employment reduce job prospects and by definition, mean families are living on low incomes and are at risk of poverty and hardship, further impacting on outcomes for their children.

Recent trends

The number of jobless families has fallen in recent years. In 2002, more than 18% of Australian children aged 0-14 years were living in a jobless household – this fell to 13% by 2006. The largest decrease took place during the period from 2004 to 2006, and most researchers agree it is likely to have been influenced by a combination of factors, including strong economic growth and the introduction of the welfare to work reforms by the Australian Government in July 2006.^{xi} One of the main goals of the welfare to work reforms was to increase the labour force participation of single parents by requiring

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sole parents with children aged 6-12 to participate in job search or education.

The Smith Family and NATSEM analysis of the HILDA survey data found that the proportion of children living in a jobless household decreased slightly from 2008 to 2009 from 13.4% to 12.7%. The proportion of children living in persistently jobless households, with no income from employment for more than two years, was 8.9% in 2009.^{xii}

1.2 Who are jobless families?

The best current estimate of the number of jobless families can be derived from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) published data.^{xiii} These show that at February 2011, there were 255,000 families with children dependent on income support and without earnings for more than one year. This represents about 40% of the 640,000^{xiv} families with dependent children reliant on Centrelink payments at that time. The remaining 60% will have had income in the past year or been in receipt of payments for less than a year, or a combination of both.

Characteristics include:

- Of the 255,000 jobless families in Australia at February 2011, DEEWR estimates 215,000 or 70% were sole parents in receipt of a government payment such as Parenting Payment Single or Newstart. In 2010, 58% of single mothers were in either full or part-time paid work. This is a dramatic increase in the numbers from 1983, when only 32% were working either full or part time.^{xv} However there remain significant gaps in the employment rates between sole parent and partnered mothers. Treasury states in the 2011-12 Federal Budget Papers that the employment rate for single mothers whose youngest child is aged five to nine years is

59.8% compared with 71.4% for partnered mothers.

- About 50% of the total number of jobless families have children under six years of age and are not required to seek work or engage in education or training under current income support arrangements.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are three times as likely as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to be living in a jobless family.^{xvi}
- It is unknown what proportion of all those dependent on income support are receiving Disability Support Pension, Carer Pension or Age Pension, as details of these recipients with dependent children are not published.

Other characteristics:

- Jobless families are more likely to have larger numbers of children (ABS Australian Social Trends 2009).
- Both jobless single and couple families are more likely to have children under five years of age, have more than one child, be headed by parent who is under 30 years and with no post school qualifications and Year 10 or below as their highest level of education. They are also likely to have no access to motor vehicles, no access to computer/internet at home, report poor health and/or disability, They exhibit a low level of generalised trust and are not able to raise \$2000 in a week for emergency aid. (ABS 2006 Census data).
- There are approximately 11,000 teenagers receiving Parenting Payment Single (approximately 3% of the total number of recipients). However this is an important group due to the poor educational attainment – 90% do not have Year 12 and 25% have primary school as their highest level of educational attainment.^{xvii} DEEWR has stated about one quarter of these are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

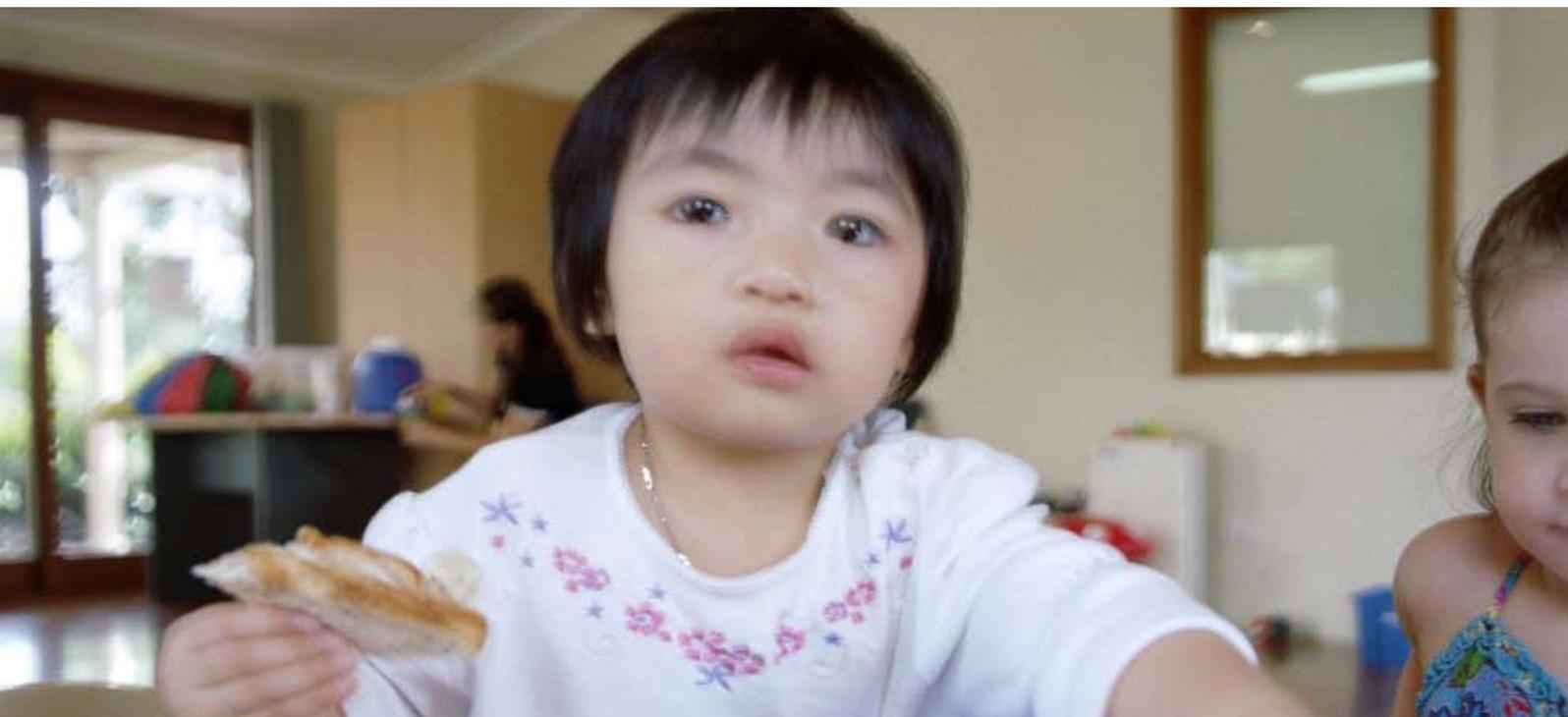
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Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011 reports that there were 79 births per 1000 Indigenous teenage women compared with 14 births per 1000 non-Indigenous teenage women in 2009.^{xviii}

Disadvantage is concentrated by location

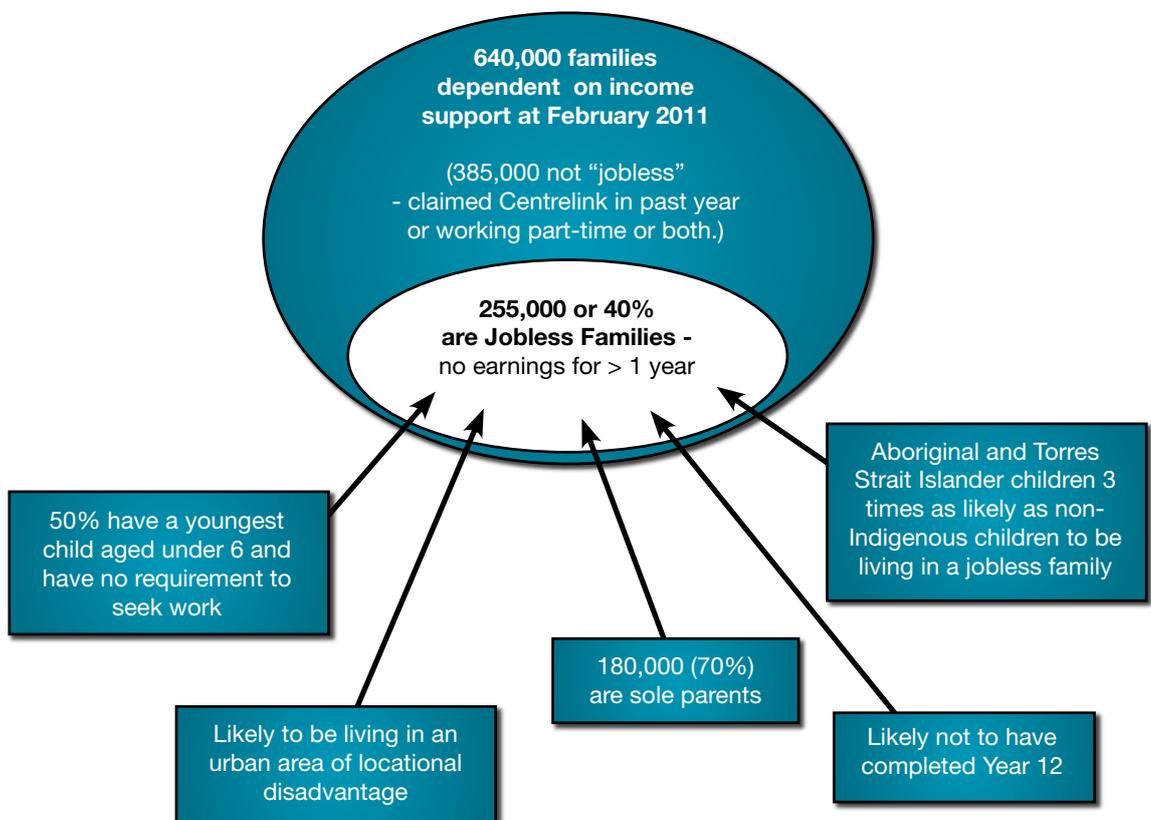
Tony Vinson in his report *Dropping off the Edge* found that 1.7% of Australian postcodes account for more than seven times their share of major factors causing intergenerational poverty and disadvantage and that these are mainly found in urban areas.^{xix} This has been confirmed by longitudinal research published in *Growing Up in Australia* which found a “clear relationship between the socio-economic status of the neighbourhood and the likelihood of a child living in a jobless family.” Families that experience

joblessness at two or more interviews were much more likely to live in socio-economically disadvantaged geographic areas than families that do not experience joblessness. Among these, 44% of the families who were jobless at each time they were surveyed (2004, 2006 and 2008), were living in areas of lower socio-economic status, compared to 20% that were never jobless.^{xx} The decision by the Federal Government to introduce jobless family trials in three locations of disadvantage and then further trials in 10 Local Government Areas announced in the 2011-12 Budget confirm concentrations of disadvantage by location. According to Minister Macklin, “the 10 sites were chosen based on an assessment of the prevalence of factors such as unemployment, the number of people relying on welfare payments as their primary source of income, and the length of time people have been receiving income support payments.”^{xxi}



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Summary of jobless families in Australia



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2. Our clients are your clients: Crossover between jobless families and participants in child and family services

There is considerable overlap between jobless families and clients receiving child and family services, especially those services aimed at disadvantaged families, either because they live in an area of locational disadvantage or due to the presence of other indicators. This provides opportunities to help overcome barriers to education and employment and create pathways for jobless families into education and employment.

Most agencies providing child and family services focus on providing programs for families with children up to 12 years from early intervention, to ensure children are safe and well, to services where children are at risk of abuse and neglect.

Early intervention programs are designed to provide support to children and families to prevent problems escalating to crisis point. International and Australian research shows that intervening early in a problem is more effective, less time consuming and less expensive than treating problems later when they are more likely to be entrenched.

One example of an early intervention program is the Federally funded program *Communities for Children*. A key local non-government organisation (Facilitating Partner) in each site acts as broker in engaging local organisations to deliver a range of activities in their communities. Examples of activities being implemented under the *Communities for Children* program are:

- home visiting
- early learning and literacy programs
- early development of social and communication skills
- parenting and family support programs
- child nutrition
- community events.

The *Communities for Children* program commenced in 2004 and has been the subject of extensive evaluation.^{xxii} There are currently 49 *Communities for Children* sites funded across Australia. Under the 2011-12 Federal Budget jobless family measure, \$4 million is also being provided for the *Communities for Children* program to help eligible parents in these locations connect to early childhood services and prepare their children for school. As part of the trial, three new sites will commence from 1 January 2012 in Bankstown, Greater Shepparton and Rockhampton.

It is unclear the precise extent that jobless families are clients of these family and children services, as most of these services do not collect data on the employment status of the families. This is because employment is not their core service and the concern about overly-intrusive data collection may deter families from participating. However, *Communities for Children* sites are usually selected on the basis of disadvantage and the presence of many of the factors associated with family joblessness. One example of this is Kempsey, on the mid north coast of NSW. The Benevolent Society began operating *Communities for Children Plus* in this local government area in October 2010. According to a DEEWR 2010 presentation,^{xxiii} Kempsey had:

- An unemployment rate of 7.8% at March 2010, compared with 5.6% Australia-wide.
- A high proportion of people receiving Centrelink benefits (36% at June 2010 compared with 17% Australia-wide).
- A low labour force participation rate (50% at March 2010 compared with 65% Australia-wide).

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2006 Census data shows that:

- 1,416 jobless families and 61% of sole parent families were jobless (compared with 47% Australia-wide)
- Low levels of educational attainment (24% completed Year 12, compared with 47% Australia-wide)
- A relatively high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, recorded at 9.5%, (compared with 2.5% across Australia).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children are an important client group, partly because significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are children. In 2006, 38% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were aged 14 years and under, compared with 19% of the non-Indigenous population. While there has been considerable focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families living in remote communities, 75% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia live in major cities or regional areas (32% in major cities, 21% in inner regional areas and 22% in outer regional areas).^{xxiv} Significant numbers of families are living in urban areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in the child protection system. In 2010, 48 per 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years were on care and protection orders, compared to 5 per 1000 non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.^{xviii}

Brighter Futures is a NSW Government program that provides support to vulnerable families with children aged 0 to 8 years at risk of abuse and/or neglect, with a specific focus on families with children under three years of age. *Brighter Futures* is an evidence-based service model being delivered in partnership between the Department of Family and Community Services and non-government organisations.

Commencing in 2006, the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, conducted an extensive evaluation of *Brighter Futures* which was published in 2010.^{xv} Among other findings, it provides a rich data source of the characteristics of, and issues experienced by, the participating families. It is likely that significant numbers of *Brighter Futures* families are also jobless families. A total of just under 2,500 families completed the Family Survey at entry to the program:

- Only 14% of mothers in the program were in paid employment, and 47% of fathers. There were not great differences between employment status of the mother between single and partnered families. There were significant differences with mothers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – 90% were not in paid work, compared with 83% of non-Indigenous children.
- The main source of income was government benefits, with about one quarter stating their main source of income was derived from paid work. Reliance on government benefits was more pronounced in sole parent families (89%) and where the child was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (90%).
- 56% were single parent (mother) households, 21% had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and 15% spoke a language other than English at home.

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- More than half did not have anyone living in household with a Year 12 certificate. Just below 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander study children resided in a household where no one had a Year 12 certificate, compared with 45% on non-Indigenous study children.
- The highest reported vulnerability was a lack of social support – nearly 60%.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were much more likely to enter the program with alcohol and drug problems (51.4% in comparison to 35.5% for non-Indigenous families) or with experiences of domestic violence (59.5% in comparison to 51.3%). However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were much less likely than non-Indigenous families to indicate mental health problems upon program entry (39.9% in comparison to 55.3%).



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3. Barriers to employment for jobless families

The Australian Social Inclusion Board Report, *Addressing Barriers for Jobless Families*, 2011, categorised barriers to work for jobless families into internal and external factors. The individual or internal factors include:

- health problems (mental and physical)
- disability
- poor education, literacy, numeracy skills
- children with health or behavioural problems
- domestic violence (ongoing and/or escaping and re-establishing new household)
- housing instability/homelessness.

Structural or external factors include:

- tax and transfer systems may provide a disincentive to employment (income support is withdrawn as recipients enter paid work)
- lack of affordable child care
- lack of affordable transport to education or employment
- work places not suitable for combining with child caring role
- lack of internet/computer access.

These factors are reflected in jobless family programs operating on the ground, such as the *Family Centred Employment Projects* (FCEP) in Broadmeadows, Victoria and Goodna, Queensland and the *Parent Mentoring Project* which operated in NSW and Queensland from 2009 to early 2011 and the Kwinana and Bundaberg Jobless Family Innovation Fund projects which are currently underway.

The Parenting Mentoring Project, also funded by the Innovation Fund and conducted by Work Savvy Training, was designed to target parents from jobless families from western and south western Sydney, and the Logan and Ipswich areas in Queensland because

of the large incidence of disadvantaged jobseekers in those areas. The project was also aimed at jobless families who were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, people living in areas of entrenched disadvantage, the homeless and those at risk of homelessness and people with mental health conditions. More than three quarters of the 168 participants were in these categories, with the largest number experiencing mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.

The *Bundaberg PATH Jobless Family project* has found low levels of literacy and numeracy, lack of qualifications, as well as long durations out of the workforce as barriers.

Interviews with staff in two sites FCEP projects reveal a high degree of domestic violence, drug and alcohol and mental health problems operating within families as well as low levels of literacy and numeracy. In many cases families experience multiple internal barriers which are compounded by their location and lack of transport to places of suitable employment and gaps in affordable, suitable child care. This is confirmed with interviews of staff from the Innovation Fund Jobless Family projects in Kwinana and Bundaberg.

The Federal Government's Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) provides extra help with the cost of approved child care to eligible parents undertaking activities such as work, JobSearch, training or study as part of an Employment Pathway Plan, to help them re-enter the workforce. JETCCFA is available for up to six months for parents who are engaged in employment activities and available for up to two years for those in approved study activities. This means most parents will pay no more than 10 cents per hour for child care while they are doing approved activities, such

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as study, training or paid work. However there is a need to better promote this to families as many parents may be over-estimating the cost of childcare if they search for a job, undertake a course or return to work and are not accessing this entitlement.

In all sites, it is reported that participants fear they will be worse off in work and this is a barrier to them pursuing employment as a goal. In Broadmeadows, Victorian Government Department of Human Services is trialing a *WorkPays Estimator*, a simple portable device which can be used by workers in the community to quickly calculate people's income after working a number of hours at a set rate. It will also take into account the impact of paid employment on their public housing status and rent.

3.1 The impact of domestic violence on women's employment

In the Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey*, over a third of women who had a current or former intimate partner reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence since the age of sixteen. Of those in a current relationship, 9-11% reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from their partner at some point in their lifetime.^{xxvi} Women (and their children) who leave domestic and family violence are often faced with poverty, housing instability and sometimes homelessness.^{xxvii}

The ABS Social Trends survey found that 60% of women who experienced partner violence had children in their care, with 68% of those women reporting that their children witnessed the violence. There is increasing evidence of the negative impact of domestic violence on children's mental health, self-esteem, and social competence.^{xxviii}

Domestic violence can be a significant contributor to unemployment as well as a barrier to returning to work. Research from Australia and the United States has found that domestic and family violence affects women's ability to work and to look for work because of trauma, fear for their safety at work, and instances of stalking and violence at work by the perpetrator.^{xxix} Women with a history of domestic violence have a more disrupted work record, are on lower personal incomes, have to change jobs more often and are employed at higher levels in casual and part time work than women with no experience of violence.^{xxx}

Domestic violence is also associated with controlling behaviour which may include restricting women from leaving the home to attend education or training classes or participating in employment. This in turn leads to lower self confidence and self-esteem, further inhibiting employability skills.

In 2009, The Benevolent Society conducted an extensive literature review as well as qualitative research with six experienced domestic violence workers and eight women who had been out of a violent relationship for at least one year and considered themselves to be safe from the abusive partner. All women who participated in the research had to surrender their home, the majority of their personal belongings, and financial savings when they left the abusive relationship. The impacts of domestic violence were enduring and severe, often lasting for many years after they left the relationship.^{xxxi}

Domestic violence can lead to a family moving, losing not only social supports, but also networks that lead to employment and or moving to an area with cheaper housing but fewer job opportunities. The Benevolent Society literature review found most women do eventually re-enter the workforce or return

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to education in order not to rely on benefits but initially stabilising housing and settling their children is a key priority. Nevertheless, for many women, education and meaningful work are vital as a source of pride and self esteem, even more important than improving their financial situation.

3.2 Social isolation and joblessness

The highest reported vulnerability amongst 2,500 clients of *Brighter Futures* across NSW was a lack of social support. In many of these families there was also no family member in paid employment. Centrelink has been implementing Local Connections to Work, a program in which social service and other governmental agencies to co-locate and jointly interview disadvantaged job seekers at their local Centrelink office. A report detailing the initial findings across four sites found that 35% of participants at the initial wraparound interview said they had little or no contact with family or friends, making social isolation the most common barrier to work for participants.^{xxxii}

A recently published National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) paper concludes that social capital influences educational participation over and above the effects of background characteristics such as parental education and occupation, geographic location, cultural background and academic achievement. The paper explores the relationship between social capital at age 15 and participation in education and training at age 17, using data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) 2003 cohort. The analysis shows that for both males and females, participation in school-based activities is found to have the greatest influence on participation in post-school education and training, followed by the

strength of the relationship students have with their teachers.^{xxxiii}

3.3 Education levels of mothers

More than half of the families who were jobless at all three surveys (2004, 2006 and 2008) of The Growing Up in Australia LSAC survey had not completed secondary education. Of the single parents surveyed, more than half who were jobless at all three survey times had low educational attainment. Conversely those with higher educational attainment were much less likely to be jobless.^{xxxiv}

Lower levels of education are associated with higher levels of unemployment, both for men and women, single or partnered mothers. Not only are levels of educational attainment and skills a predictor for employment, high educational attainment is a buffer against unemployment. According to census data cited in Treasury Federal Budget 2011-12 documents, people of prime working age who have completed Year 11 and 12 have an unemployment rate of less than five per cent, compared to more than seven per cent for those who highest level of educational attainment was Year 10 or less.^{xxxv}

International evidence confirms that the level of educational attainment of mothers is not only related to their employment prospects but crucial to improving outcomes for children. Half the reduction in child mortality over the past 40 years can be attributed to the better education of women, according to recent analysis published in the journal *Lancet*. “For every one-year increase in the average education of reproductive-age women, a country experienced a 9.5 per cent decrease in the child deaths.” The study shows that improving mother’s education directly reduces child mortality - and more effectively than increasing gross domestic product.^{xxxvi}

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4. Barriers to employment for jobless families

4.1 Key trends and policies

- Australia's ageing population will put greater pressure on Australia's workforce in the future. Currently, there are five working age people for every person aged over 65 years but that this is expected to fall to 2.7 by 2050.^{xxxvii} However as early as 2011 the impact will be felt, as there will be fewer young Australians entering the working age cohort than last year and this trend will continue at least until 2026.^{xxxviii}
- Australian unemployment levels are generally low but there are pockets of disadvantage and high rates of joblessness. For example, the unemployment rate in Playford, South Australia is nearly three times the national average. The Government has recognised these pockets by funding Local Employment Coordinators to work in 20 priority areas across the nation.
- The Federal Government's Apology in February 2008 and its 'closing the gap' commitments to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians over a decade has been a key driver for increasing interest and commitment to employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Projections indicate that across Australia an estimated 100,000 new jobs will be needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve this.^{xxxix} While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 2.5% of the population, they are estimated to comprise 17% of job seekers who have been unemployed for more than two years.^{xl}
- One of the Government's imperatives is to lift the proportion of skilled workers in Australia. According to Skills Australia, Australia needs an additional 2.4 million people in the workforce with qualifications at Certificate III level and higher by 2015, increasing to 5.2 million by 2025 to meet projected industry demand and the replacement of retiring workers. They also estimated that there were at least 390,000 unemployed people with levels below the levels required by the workforce in December 2009.^{xli} The Federal Government stated in its 2011-12 Budget that "around 40% of working age Australians need improved literacy and numeracy skills to participate in society and meet the requirements of the jobs of the future."^{xlii}
- Australian income support policies have moved increasingly towards activation and participation requirements reflecting OECD best practice. The OECD also advocates a more active focus on job search at the beginning of a claim for income support and more joined up support, including a focus on counselling, training and skills building, for more disadvantaged job seekers. (see Appendix D of the Taskforce on Strengthening Government Services for more on this.)

4.2 Overview of Federal Employment Services^{xliii}

There are a number of programs funded by the Federal Government which can support jobless families with skill acquisition and job placement. An overview of the 2011-12 Federal Budget initiatives by national, regional and local programs is attached at Appendix A. This section details two of these, Job Services Australia and the Indigenous Employment Program. In addition, the Disability Employment Services program (more than \$3 billion in over the four years July 2011 to June 2015) may be of relevance to jobless families claiming Disability Support Pension.

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Job Services Australia

Job Services Australia (JSA) was introduced on 1 July 2009 to assist job seekers to secure employment. It replaced the Job Network system which operated from 1997 to 2009, when the Federal Government contracted out support and services to unemployed people. The Australian Government will invest more than \$3.8 billion over the next four years (July 2011-June 2015) in JSA services.

Australia is divided into Employment Service Areas (ESAs), geographical areas within labour market regions and contracts are granted within each. Individual Centrelink clients are allowed to choose the provider in their area. At March 2011, there were 106 JSA providers delivering services to approximately 750,000 people in over 2000 sites across Australia.

Job seekers are assessed to determine if they are in Stream 1, 2, 3, or 4, based on their participation barriers and current capacity to work. Stream 4 job seekers are the most disadvantaged and have complex and/or multiple non-vocational barriers that may prevent them from obtaining employment. These include mental illness; problems such as domestic violence, family and relationship issues; torture or trauma; drug, alcohol or gambling addictions; or homelessness or unstable accommodation. At March 2011 about one fifth of all clients were in Stream 4.^{xiv}

JSA Performance

JSA providers are assessed on a Star Ratings performance system administered by DEEWR. The ratings range from 1 (poorest performer) to 5 (strongest performer). At March 2011, nearly 62% of providers were rated at 3 Stars; 16% at 4 Stars and 4.1% at 5 Stars. Less than 16% were rated at 2 Stars and 2.2% at 1 Star.

However there is considerable scope to lift the performance of employment and training

services, especially for more disadvantaged jobseekers. The Brotherhood of St Laurence has stated: *“despite the reforms in 2009, assistance to highly disadvantaged job seekers who are not ‘job ready’ and face multiple barriers to open employment remains poor and must be substantially improved. Employment outcomes result for only 15 per cent of JSA Stream 4 clients and only 28 per cent of this stream are reported as achieving positive outcomes (September 2010 DEEWR data). Only one-third of those obtaining employment have permanent jobs.*^{xiv} In December 2010, these outcomes had improved slightly to 22.8% into employment and 15.8% into full time training or education.

ACOSS has expressed concern that *“despite the improved flexibility for providers, the system for the most part still directs jobseekers to follow detailed rules and requirements rather than encouraging choice and initiative.”* The Australian Social Inclusion Board Report expressed concerns that there were serious consequences if the assessment determining which stream a person was allocated to got it wrong; that quality indicators need to be built into the Star Rating system; that the current highly prescribed and competitive system inhibited collaboration at a local level and that a more individualised, personalised service would be of benefit to jobless families. A review of JSA providers conducted for this report found case loads of approximately 50 Stream 4 clients per employment consultant.

The Government has recognised the need to improve services for unemployed people in Stream 4. They will fund demonstration pilots in 20 areas from late 2011 to mid-2013 to trial innovation in working with 5,000 Stream 4 jobseekers, including those unemployed for more than two years, mature age, homeless, Youth and Aboriginal and

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Torres Strait Islander job seekers. A select number of high performing JSA providers have been invited to tender and the precise locations and successful projects should be published before November 2011.^{xlvi}

JSA contracts from 2012 to 2015

The Government announced in the 2011-12 Budget that it would renew contracts for a further three years until 30 June 2015 for all providers at 3 Stars or above, delivering in non-remote areas. It is expected that 80% of JSA organisations delivering services will have their current contracts renewed. The share of business of below average (2 Star or below) performing organisations will either be offered to high performing JSA providers or put to open tender. This should be resolved before the end of 2011 calendar year, providing a period of contract stability throughout 2012 and until tenders are let again in the run up to the 2015-2018 contract.

Indigenous Employment Program

The Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) began on 1 July 2009. The IEP complements the services offered by JSA and the Community Development Employment Projects program. The IEP assists employers recruit, train and provide sustainable employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The program also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders pursue self-employment and business development opportunities. Under the IEP, communities, individuals, employers and industry bodies can access funding and services. These typically relate to Indigenous Employment Strategies and cross-cultural awareness training for employers; wage subsidies and mentoring and intensive preparation not able to be provided under JSA services. A JSA service may refer an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client to an IEP program to receive

these additional services. The Federal Government has allocated \$650 million to IEP over the four years 2011-2015. Program outcomes are not currently published.

In October 2008 the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) was launched with the aim of getting employers to pledge jobs and mentors for 50,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At 5/4/11, 28,000 jobs were pledged but only 4,200 had been filled. On 27/6/11 the number of pledges had risen to 45,467 with an unknown number of actual jobs filled. The AEC reported they had achieved 1048 jobs where the person remained in work for 26 weeks by 11 July 2011.^{xlvii}

There is evidence that employer commitments or pledges to employ and mentor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, will not, of itself, ensure sustainable jobs for them. Employers need to undertake broader work within their organisations to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees succeed and partner with effective intermediaries to attract and prepare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.

Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training (VET) enables students to gain qualifications for all types of employment, and specific skills to help them in the workplace. The providers of VET include technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, adult and community education providers and agricultural colleges, as well as private providers, community organisations, industry skill centres, and commercial and enterprise training providers. In addition, some universities and schools provide VET.

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The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) reports that:

- In 2010, there were 1.8 million students enrolled in the public VET system
- In 2009, 82.7% of VET enrolments in publicly-funded VET places were provided by TAFE or other government providers
- At 1 July 2011, there were 4,929 registered training organisations (RTO's) in Australia.

Skills Australia undertook a major study of Australia's VET system during 2010 and 2011, publishing a final paper in May 2011. That study found that: *"The Australian VET sector is generally considered both complex and not readily comprehensible to clients. It is unnecessarily difficult for clients to access and navigate and difficult for others, including policy makers, to understand... The sector is governed and funded by multiple jurisdictions. It intersects with the school, community and higher education sectors; it has two main sets of clients—industry and individuals—who may sometimes have different objectives; and it is characterised by significant diversity among its learners and in its products and stakeholders."*^{xviii}

VET Performance

The completion rate for qualifications in publicly funded VET is less than one third, and for courses that commenced in 2007, ranged from 17% for Certificate I to 32.6% for Diploma and above. Certificate III, the most common for entry level positions in Aged Care or Child Care, was 32.5%.^{xix}

The Skills Australia final report stated that: *"By any measure, national estimated course completion rates... raise serious questions about the nature of the VET learning experience as well as systemic issues related to learners' interests in taking only modules or skill sets as opposed to full qualifications."*ⁱ ACOSS's submission to the Minister's review

of the JSA system noted that *"the vocational training system has not responded to the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers as the policy intended... The key problems include a lack of training in a format that is suited to the needs of disadvantaged jobseekers (for example, linked to work experience rather than classroom based), a lack of places at lower qualification levels (for example below Certificate four), and a tendency for RTOs to charge jobseekers or JSA providers for training despite being funded under the program to train jobseekers."*ⁱⁱ

The Federal Government announced in the 2011-12 Federal Budget that it would reform the VET system to make it more efficient so that effort and funding is better matched to areas of skills shortage; be more transparent so that employers and students can be more confident about training providers and ensure opportunity to all including those outside the labour force. This will require negotiations and restructured agreements with the States and Territories.ⁱⁱⁱ

4.3 Jobless families and employment services

Most jobless families will be headed by a sole parent claiming Parenting Payment Single. Until their youngest child turns six, they are not required to interact with Centrelink or JSA services in relation to looking for work. When the youngest child turns six, they are required to enter into an Employment Pathway Plan and meet participation requirements but can retain Parenting Payment Single until their youngest child turns eight.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ However if they volunteer for JSA services, they are entitled to the full range of services (the technical term is "fully eligible job seeker"). It is not clear whether DEEWR collects data on the number of JSA clients who are volunteers and receiving full services. It is expected most

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jobless families would qualify for Stream 4 services. (See Appendices B and C).

Anecdotally, it appears very few parents who are not required to register with JSA provider, actually are. Hard data on volunteer participants is not available but interviews with jobless family projects operating on the ground reveal less than half of the clients they are working with were registered with a JSA. This may be due to a lack of information (similar to confusion about costs of child care and being worse off financially if working). It may also be attributed to a sense that *“these services aren’t for me. I’m not unemployed, I*

am looking after young children but looking for work or thinking about going back to study.”

Discussions with the author and JSA providers at the National Employment Services Association conference in August 2011 reveal considerable confusion about rules and treatment of volunteers, including those who are “fully eligible” for services and how these may operate when or if a volunteer client needs to withdraw from the activity for a period of time, perhaps due to child-related responsibilities.



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4.4 Dedicated jobless family projects

To date the Federal Government has funded a small number of initiatives aimed at providing holistic services to jobless families in five select locations – usually covering one or two suburbs or postcodes. These projects offer integrated support to overcome barriers to work and employment, while sometimes offering employment very early in the intervention. In addition to employment outcomes, engagement and mentoring, enrolment in education and training and volunteering are counted as positive outcomes. Significant resources have been invested in providing individualised case management to all families, with low numbers of cases (around 15-20) per support worker.

Three of these are the Family Centred Employment Projects and two were initiated by community groups who submitted proposals under DEEWR's \$40 million Innovation Fund which operates from July 2009 to June 2012. All projects need to engage families voluntarily (there is no compulsion or link to payment eligibility) and so have application to jobless families, more than 50% of whom do not have a requirement to seek work as their children are under six years of age.

Family Centred Employment Project

The Government has committed \$9.4 million to deliver the Family Centred Employment Project (FCEP), a three year demonstration project that aims to address the barriers to employment experienced by jobless families and support them on a pathway to education and employment.^{iv}

The FCEP is being delivered in three priority employment areas across Australia. It commenced in Broadmeadows, Victoria and

Goodna, Queensland in July 2010, and in November 2010 in Mansfield Park/ Angle Park, South Australia. While quite different communities, each has high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally/linguistically diverse (CALD) families in addition to high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Some of the key elements of the FCEP model include:

- providing family-centred, as opposed to individual, support
- taking a client focused and strengths based individual case management approach that brings together a range of supports that revolve around the needs of the individual and their family
- providing intensive support for jobless families with children aged 0-5 years to address their childcare and early education needs
- in two locations, working with employers to create a workforce environment that supports the employment of local jobless families, particularly those being assisted through the FCEP
- establishing local steering committees to coordinate service arrangements and guide the FCEP design and approach.

Emerging findings include:

- There is value in being able to engage families in their own homes; and to provide an individualised service with 15-20 families per caseworker.
- There is a high level of disadvantage for many families.
- There are local gaps in services.
- The integrated model is treated with suspicion by some local providers (JSAs and social services), with many JSA providers reluctant to refer clients for additional services, even if they retain outcome payments.

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- Collaboration and partnerships with other service providers – government of all levels and NGOs – takes time to build trust between providers and between providers and clients.
- The pathway to employment is not linear but stop-start (some clients who think they are ready to sustain employment are not when tested. However they can be assisted into other jobs complemented with other supports).
- Employers are willing to engage with projects that provide holistic support; are prepared to employ locally; and to give work tasters, work experience and student vocational placements.
- The quality of VET training is patchy with some employers not recognising Certificate III courses delivered by some providers.^{iv}

Kwinana Jobless Family project in Western Australia is operated by Bridging the Gap, a member of Job Futures, which has been operating employment, youth and training services in Kwinana since 1984. 2006 Census data shows that some 60% of homes in Kwinana do not have computers; 43% of residents left school before completing year 10 and only 29% have completed Year 12.

Bridging the Gap received funding under the DEEWR Innovation Fund to operate the project between May 2010 and 31 October 2011. As at 21/9/11, all of the outcomes had been met: 44 families had been engaged, 41 participants were being mentored, 15 people had entered employment, 21 had enrolled in education or training and 17 had participated in work experience, with an additional six continuing in work experience at the time of interview. Perversely funding for the project will finish two months before the 2012 jobless families measures commence in Kwinana, one of the 10 locations selected. It is unclear whether Bridging the Gap will be able to continue the project throughout 2012 and beyond.^{vi}

Some of the key findings are:

- Engagement with clients takes time and needs to occur through soft entry points such as the local Anglican church, not at mainstream JSA providers.
- Getting other NGOs and service providers on board is a critical first step, sometimes they are part of the problem in perpetuating a cycle of dependency. Creating relationships with other NGOs and government service providers is also time consuming.
- There were no outcomes in the first eight months of the project while relationships with social service agencies and clients were established but these have increased significantly in recent months.
- Social isolation has been the biggest barrier, measured engagement in social activities and at 21/9/11, 46 individuals had participated.
- For families: non-threatening opportunities to leave the house, connect to others, and do volunteer work and learn some skills through doing – experiential learning (such as Ngulla community nursery social enterprise operating in the Kwinana community by Bridging the Gap since 2005) are good pathways.
- Mental health issues are seen in approximately 70% of families while domestic violence is within 25%. These issues are interspersed with a prevalence of drug (mainly marijuana) and alcohol addiction.
- Looking at the whole family is critical – overcoming problems children may be having at school impacts on the ability of the parents to engage in education/employment. Also need to get the whole family to buy-in, for one person to step outside what is familiar.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families require specialist services.
- Such an approach needs a long term commitment – probably over 10 years.

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PATHS (Providing Assistance Through Holistic Servicing) is a family case management project designed to support jobless families in Bundaberg, Queensland, to develop pathways to employment and reduce their dependency on welfare. It is operated by BEST CDG following a grant from the DEEWR Innovation Fund. PATHS offers wrap around services and links participants to relevant community, training and employment projects whilst providing case management. The project is expected to support a minimum of 30 jobless families with a pathway to employment (approximately 70 working age participants) over the 15 months of operation from 31/3/11 to 8/6/12.

PATHS has exceeded its engagement milestones for the 15 month project within the first five months (they have engaged 36 families with 46 participants in total and estimate the majority of these to be sole parent families).

They have built relationships with local service agencies and locate their staff at these agencies for a dedicated time each week. They also operate an open door policy where clients and prospective clients can drop in and wait to see a staff member, rather than have to make an appointment. They believe they could double their caseload but are reluctant to do so, given the small number of staff and not wanting to dilute the level of service. BEST CDG General Manager Chris Dale attributes their success to working holistically with clients and the training and engagement of the two staff, both of whom have completed the Welfare Applied Positive Psychology Course and a Mental Health First Aid Course. One staff member works with an external focus on building relationships with other service providers and employers, the other is more focused on the individual clients.

Vocational training for families has been a priority due to very low levels of qualifications and clients have been supported into training that suit the employment they are interested in. Queensland Government training funds have covered the costs to date. Rather than reverse marketing clients to employers, BEST CDG is working to build deep relationships with five to 10 local employers and this is paying off. They achieved 16 job outcomes at the end of August 2011.^{lvii}

4.5 Jobless family trials in 10 locations

New participation requirements and additional services for teenage parents and jobless families without income for more than two years were announced in the 2011-12 Federal Budget. The trials will operate in ten Local Government Areas: Logan (QLD), Rockhampton (QLD), Playford (SA), Bankstown (NSW), Wyong (NSW), Shellharbour (NSW), Greater Shepparton (VIC), Hume (VIC), Burnie (TAS) and Kwinana (WA).

Legislation amending the Social Security Act was introduced on 21/9/11 and set out the requirements:

Teenage Parent Measure

This is a three and a half year trial starting 1 January 2012 that will apply to teenage parents:

- with a youngest child under 6 years of age who are receiving Parenting Payment,
- are 19 years or under
- have not completed year 12 or an equivalent qualification and
- reside in one of ten locations of identified disadvantage.

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DEEWR estimates the trial will reach 4,000 teenage parents in the 10 locations over the three years:

- Once a parent's youngest child turns six months, they will need to attend a general information interview with Centrelink. At this interview, Centrelink will explain the initiative to the parent including what they will be required to do once their youngest child turns one, and the local services and assistance that they can access.
- When their youngest child turns one, these Parenting Payment recipients will be required to attend Centrelink to discuss and develop a participation plan that focuses on them attaining Year 12 or equivalent and getting good early health and education outcomes for their children, including through services provided by local *Communities for Children* programs. There will be a range of activities that a parent will be able to choose from, to put in their plan.
- Teenage parents will need to agree to comply with the plan or face losing their income support.

The Minister's Second Reading speech when introducing the amendments stated that: *"There are some teenage parents who do very well for themselves and their children. However there is also clear evidence that becoming a teenage parent carries with it a greater risk of poor life outcomes for both parents and children."* ^{lviii}

The key to the success of this program is to provide the appropriate support to ensure these young parents can achieve their extra responsibilities and minimise the risk of any parents having their support payments affected. It is important there aren't any unintended consequences resulting from a loss of income.

Jobless Families Measure

This is a three year trial starting on 1 July 2012 that applies to Parenting Payment recipients who:

- have been on income support for two years or more, or
- are under the age of 23 years, and not working or studying, and
- who have a youngest child under 6 years of age.

The Government estimates this will assist 22,000 parents in 10 locations across Australia per annum.

- Parents will be required to attend annual interviews when their child turns one. These will focus on child health, development and wellbeing. When their child turns four, interviews will focus on the importance of pre-school in their child's development and workshops with Centrelink to develop a plan that focuses on the child's transition to school and the parent returning to work.
- Unlike the teenage parent measure, Centrelink will not require evidence of compliance with the plan and there will be no sanctions for these parents if they fail to comply with the activities in their Employment Pathway Plan.

In associated announcements in the 10 locations:

- The Communities for Children program will be extended so that it operates in all 10 sites and existing services will receive some additional funding.
- There will be some limited additional funding to Job Services Australia and Youth Connections services.
- The additional childcare subsidy (JETCCFA) will be extended from up to 26 weeks to up to 52 weeks for parents who

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- are engaged in employment activities.
- a Local Solutions Fund of \$25 million over four years will commence in July 2012. Local organisations will be able to bid for innovative projects to boost engagement, capability and workforce participation among disadvantaged target groups in these areas.
 - Additional Centrelink resources have been deployed in each location (Government Action Leaders and Community Action Leaders), as well as a Local Advisory Group comprising 10-12 community members with particular expertise in local issues relating to education, employment, families and early childhood learning.

Centrelink will act as the dedicated co-ordinating agency and it appears there are no plans for individualised case management for the teenage or jobless family parents, unlike in the existing family jobless projects currently operating and discussed previously in this report. In addition it is unlikely there will be individualised assistance to accompany families to appointments or activities specified in the plan. For particularly isolated or disadvantaged families, this may mean they do not connect to the services at all. For example, evidence from *Communities for Children* found that: “While it was originally outlined in the main project worker’s job description that she would accompany community members to activities only once, three times was subsequently found to be the minimum for those individuals to then feel comfortable attending alone.”^{ix}

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5. How child and family services can help tackle family joblessness: Five strategies

5.1 Reduce barriers to employment by addressing domestic violence and social isolation

Child and family services can and do reduce family joblessness by preventing and addressing many of the barriers to employment, and in some cases, the causes of joblessness. These include domestic violence and social isolation. Projects which focus on supporting women and their children experiencing domestic violence or leaving domestic violence are vital and understated in their impact on family joblessness. The national *Communities for Children* program has been shown to reduce social isolation and support children's outcomes and also to reduce unemployment.

Domestic violence and the workplace

In 2009, The Benevolent Society concluded that there was *“a lack of services that are free, anonymous, and flexible. Furthermore soft entry points should be available in services that are not domestic violence specific e.g., general practitioners and non-government organisations. The findings also highlighted a need for community attitudes towards women having experienced domestic violence to change so that they focus on the long-term impact of domestic violence, reduce imposing feelings of shame and guilt, and bring light to the often hidden nature of domestic violence.”*

Child and family services can contribute significantly to these strategies via advocacy and direct engagement with employers in their local communities. In addition they can themselves provide domestic violence provisions in enterprise agreements for their own employees. Resources are available through a project of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse which is working to ensure that domestic violence entitlements

become standard in all workplaces.^{lx} Family violence generates an economic cost to the workplace, but the evidence is that it makes better economic sense (both for the employer, the victim and the government in terms of reduced welfare payments) for employers to support an employee suffering domestic violence by providing some paid leave and safe workplace policies, rather than have the employee leave or terminate their employment.^{lxi}

In February 2011, the NSW State Government granted domestic violence entitlements to its employees: *“Under the reforms, public sector employees’ existing leave entitlements can be used for domestic violence-related issues. When those entitlements are exhausted, the employee will be granted up to five days special leave per calendar year. Employers will be encouraged where possible to facilitate flexible working arrangements, including changes to working times and work location, telephone number and email addresses.”*^{lxii}

Communities for Children as a pathway to employment

One of the key indicators assessed by the National Evaluation of *Communities for Children* was whether or not the program helped improve communities for young children and their families. In three domains, *Communities for Children* sites were found to be performing better than non-*Communities for Children* sites: employment, participation in community service activities, and social cohesion.

Children living in *Communities for Children* sites were significantly more likely to be living in a household where at least one parent was employed than children in non-*Communities for Children* sites. This was the case across the full sample at the final interview and including children from hard-to-reach groups and from households with mothers with low education (Year 10 or less). Increasing employment was

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not a specific objective of *Communities for Children* and the evaluators described the decrease in jobless households in *Communities for Children* sites compared with non-*Communities for Children* sites as a “somewhat curious finding”. They concluded it was difficult to assign causal explanations for this but that “*Communities for Children* assisted some parents to increase their broader participation in the economy by supporting them to access education and employment. Improvements in social capital may have also contributed to a decrease in jobless households”.^{lxiii}

This is confirmed in the evaluation of two The Benevolent Society’s *Communities for Children*’s sites that the project helped build connections and reduced isolation, which in turn “was felt to have improved parents’ mental health and ability to cope with the demands of parenting.” In some cases this may have resulted in direct participation in vocational training:

“Sarah was a single mum new to the Campbelltown area. She knew little about the early childhood services in the local area and had few friends. She heard about, and attended, a local playgroup through the Community Connectors project, and began volunteering for the project. Sarah and her son benefited from the *Communities for Children* Mobile Toy and Book library which visited the playgroup, and went to the Yummy Café to meet other families. She also attended *Communities for Children* funded skills and development courses run in the café. Sarah attributes starting a childcare course to all the *Communities for Children* opportunities she had, and never expected to get as much out of her volunteering experience as she did. Her son also benefited from increased learning and socialisation opportunities.”^{lxiv}

In the Broadmeadows *Communities for Children*, seven Community Hubs were established mostly at local primary schools. These became a venue for bilingual playgroups, early learning centres and adult English classes so that parents could learn English and support their children’s learning. Approximately 100 mothers have benefited from casual employment as paid playgroup facilitators. In addition 21 local bilingual community leaders were identified as having become active and skilled in the community.^{lxv}

Early Years Centres in Queensland providing pathways to employment

Since 2009, the Queensland Government has funded Early Years Centres, ‘one-stop-shops’ where children and their families can access integrated early childhood education and care and parenting and family support services in one location. They service families with children aged 0-8 years, are designed to be accessible and welcoming, and have experienced staff such as early childhood educators, family support workers and child health nurses. Centres are located in areas identified as having a high need for services available and a number extend their services to neighbouring communities via satellite services. There are currently four Centres funded in Queensland. The services provide individual case plans and intensive individualised support for families in greater need of support. An evaluation of three sites operated by The Benevolent Society is currently underway and due to be published in early 2012.^{lxvi}

The following provides a snapshot of the range of services and the intense support required to assist a University educated woman back to part-time employment. The support would no doubt be even greater for a client who had not completed high school and would need more education and training support to enter employment.

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Early Years Centre Case Study

Emma was supported to separate from a violent partner with mental health and alcohol abuse issues. Emma had four children under 7 years of age, the youngest of whom was three months at the time she first entered the program. Emma was a University graduate and a qualified nurse but had left employment after her maternity leave ran out and complications relating to her marriage. Her partner was employed full-time and they had a mortgage on the family home. The family support worker worked with the family intensively for 12 months before she was able to help Emma return to nursing two days a week.

The family entered the program via the Early Years Centre, with Emma reporting behavioural problems and developmental concerns with her older children. This led to a referral to the Family Support Worker and subsequent discussions about the partner and domestic violence and abuse which was occurring. Much of this behaviour was occurring in front of the children, leading to some of them acting out similar behaviours including lack of respect for their mother. A number of appointments were conducted in the home which suited Emma and her family. Supports included:

- Intensive counselling to build Emma's self-esteem and assistance with behaviour management with the children
- Counselling for the older children
- Taking Emma to legal aid visits and helping her obtain a protection order
- Attending all meetings with Emma for legal representation (at her request)
- Liaison with Centrelink to ensure all entitlements were being received after separation
- Provision of brokerage funds to the family (support to pay car registration, supermarket vouchers, childcare, fun day out for children)
- Support on household budgeting, discussions with the bank and help with the decision to downsize and sell the home
- Referral of father for counselling and support
- Use of Early Years Centre computer nook and some support with her resume and job applications but enhanced self-esteem meant Emma did extensive job search on her own and was able to eventually secure a part-time suitable nursing role.

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5.2 Engage jobless families

Child and family services have extensive experience with outreach and engagement to jobless families and can offer pathways to education and employment. Their experience can also be applied to other services assisting jobless families return to employment.

The Promising Practice Profiles was a key component of the cross-strategy national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004–2009. The Profiles aimed to identify “what works” and the associated processes in community development, early childhood development and early intervention service provision across three Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) funded services: Communities for Children, Invest to Grow and Local Answers. Six key findings were set out in the final report:^{lxvii}

1. The importance of a welcoming, comfortable and safe environment. Neutral, non-stigmatising venues—such as schools, child care centres, neighbourhood centres, health centres, toy libraries, and even parks, cafés and football clubs—are used to convey a social, welcoming and nurturing environment in order to facilitate parent engagement.
2. Attaching targeted services to other universally available services—such as schools, maternal and child health centres, libraries and health clinics—is effective when working with hard-to-reach populations.
3. A facilitation approach that gives clients a say in program activities and outcomes, as well as gradually increasing expectations, appears to work well with the socially excluded (young parents and parents with multiple needs).

4. The importance of relationships based on trust and rapport between workers and families. This requires resources, such as staff time and funding, but also depends on workers’ skills, knowledge and experience and other personal attributes (e.g., empathy, sensitivity, dedication and a non-judgemental attitude).
5. Cooperation, collaboration and networking between different service providers at the local level are also related to positive outcomes.
6. For culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous families in particular, free child care services, assistance with transport, use of bilingual workers or interpreters, and incorporating a meal into the program are key to client engagement and retention.

All strands of the SFCS 2004–2009 found engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities challenging; it required in-depth consultation, longer periods of time, skilled, well-trained staff, and workers or volunteers with close links to the community.^{lxviii}

5.3 Participate in integrated and co-located employment services

Child and family services can collaborate with programs which offer integrated employment services to jobless families. These can model their services on the effective employment programs operating to assist people with mental illness and refugee settlement. Key to their success is providing non-vocational and vocational assistance simultaneously. Co-located services, though not as effective as those which are fully integrated, are also exhibiting higher outcomes for more disadvantaged jobseekers than stand-alone services.

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Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model operating in the mental health arena

One of the most promising strategies to improve employment outcomes for people with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia is the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. The IPS model identifies seven critical ingredients that guide service delivery:

- consumer choice
- integration of vocational and mental health services
- competitive employment as a goal
- rapid job search and placement
- attention to individual preference
- continuous assessment and support
- personalised benefits planning.^{lxix}

MI Fellowship Victoria has been operating this approach since 2006 and contend that the existing structures which separate clinical from employment and other services are counter-productive. This can be for the simple reason that a person expresses a desire to work when they are talking with a clinician but the clinician does not know where an appropriate employment service is. Even if they do, the lapse in time or effort to connect to another service in another location means it simply doesn't happen. CEO Liz Crowther says, *"we know from the data that a good predictor of success is timing - the shorter the time that someone with schizophrenia expresses a desire to work and the time they are connected to support, the better."*

When people do get a job, integrated services remain critical to retention. For someone with mental illness, lots of things can create instability: a new team at work, altered medication, changes at home or other aspects of their private life. *"Everything has been meticulously knitted together and if you drop one stitch, it may all unravel. We need to*

know what's going on and be able to provide a quick response to maintain employment" says Laura Collister, General Manager of Rehabilitation Services at MI Fellowship Victoria.

In 2007, MI Fellowship delivered six programs in line with the IPS model in diverse locations in both country and metropolitan Victoria and achieved employment rates of up to 80%. While differing somewhat in application, the fundamental principle, common to all, was that of shared service integration, including co-location.^{lxx}

Integrated services operating in refugee settlement programs

A number of non-profit agencies operate contracts under the Federal Government's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Increasingly DIAC has seen the benefit of integrating education and employment services with refugee settlement. ACCES Service Inc delivers this program in Logan, Queensland and surrounding suburbs providing a range of settlement and employment services to over 6,500 newly arrived refugees since 2000. Settlement services include torture and trauma counselling, housing, household goods packages and English language classes. ACCES works holistically with clients, tailoring services to individual needs and partnering with other local agencies. *"Settlement work means we touch the whole family. If someone has a bump in the road on their journey, they can be supported. We empower our teams so that they are aligned to offer a wrap-around, holistic service,"* says CEO Gail Ker. ACCES also offers vocational training and employment services funded through separate Federal and State Government programs. It mixes these varied funding sources to provide a seamless service to meet individual client's needs, as much as

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possible. In addition it operates a number of social enterprises including a driver training school (with a female Muslim instructor) and a specialist health clinic to meet the needs of recent arrivals. A significant number of staff are former refugees and clients. An independent evaluation conducted in 2009 found that ACCESS was *“transitioning clients from one employment or training entry point to others and delivering client-focused, longer term aspirational employment goals.”*^{lxxi}

Centrelink Local Connections to Work

Local Connections to Work was introduced in four Centrelink offices in disadvantaged locations in 2010 and was rolled out to five more locations over March to May 2011. Under Local Connections to Work, participating organisations, called community partners, co-locate within the Centrelink office to deliver their services on a rostered basis. Community partners include Australian Government services, State and local government services (for example, health and housing services), employment services providers (JSA and DES providers), training providers, and community welfare and service organisations (for example, youth and family support services). Organisations co-locate without additional funding in the expectation they can better access their customers directly in the Centrelink office, better achieve their existing goals and objectives, and strengthen their connections with other agencies and providers in the local area. The identified target group are those who have been unemployed for more than five years and disadvantaged youth (homelessness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, psychiatric or mental illness, lacking literacy/numeracy skills). Early analysis indicate these clients comprised 60% of all who participated.

Early outcomes from the programs that operated between 24/5/10-17/1/11 were promising:^{lxxii}

- Higher attendance rates (66% versus 58% normal JSA interview attendance rate)
- A 50% higher job placement rate than for similar clients who had not participated
- 82% of clients said the service was better than previous Centrelink interviews and service and 73% said it was better than previous JSA interviews and service
- Centrelink and employment service providers were working well together and community partners said they were building stronger links with each other and the Centrelink office as a convenient access point for service delivery to clients.

The Federal Government will continue and extend the approach and announced in its 2011-12 Federal Budget that an additional 15 Centrelink offices would operate Local Connections to Work. It also announced a new approach to case coordination in 44 Centrelink sites.^{lxxiii} In essence this will identify customers who need additional support and connect them to appropriate community services. However, it will not involve co-location of these community services in Centrelink offices.

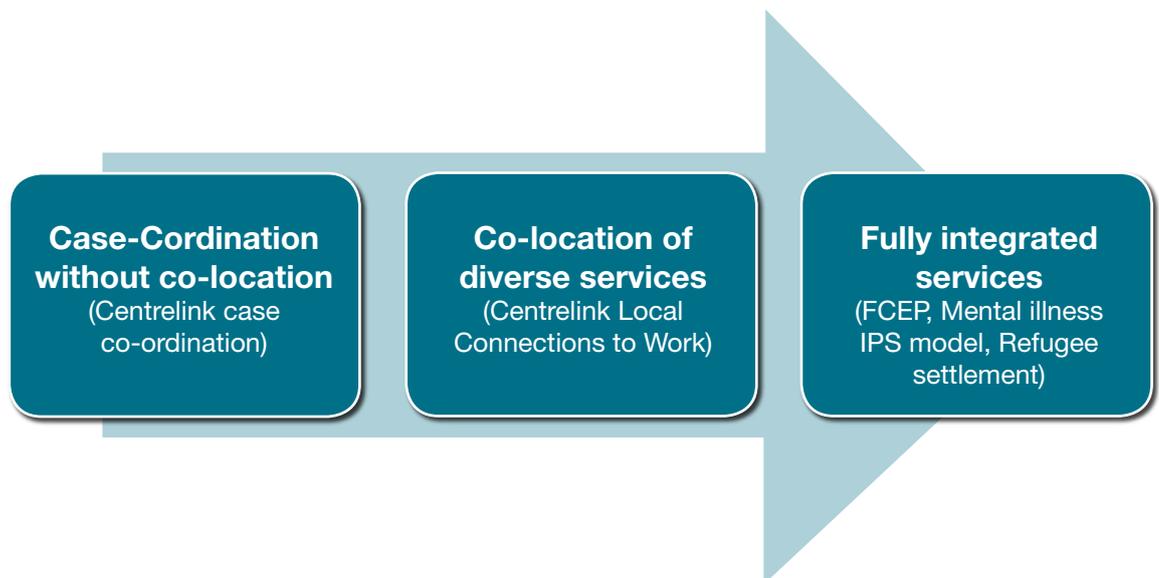
Continuum of co-location to integration

The above models operate along a continuum, from case co-ordination (without co-locating services), to co-location to fully integrated services. While co-location is producing higher outcomes than disparate services assisting the same clients, to date Centrelink has not embraced the concept of fully integrated services, where clients are not required to tell their stories

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multiple times and their vocational and non-vocational needs are met holistically in one location. The five jobless family projects are examples where this is occurring, using many of the principles of the IPS model for

clients with severe mental illness and by effective refugee settlement agencies. Child and family services can be involved in all three models described below:



5.4 Improve the education and employability skills of mothers

Educational attainment is a significant predictor of unemployment. More than half of families who were jobless in 2004, 2006 and 2008 in the *Growing Up in Australia* study did not complete Year 12. As many jobless families are led by female sole parents with children under six years of age, the most effective education programs will improve skills at the same time as taking account of the role of mothers of young children. The two programs outlined below are models of this approach and could be offered by child and family services. In addition, employment preparation programs which offer learning by doing, instead of replicating a traditional

classroom setting are likely to be more effective with parents who have a poor history of success in school.

Parent Mentoring Program - Work Savvy Parents

The Federal Government (DEEWR) funded Work Savvy Parents to run the Parenting Mentoring Program (PMP) for 18 months to February 2011 under the Innovation Fund program.^{lxxiv} The project commenced 168 participants over the course of the contract, exceeding their target by eight participants. All participants were jobless families living in disadvantaged communities in NSW and Queensland. Of these 47% obtained employment and 20% entered vocational education, a total of 67%.^{lxxv}

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The *Parent Mentoring Program* developed a mentoring and life coaching model which supported the participants gain education and employment outcomes, through the lens of them as mothers:

- a 12 day intensive return to work program that addressed specific issues, concerns and barriers faced by jobless families, particularly principal carer parents who had been out of the workforce for extended periods
- a style 'make-over' which included a new interview outfit, hairstyling, make-up application and presentation workshop (this was included in the 12 day program)
- life Coaching sessions
- ongoing support and job search assistance from a PMP Mentor
- interview preparation and support
- connection with employers
- post placement visits support that focussed on work/life balance.

The project found success in marketing clients to employers as 'return to work mums' instead of long term unemployed or other disadvantaged groups. *"Community and employers recognise that full-time parenting is a normal process of family life, and that long term absence from the workforce to raise a family is a fact of life."* They also concluded that *"most employers did not discriminate as long as the candidate has demonstrated some recent upskilling and can commit to working conditions on offer."* The program also focused on developing relationships with a small number of local employers, inviting employers to speak to groups and developing 'buy-in'. This resulted in recruitment of multiple participants.

Strong Young Mums – Centacare Wilcannia Forbes

The Strong Young Mum's Program (NSW)

started in Bourke in mid-2005 and now also runs in Lake Cargelligo and Narromine in Western NSW. It began as a response to high levels of teenage parenthood amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women, subsequent disengagement with education and low use of child and maternal health services. The program focuses on re-engagement with education, as well as teaching parenting skills and providing information about services. It also supports young mothers experiencing violence in their relationships to take action.

Initially parents are engaged through home visits, then encouraged to attend casual social activities which have an artistic focus. Women familiarise themselves with the workers, the group, and the venue of the activity while engaging in painting, beading and scrap booking. Transport to the centre is provided. Women can also participate in playgroups, guest speaker sessions and training, with childcare available while the women attend speaker sessions and training. TAFE has been a committed partner with Centacare, providing courses that meet the women's level of ability and interest. In most cases women enter TAFE through clothing production and hospitality courses (chosen as a result of consultation with the women) but then may go on to complete school or more vocationally oriented courses.

Client input is crucial to keep the women engaged and they are frequently invited to contribute to the program's structure and delivery - through group discussion, individual interviews, informal conversations, and/or surveys. Project workers regularly consult with Elders of the Bourke community in order to assure cultural appropriateness of all activities. Mothers, grandmothers, and aunties, are often invited to activities to engage with the younger women. This enables the Elders to share their knowledge,

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stories and skills, including sometimes running art workshops with the young mothers. The Centacare Aboriginal Men's Worker has a strong input into the program, particularly concerning issues relating to the women's partners. The project workers, four of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, are the connecting link between all these aspects of the program, including driving them to TAFE and regularly dropping in to maintain motivation and detect any concerns.

Outcomes from 2006 to 2011:
120 participants with 60% engaging in informal and accredited training, ranging from art and photography workshops to certificate level II and III courses in childcare, aged care, hospitality, and fashion. Some women have also completed their School Certificate and their Higher School Certificate through the program. One quarter of the women have also found employment. This is a strong outcome in an area of high unemployment.

The majority of the women participate in play and support groups, building stronger bonds with their children, other mothers and support services. As a result of participation, 70% of the women reported that they had a greater awareness of support services with most accessing these more regularly.^{lxxvi}

Learning through doing

One of the biggest challenges is lifting the adult language, literacy and numeracy - for many jobless families, both where English is a first or second language. Job preparation and training must offer smarter ways to engage, educate and employ people who have not succeeded in traditional school or training environments. The Federal Government has recently implemented the Earn or Learn policy targeted at young people not in full-time education, training or work but Jobs Australia members reported *"a great reluctance among many early school leavers to undertake training, often because of strongly negative attitudes towards school and formal learning."*^{lxxvii}



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In addition to work experience and on the job training, effective practice includes individual case management, experiential learning, self-paced learning and support to overcome other barriers to work. It may also include employing mentors from the same cultural background or community as the job seekers. The promise of a real job presented by a local employer is also a powerful motivator for many job seekers.

Bridging the Gap in Western Australia has long used hands on, experiential learning to help disengaged youth and other clients become connected to learning and work. Ngulla community nursery has been an important opportunity for this engagement. They are continuing to use the nursery in their jobless family project in Kwinana as a training ground. CEO Colin Kerr says *“Experiential learning with a purpose, outside a classroom setting is a powerful alternative for many people who have not succeeded in traditional training or work.”* ^{lxxxviii}

MTC Work Solutions in Sydney has combined literacy and numeracy programs with training in childcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. This approach has attracted greater numbers to Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) training when they see it is applied to training for a concrete qualification and job they are interested in achieving. Since 2007, they have also developed and funded Warakirri College to help young people in the western suburbs of Sydney who had prematurely left school and wanted to attain their Year 10 certificate. Learning is in small groups, with only 12 students per teacher. This way, every student has a core teacher providing emotional and learning stability. They ensure that learning is meaning driven and links across subject areas. In 2011, they expanded from their Parramatta site to include a campus in Fairfield. ^{lxxxix}

Victoria University runs programs which combine work tasters in construction trades with English language training for newly arrived migrants and refugees. AMES, Victoria’s largest provider of refugee settlement services is also a JSA provider. It has an increased employment focus on their programs such as learning English, literacy and numeracy courses and vocational training. They have found that employment is one of the key determinants for successful settlement. More than 90 per cent of AMES clients studying English are doing it to get a job. Numerous studies and AMES own history has shown a lack of Australian work experience is a major barrier to employment, even for those with overseas qualifications, and even if these are recognised in Australia. Local work experience, either paid or unpaid, can lead to a job offer as employers hire program participants after their temporary placements. Other participants use their increased confidence and experience, and new networks, to source work in their preferred industry. ^{lxxx}

Best practice examples of provision of VET to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians shows the consistent benefit of mentoring and student support officers and counselors in helping people choose the right course, get the right assistance and complete their training. ^{lxxxi} NCVER research published in 2009 has identified essential factors for achieving successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in VET, including:

- having strong vision and understanding the importance of monitoring targets
- responding to the employment market
- maintaining strong relationships with community and business
- offering job-related and culturally appropriate training
- collaborating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and the community
- providing holistic support ensuring strong staff commitment. ^{lxxxii}

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ACOSS has argued *“the best solution is investment in employment counselling, rehabilitation and training to boost work capacity, and policies to encourage employers to take unemployed people on, including paid work experience.”* The Brotherhood of St Laurence agreed, *“Our experience shows that better integrated approaches, that combine personal support, soft and vocational skills development and work experience with a closer alignment to local employment opportunities, are essential.”* ^{lxxxiii}

5.5 Employ jobless families and driver more effective employment and training programs for them

Jobless families need quality jobs with advancement prospects, not casual, short term or low paid positions. These will lift their families out of poverty and help protect them from cycling back into unemployment. Child and family services are part of a large and rapidly growing workforce and many of the same agencies also provide aged care. A lack of Australian work experience and employer reference is a major barrier to many jobless families, either because they come from overseas or long periods of withdrawal from the labour market. There are many opportunities for direct employment as well as transitions to employment (including work tasters, work experience, student vocational placement and employment in a social enterprise), that can be offered by child and family services. The skills acquired as parents can offer valuable advantages to these services, including an opportunity to increase the diversity of staff to more closely match the background of the local community. This can enhance program outcomes especially in human and social services. As employers, child and family services (and their associated social services) can help to drive more

effective employment and training provision across this sector. This will better meet the needs of both jobless families and the vital services these agencies provide.

According to the latest data produced by its Industry Skills Council, the community services and health industries' workforce is Australia's largest employer group, accounting for 11.4% of the total workforce. It continued to grow rapidly in 2010:

- In November 2010 there were almost 1.3 million community services and health workers, representing more than 100,000 more workers than the previous year and a national growth rate of 8.6%.
- Community services and health accounted for one in five of all new Australian jobs in the 10 years to 2009.

The community services and health industries' workforce is expected to continue to expand in future years:

- Between 2010 and 2050, the number of people in Australia aged over 85 is expected to increase four-fold, from 0.4 to 1.8 million. Services for older people will also need to cater for an increasingly diverse population, with an expected rise in the number of clients from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The sector has an older workforce so will be more affected by an ageing population.
- The projected workforce growth in community services and health in the five years to 2014–15 is 3.3% per year, with 211,500 new jobs needed
- Further-reaching projections see the community services industry growing second fastest out of all Australian industries, at a rate of 4% per year to 2025. According to Skills Australia's modelling, the two highest-growing occupations to 2025 will be welfare

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associate professionals (2.8% per year) and carers and aides (2.6% per year).^{lxxxiv}

Aged care has been identified by the Federal Government as one of two priority industry sectors, the other being construction. On 10/8/11 Minister Evans announced that \$73 million for the 2011-12 National Workforce Development Fund would be available across all industry sectors but that \$50 million of this would focus on Construction (civil and general) and Aged Care.^{lxxxv} At August 2011, the DEEWR Priority Occupations List included: Diversional Therapists, Enrolled and Mothercraft Nurses, Indigenous Health Workers, Welfare Support Workers, Child Carers, Education Aides, Aged and Disabled Carers, Nursing Support and Personal Care Workers.

This rapid growth and changing workforce needs represents an important employment opportunity for jobless families. While not all families will seek employment in this sector, there is a proportion who may. For some it may be a career aspiration, for others it may be a shorter term pathway to employment in other sectors. In particular caring roles are often a good pathway for mothers who have developed these skills in the course of their unpaid work. The Work Savvy Parents *Parent Mentoring Project* also found that the community services sector was particularly interested to engage parents returning to work. Aged care, home and community care and disability and children's services all valued the experience of parenting as a transferable skill.

The majority of aged care services in Australia are run by social service agencies, many of whom offer other services which support jobless families. In 2010, around 84% of community care packages were delivered by charitable and other nonprofit community-based providers and 59% of the beds in 2,773

aged care facilities delivering formal residential care were operated by nonprofits.^{lxxxvi}

For example Uniting Care NSW/ACT the largest provider of aged care services in NSW and the ACT is affiliated with UnitingCare Burnside, a major provider of child and family services. The Benevolent Society operates aged care and children's services, and employs more than 865 employees. Like many other agencies it also runs a co-ordinated volunteer program which may also be a pathway to employment for some jobless families. The Benevolent Society is one of four nonprofit agencies which run GoodStart, the consortium that purchased ABC Learning Centres and is now the largest provider of child care in Australia. In 2011, GoodStart ran 660 child care centres around Australia serving 75,000 children per week and employed more than 14,000 staff.

The business case for employing former clients

The advantages of employing jobless families is that employees will more accurately reflect clients (in terms of cultural background, language spoken, living locally, having similar 'lived experiences' and strongly motivated to improve their local community). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, stronger outcomes flow from having suitably qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. The National Evaluation of Stronger Families found that *"Staffing is critical in either facilitating or hindering engagement. Employing people with links to local communities increased the credibility of Communities for Children services and activities. Having at least one project or outreach worker of a similar background to the target group and ensuring staff were appropriately skilled were also important."*^{lxxxvii}

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Other benefits include reduced recruitment costs as there is less reliance on advertising and agency recruitment plus lower internal HR costs if an effective employment and training provider is used. If the employer can work closely with the provider so they understand the jobs and entry requirements, a smaller number of candidates will be submitted who are a better “match” and more likely to succeed. There is also the potential to fill hard-to-fill vacancies and meet skill shortages without poaching from competitors and driving up wages. Other benefits can include reduced absenteeism and turnover costs.

Child and family services as drivers of effective practice

Agencies can drive the pathways to employment and lift the quality of training. International best practice shows that demand-led programs where employers are the starting point have better outcomes for sustained employment. The May 2011 meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial Level released the paper, *Towards an OECD skills strategy*. It states:

Employers are also important partners in providing initial training and the training needed to fill skills gaps. Labour-market outcomes, especially for the first transition from education to the workforce, have been found to be much better in (vocational) education systems that collaborate with employers and include some element of workplace training. ^{lxxxviii}

Employer-led (also known as demand-led) practices include:

- **Employers providing clear information** to those responsible for client outreach. This should specify the nature of the jobs, key competencies and selection criteria, details of pre-employment provision and eligibility rules attached to it.
- **Employer involvement with jobseekers early on as** a powerful tool for motivating job seekers – having employers visible at open and information days to directly explain their jobs and willingness to hire.
- **Employers offering work tasters** integrated with other pre-employment training such as language, literacy and numeracy support.
- **Employer involvement in the design of selection procedures for pre-employment training.** These may include assessments and interviews. Build in equal opportunity measures ensuring that disadvantaged people receive a fair chance at competing for a place and ensure feedback on job seekers who do not achieve a place, leading to remedial activities to help join a future course or referral to other appropriate options.
- **Employers assisting with design and deliver pre-employment training.** Preparation needs to simulate the workplace as much as possible enforcing strict standards on punctuality and attendance. Key elements include classroom and on-the-job experience (such as work tasters and ideally, placements during training); employability skills (such as team work, punctuality and dependability, dealing with supervisors, dressing appropriately, taking initiative); and quality technical skills which meet industry standards including the offer of student vocational placements. ^{lxxxix}

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment levels within organisations can be greatly assisted with the development of Reconciliation Action Plans. Reconciliation Action Plans are holistic documents that cover a wide range of organisational change. The RAP framework includes specific actions in three interdependent areas of reconciliation: building relationships, demonstrating respect and creating two-way opportunities. All RAPs include specific, measureable actions and targets with timeframes, and annual reporting and updates based on lessons learned. The program is based on the strong business case for closing the gap which sits alongside the moral and social case. While RAPs do not limit themselves to employment outcomes, it is a considerable component and organisations with a RAP have a stronger attraction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees than those without and are more likely to retain their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruits.

At December 2010, Reconciliation Australia estimated that there would be 334 organisations employing 1.4 million people (14 percent of the Australian workforce) engaged in the RAP program by the end of 2011. All Federal Government Departments and the Queensland Government have a RAP.^{xc}

Social enterprises can be an additional source of employment

In addition to offering work experience and employment, a number of agencies are creating social enterprises. These trade in the market but offer employment or training opportunities for disadvantaged job seekers. Since 2002, AMES has established 10 social enterprises across a range of industries including in hospitality, catering, cleaning and agriculture. During 2009, AMES social enterprises provided 517 training places. A number of agencies providing child and family services are beginning to operate social enterprises. The Benevolent Society has started Taste Food Tours in Bankstown and surrounding suburbs as a means to train and provide casual employment for local mothers. See

More Forces at Work for more lessons on operating social enterprises based on the experiences of nonprofit employment agencies operating more than 30 enterprises, some for as long as 15 years.

6. Conclusion

This report has provided an overview of the characteristics of jobless families in Australia, looked at the crossover with child and family services and some key barriers to education and employment. It has summarised current programs and policy directions relevant to the education and employment of jobless families and strengths and weaknesses of initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for jobless families. The report has also identified a best practice model for assisting jobless families (described in a diagram following the Executive Summary). It has also identified five strategies where The Benevolent Society and other agencies providing child and family services can strengthen their services and pathways to education and employment for their jobless family clients.

Some emerging policy implications:

- Further investment in programs that reduce domestic violence and social isolation is justified on the grounds they can also reduce family joblessness. They need to be valued for their economic as well as social policy returns.
- Current jobless family projects need to be evaluated to determine what specific components generate success and how they can be delivered in a cost effective manner. These learnings need to be applied to other programs. Innovation Fund projects trialling new approaches for jobless families should also be evaluated.
- Pathways to education and employment for jobless families and other disadvantaged jobseekers need to build self-esteem, incorporate learning by doing, and work experience with local employers. The promise of a real job presented by a local employer is a powerful motivator for many job seekers.
- Children and family services should

explore ways to offer life coaching and mentoring to build self-esteem of jobless family clients.

- Jobless families need quality jobs with advancement prospects, not casual, short term or low paid positions. These will lift their families out of poverty and help protect them from cycling back into unemployment. Child and family services can offer these jobs and can help build effective pathways to them.

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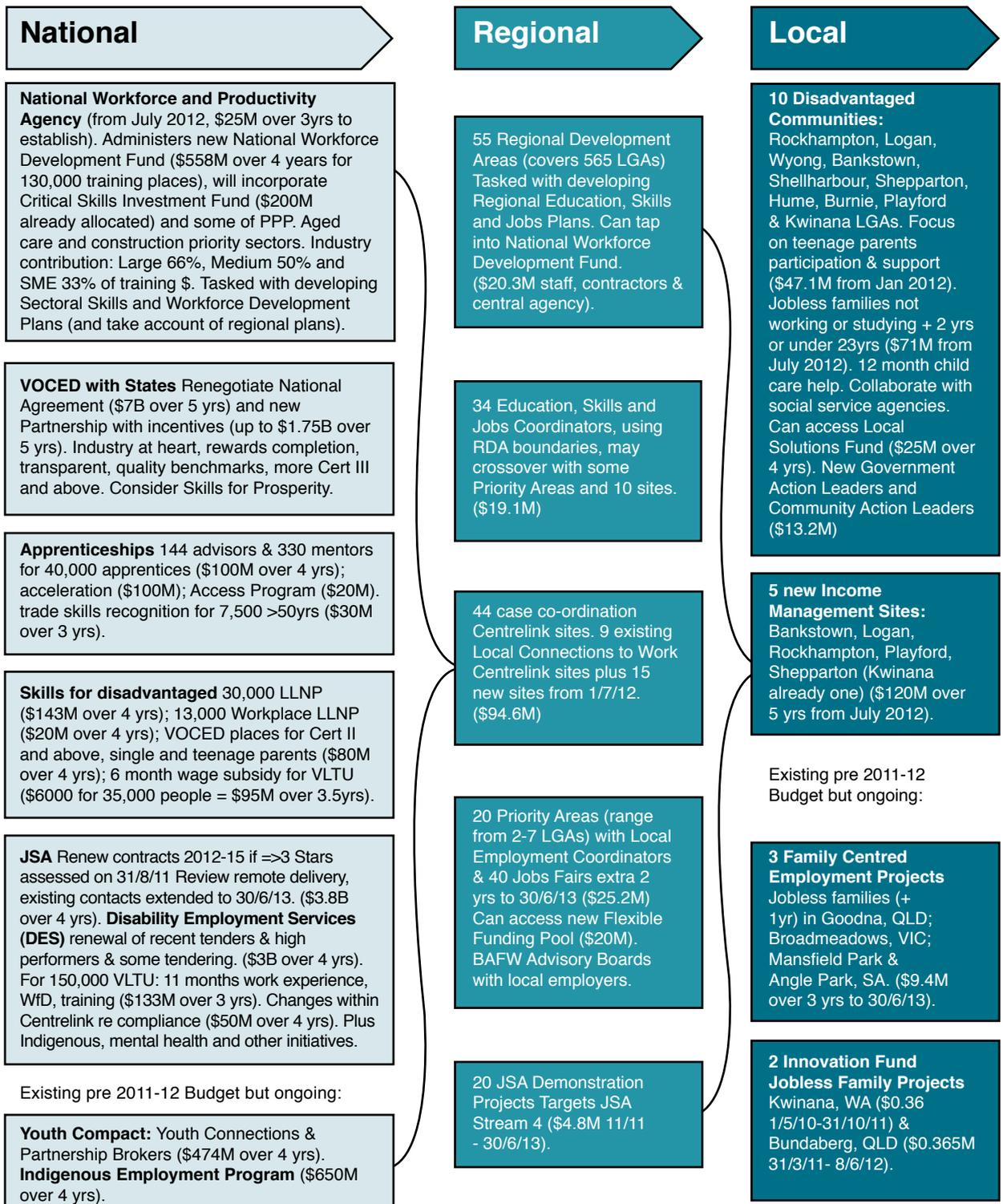
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- liii This is for parents who claimed after 1 July 2006, currently different rules apply to previous claimants and these will change on 1/1/13. See Appendix B. for more on participation and income support rules.
- liv For the purposes of the FCEP, DEEWR defines a jobless family as a family with a dependent child under the age of 16 where either one or both parents are on income support and have no more than four weeks reported earnings in the previous 12 month period.
- lv Data and findings derived from interviews with Broadmeadows and Goodna FCEP workers, August and September 2011.
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- lxxiv *DEEWR Innovation Fund Project, Parent Mentoring Project, Project Summary*, Work Savvy Parents, 2011. http://www.worksavvytraining.com.au/parent_programs/documents/ParentMentoringProgram-ProjectReport.pdf
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- lxxxvii National Evaluation Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.
- lxxxviii Ministerial paper citing *Learning for Jobs*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, OECD, 2010.
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- xc See Reconciliation Australia's website for "What Makes a Good RAP" and sample RAPs. <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/>

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Appendix A. Federal Government Employment & Skills Funding, 2011-12 Budget



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Appendix B.

Participation Requirements and Income Support Rules

Parenting Payment Single:

If the person is single, they can receive Parenting Payment Single without activity or participation requirements until their youngest child turns 6. However they can volunteer at a JSA as a fully eligible participant and receive services (assessment into appropriate Stream etc).

A significant proportion of jobless families will have older children. When the youngest child turns 6, they are required to enter into an Employment Pathway Plan and meet participation requirements but can retain Parenting Payment Single until their youngest child turns 8. They are assessed for work barriers at this point, if Stream 1, the participation plan is decided by Centrelink, if Stream 2-4, they are referred to a JSA provider. If stream 4, they are assessed using the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA).

The participation requirements (for a “principal carer of a dependent child”) are 15 hours of one or a combination of paid work, study or voluntary work with vocational value and must be approved by the Job Services Australia provider and be included in the individual’s Employment Pathway Plan. (Although the claimant can be required to accept a job of up to 25 hours per week if one is offered to them).

When the youngest child turns 8, they lose eligibility for Parenting Payment Single. If still unemployed, they can claim Newstart Allowance (~\$112 drop in fortnightly payment and less generous amount they can earn before payments are withdrawn, and a higher withdrawal rate, so significantly worse off if combining part time work and income support –this changes Jan 2013, as per 2011-12 Budget announcements). Once receiving Newstart for one year, claimants may be required to undertake a Work Experience Activity. This can mean doing a course, working part-time or doing another activity that will improve their chance of getting a job. These activities can be done during school hours (9am – 3pm) unless they can access suitable child care. Also reduced servicing payments to JSA at this point (typically \$385-\$440 per placement if it meets specified hours).

Parenting Payment Partnered

If partnered, the claimant can receive Parenting Payment Partnered without activity or participation requirements until their youngest child turns 6. When the youngest child turns 6, they lose eligibility for Parenting Payment Partnered, but may claim Newstart and are required to enter into an Employment Pathway Plan and meet the “principal carer of a dependent child participation requirements” stated above.

Claiming before July 2006

If they claimed Parenting Payment before 1 July 2006 they will have to sign an Employment Pathway Plan and meet their participation requirements when their youngest child turns seven but may continue to get Parenting Payment until their youngest child turns 16.

However if the person changes their relationship status for more than 12 weeks (ie go from being partnered to single, or single to partnered) they will be subject to the new rules. If Parenting Payment is cancelled for more than 12 weeks (eg due to an increase in income) they are subject to the new rules if they reclaim.

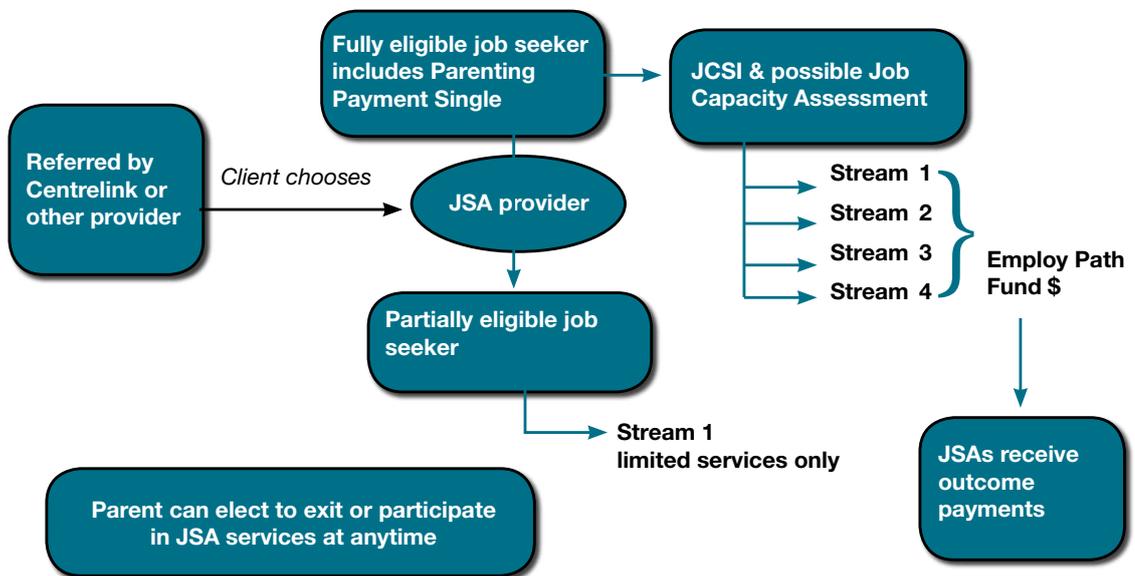
These rules will change on 1 January 2013 for parents who have been receiving Parenting Payment since before July 2006, eligibility will cease when their youngest child turns 12 or 13 in 2013, or 12

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in subsequent years. Parents whose youngest child is 13 years old before 1 January 2013 are not affected by these changes. It shifts sole parents with a child 12-15 years who were on Parenting Payment Single (PPS) prior to 2006 (Welfare to Work) from PPS to Newstart Allowance (NSA). According to ACOSS analysis, it will mean a loss of up to \$56 pw in income support for at least 24-28,000 sole parents (over 4 years). It will save \$152m over 4 years. Current PPS plus FTB for sole parents with 1 child (13-15) is \$464 pw, on NSA this falls to \$408 pw.

Single principal carers on Newstart Allowance will receive a more generous taper rate. Parents will lost 40 cents per dollar earned above \$31 pw instead of 50 cents from \$31-\$125 pw and 60 cents above this. This will cost \$179m over 4 years.

Appendix C. Jobless Family ‘volunteer’ - pathway through JSA





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