

Children and Young People Policy Scan Issue 9, September 2010

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Consultation Opportunities

Disability services consultation – Improving online information, Department of Communities – Disability and Community Care Services, September 2010.

Feedback is being sought on ways to improve and streamline online information for Disability and Community Care Services to make it easier for people with a disability, their families and carers, to find information on government services.

Submissions are due on **31 December 2010**.

<http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/consultqld/index.cfm?go=consultonline.viewIssue&activityID=322>

Reports, research papers, policy initiatives etc

Child Protection

Parental intellectual disability and child protection: Key issues, Lamont, A. & Bromfield, L., National Child Protection Clearinghouse, August 2010.

This report reviews Australian and international research to identify common risk factors leading to the over-representation of children in the child protection system who have parents with an intellectual disability.

The report's **key findings** include:

- parents with an intellectual disability make up a small proportion of the total number of parents in Australia, however evidence suggests they are over-represented in child protection services and legal proceedings
- parents with an intellectual disability often come to the attention of child protection and support agencies due to allegations that, because of their disability, their child has been or is at risk of abuse or neglect
- the community generally believes that a person with any form of intellectual disability, regardless of the degree, is incapable of providing adequate parenting and care for their child
- an intellectual disability, by itself, is a poor indicator of parental capacity because a person's situation can be compounded by other problems which make parenting difficult, such as poverty, unemployment, social isolation, stress and relationship difficulties
- while some intellectually disabled parents may neglect their children there is insufficient evidence to suggest that all children of intellectually disabled parents are at greater risk than other children
- evidence suggests that parents with an intellectual disability or their children may be more vulnerable to being targeted by predatory perpetrators of child physical and sexual abuse thereby placing children at a heightened risk of being sexually and physically abused or of witnessing domestic violence, and
- parental capacity of a person with an intellectual disability can be enhanced with appropriate support services that are long term family centred, home based and focus on the parent's strengths rather than deficiencies.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues31/issues31.html>

Youth Justice

Police-referred restorative justice for juveniles in Australia, Richards, K., Australian Institute of Criminology, 2 September 2010.

This paper overviews the legislative and policy context of restorative justice measures for juveniles in each Australian state and territory, highlighting the diverse characteristics of current practices. Numbers and characteristics of juveniles who are referred by police to restorative justice measures and the offence types for which they are most commonly referred are provided.

The paper identifies a number of key points about police-referred restorative justice measures for juveniles in Australia, including:

- the proportion of all juveniles who were referred by police to restorative conferences varied substantially by jurisdiction
- juveniles were referred to conferences primarily for property crimes
- similar proportions of male and female juveniles who came into contact with the police were referred to restorative justice measures, suggesting that restorative measures may be having a net-widening impact on female juveniles
- substantial proportions of juveniles referred by police to restorative justice measures were aged 10 to 14 years suggesting that conferences may be disproportionately used for younger juveniles, and
- although Indigenous juveniles comprised varied proportions of those referred by police to restorative justice, they consistently comprised higher proportions of juveniles sent to court than conferencing. This could suggest that Indigenous young people are not being diverted via restorative measures to the same extent as their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The paper also indicates that there are a range of factors that may influence police decisions about whether to refer a particular juvenile to a restorative conference, including offending history and offence type.

The paper argues that more detailed data on the offending histories, offending types and offence seriousness of juveniles referred by police to restorative justice processes would enable a more finely-grained analysis of restorative justice for juveniles in Australia.

<http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/D/3/F/%7BD3F3C924-7049-49E9-8545-B5D755553BBD%7Dtandi398.pdf>

The Early Years

Investing in children's development: The importance of early relationships, The Benevolent Society, August 2010.

This paper outlines the important role families, workers and communities play in supporting children's early development particularly where children are living in families and communities that are under stress because of poverty, violence and discrimination.

It also presents the results of an evaluation which explored the impact of Partnerships in Early Childhood (PIEC) on children and their families, and the effectiveness of the service model.

PIEC is run by The Benevolent Society in conjunction with child care and preschool organisations in NSW and Queensland.

PIEC aims to improve the quality of early education and care through staff development and support for parents and, in so doing, enhance children's social and emotional development. The focus is on building nurturing and supportive relationships between children and adults.

Policy and practice directions that are needed to support children's growth and resilience are also discussed

<http://www.bensoc.org.au/uploads/documents/Position-paper-investing-in-childrens-development-early-relationships-Aug2010.pdf>

Vertical living kids, Mizrachi, D & Whitzman, C., University of Melbourne, August 2010.

This report presents the findings of a research project which had two objectives: to explore the physical and social environmental determinants of Children's Independent Mobility, in this case children aged 8-12, to autonomously explore public space in central Melbourne high rise housing; and to identify international best practice planning policy for these communities.

Forty children and their parents (18 living in public housing and 22 in privately owned housing) participated in the project.

Significant differences were found between the travel behaviour of children residing in public and private high rise housing, including:

- children in public high rise housing experience greater levels of independent mobility than children in private high rise housing
- the geographies of children residing in public high rise housing were dominated by local, designated play spaces. Conversely, the geographies of children residing in private high housing covered not only a larger territorial range but a wider variety of purpose built play spaces as well as public transport and commercial spaces
- distance to school and local open green spaces is a determinant of independent mobility. Participants residing within an 800m radius from their school or within 300m of local green space were more likely to access those spaces independently than children who had to travel further
- factors contributing to children's environmental preferences include accessibility and proximity to home, amenity, and the range of play and socialization opportunities, and
- Singapore and Vancouver were identified to have best practice policies that support children living in high rise environments.

The project report makes the following recommendations to State and Local Governments:

- that state and local planning authorities develop specific design guidelines for children and families living in high rise housing,
- undertake consultation with children, and act on the recommendations arising from that consultation.

<http://www.abp.unimelb.edu.au/research/pdf/vertical-living-kids.pdf>

Education

Formative assessment for secondary students with disabilities, Duke, J. Curriculum Leadership, Vol 8, Issue 25, August 2010.

This article describes the use of, and challenges associated with, formative assessment as a way of improving student learning, particularly for students with a disability (SWD). It overviews Education Queensland's *P-12 Curriculum Framework Guidelines for SWD*, which set out expectations that schools and teachers "enable all students, including students with disabilities, to access and achieve the learning described in the mandated curriculum document".

The article describes how the guidelines have been applied at a large special education program in a Queensland secondary school.

http://cmslive.curriculum.edu.au/leader/how_can_secondary_schools_enact_assessment_policy,32149.html?issueID=12195

The provision of education to students with a disability or special needs (Inquiry), New South Wales Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, July 2010.

This inquiry examined the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs in New South Wales. Of particular concern to the inquiry, was the number of recurring issues which were outstanding despite being addressed by previous disability education inquiries.

The key issues arising from the inquiry included:

- **Increasing pressure arising from greater inclusion** – the move towards greater inclusion of students with a disability or special needs into mainstream schooling has placed increasing pressure on available government and non-government education resources, including funding to meet the demand for educational services for these students.
- **Inadequate funding** – current funding levels for providing education to students with a disability or special needs are inadequate and need to be substantially increased to ensure that all students have equitable access to education to reach their full learning potential.
- **Inconsistency of school learning support teams** – school learning support teams are a key means through which planning and integrated support is provided to students with a disability or special needs in mainstream school settings. However, the quality and effectiveness of school learning support teams throughout New South Wales is variable, and in some schools non-existent.
- **Inadequate assessment process for identifying student's needs** – the current assessment process is complicated, costly, time consuming, lacks transparency and requires students to annually reconfirm their disability status even when their disability and level of need is unlikely to change dramatically in the space of a year.

A diagnosis of a disability, based on the DET Disability Criteria, should not be a prerequisite to receiving disability funding and should also include a functional assessment tool.

- **Unmet demand for special education places** – special education places for students with higher support needs is driven by demand whereas special education places for students with lower level support needs such as a mild intellectual disability, language, reading, behaviour and in some cases autism are fixed. This has resulted in some Schools for Special Purposes, which target children with high level needs, having to accommodate students with lower level support needs which potentially reduce the number of special education places available to students with higher level support needs.

Inadequacy of support in mainstream schools – current levels of support in mainstream schools do not allow teachers to fulfil their responsibility to meet the learning needs of all students and accordingly a significance increase in disability funding will allow for improved support services for these students.

- **Lack of coordination of professional support services** - currently professional support services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and counselling are provided by multiple agencies resulting in inefficiencies and inequities. This needs to be addressed by coordinating multi-disciplinary teams at a regional level to deliver professional and allied health support services.
- **Inadequate teacher training** – many teachers feel inadequately equipped to cater for the learning needs of students with disabilities and special needs. On-going training and professional development is necessary to maintain adequate support for students with disabilities and special needs.

The inquiry presented **31 recommendations** including:

- substantially increasing funding and resources for students with disabilities and special needs to ensure equitable access to education
- improving the assessment funding process for students with a disability to provide greater transparency and better communication to families, carers and schools in a manner that is clear, timely and sensitive
- providing satellite autism classes in country areas to enable all children with autism to have appropriate access to these classes regardless of their location
- increasing the number of special education places and classes to ensure that there are adequate places to cover demand for all students with disabilities and special needs
- improving student learning support teams by providing greater resources, ensuring that each team has at least one member who holds a special education qualification,

publishing guidelines on the functions and outcomes of school learning support teams including the role of parents in these teams

- publishing guidelines on the development of Individual Education Plans for students with disabilities and special needs, and
- improving teacher's special education skills and knowledge by requiring pre-service teacher education courses to incorporate a mandatory special education unit and additional content regarding teacher strategies and practical skills to cater for the learning needs of students with disabilities or special needs.

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/47F51A782AEABBABCA25767A000FABEC>

Law and Justice

The Need for Reality Testing in Relocation Cases, Parkinson, P. Cashmore, J. & Single, J., *Family Law Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 2010) p. 1-34.

This article reports on a study of Australian relocation cases where separated parents in shared parenting or custody arrangements seek to permanently relocate, with their children, either interstate or overseas. The study examines the impact of relocation disputes on families and the court system.

Relocation disputes are a growing international trend in part because of the increase in international mobility and changing dating patterns resulting from use of the Internet as a social networking tool.

The authors look at 71 cases and report that in 47 of them, courts allowed the applicant to move with children. The proportion of cases going to trial in Australia over the issue of relocation is very much greater than in family law disputes generally. The study demonstrates that relocation disputes are very difficult to settle and disproportionately take up judicial resources.

For many relocating parents, victories are gained at a significant cost due to high litigation expenses arising from disputes and maintaining contact with the other parent after the move. Travel can be burdensome for parents and also children. Thus, if parents are unable to negotiate their own resolutions, changes in shared parenting arrangements may result from breaches of orders, rather than their variation.

<http://www.abanet.org/family/flq/>

(Family Law Quarterly is available to subscription holders only)

Participation and Engagement

Children's Voices: Experiences and Perceptions of European Children on Drug and Alcohol Issues, Olszewski, D. Burkhart, G. & Bo, A., European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, September 2010.

This research paper from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction gives insight into some of the key drug and alcohol issues that affect children from the perspectives of the children themselves. The paper collates previously reported quotations from a range of qualitative research interviews with children and young people, as well as parents and carers across Europe.

The qualitative information focuses on the following four main issues for children:

1. living with harmful parents drinking or drug taking
2. being separated from parents and looked after by relatives, foster carers or institutions
3. experience and perceptions about alcohol and drug consumption, and
4. experience and perceptions about interventions to address alcohol and drug consumption.

The quotations reported in this publication explore the complex nature of alcohol and drug use and exposure by using children's own words to describe their perceptions of the issues. The authors acknowledge the importance of understanding issues from a child's perspective to inform the development of flexible and effective interventions.

The report is available at: <http://www.crin.org/docs/ChildrenVoices.pdf>

Events and Conferences

Inaugural Australian Youth Led Convention, Canberra, 26 - 28 November 2010.

This convention is intended for young leaders from youth led organisations and is designed to enhance their skills and allow for networking opportunities with government.

<http://www.aylc.org.au/about/>

Young people, risk and resilience: The challenges of alcohol, drugs and violence conference, Australian Institute of Criminology and the Victorian Safe Communities Network, RACV Club, Victoria, 7 - 8 March 2011.

This conference will promote discussion on the nature and extent of young people's involvement in alcohol, other drugs and violence and the sharing of young people's and practitioners' experiences in reducing the risks of engaging in these types of activities.

<http://www.aic.gov.au/en/events/aic%20upcoming%20events/2011/vscn.aspx>

Middle Years Symposium "Betwixt and between" – a policy and practice agenda for children in the 'middle years' – why, what, who and how? Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, Canberra, 25 November 2010.

This symposium explores issues and actions for enhancing the development of children aged 9-14 years, with a particular focus on children's social and emotional developmental needs during the pre- and early adolescent years and the policy links between existing early childhood and youth agendas.

<http://www.aracy.org.au/index.cfm?pageName=Symposium>

Early Childhood Development Research Gaps workshops, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, 27-28 October, 1 & 3 November 2010.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth is conducting two-hour workshops in four capital cities, including Brisbane to identify gaps in early childhood development research.

The Brisbane workshop will be held on Wednesday, 27 October 2010.

http://www.aracy.org.au/index.cfm?pageName=early_childhood