



Tasmanian Early Years
FOUNDATION

TASMANIAN EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

FACT SHEET

THE TEYF OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

One of the Foundation's research priorities has been to find a way to measure outcomes related to how well children are faring on a range of measures of health, wellbeing, safety, development and learning.

The initial reason for doing this was to be able to allocate grants funds more effectively. The importance and potential value of having an outcomes approach to assist larger decisions about planning and investment is also clear, as this can influence both government policy decisions and the allocation of funding.

This report on Tasmania's young children has been produced by the Foundation as a one-off document. Its purpose is to explain the outcomes approach, showcase the extensive range of information now consolidated into one major database, and point the way to how this information can be used by all those with an interest in the health and wellbeing of Tasmania's young children.

1. Introduction

The years from birth to six are a crucial time in every child's development, setting the scene in many ways for their future. Common sense and experience tell us this.

Increasingly, scientific evidence about how our brains develop throughout life, and research into the effects that a child's environment has on their development, are adding to this knowledge.

At the same time, advances in information technology are allowing us to gather, sort and analyse information on a scale not possible in the past. Brought together, they are giving us a better understanding of the forces and factors that shape young lives, establishing patterns, both helpful and harmful, that can last a lifetime.

Like many governments around the world, the Tasmanian Government is committed to improving outcomes for children. Building on the initial research work done by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, it has decided to bring together in one database a range of information that shows how well our children are faring in a number of important areas.

This report produced by the Foundation is the first from the outcomes framework database and gives us some specific information about the health and wellbeing of our young children, how well they are developing and learning, and how safe they are.

The Foundation's intention with this report is that it will assist all those people who care for and about our young children and their future: parents and carers as well as those who work with children, manage services and programs for children, and make government policy related to children. It provides an introduction to outcomes indicators – the idea of thinking specifically and collaboratively about the outcomes we desire for children. It places children at the centre of families, communities and society as a whole, seeing them in relation to the people and places that surround them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A snapshot of how Tasmania's young children are faring

Compared with children in many parts of the world, children in Tasmania, as in the rest of Australia, are faring well on many measures:

- infant mortality rates are low
- a high number of babies are born full term
- immunisation rates are high
- a high percentage of children are enrolled in Kindergarten
- nearly all children are achieving health and wellbeing markers as shown through the Kindergarten Development Checks (KDC)
- most children identified with special needs are accessing early childhood intervention services
- over 90% of children on the Severe Disability Register are accessing mainstream schools

Other important indicators are not as positive:

- rates of low birth weight babies higher than national figures
- low rates of breastfeeding
- high rates of mothers smoking during pregnancy
- high rates of teenage pregnancy
- 22% of children failing to achieve on at least one of the KDC markers for numeracy, literacy and cognition
- one in five young children in out-of-home care having multiple placements
- There is a considerable drop off in attendance for child health nurse assessments after six months
- only a small proportion of teenage parents are able to access the supportive cu@home program

Childhood obesity, physical activity, nutrition, mental health, and family functioning are emerging health concerns.

The report shows clearly that there are striking inequalities in health, wellbeing and learning outcomes affecting substantial numbers of young children and families in relation to where they live and their socio-economic status. This has significant implications for how we deliver our services.

There are some excellent services that support young children in Tasmania. Some exciting new initiatives are aiming to strengthen and extend these services, and early signs of success for some programs are very encouraging.

TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

The Tasmanian government has responded to concerns that the contemporary needs of families are not being well met. There are now several major programs under way to improve outcomes for children. These include the **Kids Come First** project, **Launching into Learning, Child and Family Centres** and **cu@home**. Major reform of the government's services for children and families is also occurring.

Kids Come First

The Kids Come First project, which has grown out of the Tasmanian Early Years Outcomes Framework, will provide the government with a comprehensive way of monitoring how well Tasmania's children and young people from birth to 18 years of age are faring. It will provide around 100 indicators of children's health, wellbeing safety and learning, together with community profiles and time trends.

Launching into Learning

A number of Tasmanian schools are running *Launching into Learning* initiatives for preschool children and their families. At the heart of this program is the evidence that parents are their child's first and most important teachers, and have a significant influence on their early learning and development.

Twelve hub schools were initially set up when the program started in 2006. Currently, 102 schools are providing over 250 programs to more than 2,200 children and their families. An evaluation is under way and preliminary evidence is encouraging.

Child and Family Centres

Child and Family Centres are one-stop shops of support for families, bringing together services that make the most difference in the early years of a child's life.

Designed to be accessible and welcoming, they are places where parents can drop in, get advice about their child and tap into a range of supports, such as parenting programs, early years learning, child and family health services, early identification of children with special needs, counselling, and educational programs. As well, these centres will provide opportunities for parents to engage in education and pathways to employment.

Up to 30 centres will be established over the next four years, with the first eight under way by the end of this year. These will be located at Clarendon Vale, Ravenswood, Chigwell, George Town, East Devonport, Beaconsfield, Queenstown and Risdon Cove. The latter will be a centre to support the needs of Aboriginal children and their families.

Additional centres at Bridgewater and Geeveston will be funded by the Australian Government. The focus of each centre's work will evolve in response to local needs and existing services, with local communities actively involved in planning and developing services.

cu@home

This service is offered to first-time mothers aged 15–19 years who might be having difficulties related to their pregnancy. Specially trained nurses visit each young woman in the program in their homes before the birth of their baby, and then regularly up until their child is two years old. Young mothers receive support and guidance on building a good relationship with their child and nurturing their growth and development. They are also encouraged to continue their education and future career development.

Another of the Tasmanian Government's significant platforms for realising its vision is the forthcoming Social Inclusion Strategy. It appointed the state's first Social Inclusion Commissioner in December 2008 and is developing a Social Inclusion Strategy in consultation with the Tasmanian community.

OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK RECOMMENDATIONS

The Tasmanian Early Years Outcomes Framework and the extended framework for Kids Come First provide us with practical and useful information in one database, allowing us to monitor and analyse the changing strengths and needs in our communities, and plan accordingly. With a combination of sound data, informed analysis and research-based action, we come a step closer to making sure that each and every Tasmanian child can achieve their full potential.

The Tasmanian Early Years Foundation, in considering all the findings of this report on Tasmania's young children, makes the following recommendations, which are addressed to all those concerned with improving the lives of our children. This includes politicians, policy makers, senior managers, community organisations and practitioners in the field.

1. Ensure that government has effective mechanisms for collaboration and joint planning across government and non-government agencies, with the common aim of improving outcomes for young children.
2. Fully involve family members and communities in local level planning to develop integrated services for children that are accessible, welcoming and responsive to changing needs. This will be particularly important in the newly developing Child and Family Centres.
3. Encourage local governments to use the local and regional data to focus on opportunities for working in partnership across sectors in order to improve the wellbeing and outcomes for children and families, extending and building on their traditional role in infrastructure issues. This could include reference to early years initiatives in existing and future strategic plans for children and young people, within a community development framework.
4. Make use of the data to activate coalitions of people within the community, such as the Tasmanian Breastfeeding Coalition, and Child Injury Prevention Coalition, in response to significant health promotion needs such as breastfeeding rates, smoking rates and childhood injuries.
5. Review the coverage, accessibility and effectiveness of smoking cessation programs for pregnant women.
6. Continue targeting resources and programs such as Launching into Learning to areas of greater need, and market the programs effectively to improve uptake of these services.
7. Expand the program and reach of nurse home visiting through cu@home to include more geographically remote areas, particularly those with high rates of teenage pregnancy.
8. Commit resources to professional development programs such as family partnership training, which build on the skills of service providers and policy makers to enable them to be more effective at listening to parents, and working in partnership with families and communities.

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