

Consulting, Coaching and Accreditation Services



CHILD WISE
creating child safe communities

Child Wise Submission

Productivity Commission

Draft Report: Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory

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2. BACKGROUND

In Australia, Child Wise pioneered the use of Child Safety Standards within organisations where children and young people spend time. Based on the principles of capacity building and prevention, Child Wise works with organisations to create and maintain a culture where child safety is front of mind.

3. WHAT WE DO

Consultancy and Coaching Services

Child Wise conducts a thorough review of organisational culture, policies and practices to help implement the highest child safe standards. We provide guidance at each stage of this process to help build internal capacity to maintain a child safe environment into the future. We can support organisations by developing an over-arching child safety framework that pulls together all relevant policies, procedures and approaches to guide teams in their work with children and young people.

Child Wise Accreditation

We provide a visible and robust accreditation process that demonstrates that organisations have achieved and maintained best practice standards for protecting children and young people.

Child Safety Training

Through our awareness, prevention and early intervention training programs, Child Wise equips your organisation's staff and volunteers with vital knowledge and skills to help keep children safe from harm.

4. DRAFT REPORT OVERVIEW RESPONSE

Child Wise endorses the need for a coordination of funding for children and family services matters and prior to the Productivity Commission draft report being handed down, Child Wise met with the CEO of Territory Families and proposed a coordinated, place-based trial for the prevention of child abuse through training of all people who interact with children under the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations endorsed by COAG which were recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (*Royal Commission National*).

Following the Productivity Commission Draft Report, Child Wise provided a Child Safe Communities Proposal (Child Wise Proposal) to Territory Families to create a multi-disciplinary team approach of NT Government agencies to coordinate prevention and family interventions. The Child Wise Proposal was not adopted; however, we believe its integrity stands and there is no reason why it cannot be amended to incorporate a Commonwealth representative on the multi-disciplinary team to assist with coordination of funding and service delivery.

This Child Wise Proposal goes to the very heart of dismantling the fragmented approach while allowing the place-based and community led plans to be developed and tested.

We believe it is important to sustain existing trust-based relationships between non-government service providers and their communities ... the worst outcome would be to diminish or dismantle existing support for our most vulnerable ... and the Child Wise Proposal provides the flexibility of working in a fit-for-purpose approach, seeking not to remove or replicate support services but rather coordinate effort and share knowledge of the children and young people requiring support.

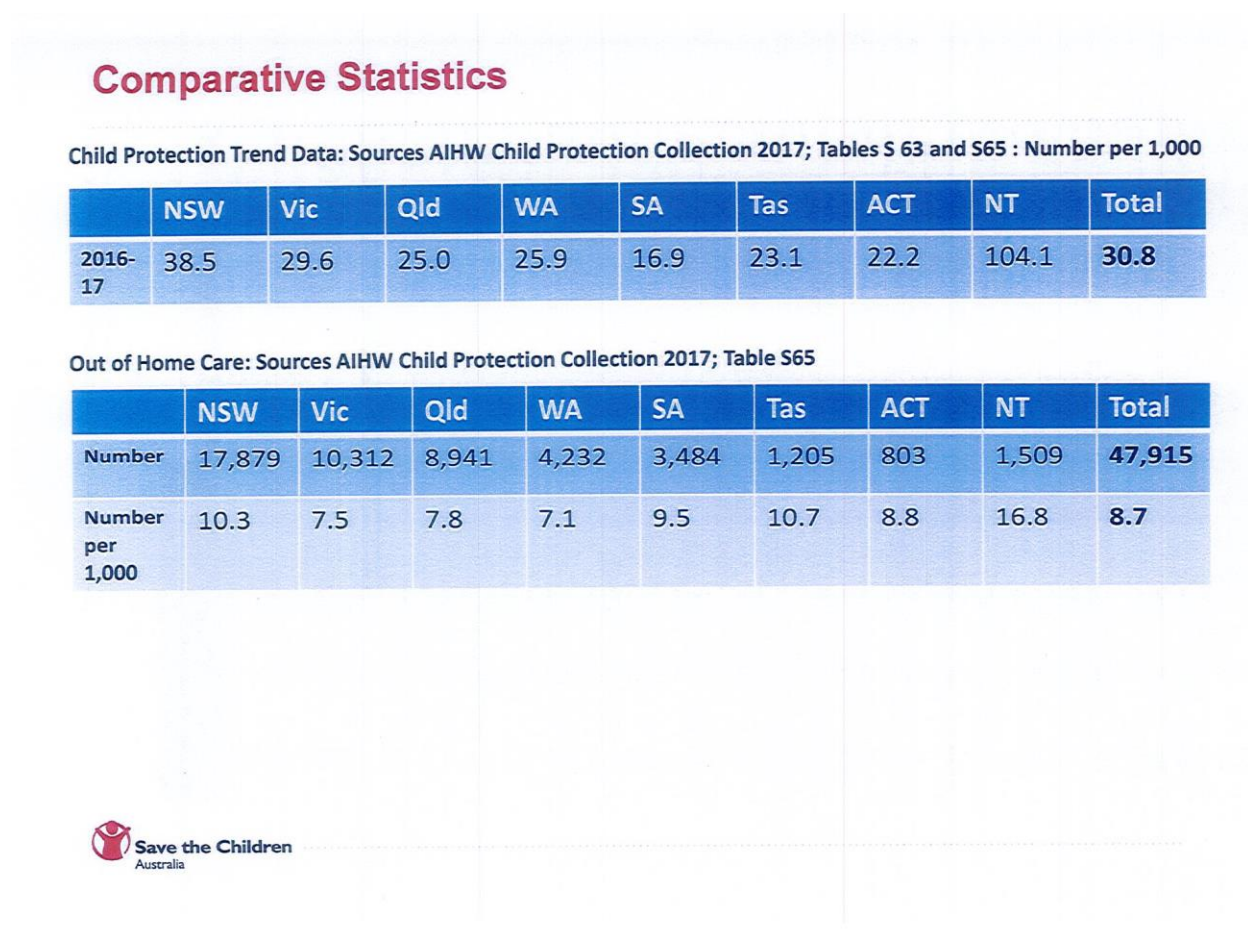
The “new public health approach” recommended by the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (*Royal Commission NT*) called for funding the right mix of universal, early intervention, and statutory interventions to reduce the risk of harm to children, with these services working together rather than in isolation.

The Productivity Commission Overview found: “that funding decisions are typically made in silos, by government departments that are largely unaware of what others are funding or what services are being delivered on the ground.” p. 5

Child Wise agrees that this is the case and that further, the funding decisions are occurring ***in response to abuse*** and ***to mitigate further abuse*** instead of the early intervention approach required to ***prevent abuse***. That is, we believe this is a ***system that fails to prevent abuse***.

Despite significantly increased Northern Territory and Federal Governments funding investment in child protection services, early intervention services and family support services, we continue to see the Northern Territory child protection rates at per capita significantly higher levels than elsewhere in our nation.

Figure 1. Comparative Statistics (state source)



During this period of sustained increases in investment into child protection the number of child protection notifications in the Northern Territory have also significantly increased. While this is arguably a good outcome, that is there is less “under-reporting” what it reinforces is that it is a system *responding to child abuse and not a system that prevents child abuse*.

In 2013-14 there were 12,936 child protection notifications, with the 2018-19 notifications of 23,482 just slightly less than double the notifications six years earlier. This is a child protection system overwhelmed.

While 2018-2019 showed 23,482 child protection notifications, a 1,261 decrease from 24,743 in 2017-2018 there was an alarmingly significant drop in the number of child protection investigations finalised ... by almost half.

In 2017-2018 some 10,448 child protection investigations were finalised, but this figure dropped away to only 5,811 investigations finalised. While we appreciate Child Protection staff prioritise investigations, the fact that less than a third of child protection investigations were notified shows the system simply cannot keep pace with comprehensively understanding the notifications and therefore unable to holistically respond.

Figure 2. Territory Families Annual Report 2018-2019 Year at a Glance KPIs

OUR PERFORMANCE

FIGURE 1: Our Budget Paper KPIs at a Glance

BP3 Measure	2014-15 Actual	2015-16 Actual	2016-17 Actual	2017-18 Actual	2018-19 Actual	2018-19 Budget
Family and Parent Support						
Number of family support cases commenced to support families with identified needs				1,120	848	1,476
Proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in the previous financial year, who were the subject of a subsequent substantiation within 12 months		23%	21%	26%	24%	24%
Child Protection						
Child protection notifications received	17,032	20,465	22,313	24,743	23,482	26,000
Child protection investigations finalised	6,870	8,167	9,027	10,448	5,811	11,600
Child protection investigations substantiated	2,075	1,907	2,265	2,366	1,635	2,700
Proportion of substantiations within 12 months of a decision not substantiated	19%	19%	17%	22%	17%	19%
Out-of-Home Care						
Children in out-of-home care	997	1,020	1,049	1,061	1,054	1,055
Children admitted to out-of-home care	335	315	304	297	248	250
Children exiting out-of-home care	251	304	281	286	258	310
Proportion of children admitted to out-of-home care who are Aboriginal	88%	93%	90%	89%	88%	90%
Foster places of care at 30 June	229	249	272	279	302	270

The Northern Territory Government is undertaking significant reforms but is not yet focussed on implementation of the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations – despite signing up to

its obligations at COAG in 2018. The *Royal Commission National* and its crucial, evidence-based recommendations was essentially lost due to the *Royal Commission NT* over-running the government and now the NT is grappling with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (*Royal Commission Disability*).

Indeed, the Government agencies at Northern Territory and Federal level largely required to respond to, and implement, the decisions of governments in response to Royal Commission Disability, Royal Commission National and Royal Commission NT recommendations are the same.

Therefore, our concern is that as we have seen with the failure to address the COAG endorsed 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, the overloaded bureaucracy “system” may lose further sight of prevention and the actions needed ensure the safety of children and young people.

Figure 3. National Child Safe Principles agreed by COAG



There is one notable exception, the Department of Education in the Northern Territory is currently considering a proposal to audit its policies and procedures with a view to meeting the COAG-endorsed 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

At the Federal level there is a growing attention to the requirements to establish Child Safe Organisations, with the latest round of grants to Aboriginal organisations including the following stipulation:

“As part of the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework, all Commonwealth entities are required to establish measures to promote the protection of children in services and activities funded by the Australian Government. This means that, from 1 February 2020, organisations funded by the Department will be required to comply with child safety requirements consistent with the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework.

While this requirement is intended to start from February 2020, the Department will implement this requirement for this grant opportunity, given that the funding runs for two years.”

Child Wise welcomes the Commonwealth focus on implementing the COAG requirements into its future grants funding, however we note that no funding is being provided to assist organisations to meet the Child Safe Principles and we are very concerned that this will lead to a “tick-and-flick” approach rather than genuine cultural changes as provided for in the 10 national principles.

Self-assessments of child safe policies and procedures and on-line training courses for staff will not create child safeguarding, rather we believe it will perpetuate and entrench the reactive approach to child protection rather than genuinely provide a holistic approach that considers legislation and reporting processes, policies and procedures, recruitment, screening, risk management and change of culture. Without funding organisations to implement the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations there will continue to be a failure to represent children’s best interests in decision-making and their ability to access resources and information to provide feedback.

We believe that despite the significant investments in the Royal Commission National and Royal Commission NT we risk ignoring the lessons and remaining a fragmented system that responds to child abuse rather than preventing it.

It is our fervent hope that the work of the Productivity Commission ensures the lessons are not lost.

Child Wise believes the Child Wise Proposal provided to Territory Families and contained in our Submission to the Productivity Commission provides a practical measure to implement **Draft Recommendation 6.1**.

Child Wise proposed in discussions with Territory Families trialling an urban pilot in Palmerston. We would propose a regional pilot in Katherine or Tennant Creek and a remote pilot in both a Centralian and Top End community based on the rate of child protection notifications.

We believe that the efforts undertaken in such a multi-disciplinary approach meet the Productivity Commission's **Draft Recommendation 7.3 and Draft Recommendation 7.4**.

While we recognise that government's can pursue the multi-disciplinary approach without an NGO Child Safety Advocate we believe this would fail to break the silo approach as each agency representative can remain protective of their "patch" and rely on the layers of agency reporting lines for the critical messages to be filtered before reaching the ultimate decision-makers ... the relevant CEOs and Ministers.

A non-government Child Safety Advocate is capable of being agile and reporting directly to the top, unfiltered while focussing on best-practice knowledge and approaches defined by an organisation that solely has the prevention of child abuse as its raison d'être. Just as every child needs its champion, every significant reform needs its champion.

5. CHILD WISE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH CHILD SAFE COMMUNITIES

Child Safe Communities is a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to child abuse prevention and to interrupt the cycle of intergenerational trauma that underpins many problems today.

Child Wise proposes working collaboratively with Territory Families to establish Child Safe Communities throughout the Territory. The key elements of Child Safe Communities would be:

- A **Child Safety Advocate** in key locations;
- **Child Safety Training** for all staff working across Government, business and the community sector;
- **Child Safety Awareness Raising** for parents and carers at a community level; and
- **Child Abuse Prevention Programs** for children and young people.

These elements will be coordinated by Child Wise and are described further below.

Child Safety Advocates

Child Safety Advocates could be established in communities and have the following functions:

- Promote the importance of a community response to tackling child abuse;
- Raise community awareness about identifying and minimising risks to children;
- Act as a contact point for concerns about children in the community and ensure reports are made to the appropriate authorities;
- Work with children, young people and families to establish *community safety plans* for vulnerable or at-risk children; and
- Coordinate joined-up responses for vulnerable children where child protection services are not involved.

Child Safety Training

Findings from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse include the importance of ensuring that all organisations that work with children and young people understand, identify and mitigate risks for children. Training staff in Government, business and community organisations about child abuse, and how to identify and respond to this is a critical component of creating child safe communities.

These findings are underpinned by the draft recommendations in the recent Productivity Commission Draft Report into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory which advocates a place-based and collaborative approach to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The Productivity Commission Draft Report stated: "... that there has been little enduring change to the outcomes that matter most – keeping children and young people safe and well" * (Overview Page 3). "The ethos of those running the system should be a local focus, learning by doing and collaboration with providers and communities." * (Overview page 3).

Child Wise believes a new model could support *a cooperative approach to funding underpinned by community plans* (draft Productivity Commission Reform 1) by creating the multi-disciplinary team approach to consultation to undertake consultation and develop community plans. We would recommend consideration of pilots of this new model in urban, regional and remote locations.

Child Safety Awareness Raising

Keeping children safe starts at home and relies on all adults in communities understanding what child abuse looks like, the impacts of child abuse and how cycles of abuse can be interrupted and healed. The focus of Child Safety Awareness Raising will be on supporting families and communities to identify, interrupt and respond to child abuse through a grassroots education and awareness campaign which includes new digital mediums, including but not limited to Facebook.

Child Abuse Prevention Programs

A comprehensive approach to child abuse prevention includes education of parents and children through early childhood centres, primary, middle and senior schools. Research suggests that children who are educated about child abuse, and are taught to speak out, are less vulnerable to abuse.

6. NEXT STEPS TO IMPLEMENT PROPOSAL

Child Wise sought \$25,000 seed funding from Territory Families to further develop a Child Safe Communities model in the Territory. The steps involved in this process proposed to include:

- Consultation with key stakeholders including Territory Families; Department of Education; Department of Housing; Territory Police and Department of Health as well as key sector leaders on the Children and Families Tripartite Forum.
- Development of place-based and collaborative model which meets the recommendations of the recent Productivity Commission Draft Report into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory.

7. SUMMARY

Child Wise recommends:

- the establishment of local multi-disciplinary teams
- the local multi-disciplinary teams coordinate place-based approaches to the implementation of the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, early intervention and family support services
- the multi-disciplinary teams are chaired by a Child Safety Advocate who reports directly to the CEOs of agencies and provides reports to the Children and Families Tripartite Forum
- the Commonwealth establishes a grant for Organisations to fund staff training and policy development to become Child Safe Organisations
- the Northern Territory legislate the 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations as Standards
- child abuse prevention programs for children and young people
- child safety training for all government and non-government staff who work with children or young people
- child safety training for community members
- the Productivity Commission review efforts to implement its Final report recommendations in two years.

8. CONTACT DETAILS

Please don't hesitate to contact NT Manager, Delia Lawrie or Executive Director, Jane French if you wish to discuss any aspect of this proposal.

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Authorised by:

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Executive Director

Appendix A – Child Wise Training Programs

TRAINING PROGRAM	OVERVIEW	WHO SHOULD ATTEND
Leading a Child Safe Organisation (2 hours)	This program is designed for leaders and senior managers to gain an understanding of legislative and policy requirements of organisations to protect children and young people in their care.	Leaders, management and executive members in organisations where children and young people spend time. Prior training or knowledge of the topic is not required.
Speak Up (2 hours)	An introductory training program which aims to help you identify and recognise signs and indicators of child abuse and build confidence about what to do if you have concerns about a child.	Staff and volunteers that work with children and/or young people and have had no prior knowledge of child abuse.
Child Safe Fundamentals (3 hours)	This program provides an overview of the elements of child safe practice and culture based on the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.	Staff and volunteers who work with children and/or young people and have some prior understanding of child abuse.
Child Safe Organisations (1 day)	This program unpacks the actions that organisations need to take to ensure they are safe for children and meet their obligations under state and federal Government Child Safe Standards and Principles.	Anyone in a leadership or management position in an organisation that engages with children, or has responsibility for keeping children safe via a child safeguarding portfolio.
Child Safety Champions (2 days)	An intensive training program designed to give you the skills and knowledge to lead a child safeguarding portfolio or reform in your organisation.	Child Safety Officers and other professionals that have a responsibility to lead the implementation of a child safe environment for children and young people.
Yarn Up for Professionals (1 day)	The Yarn Up program was designed to build the capacity of professionals that work with indigenous children and young people to ensure their safety in the organisations where they spend time.	This program is for anyone in an organisation in a leadership or management position, or who has responsibility for keeping children safe via a child safeguarding portfolio.
Yarn Up for Parents & Carers (3 hours)	The Yarn Up program was designed to inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers about child abuse and factors that holistically increase child, family and community safety and well-being.	This program is recommended for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers.

For detailed information see attached flyer or visit www.childwise.org.au.