Working Together for 3 Year Olds
NEWSLETTER — AUGUST 2019

WT3 VISION:
Confident and creative three year olds, thriving in strong, connected communities.

Pilot update

Last month the WT3 team, service partners and collaborative partners reached a significant milestone with the presentation of the preliminary analysis of the first three months of the pilot.

We heard inspiring stories of change in children and families and the individual and collective experiences of service partners and the broader network of collaborators.

It has also been a time of reflection; we heard about what worked well during the pilot, what needed to be adapted and potential opportunities for improvement.

As part of the co-design process, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service partners and their families have been providing regular feedback on their journey, so we can learn and refine the program in preparation for its expansion in 2020.

Data was collected from service partners, families and key stakeholders and uploaded to an online, interactive dashboard. This was a crucial aspect of the co-design process, ensuring we were constantly learning, evolving and improving.

We have provided a summary of the successes and challenges below, as detailed in the preliminary analysis by independent evaluators Clear Horizon.

Overall, we are delighted to report there were many positive results for children and their families and the pilot has been effective in meeting its targets.

The most significant outcomes were in the development and strengthening of interpersonal relationships. This is seen as a vital lever in achieving change in children and families.

Children also had gains in their socialisation, particularly their behaviour, skills, communication and patience.

WT3 service partner expectations were exceeded and there was significant relationship and trust building with families, peers and system partners. However there were also challenges, particularly around increased workload.

We look forward to sharing the full report and its recommendations with you in due course.

The end of pilot evaluation workshop brought together many key players in the WT3 pilot to reflect on the findings of the preliminary report by Clear Horizon.
Key findings from the preliminary analysis of the WT3 pilot

The WT3 pilot was conducted between February and July 2019 using a co-design approach, which assumes that people are experts in their own lives.

The pilot’s aims were to:

» Co-design the initiative with relevant stakeholders – with the voices of families and children central to the design and continued refinement of the initiative
» Increase participation in quality early learning for 3 year olds experiencing vulnerability
» Facilitate the delivery of a quality early learning program for eligible 3 year olds.

The pilot engaged 51 eligible children and their carers at 11 early-learning centres in nine suburbs.

The independent Clear Horizon evaluation aimed to answer these questions:

1. To what extent has the pilot been effective in achieving its intended outcomes?
2. What did we learn about the model and its scalability?

The evaluation found:

“Overall, the WT3 program achieved sound and positive results at this relatively early stage of its delivery. There is evidence that WT3 has contributed to changes and early instances of impact for 0–3 year olds and their families, in line with WT3 focus areas. Despite some challenges, WT3 is considered to have achieved a strong effectiveness rating. For the evaluation period, WT3 has been effective in meeting its delivery targets and pilot goals in terms of the breadth of the outcomes it influences across community and service partner cohorts, and extent of change evidenced for individuals and small cohorts of families.”

The pilot surpassed expectations in these areas:

» the co-design prototype testing and adaption process
» family satisfaction and quality of interactions – families developed significant relationships with service partners and with others in their wider community
» service partner outcome domains of; participation, community engagement, and improvements to capacity, capability and practice
» significant relationship and trust building outcomes for service partners with children, families, peers and system partners
» collaboration between ECEC service providers and other services in the community.

The pilot matched expectations in this area:

» services collaborating with a referral service, family or other stakeholders to achieve goals for the family.

Weakness and limitations:

» Attendance and enrolment metrics tracked behind initial targets set for the pilot. We found staggered starts, building up from 2 to 10/15 hours per week are better suited to the transition needs of children and their carers. As at the end of June 2019, 93% of the available places were filled. Recent attendance rates shows the pilot now only tracking marginally behind targets (70% attendance) and is in some weeks exceeding them.

» Service partners were funded to undertake additional work. However, the significant workload in the first five months, which included: fortnightly reporting, intensive two way orientation and settling children, involvement in professional learning and the monthly Local Enabling Groups (LEGs) was challenging due to staffing and rostering. For the second half of this year reporting, LEGs meetings and professional learning have been scaled back to every two months.

» The referral process will require additional attention and improvement to become more systematic.
What we heard worked well

The key questions families, service partners and collaborative partners were asked were: “what’s working well?” and “why?”

The diagram below (from the preliminary Clear Horizon evaluation) illustrates six main areas identified as strong and positive aspects of WT3.

1. Existing connections with families for enrolment

Working with existing connections in many instances the Child and Family Centres, to find families to take up the WT3 opportunity was crucial to the enrolment process; establishing and building relationships and finding wraparound supports.

2. Capacity and dedication of service partners/engagement workers

Parents and carers and collaborative partners praised the welcoming and non-judgmental EECEC staff and engagement workers, who made the experience a safe and positive one.

Service partners appreciated the professional development offered as part of WT3 with training in the Family Partnership Model (FPM) singled out as a positive aspect of the pilot.

3. Support and wraparounds for children and families

Families highly commended the support they received from service partners, Engagement Workers and collaborative partners. This included: during the enrolment process, to continue their child’s attendance and when challenges arose.

Wraparound supports were singled out as particularly valuable. The no-cost model and transport assistance were extremely well received by families.

Parents and carers felt welcomed, safe and comfortable. Educators invested time and effort into building connections with them and their child and helped them deal with separation issues.

4. The changes and benefits being experienced by WT3 children and families

The benefits for children and families included improvements in: relationships, communication, socialisation, learning and skills development. Strategies for overcoming separation anxiety worked well. There were flow-on effects on the families; some began to form friendships with other parents, others enjoyed spending time with a younger child or on their own.

5. Collaboration and joining up of the network

Feedback from service partners indicated that collaborating with Child and Family Centres, service partners, the Department of Education (DoE), including the engagement workers, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) and Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS) was beneficial. It helped them feel supported; strengthening existing partnerships and helping to form new ones.

6. Culture of learning

Service partners, DoE, TACSI and TasCOSS reported the culture of learning across the partnerships, which included data sharing and Local Enabling Groups (LEGs), worked well. There was also evidence that the benefits extended beyond WT3.
Life changing: a story from a WT3 service partner

“Each child has made a huge amount of growth in a short period but there’s one child and parent that stands out as having the biggest changes.

“When the child was first brought here, I don’t think I’d ever seen them with shoes and socks on, they wanted to wee outside, hadn’t had their hair done, and didn’t really have any play skills. They’d just scream and kick and carry on. The parent barely ever left the house. They would walk into a big room with lots of other people, and they could see people judging them.

“The growth we’ve seen in this child… Now the child smiles and they’re really comfortable and satisfied, isn’t tired, isn’t grumpy, is compliant. They’re happy to use the toilet, are washing their hands, plays really nicely with other children and is starting to build a wider friendship circle.

“And the parent is volunteering in the community. This is what they had decided they’d do for themselves when their child was in care. They drop off their child on time and are building friendship now with others in the program. I heard two parents met and did something at the park on the weekend. That parent now talks about being best friends with other parents and so do the children.

WHAT FAMILIES ARE TELLING US IS GREAT ABOUT WT3:

“What helped most was having the educator there – that one main carer. Because she’s mother-like to them. She describes everything to them when they’re doing stuff. You can poke your head through the window and see what she does with them – she’s real good with them.”

“The change has happened because of the support and consistency, relationships, lack of judgment. We’ve been actively engaging the parent and having regular conversations with them. The parent has trust issues and knows what it is to be judged but they’re not feeling that in this program. People won’t engage if they’re being judged.

“All of this has happened in such a short period of time. It makes you think, ‘wow, what can we do in 12 months?’ All have made progress but these changes in particular are massive. To go from not going out to having a friend and going to the park, that’s a lot, and your child having a friend: that’s massive.”
What we heard was challenging:

Challenges were identified (as illustrated in the diagram below). Some of these issues were addressed as they arose and others are being worked through or will be considered in the future.

1. Identifying and enrolling targeted children

Service and delivery partners said it was challenging to reach prospective families in the community, especially where no previous networks or relationships existed. Delays in engagement worker appointments were suggested as contributing factors.

2. Staffing, resourcing and time challenges for service partners

The majority of service partners found meeting existing and new workload demands was challenging. Issues included: meeting WT3 commitments, while also maintaining staff ratios; administration tasks; staff rostering challenges and finding time to provide wraparound support. Some service partners understood that as a pilot, WT3 required extra time.

3. Building connections

This issue relates to building connections between service partners and families, families and services and the community. The referral process may also require refinement.

4. Access and transport for families

For many families transportation has been an ongoing challenge because: some do not own a car, have a driver’s licence or cannot afford petrol or access public transport.

5. Participation/ other challenges for families

Some families had challenges ranging from: the enrolment process to separation issues and other aspects of WT3. These were expected and they are being addressed.

**WHAT FAMILIES ARE TELLING US IS GREAT ABOUT WT3:**

“I think [name’s] a lot better. The biggest change has just been talking – they’re saying a lot more words. They just used to make sounds and that, just mimicking things. Never really knew anyone either. They used to get frustrated – used to be real fiery – because they couldn’t express themselves.”
Local Enabling Group (LEG) reminder

A reminder to everyone involved in WT3 Local Enabling Groups (LEGs) that meetings will now be bi-monthly. The next round of LEGs will be in September, except for Kingborough, which will hold its next meeting in the last week of August. We will advise you of the dates and venues shortly.

Building cultural competency

One way to overcome the cultural barriers that can prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing and participating in early learning is to create culturally safe spaces, which reflect the culture and knowledge of Australia’s First Peoples.

Early years education lifts IQ and resilience of vulnerable children

Findings from a new research trial show how targeted childhood education and care can improve the IQ, resilience and social emotional development of Australia’s most vulnerable children. The 24 month evaluation of The Early Years Education Program (EYEP) found it had a “broad and powerful impact” on children exposed to significant family stress and social disadvantage.

The EYEP offers children five hours of care and education each day for 50 weeks a year, for a period of three years. The key features of the program are: high staff to child ratios, qualified and experienced staff, an infant mental health consultant on staff and a rigorously developed curriculum.

The results of the University of Melbourne led study provide “proof of concept” that it’s possible to improve the life trajectory of children suffering extreme adversity. It also found evidence the program led to improvements in children’s language skills and a reduction in the psychological distress of their primary caregivers.
Upcoming events

A day to consider quality in early childhood education and care with Gunilla Dahlberg

Tuesday, 1 October – Hobart

Hosted by the Department of Education’s Early Years Partnerships and Projects Unit. Register your interest by emailing eypp@education.tas.gov.au and we will be in touch with more details.

Gunilla Dahlberg is professor emerita of education at Stockholm University, Department of Child and Youth Studies.

Since 1971, she has carried out research in the area of education and social welfare policy for young children and their families.

In 1993, Gunilla was the scientific leader of an experimental and network-oriented project, in which new philosophical, theoretical and aesthetical perspectives were brought into the field of ECEC.

The project is considered a huge inspiration for ECEC in the Nordic countries, as well as internationally.

Gunilla has served on several curriculum committees during the years, including helping to write the first national curriculum for the Swedish preschool system (children aged 1–6). She has also co-authored several books on ECEC.

Over the past 30 years, Gunilla has carried out research in collaboration with preschools in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and she is a member of the scientific board of Fondazione Reggio Children, Centro Loris Malaguzzi.

Early Childhood Australia’s (ECA) National Conference

A reminder that the ECA’s National Conference will be held next month in Hobart, Tasmania.

The conference, which has virtual tickets for those unable to attend on the day, runs from 25–28 September 2019.

This year the theme aims to progress the ECA vision of every young child thriving and learning.

WT3 team members and colleagues from the Department of Education’s Early Years teams will be there so please reach out and say hello.

For more information or to register visit: www.ecaconference.com.au/register/

Australian Conference for Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Tickets are available for the event at the Launceston Conference Centre from 19–21 September.

The conference has streams for educators, education specialists, families, clinicians and practitioners. One of the keynote speakers is Russell Barkley, who is known internationally for his work on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

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