WORKING TOGETHER FOR 3 YEAR OLDS (WT3)

PILOT EVALUATION

August 2019

The following is an excerpt from the full independent evaluation report prepared by Clear Horizon. WT was piloted 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 three year olds experiencing vulnerability
- Facilitate the delivery of a quality early learning program for eligible three year olds.

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

Clear Horizon was commissioned by The Department to undertake an independent developmental evaluation of the WT3 pilot.

Key findings from the developmental evaluation of the WT3 Pilot

The evidence

The developmental evaluation findings were informed by mixed data collection methods to collect feedback on the co-design and pilot from those directly involved: children and families, Early Childhood Education and Care service partners Child and Family Centres; as well as from core collaborative partners (DoE, Tasmanian Council of Social Services and The Australian Centre for Social Innovation). The data includes:

- 18 weeks of Activity Reports from 10 service partners
- 36 conversations with 20 families
- 12 semi structured interviews and Most Significant Change with 14 ECEC service partners (including two CFCs)
- Three semi structured interviews with collaborative partners
- 20 LEG meeting summary reflections
- One DoE team focus reflection
- Observation of Co-Design Synthesis Workshop with service and delivery partners
- Prototype feedback surveys completed by nine service partners.

Using these data sets, Clear Horizon identified what worked well, what could be improved and early instances of change for individuals and small cohorts among children and families, and services partners (ECEC services and CFCs) as well as early instances of systemic change among the various mindsets, systems and structure that WT3 operates within.
Overall findings

The 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?

“Overall, the WT program achieved sound and positive results at this relatively early stage of its delivery. There is evidence that WT has contributed to changes and early instances of impact for 0-3 year olds and their families, in line with WT focus areas. Despite some challenges, WT is considered to have achieved a strong effectiveness rating. For the evaluation period, WT has been erective 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. Learnings include that 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 51 children are enrolled (93% of the 55 places available), and recent attendance rates show the pilot now only tracking marginally behind targets (70% attendance) and is in some weeks exceeding them.

- Whilst service partners were funded to undertake additional work, the significant increase in the first five months due to fortnightly reporting, more intensive two way orientation and settling in of children as well as involvement in off-site professional learning (PL) and the monthly Local Enabling Group (LEG) was challenging due to staffing and rostering. For the second half of 2019 reporting and LEG meetings have been scaled back to every two months, along with the PL schedule.
• 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 illustrates six main areas identified as strong and positive aspects of WT3.

1. Existing connections with families for enrolment
Working with existing connections, in particular, the Child and Family Centres in many instances, 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 ECEC 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, DoE including the engagement workers, TACSI and TasCOSS was beneficial. It helped them feel supported; strengthening existing partnerships and forming 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.

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 not working with Child and Family Centres 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.

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