

Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework





Introduction

The wellbeing of children and young people is our shared responsibility.

The *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework* (the framework) provides a contemporary definition of child and youth wellbeing. Its primary aim is to ensure that everyone, in all parts of Tasmania's service system, as well as in the broader community, has a strong, common understanding of child and youth wellbeing. We need to build capacity and strengthen our families and communities across Tasmania to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. By doing this, it is possible to prevent problems from occurring and reduce the impact of problems that could otherwise escalate.

The framework uses the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth's (ARACY) *The Nest*¹ as the foundation for an evidence-based definition of child and youth wellbeing.

Just as child and youth wellbeing is a shared responsibility, the framework has been developed in partnership with people who work with children, young people and their families.

All services that contribute to child and youth wellbeing are invited to embrace and implement this definition and incorporate it into their own services, policies and procedures.

The framework will also provide the basis for more detailed work on outcomes that will be used by Government agencies to set goals, monitor and report their progress, identify areas where they can improve, and inform the design and delivery of services. The outcomes framework is scheduled for release in 2018.

The framework is intended to provide the foundation for an ongoing discussion about child and youth wellbeing. It is a living document that will evolve over time to reflect our maturing, collective understanding of this critically important topic.





Background

The March 2016 report, *Redesign of Child Protection Services Tasmania, 'Strong Families – Safe Kids'* (the report) outlined the essential components for redesigning the service system to more effectively protect children from harm.

The report aligns with the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* in recognising that 'the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place.'²

The importance of focusing on child and youth wellbeing was recognised in the Tasmanian Government's response to the report: the *Strong Families – Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2016-2020* (the implementation plan).

Action 2 of the implementation plan commits to the development of a robust and common understanding of child wellbeing by relevant stakeholders.

The framework is underpinned by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to which Australia is a signatory. This sets out obligations to protect children and young people at different stages in their lives, including creating opportunities for wellbeing and to help them realise their potential. It states that children and young people have a right to be heard and need to be recognised and treated as active participants in the development of their own wellbeing.³





Why Child and Youth Wellbeing is so Important

The wellbeing of Tasmania's children and young people is of critical importance.

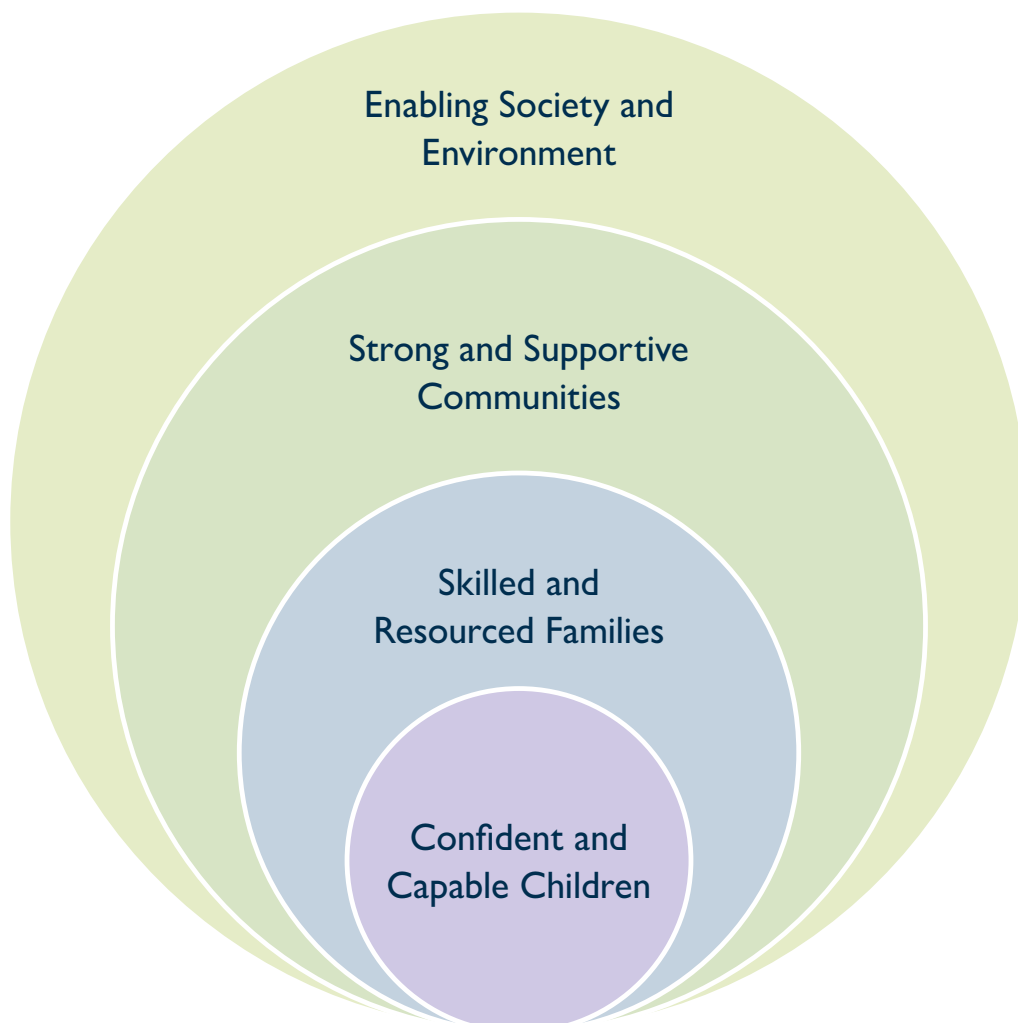
Wellbeing influences the way that children and young people interact with other people and their environment. When a child has a strong sense of wellbeing they will be more resilient and more able to approach their interactions with others in a positive and optimistic way. They will learn better, be healthier, happier and more confident.

Children and young people's wellbeing does not exist in isolation and is not determined by them alone. An ecological model of human development helps us to better understand child and youth wellbeing (see Figure 1: The Ecological Model of Human Development).

It places the child at the centre and recognises the influence of relationships within the settings of the family, the community and the wider society and environment.⁴

Children and young people's wellbeing is heavily shaped by their relationships with their family and wider community. These relationships are critical to the development of wellbeing; and secure, predictable and loving attachments from early life are of particular importance.

Figure 1: The Ecological Model of Human Development



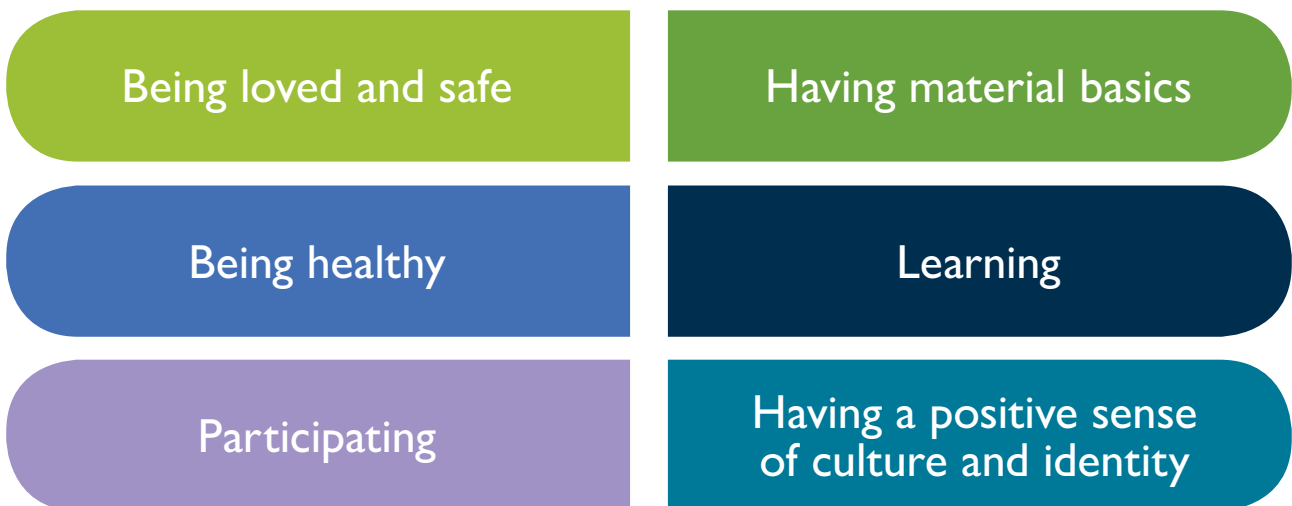


Defining Child and Youth Wellbeing

Wellbeing is the state where a child or young person feels loved and safe; has access to material basics; has their physical, mental and emotional health needs met; is learning and participating; and has a positive sense of culture and identity.

Tasmania's definition of wellbeing is based on six 'domains'. It is inspired by *The Nest*, a national, evidence-based initiative on child and youth wellbeing developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).

The Six Domains of Child and Youth Wellbeing



The six domains are a simple way of presenting a complex concept. There are significant inter-relationships between the domains; and it is highly likely that services will be focused on improving outcomes across multiple domains, due to these inter-relationships. A child's participation in education falls within the learning domain; but their ability to confidently engage with education will rely heavily on their having a supportive home environment (**being loved and safe**) and having access to educational materials (**having material basics**).

A number of descriptors are listed against each domain to help define what wellbeing includes. These descriptors are capable of application to various purposes across the service system. This includes informing service design and delivery; and supporting consistent outcomes measurement.

The descriptors focus on those things that are required to support the wellbeing of children and young people. Some of these things we already do well, while others require further work. Future priorities can be guided by further consideration of each of these domains and descriptors.

Service providers are encouraged to develop additional descriptors to help the framework to develop over time.

Being loved and safe

Being loved and safe means that children and young people:



have a safe, stable and supportive home environment



have positive, trusted relationships with other people



feel safe, secure and protected at home and in the community



have a voice and the ability to raise concerns and have these concerns addressed



feel valued and respected

Having material basics

Having material basics means that children and young people:



have access to adequate, stable housing



have access to adequate clothing and footwear



have access to nutritious food and clean water



have access to materials to support participation in activities



have access to education and training materials



have access to adequate heating and cooling

Being healthy

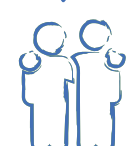
Being healthy means that children and young people:



are mentally and physically healthy



have access to appropriate health and care services



are emotionally well, happy and supported



are immunised



are as physically active as they can be

Learning

Learning means children and young people:



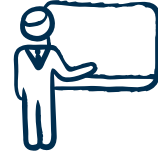
are attending and engaging in education, training or employment



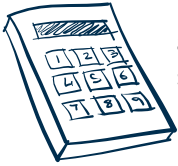
are supported to learn by their caregiver and education providers



are participating in early childhood education



receive assistance for additional needs



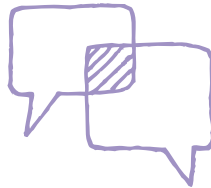
are developing literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to age

Participating

Participating means children and young people:



are engaging with peers and community groups



are an active participant in their own life; including being able to have a say and have their opinion heard and valued



are taking part in organised activities, including sport



have access to and use technology and social media

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

Having a positive sense of culture and identity means children and young people:



can find out about family and personal history and are supported to connect positively with their culture



have a positive sense of self-identity and self-esteem



feel like they belong



are in touch with cultural or spiritual practices and have these practices valued and respected

Table 1: Child and Youth Wellbeing Developmental Focus Areas

4 Years and Under

Being loved and safe	The child or young person feels safe in their home and community environment. Their caregiver provides...	
	The child demonstrates an attachment to their primary caregiver and their caregiver regularly initiates and participates in positive interactions with the child.	The child demonstrates s... part
Having material basics	The child or young person is provided access to adequate clot...	
	The child has access to healthy food in sufficient quant...	
	The child's caregiver provides access to mental stimulation.	The child
Being healthy	The child or young person is fully immunised; a healthy weigh...	
	The child's caregiver encourages and provides opportunities for unstructured physical exercise and play, including in the natural environment.	The child is support... unstructured exercis...
	The child's caregiver engages with health services as needed, including the Child Health and Parenting Service.	The child's careg...
Learning	The child is accessing early learning and developing age-appropriate language, literacy and social skills.	The child is participati... learning skills, and is d...
	The child's caregiver is engaged in the child's early learning and provides a stimulating play environment appropriate to the child's age.	
Participating	The child or young person is provided with opportunities to...	
	The child's caregiver encourages and facilitates participation in social activities, whether structured eg play group, or unstructured eg visits to a park or library.	The child or young perso... They are able to form po... to
Having a positive sense of culture and identity	The child or young person's environment, including their learning...	
	The child is forming relationships with family members as appropriate and their emerging sense of personal identity is supported and encouraged.	The child o

5 to 12 Years

13 Years and Over

... lives in a safe, stable and nurturing environment. They are provided opportunities to raise concerns and have their concerns addressed.

... has strong positive relationships with certain individuals, particularly their primary caregiver.

The young person has a growing level of independence from their caregiver and is able to identify at least one person who they can rely on for support and assistance.

... has clothing and footwear, appropriate housing, clean water and adequate heating and cooling.

... has sufficient resources and opportunities.

The young person has access to healthy food in sufficient quantities. This includes meeting their increasing need for certain nutrients such as calcium and iron.

... has access to educational materials.

The young person has access to education and training materials.

... is of a healthy weight for their age and height; and is emotionally and mentally well, happy and supported.

... is supported and encouraged to engage in structured or unstructured sport and play, including in the natural environment.

The young person is physically active and socially engaged. They are supported and encouraged to engage in structured or unstructured sport and recreation activities, including in the natural environment.

... has a caregiver who engages with health services as needed.

The young person has access to health services as needed.

... is supported to engage in compulsory education, developing life-long learning skills, and developing age-appropriate language, literacy and social skills.

The young person avoids smoking and engaging in risky alcohol and drug use; or is supported to give up smoking and risky alcohol and drug use.

... is supported to develop skills to be independent, resilient and transition successfully from school.

The young person is developing skills to be independent, resilient and transition successfully from school.

... is supported to meaningfully participate in decisions and have a voice about issues that affect them.

... is supported to be engaged in organised activities, including sport. They have positive relationships with peers and are encouraged to engage with their community.

The young person is participating within their community; is able to satisfy emotional or social needs outside of their family group and has a strong support network.

... lives in a safe, stable and nurturing environment, is culturally respectful, appropriate and free from bullying or victimisation.

... is supported to understand their family history and satisfy any interest in their identity or culture. Their sense of personal identity is supported and encouraged.



Developmental Focus Areas

There has been a recent rapid expansion of knowledge on child development, particularly in relation to the detrimental impact of neglect and abuse on the developing brain.

Brains develop over time, beginning before birth and continuing into adulthood. Prenatal events and the child's relationships and environments in the first few years of life have a major impact on the development of the architecture of the brain. This forms the foundation for the child's future learning, health and behaviour.

Identifying and responding to developmental issues will vary depending on a range of circumstances, including the age of the child. Wellbeing promotes the strengths of all children regardless of their different abilities and different needs.

The framework considers developmental stages in three focus areas: prenatal, infancy and the early years (4 years and under); the middle years (5 to 12 years); and adolescence to young adulthood (13 years and over) (see Table 1: Child and Youth Wellbeing Developmental Focus Areas).

These broad developmental focus areas have been presented against the six wellbeing domains, to provide some guidance as to what wellbeing encompasses at each stage of a child's development. These focus areas don't provide a comprehensive account of the various areas that make up a child's overall wellbeing at each stage of their development. That's why it is intended that this section will be subject to the most development as the framework continues to evolve over time.

4 Years and Under

From the prenatal period the brain undergoes rapid development and many determinants that impact later health and wellbeing are activated.

The first four years of life include rapid development in motor skills, language development and emotional regulation. Children learn to walk and develop their fine motor skills. They rapidly acquire the ability to verbally communicate, modulate their emotions and interact with their peers.

Early childhood is a time for children to develop attachments and bonds with caregivers that will assist them in developing their self-esteem and their ability to relate positively to others. Early experiences and relationships impact on brain development during this period and can have a long-term effect on the lifelong wellbeing of the child.

In this developmental stage, while the focus of service responses will be on the needs of the child, this will generally include a focus on improving the primary care giver's capacity to provide the child with stable, positive relationships and environments.

5 to 12 Years

School-aged children gradually gain their independence during these formative years. They learn how to make good choices, exercise self-discipline and fine tune their gross and fine motor skills. As the brain matures it has a reduced capacity for plasticity and becomes more specialised so it can deal with more complex tasks.

In this developmental stage, the focus of any service response will often be on supporting the caregiver and the child as a family unit. If the child has been exposed to trauma or toxic stress early in life they may suffer developmental delays that continue to impact their development throughout their school years. This may reduce the child's ability to communicate, learn, be mobile, make good decisions, manage stress and care for themselves.

13 Years and Over

The adolescent years are characterised by a surge in independence, changes to body shape and an influx of hormonal changes. Young people will have a strong urge to start defining who they are and developing their skills in preparation for entry into the workforce or further education. Adolescence is a difficult time for many young people.

Promoting positive health practice during adolescence is critical for the prevention of health problems into adulthood. While young Tasmanians enjoy good health compared to people in other age groups, they are particularly vulnerable to some health conditions and risk behaviours.

In this developmental stage, the focus of any service response will often be on supporting the young person themselves. Intensive interventions may be required to deal with behaviours and developmental problems that have become entrenched, underlining the need for early intervention wherever possible. While supporting a positive family environment is still important, the focus of support services will shift towards supporting young people to overcome trauma, and to make positive choices as they transition into adulthood.





Using the Framework

The Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework provides a common language for everyone providing services to children and young people; across Government, non-government organisations and the private sector.

The framework has many applications. It will be used as a foundation tool for talking about child and youth wellbeing, designing programs that promote wellbeing and for holding ourselves collectively to account for delivering better outcomes for children and young people in Tasmania.

Embedding a shared commitment that all services focus on the wellbeing of children and young people will mean that services are less fragmented and that fewer children will fall between the cracks in the service system. A strong commitment to wellbeing will empower everyone to take action to better support the needs of the child and to ensure children receive the support they need to meet the critical developmental milestones required for lifelong wellbeing. All organisations that work with children and young people are invited to adopt the framework's definition of wellbeing and in doing so, become an

alliance partner of the framework. Alliance partners will continue to evolve the framework, ensuring it is contemporary and relevant to the Tasmanian community.

As outlined in action 3 of the *Strong Families – Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2016-2020* the framework will provide the foundation for a more detailed outcomes framework, which will be used to set goals, monitor and report progress, identify areas where improvement is needed, and inform the design and delivery of services.

Similarly, as outlined in action 4 of the implementation plan, the framework will provide the basis for the development of materials on child and youth wellbeing that are accessible for the general public, as well as professionals and service providers, to ensure that everyone understands the role they can play in supporting child and youth wellbeing.





References

- ¹ Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth 2014, *The Nest Action Agenda 2nd Edition*, viewed 17 October 2017, <https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/329/filename/Second_edition_The_Nest_action_agenda.pdf>
- ² Council of Australian Governments 2009, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business - National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, viewed 17 October 2017, <https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/child_protection_framework.pdf>
- ³ United Nations 1989, *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, viewed 17 October 2017, <<https://www.unicef.org/crc/>>
- ⁴ Bronfenbrenner, U 1979, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.



The Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework is based on *The Nest*, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People's (ARACY) national initiative on child and youth wellbeing. *The Nest* is supported by a significant evidence base and was a product of collective action involving more than 4 000 Australians. Further information on *The Nest*, including the Action Agenda, Technical Document and Literature Review is available at www.aracy.org.au.

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Comments / Queries / Feedback: CPSRedesignTeam@dhhs.tas.gov.au