



City of **HOBART**

MAKING THE MOST OF AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT CENSUS INFORMATION IN A LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXT: AN INVESTIGATIVE PROJECT BY THE CITY OF HOBART

The City of Hobart wanted to investigate ways it could help its communities to develop supportive, caring environments that would lead to good outcomes in early childhood development. The City places great importance on creating inclusive, vibrant communities that value the contributions of all of its citizens. But more than just a desire to support the people who live in Hobart, the City wanted to share its insights and learnings so that they might be scaled to suit other local governments.

*We cannot afford to postpone investing in children
until they become adults, nor can we wait until they
reach school age - a time when it may be too late to
intervene.*

- James Heckman, Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.¹

BACKGROUND

Children and families live in communities, and communities are supported by local governments, the most accessible layer of government. Yet the roles that local governments could or should play in early childhood development have not been thoroughly analysed or documented to date. The City of Hobart, supported through a grant from the Australian Early Development Census (ADEC), undertook a project to investigate how it could help its communities address their early childhood development vulnerabilities as identified

¹ Guldbrandsson, K and Bremberg, S, Municipal Intentions to Promote Preschool Children's Capabilities and Health: A Descriptive Study of 25 Swedish Municipalities, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, v33 n1, 2005, p31.

through AEDC data. The project involved gathering information from a number of sources, including:

- Review and analysis of AEDC, demographic and community data
- Literature review of best practices and emerging trends in the areas of community development and early childhood development, particularly where local governments have been involved
- Case studies and horizon scan of current practices within local governments
- Analysis of current City of Hobart strategies, operational plans, roles and responsibilities

In addition, two community action projects involved two communities – South Hobart and New Town – to map out local directions and preferences to address identified vulnerabilities.

KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

The AEDC recognises that, as vulnerabilities are identified at a local level, so too must be the solutions. As such, the AEDC have a library of case studies (www.aedc.gov.au/communities/community-stories) where communities, frequently supported by their local government, have been successful in developing strategies, programs and activities that have produced measurable impacts and improvements in child development.

While these examples do provide insights and suggest common approaches, the roles that local governments play within the policy, social and community landscapes have only started being identified. Researcher Sharon Goldfield from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) has been one of the first to map out an environmental model describing how local governments are able to support early childhood development domains (www.rch.org.au/ccch/kics/). This conceptual model has been helpful to understand the potential for local government involvement. However, what complicates matters somewhat is that each local government, and its constituent communities, have wildly varying priorities, resources, and structures.

The challenge is in identifying what possible roles can be derived from what we know about best practice, and how these might align with what we know about how local governments conduct their operations and planning. Key for the City of Hobart was to do this in a manner that made the most of available resources and current strategic and operational plans. To this end, the project focused on identifying realistic roles, best practice and contemporary approaches that could be adopted or adapted effectively within these parameters.

WHAT WAS DISCOVERED

Community development: Its focus within local governments has expanded and evolved

- The areas that are deemed to be within the domain of local government have expanded to include cultural, health and wellbeing, and social inclusion areas.
- The focus of community development has changed from being concerned with delivering activities, to delivering outcomes.

Effective roles: What local governments can do must fit within their resources and strategic environments

- Local governments can improve communication within communities, investing in community leadership and providing support and advice to guide community action.
- Local governments can create or tap into networks where community voices are needed.
- Local governments need to be more than ‘messengers’ between the community and other networks. They need to add value to the information flowing between communities and other stakeholders through analysis of data and sourcing expert advice.

Structured approaches: Help embed good practices in community development and other operational areas of local government

- The *Kids in Communities* or *Child Friendly City* frameworks can help plan actions that are specific to the way local governments work. These offer KPIs and early childhood development indicators to measure progress, which can be easily incorporated into strategic goals and operational KPIs.
- Partnerships can be formalised to ensure that all stakeholders are working towards common, agreed goals that are designed to address early childhood development issues.

ROLES THAT WERE IDENTIFIED

The following roles from the City of Hobart *Social Inclusion Strategy* were identified as of relevance to this work. Interestingly, the Community Action Projects working with South Hobart and New Town named up these particular roles as being integral to the communities being able to address their local needs.

Connection: Developing or tapping into external networks associated with early childhood development Many early childhood development networks do not have local government representation. Developing internal two-way communication channels with other areas of

the City of Hobart that affect children and families, such as public space management, transportation, safety, etc.

Facilitation: Support community groups to work more effectively

Community groups concerned with early childhood development may need help with access to internal and external networks, local government resources, and funding opportunities.

Informing: Develop and encourage two-way communication

Local governments can provide access to multiple communication channels at their disposal, including community consultations, websites, social media, distribution lists and the like.

Local governments are also able help communities with data analysis and information relevant to their work.

Advocacy: Supporting community voices

Local governments have the ability to raise issues in many decision-making forums, both formal and informal. They are also able to pull together the 'big picture' by understanding how communities in other areas may be experiencing similar issues.

Community Action Projects: South Hobart and New Town

The City of Hobart analysed AEDC data, other demographic data and community profiles of available resources of all suburbs. This revealed vulnerabilities in two suburbs – South Hobart and New Town - where early childhood development had regressed, and identified what community resources could be brought to bear in addressing these vulnerabilities. The process in working with each group was the same:

- Organise group meetings with representatives from schools, child care, playgroups, service providers and other relevant community groups
- Distribute a self-assessment tool for the groups to identify their community's environment and resources for children and families
- Compile and present AEDC and community data, including analysis of vulnerabilities
- Compile and present case studies suitable for the community and related to the vulnerabilities identified in AEDC data
- Work in groups to discuss the issues that resonate with group members
- Prioritise the issues that were raised
- Work collaboratively to identify solutions, directions or goals to address the needs

KEY FINDINGS

Each community recognised that a single program will not be sufficient to address their particular vulnerabilities, and that a commitment to supporting early childhood development will need broad support.

Creating a Community Hub

Even though the communities were addressing different vulnerabilities, they proposed that a Community Hub would be the most useful option available. A Community Hub was seen as a way of building social capital, particularly as some identified groups within each of the communities have experienced difficulties participating in the community.

Sharing information

This was seen as critical to not only service and program delivery, but also in reaching families and the broader community. Coordination of community-specific information is seen as something that would be beneficial to not only those who are hard-to-reach and disengaged from the community, but also for those families that are time-poor.

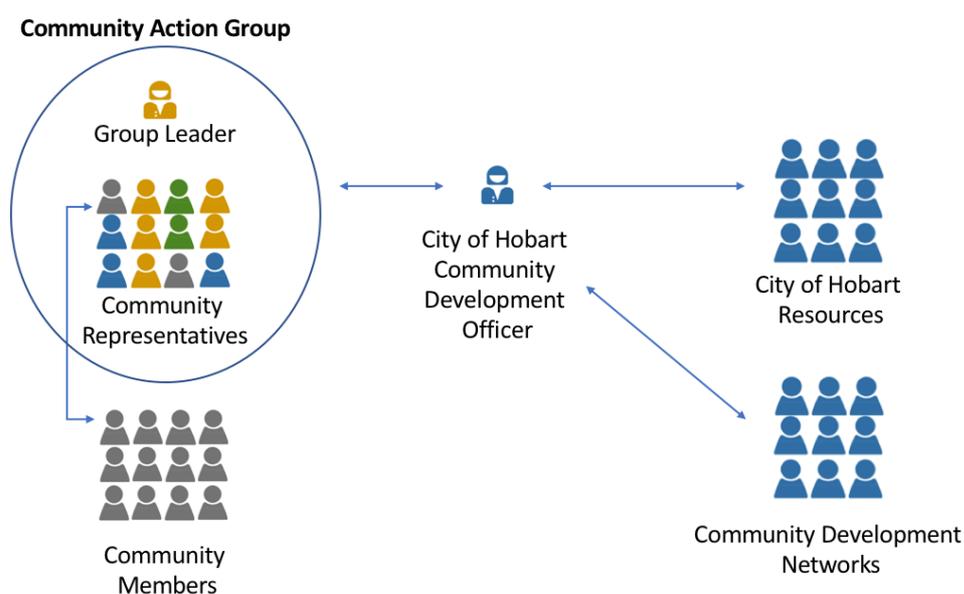
Sharing resources

Mitigating impact of limited resources is possible through collaboration. Both communities have the ability to draw on local schools, playgroups, community groups and services operating in the area, and were able to identify other stakeholders who could fill gaps in knowledge and resources.

Building leadership

There is a need for leadership within each of the communities and a natural inclination to see the City of Hobart filling this role. However, as the identified roles for Community Development do not include direct leadership, leadership will need to be fostered within the communities. See *Governance Structure* below. Targeted leadership training is on offer to these groups during 2018/2019 to support this project.

Governance Structure



SUMMARY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Local government is the level of government with the closest and most direct interface with communities, families and children, and is responsible for the environments in which they exist. We are in many ways the caretakers or custodians of communities through the provision of these services and resources that are for their benefit.

Every local government area is unique with its own restrictions and constraints. Overall though, if local governments are able to be more aware of the data and best practice relating to early childhood development, they are then able to support children and families in more appropriate and positive ways, regardless of the priorities or resources of the local government in question. Likewise, local government is able to be a conduit for information about their communities, and a mechanism for advocacy, within the early development space. Local governments have a vital role to play in supporting early childhood development. They can be the 'Magic Amplifier' for community action.

The City of Hobart will continue to work on strengthening communication and consultation mechanisms, including sharing data with the community in an accessible format. As with South Hobart and New Town, City of Hobart staff will continue facilitate targeted community development initiatives to build the capacity of communities to respond to the needs of their children, and will strengthen programs and projects by linking them to child development needs and we can focus on building strategic partnerships for long term outcomes. All of this work would be well supported by a strategic framework with well aligned outcome measures and so this will be considered moving forward.

This report was compiled by Consultant, Ann Davie for the City of Hobart. The full version of this report is available upon request to Sophie Calic, calics@hobartcity.com.au.