

Position Paper – The design and development of the South Australian Early Intervention System
November 2019

CAFFSA Position Paper – The design and development of the South Australian Early Intervention System

Paper developed in response to the DHS co-design priorities and recommissioning of services roundtable, September 2019

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Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the traditional lands of the Kurna people, and acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and the Greater Adelaide Plains. We pay our respects to Kurna Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of land beyond Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains, and pay our respects to all Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the cultural authority of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and are grateful for the cultural expertise that they represent.

Preamble

This paper acknowledges that the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care in South Australia and nationally is one of the most critical problems facing child protection systems, and one of the most looming challenges for prevention and early intervention systems. Keeping Aboriginal children safe with their families and their communities must be our collective, and our highest priority.

Supporting the viability and sustainability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO's) to provide Aboriginal families with greater choice, flexibility and culturally responsive service interventions is an outcome that we must all commit to. We also agree that embedding culturally safe and culturally responsive practices across all our services is an outcome to which we must all aspire as a matter of priority.

Background

After the Department for Human Services CEO roundtable that was convened on Friday 27th September 2019 to discuss the future direction of the co-design process for the South Australian early intervention system, the sector (represented broadly by Child and Family Focus SA, hereafter 'CAFFSA') has articulated a shared interest in working with the government towards better outcomes for South Australian children and families. The sector acknowledges that the South Australian state government is reviewing its plan to strengthen families and communities via the development of an Early Intervention Strategy for South Australia, and is in the process of engaging the sector in a co-design process to identify priorities and actions to achieve this.

The key concept that was discussed at the DHS forum (and which forms the subject of this paper) was that ***recommissioning and recontracting of services with existing service providers would be a preferable approach to achieving redesigned service outcomes, and should be pursued in place of tendering via a competitive process for new services and programs.***

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It was agreed that a negotiated arrangement with current service providers whereby existing service outcomes were reviewed and redesigned (and service agreements varied) would be a far less disruptive process for children, families, services, agencies and staff.

It was agreed that such an approach would be a more mature way of progressing into an alternative system of service delivery that reflects redesigned early intervention outcomes. There was agreement that the possibility of altering the outcomes in existing contracts rather than going through a new contracting and procurement process was something to be explored in more detail with DHS.

The main driver of this discussion is to ensure service continuity for families. Further it is acknowledged that the service demand exceeds the 2020/21 funding envelope therefore the sector prefers direct contract negotiations to move towards achieving a targeted redesigned family support service system; with the intention of working with government on future funding opportunities to increase family support services in South Australia to align with national funding.

A New Service System

There is a critical question to be asked around *how* the sector should move to the new service system that DHS is looking to design in such a way that minimizes disruption and current service continuity.

There is broad based agreement that the sector does not want to go through traditional procurement and tendering processes, and would prefer to negotiate a transition of existing programs in to a new system where there is agreement from both DHS and the sector on what the outcomes need to be in the context of a newly designed Early Intervention System.

In considering such a transition of existing contracts, it has been acknowledged by sector representatives that there will need to be some specific measures taken whereby particular agencies may need to adjust, give up, or significantly alter existing contracts and service outcomes. This is particularly true if we are to move to a truly 'regionalized' model of service delivery.

It has also been acknowledged that a local precedent in South Australia exists whereby existing contracts were coming to an end (in Foster Care) and service providers subsequently engaged in direct negotiations with government and transitioned to new contracts based on service continuity. Discussions occurred with Procurement and Treasury to assist them to understand service continuity and impact on foster families and children i.e. Loss of family homes. As a result government agreed to the market approach of direct negotiations with exiting service providers. These direct negotiations were predicated on the jointly agreed priority of preventing the loss of foster carers as a result of service disruption.

A core consideration is that it does not make sense for country and regional service providers to go through a re-procurement process when they have established services in place; it is seen here to be more efficient and far more effective to renegotiate outcomes and KPI's with existing service providers who are operating in particular regions. The market for family support service providers is limited in South Australia and the State Procurement Board supports direct negotiations with providers when

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there is a limited market supply. The direct negotiations would also encourage the providers to work in partnership instead of pitching against each other. This approach would promote shared resources which increases 'value for money' in government's investment across the service sector. For example shared training and sector initiatives could be shared across NGO's.

The sector has acknowledged that in principle we need a commitment to joined up services, collaboration and shared outcomes. If a transition process is to take place whereby existing contracts and service outcomes are to be renegotiated with current providers in order to move to a regionalized model of service delivery, then transparency, honesty and collaboration within the sector is going to be a paramount consideration. Data sharing between agencies will be crucial.

The sector agrees that there needs to be a reinvigorated focus on the measurement of service outcomes; this is a challenge for sector services that doesn't happen without leadership, and there is a question around what the new measures are going to be. It has been broadly agreed that common service elements (and their measurement) and the design of the system of care in the DHS program logic will need to align with the way the sector can measure and demonstrate these outcomes.

It has been agreed amongst sector partners that a mature approach to this transition process will be required, and this is the next step that we need to take seriously from a regionalization perspective; agencies broadly agree that we need to be honest and transparent with each other about where our efficiencies and inefficiencies lie if we are to put our contracts 'on the table' and discuss how viable they are with amended outcomes.

The sector agrees that such a process of renegotiation will mean that we can share tools and intelligence and information with each other in a way that we previously have not done. Such an approach could help to build flexibility and diversity into the service system which has previously been lacking in the South Australian context.

The sector agrees broadly that we are going to need to clearly demonstrate to government how existing resources have been used and what additional investment would be needed to fill the gaps that remain in the early intervention system.

The sector agrees that a necessary step in the process of re-designing the South Australian Early Intervention System is a coherent and complete map of services and service gaps so that we can undertake planning that addresses regional gaps.

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Our priorities

a) regional and place-based approaches to service delivery

The sector has acknowledged that, in principle, a shift to a regional and place-based mode of service delivery is desirable.

We acknowledge that there are going to need to be specialist and state-wide services that compliment place-based services, however we know that one of the values of a place-based approach is that we know who is in the community and what kind of interactions are necessary to achieve outcomes that families require.

We acknowledge that central to a regionalized approach to service delivery will be that specialist services are delivered by ACCO's for Aboriginal families, and that choice and flexibility are crucial service elements.

We understand that there are different characteristics for different regions; there will need to be a level of 'service tailoring' for unique regions and communities. Community mapping and scoping is going to be critical, given that we need to know the families whom we are working with, especially in the regions.

We acknowledge that place-based models will not necessarily achieve specialist services and supports, particularly for Aboriginal children and families. The ability to put together the kind of service response that is required needs an assessment framework that captures the complexities that families are experiencing.

We believe that all South Australian families ought to be able to access the multiple layers of services that they require in order to meet their unique needs, and we know that this has not always been the case; we do need coverage of the state and families will need to access a wide range of services that they require in their location and at a scale that is appropriate.

We acknowledge and understand that access to universal services will not suffice in certain regions if there are complex needs that require targeted and specialist service provision.

b) collaboration and partnerships in the regions

We agree that the primary objective should be to get one integrated system where we are utilising one system for screening, data collection and needs assessment. A *one system* approach is something that goes a step further than simply working together or 'collaborating'. Governance frameworks will need to be shared as will training and staff development opportunities. We agree that there will be a need to give up individual agency ownership of data and get better at sharing our data across the sector.

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We understand that the system contains several government services and they are going to need to be involved in the newly formed 'system'. An integrated service system needs to have both government and NGO's involved, and this will mean a level of service integration of both government and non-government services particularly in regional areas.

We acknowledge that the acute needs of families often means that they outgrow the capacity of services to provide for their needs and then they find themselves without a service; in regional areas this is something that needs to be addressed and which is achieved via the linkages and close relationships between agencies that develop naturally as a result of their proximity and degree of embeddedness in their communities. 'Knowing the family' is a critical component of the work.

We acknowledge that layered and tiered responses will be critical to respond to the variable and escalating needs of families; this is a principle that we agree on.

c) support for ACCO's

We agree that we cannot allow the work that we do (mainstream agencies) with Aboriginal families and communities to become tokenistic. We collectively need to retain culturally appropriate Aboriginal services within non-Aboriginal providers for those families who may want to continue to access mainstream services.

The sector needs to be more proactive however in forming genuine partnerships and collaborate with ACCO's and needs to work towards championing a diversified ACCO sector that provides greater opportunity and choice for Aboriginal families.

The sector agrees that there is a need for our general funds (within mainstream services) to be allocated to Aboriginal services where necessary and where this is going to get a better outcome for Aboriginal families.

We agree that we have not invested in working proactively with government to build ACCO's in South Australia, and this is a commitment that we are going to need to make as a sector. We are also going to need to support ACCO's to build their internal capacity, and not compete unfairly with them where this may inhibit their ability to develop tailored, culturally appropriate service responses for Aboriginal families.

We agree that a redesigned early intervention system should allocate a percentage of total funding to Aboriginal programs that are to be implemented by ACCO's or in close partnerships with ACCO's.

e) sufficient resources

We agree that there needs to be an ongoing facilitated conversation through CAFFSA whereby we are committed to maintaining a focus on appropriate resourcing for early intervention services. We agree that we need to collectively hold government to account to appropriately resource early intervention and targeted intervention. We, as a sector, need to take this opportunity to work with DHS and the

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EIRD in order to use this current opportunity to make a case for increased investment in early intervention for the 2021/22 budget initiatives.

f) willingness to renegotiate KPI's and outcomes of existing contracts

There is in-principle agreement that this is something that service providers are willing to discuss and negotiate. The sector agrees that we want a sequential, orderly, and planned process to transition to this new future system. Genuine collaboration is needed, and we believe that this will be destroyed if we go down the path of open tendering. This is the contribution that DHS can make; they can help to build a system in partnership with the existing pool of service providers.

We agree that sharing tools, frameworks and resources will become critical in the next stages of the redesign process. Mapping workshops could be a first step where the sector asks the question about what the future distribution of services across the state could or should look like.