



**Evaluation of Supports and Strategies Implemented to Increase the Capacity of
Wheatbelt Child care Service's Volunteer Management Committees**

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Evaluation of Supports and Strategies Implemented to Increase the Capacity of Wheatbelt Child care Service's Volunteer Management Committees

The Wheatbelt Organisation for Children's Services [WOCS], in partnership with Child Australia, has undertaken a project funded by Lotterywest. The broad objectives of the project included identifying and trialling potential supports for Volunteer Management Committees to increase capacity building ensuring the sustainability of the child care service and contributing to the sustainability of the community. A project officer was appointed to facilitate the project.

During the first stage of the project the project officer consulted with services to determine the range of barriers and issues encountered in operating a child care service and to identify existing supports for management committees and services. The results of this consultation were reported in a paper titled "Existing Supports for Wheatbelt Child Care Centre Volunteer Management Committees". This paper was released in June 2008 and is available from the WOCS' website: www.wocs.com.au. Additional and more specific issues or barriers have since also been identified.

Whilst funding was identified as a major factor in sustaining child care services and reducing the burden placed on volunteers the likelihood of obtaining ongoing recurrent funding is minimal. A number of State funded occasional care services have received a small increase in their contracted funding, however the amount is not sufficient to ensure long term sustainability. WOCS has lodged a proposal to the Hon Brendon Grylls, Minister for Regional Development for additional funding for services, no response has been received to date. The other primary support is local government. Child care is not the responsibility of local government and does quite often involve a cost. The majority of local governments do provide some form of in kind support.

The supports implemented under the WOCS Project were based on the needs determined through consultation, liaison and general communications / inquiries as reported. This paper evaluates the suitability of the supports and strategies implemented under this project.

Supports and Strategies Implemented

Following is a list of supports and strategies implemented,

1. Wheatbelt Child Care Services Contact List
2. Child Care Management System (CCMS) software survey
3. Forums ;
 - Childcare Accessibility & Support Forum, Trayning April 2008
 - WOCS Forum – October 2008
 - Continuing Connections Child Care Forum, October 2009
4. Publications / papers;
 - Existing Supports for Wheatbelt Child Care Centre Volunteer Management Committees, June 2008
 - Volunteer Recruitment Strategies
 - Tips & Hints to help ensure Validation Visits Result in Positive Outcomes WOCS Happening – WOCS' Newsletter
5. WOCS' Website
6. Providing links and publications including
 - National Police Checks For Volunteers Project (NPCVP)
 - Wheatbelt ACC Grant Writing Guide

- Numeracy & Literacy guides
 - DOCEP Inc Guide
 - Sport & Rec risk management tool
 - Staying Healthy in Child Care
7. Resources and consumables
 - Resources / training material / publications donated by WOCS via funding received as winner of the Community Services Industry Awards 2007
 - Small items (eg stickers, colouring books)
 8. Providing information, support, referrals and links in response to inquiries
 9. Disbursement of information
 10. Wheatbelt child care services manual

In order to establish if the barriers or issues identified have been addressed through the supports and strategies implemented a comparison of the identified needs and the supports and strategies implemented has been undertaken.

The table below outlines the original issues or barriers in the left hand column and the strategies / supports implemented to address the issues or barriers in the right hand column.

Comparison of identified barriers and issues in operating a child care services in the Wheatbelt and strategies / supports implemented

Barriers – Issues	Supports or Strategies to address issue
Knowledge of awards and employer obligations (eg employee contracts) and staff management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR section in the manual • Networks • Provision of information and links
Fitting volunteering in around work, family and other commitments – demands of volunteering role	Volunteer Recruitment Strategies document (also included in manual)
Volunteer burnout – and consequent impacts on recruiting new volunteers – workload is too onerous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Recruitment Strategies • Manual • Networks
Recruiting and retaining staff*	Recruitment process in manual
Lack of flexibility in accreditation process to accommodate rural towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on PSCWA and NCAC, • Forums, • Mentoring from NCAC • Tips & Hints to help ensure Validation Visits Result in Positive Outcomes
Lack of funding and access to CCB to increase enrolments	Funding links on website and included in manual
Volunteers do not have the knowledge or experience to deal with regulations, financials and policy development. This burden also deters potential volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual • Forums • Network (contact list)
Lack of support for volunteers – feeling isolated and having to cope with issues unsupported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forums • Newsletter
Lack of suitable premises or funding to get premises to standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information regarding funding in manual and on website. • Information regarding sharing premises • Forums - funding

Knowing what other centres are doing – are we doing it right? Is there an easier way? Are we the only centre dealing with these issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network • Forums • Newsletter
Issues encountered in shared premises – cleaning, use / damage of toys and equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking to similar services for information on how they deal with issues. • Contracts and MOUs in manual
Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information in resource manual • Information regarding funding disbursed • General liaison and suggestions provided to services
Length of the process involved in establishing service and delays in receiving funding (often quotes are no longer valid or prices have increased)	Information fed back to departments and funding bodies
Processes need streamlining for establishing and running centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual provides information to offset this. • CCMS survey will assist • Contact list will enable links to be formed and information exchanged.

Evaluation of Supports and Strategies

In evaluating the supports and strategies implemented the capacity of the support to contribute to addressing the identified needs, ease of implementation, accessibility, lifespan and cost were considered. Following is a summary of the evaluations.

1. Contact List

The implementation of the Wheatbelt Child Care Services Contact List has proved to be a successful strategy / tool to encourage networking and support. Based on feedback from services the contact list has proven useful.

The original intent was to establish the contact list and leave services to maintain current contacts. Whilst the contact numbers for the actual centres do not change, staff changes are not always notified. In addition as incorporated not for profit organisations hold an AGM on an annual basis the management committee members potentially change each year. Again changes are seldom advised. This issue may be due to new coordinators and committee members not being aware of the contact list. A lack of continuity due to limited handover or inductions for both committee members and staff is apparent in the services. This may be partially resolved through information provided throughout the project and included in publications / resources distributed.

One solution is to pass the maintenance of this list to the CSO should the service support provided through WOCS Projects not continue, however there have been three individuals in the CSO role during the term of this project so continuity may remain an issue.

A second or complimentary option is to include contact details for all services on the WOCS website without including coordinator names or committee contacts.

Cost is primarily the time and cost of contacting each service and often requires a phone call as opposed to an email.

2. Child Care Management System (CCMS) software survey

The CCMS Survey has been helpful to new long day care services and still enables existing long day care services to access local support when needed.

The information contained in the survey will not fluctuate greatly. Primarily adding new services to the survey and ensuring contact name is updated. In addition ensuring new services are provided with the information.

The CSO or a volunteer may be the appropriate person to undertake the maintenance and disbursement of the survey if required in the future.

3. Forums

The project initially planned two forums – one to obtain feedback from services regarding supports and the second to provide feedback regarding the project. Following initial consultation and ongoing liaison with the volunteer committees and the services it was apparent that the volunteers and staff needed access to information and support as opposed to open forums. Information was continuously being provided during the project and the project outcomes were outlined at both the Childcare Accessibility & Support Forum -Trayning April 2008 and the WOCS Child Care Forum – October 2008.

The feedback from participants indicates the forums to have been of high value. Forums are considered to be a great networking opportunity and the Wheatbelt Forums have provided relevant informative content. The overall response from services was for the forums to continue.

The forums have offered the opportunity for staff to network, meet with representatives from government, regulatory and funding bodies and early childhood support organisations. The forums also enabled information to be provided regarding issues being encountered in establishing a service, meeting regulation requirements, meeting obligations relating to incorporated organisations and accessing to funding.

The WOCS Child Care Forum was potentially the first opportunity services had to actually attend and meet a representative from the National Childcare Accreditation Council, aside from when the service had a validation visit or spot check. Debra Finlay travelled from NSW specifically to attend the forum. Debra's excellent presentation was aimed at ensuring participant were comfortable with the option of contacting an NCAC Child Care Advisor regarding accreditation issues. Additionally DOCEP attended the WOCS Forum and provided information many volunteer committee members were unaware of in regard to their obligations as incorporated organisations.

The Continuing Connections Child Care Conference- October 2009 was focussed on providing professional development opportunities for staff. Access to professional development and training has been identified as an issue for Wheatbelt services. The conference also provided the opportunity to network and link with similar services. Again feedback to date has been very positive.

The two forums held in the Wheatbelt were one day events. The costs were primarily catering, venue hire and crèche staff. The other costs involve time to organise presenters and registrations. There are some printing and phone / email costs involved. No participant registration feed were charged.

The Continuing Connections Conference was a larger event running from Friday evening to Sunday. Paid workshop facilitators and keynote speakers presented during the conference. Additionally catering and accommodation costs needed to be met. Funding was sourced and participant registration fees charged.

Whilst feedback indicates services would like these to continue several issues have been encountered. Location of the forums / conferences can limit attendance due to travel time. The day and timing can also impact on participants – agricultural areas have seasonal times when they are quite busy accordingly forums participation during these times would be low. Other issues are cost of attending such as staff wages and travel, time away from service and availability of relief staff.

It may be of value to hold forums twice yearly in two locations in the Wheatbelt to improve access.

4. WOCS' Publications

The majority of the publications and papers will not date for example, Volunteer Recruitment Strategies, Existing Supports for Wheatbelt Child Care Centre Volunteer Management Committees. Publications that have been developed to address a need have been included in the resource manual or are available from the WOCS website.

WOCS Happening provides services with updates regarding any developments in the sector. The newsletter also provides the opportunity for services to contribute their stories or articles. The WOCS Committee produced this newsletter prior to the commencement of the project. The newsletter has been updated and expanded to include contributions from services. The main cost is in time formatting and printing. Another issue is awareness of new developments or potential stories from services – the CSO may be able to assist WOCS continue the Newsletter in its current format.

Feedback from services indicates these publications to be of value. The Newsletter would be the primary publication requiring ongoing maintenance. The document regarding Validation Visits may require updating if there are any impacts from the development of COAG's proposed Early Years Learning Framework.

5. WOCS Website

The WOCS Website has been an excellent medium for providing information and links to support organisations, resources and government agencies. The website also provides a public profile for WOCS and contributed to raising awareness of the issues facing rural services.

The primary concern is maintaining the website. Links and information need to be updated regularly. This will fall to the volunteer management committee upon the cessation of employing a staff member.

There is a cost of up to \$200 per annum for website hosting and domain name.

6. Providing links and publications including

Publications have contributed to supporting the Wheatbelt child care services and committee members. Primarily risk assessment tools, grant writing guides, National Police Checks for Volunteers Project and the DOCEP Inc Guide. Services now have links to the organisations that produced the publications which will enable them to ensure they have current versions.

Other publications have assisted in ensuring resources reflecting quality care are available for service staff. Again the service can contact the publisher direct to ensure editions are current.

Services can also establish direct links to these organisations to ensure they are informed of new publications or resources.

Links have been included in the resource manual and on the WOCS Website.

The major barrier for the services is time. Many services employ contact coordinators so office / admin time is limited. Management Committee members are volunteers who are parents / carer and often undertaking paid employment. Accordingly they have limited time available to source resources and publications or ensure existing resources are current.

It would potentially benefit services if the CSO and other agencies have contacts and services on email distribution lists.

7. Providing information, support, referrals and links in response to inquiries

Services have indicated this strategy to have strongly contributed to increasing knowledge, capacity and networks for Wheatbelt Services. This is also reflected in the general feedback received. The Project Officer has often referred services to the appropriate organisation or website in response to queries or inquiries, or linked them with similar services experiencing the same issues.

The contact list will enable linking of services and the resource manual and WOCS website contain information and links which would provide the information required for some inquiries.

Again this relies on the capacity, in terms of time, of the staff or committees to locate and access the information. Staff / committee turnover and lack of handover can result in information not being passed on.

Unfortunately not all issues raised or inquiries will be able to be met through the previous initiatives. The availability of an individual who is independent of government agencies and communities has enabled staff and management committee members to confidentially discuss sensitive issues. An understanding of the dynamics in small communities and the Wheatbelt specifically has also contributed to the confidence the services have in knowing their issues will be understood.

10. Resource Manual

The response from both services and agencies to the resource manual has been very positive. Wongan Hills has received the final manual and commented,

“Just finished having a proper look at the resource manual and wanted to let you know that I thought it was great. It will be really valuable for new centres, who need a lot of support and how to do things, but also for centres who have been operating for a while as it is a good reference guide on how to find things out, or the right way to go about things. Very practical!”

Unfortunately due to the evolving child care industry new developments, such as the COAG Early Years Learning Framework and regulation reviews, will impact on the information contained in the manual. In addition changing government departments and support services also affect the links provided. The manual contains a substantial amount of general information for volunteer management committees regarding policies, staff management, finances etc this information will not date.

The manual will be saved in a word format to enable future revisions. Additionally the manual is in a loose leaf form in a ring binder. This will enable pages or sections to be updated and replaced as opposed to the entire manual being updated.

Potentially an organisation such as Child Australia may have the capacity to forward updates to services or the CSO may take on this role.

Issues not addressed via supports and strategies

A number of issues have arisen during and in the latter stages of the project or were unable to be addressed within the project.

1. Access to Child Care Benefit

This issue is currently dictated by Commonwealth legislation. The eligibility determination contained in the Child Care Benefit (Eligibility of Child Care Services for Approval and Continued Approval) Determination 2000 states a long day care service may be approved for child care benefit purposes where the service satisfies any eligibility rule contained in the Eligibility Determination which includes operating on all normal working days in at least 48 weeks of the year.

Registered care providers (State contracted occasional care services) are not eligible for the full child care benefit.

Information was provided to services regarding operating a long day care on reduced hours, being less day per week. During the period child care approval was granted by FaCSIA five services were approved to operate less than five days per week. Information regarding this initiative was provided by FaCSIA at the two Wheatbelt Forums in 2008 and via the WOCS Newsletter. A change in department in late 2008 resulted in child care approval being granted through DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations). In April 2009 a service was approved for 3 days per week long day care under an exemption which was due to expire in October 2009. Upon raising this issue with DEEWR the Project Officer was advised the original approvals were not within the capacity of the state branch and should not have been granted. Correspondence and liaison with Minister Kate Ellis' office is currently taking place, in addition this issue has been raised with several State Ministers and Senators, including Minister Grylls. This flexible option had offered a solution that enabled small services to operate within the needs of their community whilst ensuring cost of access to child care was affordable and the service was sustainable. Liaison and negotiations via WOCS will continue until the issue is resolved.

2. Recruiting and Retaining Staff

As outlined in the paper, "Existing Supports for Wheatbelt Child Care Centre Volunteer Management Committees", the ability to attract qualified staff is limited. The low populations in small Wheatbelt towns result in a very limited pool of potential staff. Additionally, the perceived isolation of the communities is a deterrent to potential recruits from metropolitan areas. The part time operational hours of small services and lower utilisation rates result in part time staff positions, a further deterrent to attracting staff. This also impacts on services in trying to locate relief staff.

Awareness of this issue has been raised, however the Department for Communities states that the rural areas have a higher percentage of qualified staff working in child care than the metropolitan areas.

Implementation of the recommendations approved by the Minister following the child care regulations review include the requirement for all child care contact staff to have a minimum Certificate III qualification. The drafting of these Regulations is currently taking place. The WOCS Project Officer has ensured services are aware of this impending change and has encouraged services to incorporate this factor when advertising for staff. In addition existing staff are undertaking traineeships or recognition of prior learning where eligible.

The COAG Early Years Learning Framework may also result in higher qualifications for child care staff. The framework is currently being developed and trialled.

3. Planning

One need identified by the Project Officer over the course of the project is planning at both community and child care service level. This includes planning to establish a service and planning for future community needs in existing centres. Other factors include identifying future needs and ensuring services are able to access funds to meet refurbishment needs or to renew resources and play equipment.

The Wheatbelt Development Commission has funded a twelve month project to develop planning tools for communities establishing and operating child care services.

4. Contact Coordinators

Many coordinators in Wheatbelt services work on the floor with the children in addition to undertaking the administration work involved with policies and programming. Often the administrator (if there is one) primarily undertakes accounts duties and some secretarial. A number of contact coordinators are struggling to manage the competing demands of their service.

In long day care services this has become more apparent when the service commences preparing for their self study and validation visit as part of their participation in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS).

Smaller state contracted occasional care services may operate with only one or two staff. Again the contact coordinator can struggle to ensure programming, observations and accounts are completed in addition to ensuring the hygiene requirements, supervision and child development / care needs are met.

This need may have arisen due to new (possibly less experienced) coordinators taking on roles and new services being established.

Potential solutions or strategies to assist may include establishing small hubs where coordinators can exchange ideas, developing some tips for coordinators or showcasing services that have developed ways to meet these needs.

5. Professional Development

The PSCWA provides high quality subsidised professional development to approved services (long day care) and does not exclude State occasional care services attending on a fee for service basis. However services are finding it difficult to implement what they learn within their child care service. There is a need for in service training that enables the training to be tailored

to the specific service and community. This would enable training organisations to establish the context in which the staff / committee are working and the routine of the organisation. The training could then be tailored to suit or adjustments within the organisation made to ensure they implement the knowledge gained. In addition there is a requirement for follow up to ensure the service has understood and isn't encountering any issues implementing the knowledge gained. Training needs analyses focus on areas in which staff require more training. This does not always result in the training being tailored to suit the environment in which the staff work and the outcome can be stand alone theoretical workshops being offered.

This issue has been raised with PSCWA. Neither WOCS nor Child Australia are registered training organisations and are not qualified to offer accredited training.

This issue also relates to the difficulties being experienced by contact coordinators.

Other Support Options Considered

Online training and forum

The WOCS Committee considered a proposal for an online forum for child care staff and management committee members. The committee felt there was a risk of services taking information offered as factual and this could prove detrimental. In addition there is the potential risk of users referring to information (accurate or inaccurate) gained as being available from the WOCS website as opposed to the information being provided by a contributor to an online forum. PSCWA has an online forum and indicated that it has very low usage. In addition, at the time this option was considered there were a number of services that did not have internet access. This option was not pursued.

The WOCS Committee also considered an online training forum based on an existing web based training site. The cost of establishing this support exceeded \$15000 without the package being tailored to suit the child care sector. Another issue was ensuring the site was kept up to date with current developments in the sector. This would be an additional cost and require ongoing monitoring of both sector developments and the site. Whilst the option was considered to be a viable model of support it is prohibitive in terms of cost and ongoing updating.

Conclusion

Service feedback identified providing information, support, referrals and linking to other services and disbursement of information as the supports that have contributed most to increasing knowledge and capacity of service staff and committees operating child care services. Stakeholder feedback also reflected these sentiments.

As outlined in the previous discussion many of the supports, links and information provided has been included in the resource manual and on the WOCS website.

The draft resource manual has been well received by services and stakeholders. The content of the manual is based on communications / inquiries and consultation with services. As previously noted the resource manual contains information that will assist services, staff and volunteers address issues identified as impacting on their capacity to effectively manage a child care service in line with regulatory requirements. It is expected the manual will evoke a positive response from services when distribution is completed (as indicated by Wongan Hills' unsolicited comments).

Feedback has indicated the high value placed on forums / conferences by the services. The noted difficulties encountered in his model of support may partially be addressed by holding smaller forums in separate locations in the Wheatbelt ensuring access to the majority of the services. Investigating options in regard to assisting services with the cost attendance, for example travel / relief staff, is also required. This information and contacts will be passed to the WOCS Committee and stakeholders for consideration when hosting/facilitating future forums and conferences.

The WOCS committee and other stakeholders will be apprised of the issues which have not been able to be addressed within this project. Potentially WOCS will continue to raise awareness of these issues and work with stakeholders to find solutions.

In summary there does not appear to be one single model of support (apart from an ongoing support officer) that can meet or address the needs and barriers experienced by community operated child care services. Accordingly, as demonstrated in the table "Comparison of identified barriers and issues in operating a child care services in the Wheatbelt and strategies / supports implemented", a combination of the supports implemented is required to assist the services to address issues encountered and increase capacity.

The majority of these supports will be able to be continued or updated at minimal cost and a small amount of time. WOCS will continue to maintain the website and produce newsletters for the services.

The WOCS Project Officer will continue to support services and work with the WOCS Committee for the next twelve months within the parameters and projected outcomes of the new project funded by the Wheatbelt Development Commission.