

Welcome and Opening Speech

WOCS Wickepin Forum 31 October 2008

WOCS - The "Wheatbelt Organisation for Children's Services" was established in July 2005 due to ongoing concerns raised by different communities in the Wheatbelt regarding the managing of and obtaining child care services. A group of people passionate about these issues came together to form WOCS, which now exists as an incorporated not-for-profit organisation addressing concerns over the long term sustainability of childcare in the rural sector of WA.

Our mission statement is to:-

"Achieve access, equity and sustainability for children's services in the Wheatbelt"

And through this we aim to achieve:-

- Recognition of specific requirements within the Wheatbelt
- Flexibility of child care models to reflect individual community needs

That was our goal three years ago and since then much has been achieved by a small number of dedicated committee members. I will briefly mention the compilation of the Wheatbelt Childcare Profile document which has provided the sector with a better understanding of the day to day issues facing Wheatbelt centres, and more recently, a feather in our cap, being awarded a 2007 Community Service Industry Award for Strengthening Rural and Remote Communities.

One of our main objectives since 2005 has been to obtain more supports for volunteers managing child care services and the committee believed the best way to achieve this was through the development of a reference manual for volunteer management committees.

I think the early seeds were sown with this idea when Jackie Murray and I had a number of discussions about what WOCS could do to really help child care centres being established and remaining viable within their own communities. Time and time again we kept coming back to the same conclusion – *'we need to write a how to book'*. Realising this was somewhat optimistic for two working mums WOCS took the first step by way of forming a partnership with RUCSN which lead to a joint application to Lotterywest in which we were successful with our funding application (and thanks must go to Lee Grmas and Lucy Reynolds for their assistance with putting our application together) and so we had the funding as well as the administration management from RUCSN which then enabled us to proceed with the appointment of a Project Officer for a 2 year period. In October last year we appointed Nola Poland in this role, and then we looked on optimistically as she began to *write our book*, which soon became known as the **Resource Manual!**

WOCS identified a number of areas that the proposed resource manual could address, including:-

- Strategies put in place to assist volunteer management committees confidently offer a high quality child care service
- People confident to take on volunteer management roles in their local communities
- Existing services having a good working knowledge of committee management and child care service provision

- Tangible resources in place to assist volunteers and enhance their knowledge to assist them in managing their service and all its complex components namely the “Resource Manual”, which would be accessible to all services
- Local Governments made more aware of the process involved in setting up and managing child care centres and hopefully being forthcoming with support if requested
- Improved networking between communities and services
- Greater awareness of the issues facing rural child care services within their communities as well as within the broader community of WA
- The creation of a research paper showing the trials of various methods of supports, evaluations of them and final results that can then be utilised to support the development of further supports for volunteers such that capacity building can take place within communities in the Wheatbelt
- Inclusion of supports for community management volunteers in not only government department policies but in local government and other key stakeholders in the Wheatbelt

What we've achieved to date is the **The Wheatbelt Child Care Services Draft Resource Manual** which aims to equip volunteer management committees with an overview of running a child care service.

The manual will equip volunteers with the basic skills to undertake the management of a service and will ensure the task of managing a child care service is less daunting thereby resulting in more community members potentially being willing to accept roles on the management committees. In this manner the manual will contribute to ensuring the ongoing sustainability of child care services in the Wheatbelt and the sustainability of communities.

WOCS believes the development of the manual will ensure all Wheatbelt communities are able to access adequate support to set up and maintain high quality child care services in their communities as it is our belief that rural communities have the right as well as the need for children's services as much as city families and that without supports there is a very real assumption that volunteers will burn out and services will close.

With on the ground, hands on support, combined with the provision of information pertinent to their service this will enable them to manage and run a viable service.

Benefits can then be had by the whole of Wheatbelt. Once services are sustainable then working families and those families needing respite will benefit both socially, economically and emotionally whilst children will be provided with a stimulating healthy environment contributing to a higher level of well being.

The overall long term outcomes WOCS aims to achieve through the project officer role include:-

- Viable childcare services in wheatbelt communities
- New childcare services established in area's of need throughout the wheatbelt
- Established networks between all services in the wheatbelt
- Attraction and retention of Qualified staff
- Training for staff and committees to be affordable, available and local

It is WOCS' hope that documents created through the employment of a Project officer will assist with forming an evidence base to approach applicable government departments and/or potential funding bodies to continue with the project, thus ensuring the sustainability of these vital services in rural WA.

This is an exciting period in the area of early childhood, particularly now with the Federal Governments bold reform agenda and WOCS looks forward to being a strong force in the sector in the years ahead and continuing to highlight the plight of child care services throughout the Wheatbelt.

I know I speak on behalf of the entire WOCS committee, past and present when I say how excited I am to see where we are at today and how delighted we are to be a part of the launch of the **Wheatbelt Child Care Services Draft Resource Manual**.

I'd like to make a comment, that to me sums up the success of the WOCS and that is:-

WOCS is a successful organisation because it not only aims to highlight the issues facing rural communities in relation to child care, the group works toward solutions to overcome these issues. They are a proactive group working to help further enhance the communities in the Wheatbelt by developing and supporting sustainable services that help meet not only the social and well being needs of families but to also further add to the economic sustainability of rural communities.

Thankyou