



## RESPONSE TO TASMANIA'S CHILD AND YOUTH WELLBEING STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER – MARCH 2021

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## Introduction

On behalf of Lady Gowrie Tasmania, the Tasmanian Government is acknowledged for their commitment to develop the Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy in consultation with the many and varied stakeholders.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Discussion Paper (January 2021) and contribute our views to this process. In doing so it was identified that for some of the content, Lady Gowrie Tasmania was not able to respond or make comment. It was also noted that the Discussion Paper included many questions for response with some overlapping/duplicated.

Therefore, this response focuses on generalist matters believed to be relevant and appropriate to this organisation.

## About Lady Gowrie Tasmania Incorporated

Lady Gowrie Child Centre (Hobart) Incorporated was established in July 1939 at the Battery Point site. The Centre was established by the then Commonwealth Government as a demonstration, training, and best practice model for early childhood professionals across a range of multidisciplinary services – education, care, and health.

At this time, a Gowrie Child Centre was established in each Australian capital city in low socio-economic industrialised areas to improve poverty and poor health outcomes for children in these areas during and after the Second World War.

Over the years the role of Gowrie has altered, however, the focus remains the same – supporting the education, care, and well-being of young children and those who educate and care for them, their families, and the broader community.

Lady Gowrie Child Centres across Australia have changed significantly since their establishment and more specifically, Lady Gowrie Tasmania now employs 500 staff and has grown into a multi-faceted organisation offering a range of services to the community. These services have been developed in response to community need and are delivered by a team of staff committed to providing quality programs to the community that promote the best outcomes for children, families and early to middle childhood professionals.

Lady Gowrie Tasmania's name is synonymous with quality education and care and 2019 saw the milestone achievement of providing 80 years of quality education and care services to the Tasmanian community. Countless children and their families have been a part of the Lady Gowrie Tasmania story with many families using services across generations. More information is available at <https://gowrie-tas.com.au/about-us/>

Lady Gowrie Tasmania is a values-based organisation with a strong social mandate and its position of "*Children First*" underpins all its programs and services.

## Reflection on Discussion Paper

The evidence surrounding the importance of the early years, those years prior to formal school, is vast; from research into brain development to most recently the First 1000 days report. However, it will take genuine commitment and collaboration, breaking down of silos, broader societal understanding of the significance of the early years and how each individual can make a difference – the ‘ripple effect’ known as an abstract metaphor to describe how our actions (or non-actions) reverberate throughout the physical and social world.

Within Tasmania, 23,569 children from Birth to 12 years attended a Child Care Subsidy approved education and care service, 55.5% Long Day Care, 14% Family Day Care and 38.2% Outside School Hours Care (Australian Government Productivity Commission, Report on Government services [online] available at <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services> accessed 2nd March 2021); therefore, the education and care sectors voice must be heard along with the understanding of the influence of education and care services have on the outcomes for children and their families.

Lady Gowrie Tasmania operates several Government programs (national and state) including the Australian Government Inclusion Support Agency – Tasmania, the In-Home Care Support Agency Tasmania, and the Integrated Family Support Service, funded by the State Government Department of Communities. These programs provide a deep insight, into the wellbeing of Tasmanian children. It will take a genuine collaborative approach and action to make a change for children’s wellbeing including looking through an ecological framework lens to understand the vast influences on a child’s trajectory.

*Quality early childhood education and care assists with healthy early childhood development, while supporting workforce participation of [families].* (Productivity Commission 2016).

*There is [also a vast amount of] evidence that quality early childhood education and care gives children developmental opportunities and improves school readiness* (Melhuish 2012; OECD 2017; Warren et al. 2018); however, it is vital that we change the narrative (and action) to schools being ready for the child versus the child being school ready! The transition to the first years of school is a major milestone for many children and both schools and service leaders must ensure that the significance of positive transition within and between services and schools directly affect a child’s ability to engage successfully in play and learning. The transition process requires authentic participation by all stakeholders – something that is currently a hit and miss process depending upon the individual leader. A consistent approach and commitment are required at all levels to support a positive transition for children.

As identified in the discussion paper, ‘there is already a lot happening to improve the wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania’.

Whilst this is acknowledged, our involvement in several Lady Gowrie Tasmania programs have viewed unnecessary duplication in service delivery and service delivery that does not meet the need of all children and families. Operating the In-Home Care Support Agency in Tasmania, our organisation has identified vast gaps in service delivery and families falling through these gaps. This evidence was experienced firsthand as a component of our work in

supporting the transition of families from the In-Home Care Program (focused on the education and care of children) to more appropriate support services that met the families (and children's) wellbeing needs. Gaps in service delivery included:

- Parenting Support - this was a major issue with families often requiring coaching/support on parenting challenges during late afternoon and evenings when the children are home however, we experienced family support services not facilitating home visits later in the day to family homes. This combined with limited hours a family can access support (one example 1 hour a week) left families vulnerable.
- Parenting support to ensure the wellbeing of young children in the formative years – the first 1000 days is the critical period for children and without adequate and appropriate parenting children become increasingly vulnerable.
- Adult and children mental health (inclusive of the impacts of trauma) was another area of limited support available.
- Education and care support for young people in high school (over the age of 13) – working families, however, cannot access due to age of child but child not emotionally ready to be left to their own devices in the home environment. This raises concern about personal safety and the increased use of technology that impacts both on social/emotional development but also physical development due to the increase in sedentary activity. Support is required for these older children especially for children with ongoing needs to provide social inclusion and respite for families.

Similarly, the state funded Lady Gowrie Tasmania Integrated Family Support Service, maintained full or close to full capacity through the 2019-20 financial year with 28 families and 67 children and young people supported. The clients of this program have multiple and complex needs and required intense long-term support. The current system of allocation and active case load requirements does not support the provision of support needs. This is further exacerbated by the inability to secure access to specialist services. Referrals to such services are met with long waitlists which further delays targeted support for families and children is a barrier and can make adversity worse.

Although a large number of initiatives are in place, many work in silos with a narrow focus. For a child and youth wellbeing strategy to be effective, the silos need to be broken down, both within government departments, funded programs/organisations, and the community. Genuine collaboration, listening (especially hearing the silent voices) and then planned, sustained and inclusive action is required.

The discussion paper (page 64) states: *'There are a number of agencies who have responsibility for children and young people or who develop policies related to children and young people. Budget decisions are made on the specific priorities of government many which are supportive of improved wellbeing'*.

Agencies need to work collaboratively in co-designing strategies and actions; therefore, utilising the broader expertise in the decision-making process. Key working groups established but also cognisant of the child and young person's voice.

This will require a full commitment of existing agencies and organisation – **stop** being territorial, competitive, and protective of what is perceived as their space and **start** to move from implementing separate “programs” to redesigning whole system. The pressure to continually secure funding to sustain these agencies and their employees is a key barrier to any redesign of systems.

The information in the discussion paper clearly identifies the vast range of programs and services provided by a diverse range of providers. This suggests that there should be some consolidation to prevent duplication of effort and resources, but at the same time it is imperative that adequate resources to deliver the programs required to support wellbeing.

Importantly there is a need for families to know and understand what services are available to them and how to access such services. It is acknowledged that a printed resource is outdated quick, therefore using information technology as the tool to provide such information and dedicating resources to maintaining an online information resource for families to access.

When reading the discussion paper, a key question has arisen:

- Has there been research and documentation on ALL the programs/organisations/initiatives across the state and their reach?
- How do we move forward without solid evidence on what is working, where are the gaps and what needs to improve?

Genuine and robust data collection and **sharing of data** (whilst maintaining children and young people’s privacy) is essential first step otherwise uninformed decision making is the result.

Programs alone cannot resolve the challenges when services and programs can at times be adding to the challenges. The challenges as accessibility, culturally appropriate, built on trusting relationships and being in the right place at the right time inhibit the success of programs.

The discussion paper (page 51) outlines an initiative that: *‘Provides services to assist schools to enable all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to reach their learning potential and supports learning opportunities for all Tasmanian learners to understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture.’* If we are serious about the first 1000 days this needs to start prior to school – within the early years community inclusive of education and care.

A Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy will require extensive government research and community support, and investment to avoid another document being produced without investment and support wrapped around the initiatives. Education and Care services operate on a business model, but as a not-for-profit community based, child focused organisation, supporting 4580 children and 3395 families accessing our education and care services, we are deeply committed to making a difference in children, young people and their families lives.

The discussion paper Page 8) outlines: *‘In February 2020, the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Commissioner) released a report Investing in the Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children and Young People. The Commissioner’s report commended the Tasmanian Government’s use of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework (the Framework) and recommended the development of a long-term strategy for promoting and improving the wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania, based on the Framework with the first 1,000 days as a key priority for all relevant government agencies.*

Wellbeing cannot be look at in isolation. Using the analogy of an airplane - the flight attendant demonstrates how to use the oxygen mask? They always say to put your own oxygen mask on first before helping someone else. This is exactly how self-care works. We need to invest in our well-being before we can help others. A wellbeing strategy therefore needs to include wellbeing initiatives not only for children and young people, but all people that support children and young people.

### **Summary:**

To achieve the outcome identified in the message from the Premier: *“All Tasmanian children and young people deserve the opportunity to grow up in safe, nurturing and supportive environments” the following are key to enacting this intent:*

- *development of a coherent roadmap*
- *investment by all stakeholders*
- *collaboration, commitment, and communication*
- *systemic change*

Lady Gowrie Tasmania looks forward to being a key stakeholder in moving the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy forward.

***“Children First”***