



Feedback on City of Port Phillip's Children Services Policy

Health Promotion and Child Youth and Family Teams

Star Health

July 2018

Introduction

Star Health is a major provider of health and community services across the inner southern region of Melbourne. Star Health is a not-for-profit organisation located at four dedicated centres within the St Kilda, Prahran and South/Port Melbourne areas, and we deliver more than 150,000 services each year.

As one of Victoria's largest community health services, Star Health provides access to doctors, dentists and a broad-range of allied health and other supports. Star Health provides a broad range of services- spanning pregnancy, childhood, adulthood and alcohol and drug services. With specialist expertise in engaging high risk and hard-to-reach groups, it offers health services to all, regardless of a person's ability to pay.

As well as direct service delivery, Star Health engages in community building and health promotion activities to build the health and wellbeing of the local community.

Star Health values social justice and strongly believes that everyone, no matter what their circumstance or health needs, is equally entitled to access Victoria's health services so that they can live a healthy and happy life.

Thankyou for allowing us to provide feedback on the new City of Port Phillip *Children's Services Policy*.

1. Challenges for Children living in Port Phillip

Challenges for children living in the City of Port Phillip, in addition to those identified in the 'Children's Services in the City of Port Phillip document 2018', include:

- The new Federal Government *Child Care Subsidy*. This will result in some families being worse off, both in terms of rebate received and in terms of hours of care provided. Of particular concern are those families who don't meet the *Activity Test* (as stated on page 6 of the *Children's Services in the City of Port Phillip document 2018*). Even those families who are caught by the *Child Care Safety Net* (families earning less than \$65,000, who fail the activity test) will see a decrease in hours of care provided (from 24 hours per week to 12).
- Council needs to prepare for any new policy change that may see universal access to 3-year old kindergarten, as recommended by the report [Lifting our Game, 2017](#).
- Maintaining affordability of early education services without compromising quality.
- Identifying why children from South Melbourne and St. Kilda have lower rates of development than the state average.
- Supporting the needs of children with special needs who are not eligible for NDIS.
- Ensuring information is accessible and culturally appropriate to CALD and linguistically diverse families

Ideas to help solve these challenges include:

- Council to monitor families who are worse off as a result of new *Child Care Subsidy* and be leaders to ensure vulnerable families have adequate access to early education and other support services to ensure these children don't fall behind.
- Collaborative partnerships established between service providers to ensure vulnerable families are linked and adequately supported to services and early learning opportunities The partnership would have:
 - a shared understanding of the problem;
 - an agreed goal;
 - continuous communication;
 - consistent outcomes are being measured and collected; and,
 - actions are aligned towards the agreed goal
- Supply of child care and education services, in particular for children aged 0-3, is taken into account when planning and designing Fisherman's Bend.
- Collaborative approach between services to determine why children in some areas have lower rates of development than others. Once understood, develop a long-term plan for improvement, which includes evidence-based approaches, with the aim to get these children on par with the rest of the municipality. An approach similar to [Logan Together](#) project may be beneficial.
- Increased supports are required for families transitioning through Port Phillip, both when living in the municipality and referrals to other LGA's when moving out. Quicker responses are required for these families to access early education and family services.
- Explore innovative ideas to move early education and care services out of old or outdated buildings, such as exploring models used in other LGA's (e.g. early education services being located on the ground floor of new apartment buildings, co-locating with schools or aged-care services).

- Monitor the effectiveness of the NDIS in supporting children with special needs and develop a collaborative approach to support children who NDIS misses.
- Plan and identify areas of action to support early educator's skills to improve children's language development and English proficiency, by providing professional development and curriculum ideas.

We should expect the following outcomes for children who live in the City of Port Phillip:

- Rates of child development in all suburbs of Port Phillip should meet, at minimum, the state average.
- At minimum, the target rate of 95% kindergarten participation will be achieved in Port Phillip.
- Increased proportion of children from vulnerable families' access children's services, including early education opportunities.
- All children living in Port Phillip are proficient in English before going to school.
- No vulnerable children living in Port Phillip fall through the gaps.

2. Opportunities for a better future for Port Phillip Children

The potential opportunities to provide a better future for children in Port Phillip include:

- Advocate to relevant stakeholders for universal access to 3-year old kindergarten, as this is the single reform that could impact on improving school outcomes through early childhood intervention (Source: [Lifting our Game, 2017](#)).
- Advocate to relevant stakeholders for increased access to early education and care for children aged 0-2 who are connected with Child Protection or Child First, as current policy provides services only for children aged 3-4 years. As the first 1000 days are the most important, and evidence shows us children aged 0-2 benefit the most from high-quality care, this could achieve significant benefits for this population group.
- An increased integrated service approach that provides more wrap-around services co-located for children and families. At a minimum the integrated service would include an early education service with council services (e.g. Maternal and Child Health, immunisation, toy libraries, etc.) and external services (e.g. community health child health services).
- Collectively encouraging and supporting all early education services in Port Phillip to meet the 'Exceeding Standard' of the National Quality Standard, and supporting services to participate in other high quality health and wellbeing programs (e.g. [Achievement Program](#), [Smiles 4 Miles](#), [Respectful Relationships](#)) to complement this work.
- Council investigates the benefits of Early Years Management (EYM) organisations and provide a report of findings including case studies and a business case to community-managed facilities in Port Phillip.
- Work together to identify common goals and outcomes for children. Delivered by a collective-impact approach which would see network meetings move away from information sharing to working collaboratively to address common measures that require improvement (e.g. child development rates, kindergarten participation rates, English proficiency).
- Develop a collective model around stimulating home-learning environments for families in Port Phillip. This could be based on programs already established in other municipalities. For

example, 'Wodonga's: No-one Left Behind' program where they provide literacy fun packs and concept bags to provide in-home support and home learning stimulation. (Source: <https://elaa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/No-one-left-behind.pdf>)

- Continue, and possibly expand, evidence based programs with a home-visiting component, such as *Small Talk*.
- Increased access to local libraries by vulnerable families, including new models of *Story Time* which supports attendance by vulnerable families. For example, City of Stonnington provides *Story Time* once per month on the Horace Petty Estate. A similar model in Port Phillip could be to provide *Story Time* at the Adventure Playgrounds in St.Kilda and South Melbourne.
- Increased use of Toy Libraries by vulnerable families. Pilot a model with the aim to increase access by vulnerable and disadvantaged families.
- Mobilise the broader community to play an active role in supporting the healthy development of children. For example, Port Phillip has a large pool of active retirees who are willing to contribute to their community. Star Health has recently completed a pilot inter-generational project with Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre which successfully brought older people in to the centre to support language development for the children. The success of the pilot has led to the project being adopted and expanded as an ongoing project by the centre.
- Investigate the opportunities of taking a 'first 1000 days' approach: developing services and supports for parents-to-be in the pre-conception and pregnant population

What is unique to Port Phillip that compliments children and families:

- Good mix of early education providers (council, community and private managed centres)
- Already established integrated services (Poet's Grove, Bubup Womindjeka, Ferrars' St Precinct)
- Access to high quality outdoor spaces (beach, parks, playgrounds, sporting facilities, etc.)
- Vibrant community groups
- A large pool of active retirees who are willing to contribute to their community
- New integrated school approach (this should also occur at South Melbourne Park Primary)
- Fishermans Bend Development
- More public swimming pools, or innovative ideas for swimming lessons for children

Summary

Our key focus is to ensure that all children in Port Phillip are provided with the best possible start to life. We realise that more work is needed to be done, especially for vulnerable families, to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. The Star Health Health Promotion Team and Child, Youth and Family Team are interested in working collaboratively with Port Phillip's Children Services to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, especially for vulnerable children.