Children’s Centres
for Early Childhood Development and Parenting
2015 Report

Government of South Australia
More centres announced

Since 2005, South Australia has been developing a network of children’s centres for early childhood development and parenting for children from the antenatal phase to age 8, and their families. As at December 31 2015 there were 42 children’s centres completed and operational across South Australia.

Five new children’s centres were announced in the last State Budget. These will be located at Pennington, Brompton, Roxby Downs, Seaton and Mt Barker. The construction of the centres involves new builds as well as refurbishment of existing spaces.

Expansion of services

In 2014 the SA government committed to expanding the range of services available in children’s centres, with recruitment and staff placement gradually occurring during 2014 and 2015. This process included:

- increasing the Family Services program in 2014 from 18.5 to 28.5 full-time equivalent positions in 33 children’s centres
- increasing the Allied Health program from 8 to 19.2 full-time equivalent positions across 32 centres
- the employment of the Allied Health staff by DECD
- creating a senior occupational therapist and senior speech pathologist.

With the expansion of these services and the inclusion of the Allied Health program as a DECD led service these 2 programs will now be known as the Family Support program and will have an increased focus on early intervention for vulnerable children and families.
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Children’s centres support children and families to achieve the best possible learning, health and wellbeing outcomes in a universal setting with targeted responses for children and families who may require additional support.

The South Australian government has established 42 children’s centres comprising 38 children’s centres for early childhood development and parenting (children’s centres) and 4 children and family centres across metropolitan and regional South Australia.

The centres are a collaborative early childhood initiative that brings together care, education, health, community development activities and family services for children from the antenatal phase to age 8, and their families.

An interagency partnership approach ensures the work connected with children’s centres contributes to the priority population outcomes in the following ways:

1. Children have optimal health, learning and development.
2. Parents provide strong foundations for their children’s healthy development and wellbeing.
3. Communities are child and family friendly.
4. Aboriginal children are safe, healthy, culturally strong and confident.

Programs and services

While each children’s centre differs according to their community strengths and needs, a range of services and programs are common across all centres, including:

> care and education
  - preschool
  - long day care or occasional care
  - playgroups
> health programs and information
> family support programs and services
> community development activities.

Decisions regarding services offered in each centre are made by the local leadership team and key partner agencies. These include government agencies, non-government and community-based organisations, parents, community members and staff.
Staff

Children’s centres bring together a multidisciplinary workforce with a range of professional backgrounds, expertise, and knowledge, united by a shared commitment that children and families will experience seamless service delivery.

Staff in each children’s centre includes a director or head of school early years, early childhood teachers and educators, and a community development coordinator (CDC). CDCs work in partnership with other agencies to offer a range of programs and services, and support parents and families to actively participate in all the activities of the children’s centre.

In some centres staff will also include:

» family services coordinators (FSC) who support the improvement of outcomes for families experiencing parenting difficulties and child development issues

» allied health (AH) staff such as occupational therapists (OTs) and speech pathologists (SPs) who build the capacity of staff and parents to improve children’s developmental outcomes by providing prevention and early intervention services

» Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) clinic staff including maternal health nurses who provide health checks.

The children’s centre leadership team is led by the director or head of school early years and may comprise the CDC, FSC, AH staff, assistant director, assistant principal or principal. This leadership team has shared responsibility for integrated service delivery reflective of the community and:

» monitors, reports and contributes to the achievement of the National Quality Standards

» develops program and service priorities

» develops strategies for encouraging broad communication and participation

» shares and analyses relevant data and research, including the Australian Early Development Census and community profiling.
Establishing integrated services

The Children’s Centres team continued to work closely with centre staff, families, communities, local service agencies, architects and staff from the Department for Education and Child Development’s (DECD) Capital Programs and Asset Services to ensure that the needs and suggestions of all users were considered as part of the overall planning of the 5 new centres which will be located at:

- Pennington
- Brompton
- Roxby
- Mt Barker
- Seaton.

Central to the establishment of the centres as integrated services is the understanding that service delivery models must take account of the particular community context. Models must also be responsive to the needs of children, families and communities, ensuring a child and family focus and offer a range of services. The children’s centres integrated services model seeks to:

- improve access by children and families to a broader range of services and programs through collaborative relationships across providers
- offer a greater choice of service options to families
- make it easier for families to navigate systems and services
- support and actively engage families in services, programs and decision making
- ensure accountability to the family and local community as well as other key stakeholders
- strengthen the capacity of the community to enable more supportive environments for children and families
- ensure programs are responsive to local needs and circumstances.
Promoting children’s centres

The Children’s Centres team has a role in promoting and raising the profile of children’s centres and their work to the wider community.

Pregnancy, Babies and Children’s Expo

The Pregnancy, Babies and Children’s Expo was held at the Royal Adelaide Showgrounds in April. Staff from children’s centres and Statewide Services and Child Development hosted a stand with the theme, First Five Forever, which highlighted the importance of the first 5 years of a child’s life and promoted initiatives including Great Start, My Health and Development Record (the Blue Book), Parenting Easy Guides, Child and Family Health Services, The Little Big Book Club (LBBC), and Nature Play SA.

Staff engaged with families and promoted a range of education, care and health services available to support families and their young children to achieve the best start in life.

Parenting programs in children’s centres were of great interest to families and staff discussed the range of support available, such as playgroups, infant massage, antenatal services, baby yoga, multiple birth groups and Getting To Know Your Baby courses.

Connect DECD Induction Expo

The annual DECD Induction Expo was held at the Convention Centre in April. The expo program incorporated exhibitor booths, a workshop series and guest speaker sessions. DECD and prospective employees attended the event which introduced them to the department, the strategic directions, and recruitment and career opportunities.

Early Childhood Services managed an exhibitor booth at the expo, engaging directly with prospective and existing employees to promote various career opportunities and the range of early childhood services including children's centres.

The booth was well visited by a range of people from students, DECD staff and external partner agencies and organisations. A high proportion of visitors were students interested in a career in early childhood with queries focusing on the varying learning and care programs, work environments, relevant qualifications and employment processes.

Children and family centres

Four children and family centres have been established in South Australia providing early childhood programs and services for Aboriginal children from the antenatal phase to age 8, and their families.

Children and family centres have a strong focus on supporting Aboriginal families with young children and reflect a philosophy of acknowledgement, engagement and inclusion of Aboriginal history, culture and community. Open to all members of the community, services include preschool, occasional care, Learning Together programs, playgroups and a range of parenting and health programs. The centres include:

» Taikurrendi Children and Family Centre at Christies Beach
» Ngura Yadurin Children and Family Centre at Ceduna
» Gabmididi Manoo Children and Family Centre at Whyalla
» Ernabella Children and Family Centre in the APY Lands.
Planning in children’s centres

All work connected with children’s centres contributes to the department’s strategic plan and the following priorities and key actions:

» Improve health and wellbeing: Improve access to early childhood services that provide a range of multidisciplinary, universal and targeted child development services

» Right service at the right time: Build the role of integrated service hubs and children’s centres in providing a range of universal and targeted services in communities.

Children’s centres also:

» contribute to the priority population outcomes identified in the Outcomes Framework

» are guided by the National Quality Framework

» are informed by community engagement and profiling, and data collection and evaluation processes.

The Children’s Centres Outcomes Framework

The Outcomes Framework is a statewide population-level framework and a shared commitment to integrated planning and implementation at the state, regional and local levels. The community population outcomes are:

1. Children have optimal health, learning and development
2. Parents provide strong foundations for their children’s healthy development and wellbeing
3. Communities are child and family friendly
4. Aboriginal children are safe, culturally strong and confident.
National Quality Framework (NQF)

The NQF is an agreement between all Australian governments to work together to provide better educational and developmental outcomes for children attending education and care services. Research shows that access to quality education and care services can provide better health, education and employment outcomes later in life.

The NQF raises quality through regulation of the National Quality Standard (NQS) and drives continuous improvement and consistency to improve education and care services across the nation. It also provides clear and comprehensive information for families about services for their children.

The NQS comprises 7 quality areas including program and practice, health and safety, physical environment, staffing, relationships with children, partnerships and leadership.

Children’s centres are guided by the NQF and apply the NQS. During 2015, 7 children’s centres underwent the assessment and rating cycle and were rated as “Exceeding” the NQS. All children’s centres continued their self-review process and revised their quality improvement plan for a second year, as part of the ongoing quality improvement cycle.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

The AEDC provides communities around Australia with information about how local children have developed by the time they start school. The AEDC is a COAG-endorsed national progress measure of early childhood development and a key performance measure for SA Strategic Plan target 12 – ‘increase the proportion of children developing well’.

During 2015 the third national AEDC data collection was held. AEDC data was included in partnership reviews throughout the year, reinforcing its significance for sites, including children’s centres to use in their planning for the needs of children and to link to other services and community partners.

The Mount Gambier Children’s Centre local AEDC action group is an example of this. The centre together with community partners and local council, were successful in converting an industry community capacity building grant into a custom made ‘Play on Wheels’ trailer. The trailer holds natural and recycled loose parts for children to play with, donated by community businesses. The idea builds on research that children’s development is enhanced when adults are active participants in play with their children.

Data will be available in 2016 to provide additional information to centres to assist with their planning.
Early Years System (EYS)

In line with DECD’s reporting and accountability framework, ICT have enhanced the EYS to allow for increased integration of data collection in children’s centres.

Whilst preschool data was already being captured in the EYS, data from the family and community programs and services being offered by children’s centres was not being collected uniformly. This enables a better mechanism for collecting demographic data about who uses the centre and which programs are highly utilised to follow up on their effectiveness.

Enhancements to the EYS will result in:

» more efficient recording and reporting on required service usage data
» a more efficient process for families
» more accurate assessment of reach and impact of children’s centres.

In 2015, a number of children’s centres began trialling the EYS. Representatives from each centre met to provide feedback about the training process and written support, the draft forms and system functionality. Feedback received informed the ongoing implementation and operation of the system.

To support the implementation of EYS the enhancements and resources were presented to all centres during the children’s centres professional learning days and a series of training sessions were provided along with an EYS workbook.

By 2016 all centres will be expected to enter data in the family and community programs within the EYS.

Qualitative evaluation of children’s centres

The Telethon Kids Institute, through the Fraser Mustard Centre, was engaged to undertake a three-year evaluation of children’s centres. The overall aims of the evaluation are to measure process and impact of integrated services in centres. The first stage of work involving focus groups and interviews was completed in 2013.

The final evaluation report will be delivered mid-2016.
Early childhood services priorities

During 2015 early childhood leaders (ELCs) continued to lead 7 evidence-based projects to contribute to improving the lives of South Australian children:

1. Improving preschool attendance
2. Developing early childhood leadership
3. Quality early childhood services
4. Continuity of learning and transition
5. Children’s centres – a hub for community
6. Engaging families in their children’s learning
7. Redeveloped preschool outdoor learning environments.

Children’s centres had significant engagement in all the projects given their connection with the community and their role as leaders in the field.

Specifically Gawler and District College B-12, Lake Windermere B-7 School and Mt Gambier Children’s Centres were involved in the Children’s centres – a hub for community project. The aim of the project was to identify opportunities to impact on and support improved outcomes for families and children in the broader community, document how centre teams effectively engage with the broader community to inform other services and contribute to the statewide professional learning for all children’s centre teams.

Evaluation of this project led to the following recommendations to maximise the impact for families:

» children’s centres develop a shared vision across the local partnership applying the hub and spoke principles
» the capacity of the leadership team is maximised through recruitment and communication processes
» children’s centres teams invest in relationship building
» a knowledge of data and evidence is used to drive decision making about programs and services
» professional learning about hub and spoke principles is undertaken
» a review process is built to ensure the efficacy of the hub and spoke model.

In 2016 the final project report will be developed with detailed recommendations to enhance the expansion of the hub and spoke model of service delivery across South Australia.
Professional development

The Professional Development program in 2015 consisted of 4 partnership-based groups comprising directors, heads of school early years, CDCs, FSCs, AH staff, assistant directors and early childhood leaders and members of Early Childhood Services, and a statewide gathering for all centres.

This was a new model based on evaluation of the program in 2014. The important elements of the program were identified as:

- multi-disciplinary team presence at the professional learning days
- a focus on learning rather than information delivery
- opportunity for learning between events
- opportunities for centre teams to share practice with others.

Each of the 4 partnership-based groups brought centre teams together with a focus on integrated service delivery, shared practice and planning. The focus of the statewide day in term 3 was ‘building engagement – establishing positive working relationship for the benefit of children and families’. The program included a broad range of presenters and workshops including plenary sessions by Kidsmatter Early Childhood, Jane Lemon, Manger Family Learning and Mandy Seyfang, senior OT Children’s Centres.

Concurrent presentations included a range of topics from working with infants, an overview of Multi Agency Protection Services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, supporting new arrivals, developing mindfulness to promote engagement, working with families with English as an additional language and working together for children and young people. Feedback from centres showed the day exceeded expectations; with energising activities and engaging presentations, opportunities to network and connect with others and useful content to challenge thinking and change practice.

Family Support program

In 2015 staff from the Family Support program team delivered a range of presentations through media, conferences and workshops to various audiences including centre staff and key stakeholders.

The presentations to children’s centres staff were aimed at building their capacity to respond appropriately to vulnerable families. The Family Support program team:

- played a lead role in developing the professional development days over the year
- provided centre-specific presentations eg a workshop at Goolwa Children’s Centre entitled Babies and Toddlers: Early Identification And Intervention.

The Family Support program staff also has a role in raising the profile of children’s centres and their work to support vulnerable families to the wider community. The sharing of professional development expertise also ensures positive partnerships are built with key stakeholders for example, CaFHS, Families SA, educators, departmental senior speech pathologists and the public. Examples of this during 2015 include:

- workshops on the clinical significant of early co-regulation for both parent and infant at the Marce Society for Perinatal Mental Health conference, and SP and OT perspectives on young children’s development for CaFHS nurses
- sessions on exploring collaboration between Student Support Services and children’s centres for senior SPs, and foundational skills for numeracy and literacy for the Results Plus Numeracy and Literacy team.
- sharing expertise and knowledge on attachment and trauma and reflective parenting with Families SA.
Journal clubs

In 2015 Uni SA’s International Centre for Allied Health Evidence (iCAHE) supported the development of journal clubs across children’s centres. Centre staff and ECLs become facilitators to lead reflective and evidence-based practice, reflect on successful strategies for integrating evidence into practice and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Several journal clubs met during 2015 including OTs and SPs, ECLs and directors and members of the Children’s Centres team. Topics for discussion included promoting social and emotional development with young children, inter-professional practice and language delay. The Responsive Relationships project was developed as an outcome of the Children’s Centres team journal club and will be implemented in a number of centres in 2016.

Responsive relationships project

During 2015 the Social and Emotional Responsive Relationships project was developed. The project aims to build and support children’s centre staff to embed responsive, relational skills into everyday work practices in order to increase protective factors such as children’s self-esteem, and sense of belonging and safety to positively influence children’s developmental trajectories.

The focus of this project is on developing secure relationships through the whole centre team spending focused time on responsive interactions with children in the centre through workshops, practice and reflection guided by the FSC and AH staff. Major components of the project include 2 training workshops that introduce specific skills for each week of the 10-week program and weekly reflective practice sessions.

In 2016, 3 centres will participate in the project and in 2017 the project will be facilitated in other children’s centres. The project is based on an action research model and will be developed with feedback throughout the project.
Outcomes report

1. Children have optimal health, learning and development

Children’s physical and psychological health and wellbeing is a critical foundation for their learning, and in turn successful learning outcomes promote a child’s sense of wellbeing. Support for parents and children during the early years, promotes healthy development and lays the foundations for achieving optimal outcomes in adulthood.

Health services in children’s centres
Families utilising children’s centres have access to a range of SA Health services including:

» health promotion materials and activities
» CaFHS clinics located at C.a.F.E. Enfield, il nido, Gawler, Aldinga Beach, Cowandilla, Ingle Farm, Woodcroft Heights and Goolwa children’s centres
» CaFHS visiting services
» primary health care services such as paediatric services at John Hartley, Blair Athol and Mark Oliphant and GP Plus at Parafield Gardens and Trinity Gardens Children’s Centres
» Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
» antenatal clinics at Cowandilla, John Hartley School Birth – 7, Ocean View College, Parafield Gardens and Trinity Gardens children’s centres
» Australian Breastfeeding Association at Trinity Gardens children’s centre
» Central Children and Family team, Women’s and Children’s Health Network at Lockleys Children’s Centre.

Allied health program
The Allied Health in Children’s Centres program provides speech pathology and occupational therapy, and early intervention services to promote optimal child development outcomes. These roles complement other staff in centres, including educators, community development coordinators and family services coordinators.

In 2015 the program was expanded from 8 to 19.2 FTE working across 32 children’s centres and DECD for the first time employed occupational therapists to provide services along with speech pathologists in children’s centres. In addition 2 senior positions in speech pathology and occupational therapy were created to provide professional support and supervision for these staff.

Enhanced partnership with CaFHS
A project commenced in 2013 to review ways the CaFHS ‘Blue Book’ could increase knowledge of child development, earlier identification of developmental issues and be used by educators to discuss concerns about children’s development with parents. In 2015 the project recommendations were implemented across all children’s centres and key messages promoted throughout the year included:

» the ‘Blue Book’ is a tool for educators to use in conversations with parents about any concerns they may have in relation to their child’s health and development
» the ‘Blue Book’ provides examples of developmental milestones for children so educators and families can use a common language when discussing a child’s progress or any concerns
» the developmental milestones provide a common language for starting a conversation with families
» educators, with family permission, can make notes in the ‘Blue Book’ which can be shared with the family GP, the CaFHS nurse and other family members.
In addition a video was produced at O’Sullivan Beach Children’s Centre demonstrating the benefits and outcomes of embedding the ‘Blue Book’ as part of children’s centres philosophy.

Preschool

All children’s centres offer preschool providing 15 hours access for children in the year before they start formal schooling. Aboriginal children and children under the Guardianship of the Minister are able to attend from 3 years of age.

Preschool programs are designed and delivered by qualified teachers using the approved national curriculum framework, the Early Years Learning framework. The framework has a specific emphasis on play-based learning and recognises the importance of children having a strong sense of identity and wellbeing, being confident and involved learners, effective communicators and being connected with their world.

Inclusive preschool programs

Inclusive Preschool Programs (IPP) support children with disability and high support needs to optimise their learning outcomes within a localised preschool setting. The programs provide families with a preschool education option for their child that is both local and has specialised educational expertise. The programs cater for up to six children who attend 15 hours per week with staffing of a teacher and early childhood worker. Along with 7 preschools, IPPs operate at Elsie Ey, Kirton Point, Tinyeri and Parks children’s centres.

Preschool outdoor learning project

In early 2014, the SA government announced an initiative to redevelop the outdoor learning areas of 20 preschools. In the first round during 2014 and 2015 this involved 5 demonstration sites including Sturt Street Children’s Centre. In the second round during 2015 a further 5 outdoor areas commenced development.

The demonstration sites are considered concept leaders and support other preschool educators across the State to actively engage children, families and the local community in connecting with nature.

Community development coordinators local to the demonstration sites contributed to each round of the project using the breadth of their community engagement skills and experience. Community development coordinators from Parks, Aldinga Beach, Sturt Street, Trinity Gardens and Port Pirie West children’s centres worked collaboratively with the site leader, Natural Resource Management and the architect to engage and consult with children, families, staff and the community to inform the design and creation of the outdoor learning space.

In 2016 the second round of demonstration sites are expected to be completed. During 2017 and 2018 a further 10 sites’ outdoor learning areas will be redeveloped with the continued support of local CDC expertise.
Playgroups

Playgroups in children’s centres offer an interactive and fun opportunity for children and parents to play and learn together. They also assist the development of relationships with professionals, local networks and connections for families.

Some playgroups are facilitated by parents and some are supported by an early childhood professional such as an educator, speech pathologist and occupational therapist, or a combination of these.

In 2015 there was an increased focus on targeted playgroups for families and children with particular needs. These playgroups were facilitated by a range of government and non-government agencies including Autism SA, Downs Syndrome Society of SA, Can Do 4 Kids, Multiple Birth Association and Save the Children.

Playgroups allow professionals to interact with children and families in an informal non-clinical environment and provide support, information and advice regarding children’s health, learning and development in a group play-based setting.

All children’s centres offer playgroups.

Some examples of playgroups offered in 2015 include:

- Multiple Birth Playgroup: a weekly parent-led group for multiple birth families, endorsed by the Multiple Birth Association
- Young Parents Play and Connect: a supported group for parents aged up to 25 years and their children, provided in partnership with Centacare and Communities for Children
- Baby and Me: a weekly group for parents and their babies aged under 12 months to connect and interact in a supportive environment
- Tunes, Twists and Turns: an energetic and educational group for parents and their children, facilitated by AH staff
- Saturday DAKS: a monthly group for fathers and children aged birth to 5 years.

Central Children and Family Team

The Central Children and Family Team, Women’s and Children’s Health Network provide free allied health development support to children under 4 years and their families. Services include information and support for parents and support for children’s skill development in a range of areas including communication, play, fine motor skills, nutritional health and behaviour. The team consists of workers from a range of professions including speech pathology, occupational therapy, nutrition and dietetics and social work.

In 2015 the team, located at Port Adelaide Primary Health Care Services, liaised with the Children’s Centres team resulting in relocation to Lockleys Children Centre with facilities for the team to provide individual and group sessions on a daily basis and group programs on a weekly basis.

SA Dental Service

SA Dental Service worked collaboratively with children’s centres during 2015 to screen preschool children for tooth decay. The service developed a simple screening tool to assist in the identification and referral of children suffering from tooth decay. Decay in baby teeth is a predictor of decay in permanent teeth.

During 2015, SA Dental Service staff visited 15 metropolitan children’s centres to screen children for tooth decay, to promote free dental visits for preschool children and to raise awareness of the importance of oral health. In 2015, 15% of children referred into the program were Aboriginal.
Family services

The Family Services program is a targeted service designed to support vulnerable families and strengthen family and community capacity in responding to children. Family services coordinators work alongside child care, early childhood education and school staff, health workers and other services to help families develop and maintain safe, caring, connected and resilient relationships. FSCs:

- support parents to access support within their own community
- work with families to increase their parenting capacity and early childhood development skills and knowledge, specifically in understanding the importance of relationships with children
- increase children and families’ access to a range of interconnected, high quality learning, health and support services
- contribute to building children’s centres expertise in responding to children experiencing the effects of trauma, abuse and neglect
- provide short-term counselling to identify and respond to personal and family issues
- connect families with appropriate services such as, mental health, housing, drug and alcohol, domestic violence and provide follow up, advocacy and work in partnership with the family and other services.

In 2014, the SA government committed to expanding services in children’s centres, including the Family Services program. The program now consists of 28.5 full-time equivalent positions in 33 children’s centres. With the expansion of Family Services and the creation of an Allied Health service these 2 programs will now be known as the Family Support program and will have an increased focus on early intervention for vulnerable children and families.

During 2015, 2 senior FSCs continued to provide clinical supervision and case support to FSCs, support to centre leaders regarding complex families and induction of new staff. They also provided advice and support at the strategic level and supported the implementation of partnership work with Families SA including delivering the Family Contact program in children’s centres. Also an arrangement for psychologists from Families SA to be based in some children’s centres was successfully negotiated.

In March 2015, a number of FSCs attended 5-day facilitator training in the Circle of Security parenting program. FSCs were also provided opportunities for training in Marte Meo practices, a communications approach to supporting children’s development.

Parents provide strong foundations for their children’s healthy development and wellbeing

Parents have the primary role of guiding and nurturing their child’s development and helping them grow and learn. Children’s centres support parents with this vital role.
Parenting programs

The diversity of parenting programs being offered in children’s centres reflects the partnerships that have been developed across agencies and non-government organisations by the CDCs and the FSCs.

Programs focus on areas of parenting capacity and children’s development that concern and interest families. These include literacy, behaviour management, food, nutrition and exercise and caring for children’s developmental, learning and health needs.

Some examples of parenting programs offered at children’s centres during 2015 include:

- Infant massage groups: promote parents’ ability to read and respond to their babies’ arousal states, cues and signals through learning different massage techniques and ways to manager their own need for relaxation
- Getting to know your baby courses: offered by CaFHS, cover topics such as feeding, settling, massage, safety, common illness and developmental stages and play
- Fun with food groups: promote parents’ understanding of why their children might be a picky eater and explore food and mealtimes
- My Time: a weekly peer support group for parents and carers of children with a disability or chronic illness, provided in partnership with the Women’s and Children’s Health Network
- Utilities Literacy: a program providing support to parents to reduce financial hardship associated with electricity, gas and water utilities and strategies for balancing a family budget.

Learning together

Learning Together programs focus on involving families in their children’s learning and emphasising the importance of children’s oral language development. The programs also focus on parents reading to children from an early age, the development of children’s strong dispositions to learning, attachment and the critical role that parents play in supporting their children.

In 2015 a review of the program was conducted. Previous evaluations have consistently shown that it has a powerful effect on parents’ behaviour, knowledge and confidence in engaging with their children’s learning. This review highlighted the value of the program in supporting children and their families make smoother transitions to preschool and school, in developing self-regulation, and children having improved behaviour and play skills in preschool and school.

The review recommended that Learning Together outreach programs be located in children’s centres.

As a result of the review the number of Learning Together programs located in a children’s centre has been extended. This allows families access to the other programs and services being offered at the centres, therefore providing a strong basis for engaging families in their children’s learning from birth. Learning Together teachers are now located at Elizabeth Grove Community Campus, Lake Windemere B-7 school, Gilles Plains, Blair Athol North School B-7, Woodville Gardens School B-7 and Port Augusta children’s centres and offer playgroups and parenting groups.

Learning Together programs also work in collaboration with C.a.F.E Enfield, O’Sullivan Beach and Port Pirie West children’s centres.

Learning Together continues to be offered in the Taikurrendi, Gabmididi Manoo and Ngura Yadurirn children and family centres.

Learning Together @ Home enhances the capacity of families to support young children’s learning and development through play, typically through home visiting or involvement with groups. The program is available to families with children aged birth to 4 years. Those who are not connected with other community, family or children’s services are a priority. Learning Together @ Home is offered through C.a.F.E. Enfield, Forbes, Clare Valley, Port Augusta and Kirton Point children’s centres.
Parenting SA

A free seminar for parents entitled The Wonderful World Of Toddlers was provided at the Adelaide Convention Centre in November and broadcast live via webcast. It was one of Parenting SA’s popular series with the children’s centres senior OT presenting a session on understanding toddlers, their feelings and what parents can do to support them.

As the topic related to supporting parents of young children, 11 children’s centres hosted a live webcast for parents, staff and others to view the seminar together. A recorded version was also available to view online.

Other key activities related to this event included:

» a follow-up workshop, Little People With BIG Feelings provided by the senior OT at Tinyeri Children’s Centre in Murray Bridge. Feedback from parents and staff was extremely positive. Interest in this workshop has led to it being offered in other children’s centres in 2016

» work with Parenting SA to develop short video clips for parents on understanding toddlers, and how parents can support them in play and managing feelings and tantrums. These will be available on the Parenting SA website in 2016.

Acorn Parent Infant Attachment groups

In collaboration with Anglicare SA the number of children’s centres providing Acorn groups expanded during 2015. The groups are now provided at Aldinga Beach, Cowandilla, Darlington, Gilles Plains, Kaurna Plains and Woodcroft Heights children’s centres.

Acorn groups provide an opportunity for parents with diagnosed mental health difficulties to come together and be supported in their relationship with their infant aged birth to 36 months. The Acorn group is structured to strengthen the relationship between parent and infant through experiences of dance, play and dedicated parent only time for reflection through journaling.

The program is designed to support parents to overcome blocks in their ability to accurately and appropriately read, interpret and respond to their infant’s cues as a result of their mental health difficulties. The emphasis is also on supporting the child’s exploration of the world and managing their feelings through relationships.

The numbers of referrals for the groups are high and a new group at Gawler and District College B-12 Children’s Centre will commence in August 2016.
3. Communities are child and family friendly

Children’s centres strengthen the capacity of the community to provide more supportive environments for young children and their families.

**Community development program**

The environments for community development coordinators are appointed at each children’s centre to develop partnerships within the community and with other agencies, and to encourage and support parents and families to actively participate in all the activities of the children’s centre.

Community development coordinators work in partnership with other agencies to offer a range of programs and services including:

- playgroups for parents and carers
- parenting programs including child development, early literacy, song time, music and movement, baby massage, support groups and cooking
- community events such as family fun days, cultural events, celebrations and barbecues
- personal development to enhance literacy, career pathways, skill development, volunteering, TAFE and SACE studies.

CDCs plan and coordinate family and community programs that enhance parenting and community capacity. During 2015 CDCs continued to:

- connect families with services and supports that will best meet their needs
- support families to increase their knowledge and skills about parenting and childhood development
- support parents to develop personally and build their leadership skills
- support families to link up with other families and become involved in community activities and programs
- encourage families and staff to have a strong voice about the programs and services offered
- help children and families access high quality services.

**Community events**

To engage the community and increase community connections, promote the children’s centre and celebrate families, centres regularly host or become involved in community activities and events. During 2015 children’s centres hosted a range of community activities and events.

Aldinga Beach Children’s Centre hosted the Family, Fun and Feast event to connect community with each other and local services. Agencies such as Learning Together, Communities for Children, Onkaparinga Youth Services, Oz Harvest, Anglicare, Aldinga Country Fire Service, Parenting Playground, Asperutely Autsume, Aldinga Sharks Soccer Club and the Aldinga Bay Residents Association offered healthy, fun activities for children and information for parents.

Clare Valley Children’s Centre hosted a market where local arts and crafts were displayed and fun, free activities were available. With over 1000 people attending this was an exciting way to develop local partnerships and networks.

Children at Kalaya Children’s Centre celebrated Reconciliation Week by participating in the Reconciliation Relay, coordinated by the Port Adelaide Enfield Council. For the relay, children created a book about reconciliation and shared the English, Kaurna and Pitjantjatjara songs they learnt at the centre.

Gawler and District College B-12 Children’s Centre hosted a Family Fun day event including a family picnic and playgroup for National Families Week.

Lake Windemere B-7 school Children’s Centre hosted Kids, Blokes and Dad Jokes programs with school holiday events such as trips to the zoo, nature play days and visits to Bunnings Warehouse. The group was supported by 2 fatherhood workers employed through a partnership with Novita Children’s Services.
4. Aboriginal children are safe, healthy, culturally strong and confident

Programs and services for Aboriginal families

All children’s centres have a responsibility to build a culturally supportive environment, to engage Aboriginal children and families in their programs and events and support families to access services. Some examples of this include:

» Wakwakko Young Doctors: a 15-week program for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to learn about health and leadership and become ambassadors for their community at Aldinga Beach Children’s Centre

» Pangula Parenting Program: a culturally rich parenting program for Aboriginal families at Mount Gambier Children’s Centre

» Nunga Playgroup: a weekly supported playgroup held at Maringga Turtipandi Aboriginal Outreach Health Service at Kirton Point Children’s Centre

» Ngarrindjeri Language Class: offered weekly for community members, provided by MIPAAC Aboriginal Corporation (Miwi-inyeri Pelepi-ambi) at Goolwa Children’s Centre

» Aboriginal Wellbeing Support: a weekly counselling and family support service providing advice and guidance for parents and carers at Tinyeri Children’s Centre

» Sacred Little Ones – Parent Infant Attachment Group: a nurturing group for Aboriginal families to support the wellbeing of parents and carers and their children aged birth to 36 months at O’Sullivan Beach Children’s Centre

» Marni Waendi Transition Pathways Centre: a program for Aboriginal youth and adults to support further education, training and employment.

There are 3 centres that provide specific programs and support for Aboriginal children and families at Kaurna Plains, Kalaya and Tinyeri children’s centres. In addition 4 children and family centres located in Ceduna, Christies Beach, Whyalla and Ernabella in the APY Lands focus on supporting Aboriginal families with young children to provide the best possible start in life.
Children and family centres

Children and family centres are committed to improving developmental outcomes for Aboriginal children and improving Aboriginal families’ use of early childhood development services to optimise their children’s development.

Centres are underpinned by a philosophy of cooperation between parents, community, government and non-government partners and both complement and expand the existing network of integrated early childhood services in South Australia. During 2015 a range of services and programs were provided at each centre.

Ernabella Children and Family Centre:
» Fathers Group: provided fortnightly by CaFHS to engage fathers in their child’s development
» Supported Playgroup: held daily with a focus on child development and parent education and support
» Nganampa Health Council Healthy for Life Program: provided child health checks, immunisations and growth and development monitoring.

Gabmididi Manoo Children and Family Centre:
» Strengthening Separated Families: facilitated by Uniting Care Wesley Country SA
» Bright Stars: offered weekly for parents to connect with other parents and gain information about centre and local services
» Playgroup for Young Mums: held weekly for mothers and their children to engage in play activities and connect with other families.

Ngura Yadurirn Children and Family Centre:
» Ngunţju Tjuta Ita Tjuta: held fortnightly group for expecting mothers of Nunga babies to connect with other families, facilitated by Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
» Minya Bubs Time: a weekly supported playgroup for young mothers and their children to engage in activities and information, facilitated by Save the Children
» Nunga Yarn Time Cook Up: a weekly group for parents to learn and prepare easy, healthy family recipes.

Taikurrendi Children and Family Centre:
» Nunga Mi Mininis Playgroup: held weekly for mums, aunties, grandmas and sisters and their children to engage in activities and connect with other families
» Southern Outreach Learning Experience SACE Group: a weekly study group for young mothers undertaking subjects towards SACE facilitated by Christies Beach High School
» Aboriginal My Time: a weekly support group for parents, carers and grandparents of children with a disability or chronic illness, provided in partnership with the Women’s and Children’s Health Network.
Locations

The following centres have been opened progressively since 2005:

Aldinga Beach
Andamooka
Ardtornish
Blair Athol North School Birth-7
C.a.F.E. Enfield
Clare Valley
Cowandilla
Darlington
Elizabeth Grove Community Campus
Elsie Ey (Hewett)
Ernabella
Forbes (South Plympton)
Gabmidid Manoo (Whyalla)
Gawler and District College Birth-12
Gilles Plains
Goolwa
Hackham West
il nido (Paradise)
Ingle Farm
John Hartley School Birth-7
Kalaya
Kaurna Plains (Elizabeth)
Keithcot Farm
Kirton Point (Port Lincoln)
Lake Windemere School B-7 (Salisbury North)
Lockleys
Mark Oliphant College Birth-12 (Munno Para West)
Mount Gambier
Ngura Yadurirn (Ceduna)
Ocean View College (Taperoo)
O’Sullivan Beach
Parafield Gardens
Parks (Angle Park)
Port Augusta
Port Pirie West
Renmark
Sturt Street (Adelaide)
Takurrendi
Tinyeri (Murray Bridge)
Trinity Gardens
Woodcroft Heights
Woodville Gardens School Birth-7.

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Department for Education and Child Development
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