



Australian Research Alliance
for Children & Youth



Creating Child Friendly Cities (CCFC) Conference:

Outcomes and Directions Statement

This document provides an outcomes and directions statement for the CCFC Conference which was jointly conducted by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and the Urban Research Program, Griffith University (URP). The symposium was held at NSW Parliament House, Sydney, 30 & 31 October 2006. A draft of this document was circulated to speakers and sponsors. Following this consultation, the document was finalised in early March 2007.

The first section outlines in some detail the wide-ranging findings. This is followed by a section on future directions and key actions. Participants and other interested parties are encouraged to take forward these ideas into their own forums for further action.

1. Key findings

1. Governance and responsibility issues

- Creating child-friendly cities (CCFC) involves a complex set of challenges and issues that cross sectoral and policy boundaries. CCFC should not be regarded as a narrow professional or policy speciality but as a goal that demands integrated, cross sectoral responses. Cross-sectoral collaboration should involve the NGO sector, researchers, communities, industry, and various levels of government.
- There is a need to initiate a more concentrated focus on the importance and well-being of children and young people in urban areas. There has been too little attention on children's needs in urban policy and too little work on understanding how the built environment shapes children's well-being.
- The key dimensions and measures for child-friendly communities need to be documented. Responsibility for assessing and improving practices can only be sharpened when there is greater clarity on objectives and measures.

- Key issues might vary between cities, rural town, and remote communities. They will also differ within large urban areas; for example between outer, middle and inner suburban locations. However, common concerns should also be acknowledged.
- In relation to our current focus on urban children and youth, there is a responsibility gap: no-one seems willing to be accountable for the overall pattern of outcomes in relation to urban children's welfare.
- The silo mentality is still prevalent in many of our regulatory and service provision organisations and professional bodies.
- This should be a priority area for cross-portfolio collaboration, including child safety and urban management agencies. Joined-up policy is clearly essential.
- There is strong potential and a strong need for professionals and policymakers involved with children's welfare to collaborate with the urban development industry.
- Discussion of goals and measures should involve participation by young people themselves, recognising that different approaches to engaging children and young people are required across the age spectrum.
- It is acknowledged that the 'child safety' perspective is understandably a key focus area for state reporting and a key aspect of local level services. There is a need, however, to move beyond the perspective of any single portfolio to embrace a more integrated view of the challenges and solutions.
- There is a need to build on the social data produced by public agencies (e.g. Productivity Commission, Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies) and the program evaluations reports of state programs, to embrace a broader view of child and youth well-being in urban and rural settings.
- This is not currently a high focus area for Commonwealth activities (e.g., absence of a Children's Commissioner or a dedicated HREOC Commissioner at national level); while this could be a missed opportunity, it is noted that some federal programs (e.g. Communities for Children) are clearly very relevant and useful.
- The subsidiarity principle suggests a strong ongoing role for local government in influencing CCFC issues such as planning, building design, and access to services, and engagement with local communities.

- Regulatory frameworks need to be re-examined. They can have unintended or inconsistent results – e.g., strata title laws may unintentionally discriminate against children and thus undermine urban consolidation objectives, which include shifting families to higher density residential forms.

2. Research challenges

- We need agreed objectives and measures for child-friendly communities across a range of issues, and data collected on relevant indicators. This work needs to be integrated into the growing body of population-level and community-level data on well-being that is being driven by the ABS and various state governments.
- A key question is: How are urban services, policies and practices – broadly conceived, not just “urban planning” processes – shaping the well-being of urban children? Relevant service systems and policy settings should include transport, infrastructure, health, housing, education, community care, recreation, and property law.
- The focus on younger children needs to be complemented by a focus on adolescents and young adults, who in turn need to be involved in consideration of all these issues. The distinctively different approaches to working with younger children vis-à-vis adolescents and young adults, requires more rigorous attention. Parents and care-givers are also crucial and their perspectives need to be included.
- The three scenario scans produced for this symposium were useful because they pointed to the common and exceptional issues facing children in three distinct urban settings: inner cities, middle ring suburbs and outer or fringe suburban areas. However, more thoroughgoing analysis, both conceptual and applied, is needed concerning how children’s well-being is affected by urban forms and by the social and ecological variations that occur throughout cities.
- Applied research at the local-area level is needed to understand how issues and concerns play out in actual locations. Population-level data is not sufficient to guide how the broad understandings arising from public health and other disciplinary perspectives can be translated securely into improved public policies and urban development practices.
- Another key question is: What are the implications of urban consolidation for children? How is it possible to produce and maintain child and youth-friendly conditions in high density or ‘densifying’ areas?

- What are the common and distinct risks that face children and young people at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum? Are these effects compounded by the tendency of socio-economic groups to cluster in certain locations? To what extent do these questions similarly apply to children from non-English-speaking backgrounds and to children with disabilities?

3. Challenges for professional practice

- There is a need for better documentation of what has been attempted and what has been achieved by professionals in various sectors.
- Highlighting of good practice at state and local level is necessary. Existing patterns of learning and diffusion are not sufficiently visible. There is learning potential also from federal programs such as Communities for Children.
- There is a need for strategies on how professionals can better involve young people in the development of good practice guidelines, etc.
- There is a need for new practice-oriented materials: guides, indicators, checklists etc.
- There is a need for innovative urban pilot programs, including in both older suburbs and new-release developments.
- Public-private collaborations are supported. But how can these be initiated and influenced?
- Collaborations require multiple inputs by state agencies – such as departments of communities, Children’s Commissions, planning agencies, education and training. Higher education sector involvement is also important, for providing substantial child- and youth-focused content in teaching and research across academic disciplines and professional curricula.

4. Training opportunities

- Urban professions, including architecture and planning, appear to have lost their earlier focus on the needs of children and youth. There is a need to restore this focus within the education and training curricula of urban professionals.

- There is a need to produce integrated, cross-professional understandings of urban children's well-being, especially by linking the training and knowledge bases of social and urban professions.

5. Advocacy and communication requirements

- Is there a need for establishing a national Urban Children's taskforce/coalition, especially to gain attention of Commonwealth agencies, industry associations and NGO bodies?
- Is there a need for a network of champions for Child-friendly Cities/Communities at state level, involving Children's Commissioners, leaders of urban planning agencies, and leaders of key service agencies?
- There is a need to press for greater attention to CCFC issues amongst researchers and key research funding bodies.
- Ongoing consideration is needed to ensure the perspectives and voices of children and youth are captured in research, in development practice, in services evaluation, and in the formulation and implementation of policy.

2. Future directions for developing the CCFC agenda

- There has been strong and widespread endorsement of the CCFC agenda by this Conference (and its predecessor in 2004). There is the beginning of a network of advocates, concerned professionals, policymakers and scholars. Attendees are now keen to move to the next steps.
- Strong media interest has been evident in these issues – in both the 2004 and 2006 events. This interest needs to be encouraged and material provided to the media. [As a current example, the publishers of the capital-city periodical *Sydney/Melbourne/Brisbane's Child* have decided to institute a 'Child in the City' section. Brendan Gleeson, Fiona Stanley and others will write articles in early 2007.]

NSW Parliamentary Committee Report

- Participants noted the recommendations of the NSW Parliamentary Committee on Children and Young People, which recently reported on an Inquiry into "Children, Young People and the Built Environment". These recommendations are broadly consistent with the concerns and next steps discussed by Conference participants.

Role of local government

- It is crucial to find champions in the local government sector, and to work with them to influence Local Government or Municipal Associations at both the state and national levels. Champions are also needed to take these issues to the City Mayors' forum. There is pleasing evidence of individual local authorities (e.g. Bendigo) taking up the agenda. Many local authorities are taking initiatives in child-friendly and family-friendly service planning, including our conference sponsors Brisbane City and Gold Coast City. But much more needs to be done, including consideration of:
 - Provision of speakers on CCFC themes for local government conferences
 - Encouragement and explicit support for cities wishing to nominate for listing under the UNESCO child-friendly cities program or other accredited schemes
 - Encouragement for local authorities to audit their services and planning regimes from the perspective of impacts on children, youth and families, and for these audits to be substantially guided by the involvement of young people and their carers. Each State should provide opportunities for local authorities to develop a CCFC partnership arrangement with State agencies and with industry and NGOs.
 - State departments for local government and planning should consider how they might best become involved in supporting many of these initiatives. These agencies should consider establishing planning guidelines specifically concerned with the well-being of children, youth and families; and reviewing existing guidelines and regulations for their impact on young people.
 - Regional planning authorities and growth centre authorities should take special cognisance of these directions and measures.

Planning and design professionals

- Champions need to be identified in the planning and urban design professions, and their assistance engaged in the difficult work of identifying objectives and criteria for CCFC at a practical level.
- Relevant professional associations (e.g. in the disciplines of planning, architecture, transport) should be approached and support offered to help them to host forums on these topics; and encouraged to develop good-practice publications.

- Public agencies, property owners and professionals responsible for design of open space and recreational facilities should be encouraged to become involved in good-practice networks to promote CCFC approaches in their areas of expertise.

Engaging with industry

- As with the professions, it is crucial to identify and work with firms and business leaders who are industry champions of integrated approaches. Such firms and individuals should be included in future discussions about improving urban environments and overcoming obstacles to necessary innovations. An influencing strategy is also necessary for the private property/development industry bodies (e.g. UDIA, Property Council). CCFC should be promoted as good for business as well as good for people.

Accreditation and awards

- Following some progress with identifying objectives and criteria for CCFC, consideration could be given to ways and means of sponsoring schemes for accrediting workplaces, shopping precincts, new residential developments, urban regeneration plans, local authority areas, etc, as satisfying some basic CCFC principles.
- Consideration could be given to instituting competitive awards for CCFC initiatives at local levels. Sponsors and partners (e.g. in the professions and industry) would need to step forward to take these ideas to the next level.

Research collaborations and conferences

- There is support for continuation of CCCFC symposia – perhaps every second year, with a focus in alternate years on sectoral stakeholder initiatives.
- University research partners should be encouraged to pursue research grants through a variety of funding bodies including government agencies, industry, and the Australian Research Council. ARACY will continue to give significant emphasis to the theme of applied collaborative research on child-friendly communities in allocating seed-funding under the ARC/NHMRC Research Network “Future Generation” (five years expiring 2009).

Network direction

- ARACY and the Urban Research Program (Griffith University) can provide momentum and a degree of structure for the CCFC agenda, but a broad base of public and private sector partners and stakeholders is required including the Children’s Commissioners. It is

important to draw in broader institutional and industry players beyond those who participated in the Conference.

- Consideration could be given to forming a stronger network structure – perhaps through a national Urban Children’s taskforce/coalition – to address the above findings and to share best-practice research and solutions. What would be a mechanism for calling nominations among key stakeholders?
- Two specific tasks could be:
 - Develop some high-level CCFC objectives and indicators. The working group for this task should include representatives from agencies and organisations already undertaking projects on well-being indicators whether at community or population level.
 - Develop guidelines and suggestions on the productive involvement of young people in design, planning and services issues. The working group for this task should include representatives from bodies that have extensive experience in such processes, as well as young people themselves.

International links

- An international link could be made to the European ‘Child in the City’ network and its annual conference stream. The Stuttgart manifesto of October 2006 suggests that “child friendly policy requires an integral approach whereby all areas of life within the urban area should be child friendly: education, mobility, urban planning, care services, health, environment, leisure, sports and so on”.
- The UNICEF ‘Child-friendly Cities’ program could facilitate CCFC support activities. Other international links (North America, New Zealand, etc) could be pursued in relation to policy, professional practice, and research.
- International forums are available to professionals, state and city officials, and holders of statutory offices (e.g. the Asia Pacific Association of Children’s Commissioners). These forums should be explored to generate engagement and support for the wider agendas.

Brian Head (ARACY) & Brendan Gleeson (URP, Griffith University)

March 2007