

Creating the Conditions for Collective Impact: Transforming the Child-Serving System in Disadvantaged Communities

An Australian Research Council Linkage Project: 2013-2015

*Professor Ross Homel, Dr Kate Freiberg and Dr Sara Branch
Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice & Governance*

This project, which is being undertaken in six **Communities for Children (CfC)** sites in New South Wales with a further two planned in Queensland, Australia, is built on the **CREATE Model** for building community capacity.¹ The project is the first stage of a planned 7-year research program. The research team is based at Griffith University in Brisbane. Project partners include the Prevention Research Centre at Pennsylvania State University, four government departments including the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS), and five non-government agencies (see overleaf). The project has two fundamental goals:

1. Drawing on recent advances in prevention science, to build *a set of structured processes and resources* - a **Prevention Support System (PSS)** - to strengthen the developmental system in socially disadvantaged communities to make possible sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of children.
2. To test the PSS: (a) for *efficacy* in fostering community coalitions empowered to achieve collective impact, and (b) for *transportability* to new communities (including some Indigenous communities).

The focus of this project is on *strengthening the capacity of the child serving system* and not the implementation of evidence-based programs (EBPs) and evaluation of their impact on child wellbeing. Critically, a central objective of the current project is to make such an advance *possible* in disadvantaged areas, an objective that will be addressed in the next stage of this 7-year project.

Communities for Children is a federally funded initiative administered by Linkage partner DSS. It is designed to improve the wellbeing of children aged 0-12 living in 52 disadvantaged areas across the country. Funding is provided to a large NGO in each area (the facilitating partner) who establishes and works in partnership with community stakeholders in the design and delivery of services in response to community needs. The new PSS will provide, within the CfC framework, a structured process for achieving collective impact, which *brings together diverse organisations as clearly focused, well-resourced, skilled and fully collaborative partnerships to solve a small number of specific problems that they have identified as priorities on the basis of local data*. These collaborative partnerships, which we call **community coalitions**, can empower schools and community agencies to transcend system silos; foster ethical practice and respectful relationships; and deliver goal-directed, quantitatively evaluated, evidence-based resources that promote child wellbeing.

In building the PSS, this project will implement a number of new methodologies and technologies, many developed in the Pathways to Prevention Project²:

1. Dedicated practical support for enhancing and reinforcing collaboration for community collective action;
2. An innovative interactive *web-based set of electronic resources*, including videos, games, and evaluation tools;
3. A measure of the social, emotional and educational wellbeing of primary aged children based on an interactive computer game called *Clowning Around* that has been validated and tested for reliability on 3910 children;
4. A suite of educational computer games called *LEAF: Linking Education and Families* designed to involve both parents and children in children's learning; LEAF has been piloted but not yet implemented at scale;
5. The *Parent Empowerment and Efficacy Measure (PEEM)*, that has been validated and tested on 866 parents;
6. A *cross-agency information management system* for capturing program participation by families and children;
7. *Data collection for economic analysis* of the collective impact approach, supported by modules explaining the meaning and use of economic analysis; we will adapt the Washington State Institute for Public Policy systematic framework, which extends traditional approaches to balance economic efficiency with social equity;
8. *Measures of coalition effectiveness and functioning and community readiness* adapted from research on the **Communities That Care** prevention program in the United States³.

¹<http://www.griffith.edu.au/collective-impact>

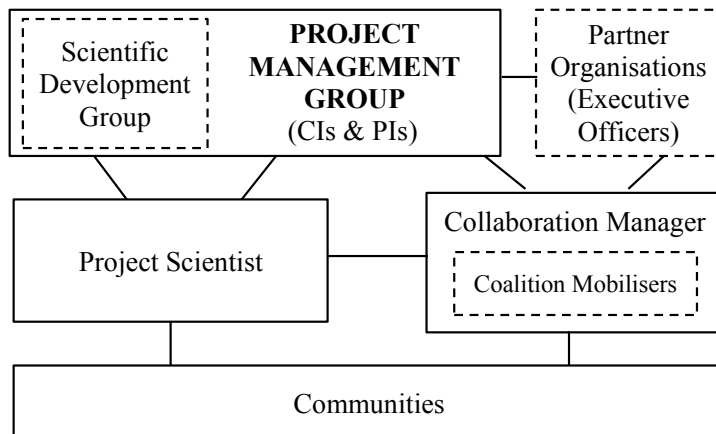
²www.griffith.edu.au/pathways-to-prevention

³www.communitiesthatcare.net

Research Design

Three CfC communities in NSW and one (planned) in Queensland are the sites for building capacity using the CREATE Model, with four other NSW and Queensland CfC sites serving as 'business as usual' communities. In all cases one of our three NGO partners is the Facilitating Partner in the community on behalf of DSS: the Smith Family, Mission Australia, or the Benevolent Society. The basic research question addressed by this study (Goal 2 above) is whether the CREATE Model succeeds in the creation of vigorous and well functioning coalitions that are empowered to deliver evidence-based services to improve mutually agreed outcomes for local children. The Model is also being 'road tested' in some communities outside NSW.

Partner Organisation Commitment and Collaboration



The research plan is being achieved through an organisational structure that incorporates (i) management of research, technical development and evaluation with (ii) management of local coalition development. The *Project Management Group* chaired by Professor Homel consists of all academic and partner investigators, and partner organization executives where possible. The committee oversees the work of the Project Scientist and Collaboration Manager and manages all aspects of the project, including: the development and quality of the PSS; the way community coalitions function; and the way each

organisation builds on the work in action communities to support future implementation of their community action plans. Based on the research, it is essential that partner organisations embed system reform in their organisational structures in order to support the implementation of the Model.

Local CfC managers are serving as Community Mobilisers, providing leadership and technical assistance, facilitating the formation and function of community coalitions, promoting the use of PSS resources, and identifying local training needs.

The Scientific Development Group consists of the academic researchers, who oversight the work of the Project Scientist and draw on the insights of partner investigators as appropriate. This group is responsible for all aspects of data collection, measurement, and evaluation, with a focus on measures of coalition functioning.

Project Participants

Universities	Non-government agencies	Government Departments
GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY Ross Homel (Project Director) Clare Tilbury (Deputy Director) Neil Dempster Matthew Manning Kate Freiberg Sara Branch	MISSION AUSTRALIA Sarah Spiker THE SMITH FAMILY Anne Hampshire Sulabar Pawar THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY Angela Carr	COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS) Jennifer Flynn NSW DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES Marilyn Chilvers NSW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & COMMUNITIES Jenny Donovan Craig Jones
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY Mark Greenberg Brian Bumbarger	THE AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION Norm Hart THE PARENTING RESEARCH CENTRE Robyn Mildon	QUEENSLAND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (To be confirmed) Angela Ferguson John Dungan