Wheatbelt Early Years Conference

“Investing in our Future”

12th March 2015 – Kellerberrin

REPORT

Prepared by Glenice Batchelor & Fiona Bush

March 2015
Wheatbelt Regional Children’s Services Plan 2015

We will work with a range of key stakeholders, including existing networks and the Wheatbelt community to increase awareness and understanding of the issues faced by the Children’s Services sector in the region.

This will be achieved through collaborative action with key partners and focus on the effective dissemination of information via a range of mediums.
Introduction
The inaugural Wheatbelt Early Years Conference (WEYC) was held on Thursday 12th March 2015 at the Kellerberrin Recreation & Leisure Centre. The event was organised by South West WA Medicare Local and Regional Development Australia – Wheatbelt, in partnership with members of the organising committee.

Wheatbelt Early Years Conference Organising Committee

- Yvette Harrison, Department of Education
- John Sylwestrzak, Sue Sieczka and Margaret Cadenhead – WA Country Health Service
- Ben Deverell – Disability Services Commission
- Lee Steel – Community Resource Centres
- David Zarb – Playgroup WA
- Deborah Clune – Department of Local Government and Communities
- Glenice Batchelor & Elizabeth Brennan – RDA Wheatbelt
- Fiona Bush – South West WA Medicare Local

Conference Aim: to bring together representatives from Local Government, Children’s Services, Health Professionals and Early Years Networks from across the Wheatbelt and provide an opportunity to showcase, celebrate and share knowledge and innovations in this most important early years sector.

In excess of 120 participants from all over the Wheatbelt and Perth attended the Conference, with representation by local government, health, early childhood education and care services (ECECs) and community representatives with an interest in promoting early years.

The focus of the conference was 'Investing in our Future' by using the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) and the importance of working together to ensure better outcomes for Wheatbelt families, children and communities. Presentations from speakers covered a variety of topics including how to use the AEDC, the role of local government in early years, children’s health and wellbeing, successes of Wheatbelt Early Years Networks and child development.

A smaller group of conference delegates also participated in a workshop session focusing on a way forward for the Wheatbelt early years sector.
Key Outcomes
See Next Steps for more detail.

The Conference has served as a catalyst for a range of outcomes as outlined below;

- The Conference Organising committee continues to meet as the Wheatbelt Steering Committee, with additional members being co-opted as required. The focus for the remainder of 2015 will be Northam. Contact is Glenice Batchelor RDA Wheatbelt for more information on the role of this Committee.
- A follow-up Forum on 8th May will occur in York for ECECs in the Wheatbelt region.
- A Early Childhood Parent Information Forum – ‘Ask the Experts’ will also be held on 8th May in York
- New EYNs are now being initiated as a result of the conference, as are additional ECEC Services.
- The DropIN! page will convert from a WEYC focus to a broader Wheatbelt Early Years Network focus.
- A Champions register of people interested in further input to the Early Years has been developed.
- It has been proposed that a follow-up Conference in 2016 as well as shorter workshops be planned.
- Ongoing engagement with community to work in collaboration – the AEDC provides a focus.

Summary of Presentations
The one day Wheatbelt Early Years Conference had a very full program, with presentations from 10:00am to 3:30pm to make the most of the opportunity of having key regional stakeholders for early years all together for the first time. We were fortunate enough to have as the MC the well-known facilitator Peter Kenyon to ensure the program ran smoothly and kept to time.

The morning session started with an opening welcome by Graham Cooper, the Chair of RDA Wheatbelt. This was followed by a Welcome to Kellerberrin by the Shire of Kellerberrin CEO Raymond Griffiths and Welcome to Country by local Noongar Elder Tom Hayden.

The three hour morning session included six presentations to an audience of over 120. The presentations included:
• Glenice Batchelor, RDA Wheatbelt – Regional Children’s Service Plan Project update
• Liz Bakowski, Public Health Advocacy Institute WA – Children’s Environment and Health Local Government Report Card Project
• Marilyn Sayers, Shire of Merredin – local example of the Report Card Project
• Gail Clark, WA AEDC Coordinator – How to invest in early years using the AEDC
• Carol Bower & Desiire Silva, Telethon Kids Institute – Supportive environments for a healthy start to life
• David Zarb, Playgroup WA – Nursery Rhymes Make Sense
• Paige Rae, WA Country Health Service – Keeping it Local, Successes of the Wheatbelt Early Years Networks

Following lunch the program was divided into two streams, with approximately 50 delegates attending each stream. Stream one consisted of six short 15 minute presentations which showcased innovation and leadership in the early years sector. The six presentations were:

• Teresa Dix, Ngala – Growing Strong Brains
• Lea Davidson, Women’s Health Clinical Support Programs - Perinatal and Infant Mental Health
• Helen Bosisto, Department of Education – Triple P Partnership in the Wheatbelt
• Michelle Gouldthorp & Raquel Willis, Southern Inland Health Initiative – Improving Early Years in the Wheatbelt
• Suzann Franklin, Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service - Boodjari Yorgas Antenatal Program
• Candelle Nestor, WACOSS & Liz Brennan, RDA Wheatbelt Inc – iLearn workshops, using technology to improve communication including the WACOSS DropIN!

Stream 2 was a workshop focusing on a way forward for the Wheatbelt early childhood education and care sector and was facilitated by Peter Kenyon. To set the scene there were three presentations; one from Lauren Clarke of Wheatbelt Development Commission who spoke about how the early years is incorporated into the Wheatbelt Blueprint and the impact and importance of people being able to participate in the rural and regional workforce.

The second presentation was by Fleur Wilkinson who spoke of her long-term involvement with the Milly Molly Mandy’s Childcare Centre in Brookton and her experiences on a voluntary management committee, current involvement through the Shire and the often overwhelming challenges that many Wheatbelt centres experience.

Glenice Batchelor then provided an overview of the opportunities and issues faced by the region – and set the scene for the participant workshop (see separate summary in Appendix A).
To close the Conference, local Noongar youth dance group ‘Static Crew’ provided us with entertainment followed by opportunities for networking over afternoon tea.

**Promotion of Key Messages**

A two hour outside radio broadcast was supported and subsidised by Radio West to help share key messages from the conference across the Avon and Central Wheatbelt, Eastern Wheatbelt, Southern Wheatbelt and Upper Great Southern regions. This also included advertising for the event leading up to the day. The broadcast was sponsored by RDA Wheatbelt, South West WA Medicare Local and the Kellerberrin Shire and local Kellerberrin IGA.

The Conference demonstrated the use of the WACOSS Online Community Platform - DropIN! as a Conference registration page and as a tool to communicate pre-event information. Following the event, all presentations were uploaded onto the Conference page and it is envisaged that the page will become a central portal for all Wheatbelt Early Years Networks. To access the Conference presentations on the DropIN! website go to [www.dropin.org.au/display/WEYC2](http://www.dropin.org.au/display/WEYC2)

The Conference hashtag #WheatbeltEYC featured in over sixty tweets from 14 different users on Twitter leading up to, during and after the conference. By utilising Twitter as a media tool, we were able to gain live feedback from participants and provide key messages to those that weren't at the conference, with one Twitter user from Horsham in Victoria following our Twitter feed.

Showbags were provided to Conference delegates at the end of the Conference with take home information. Child development organisations provided free resources for the 120 showbags, including Playgroup WA, Ngala, Better Beginnings, Kids Matter, RDA Wheatbelt Children’s Services Directory, Department of Health, Grandparents Advisor Project, Triple P, Kidsafe, Women’s Health and Family Services, Nature Play, Early Children’s Services and CY O’Connor Institute. Asthma WA, Lotterywest and CHILD Australia hosted displays at the conference.

Local newspapers The Avon Valley Advocate and Merredin Mercury were both contacted prior to the Conference and provided with a media release.
Next steps

Reviewing the number of registrations received, and feedback provided, the Wheatbelt Early Years Conference proved to be a great success. It is therefore recommended that whilst there is momentum, ongoing professional development and networking opportunities are held for those who work in the early years sector. These could be in the format of a follow-up Conference in 2016 as well as shorter workshops offered via videoconferencing using the Community Resource Centre “BeingThere” system if there is sufficient interest.

At a regional level, the Wheatbelt Steering Committee should work in conjunction with the Early Years Networks to identify professional development needs which can be addressed through this ongoing professional development strategy. It will also be the responsibility of the Committee to address the recommendations made in this report and from participant feedback received.

The Committee and the Early Years Networks will continue to utilise WACOSS Drop-IN! online platform as a way to share resources and ideas and enhance early years sector communication across the region.

After reviewing the delegate feedback, the proposed 2016 Conference should be held in a venue with at least 3 rooms suitable for breakout workshops so the program can be tailored to the specific needs of each stakeholder group (education & childcare, health, local government).

With the next AEDC collection to be undertaken in 2015, it is important to continue to engage stakeholders and communities to interpret the data and use it to improve child development. The emphasis needs to be on working in collaboration to develop community action plans based on the AEDC results and using local resources.

In regards to the Local Government Report Card Project, greater engagement with Wheatbelt Local Governments is recommended to raise awareness of the project and advocate for local governments to lead the way in providing supportive environments for the early years.

An outcome of the Stream 2 workshop is a subsequent “Models of Service” workshop which will be held during May 2015 to investigate options for Wheatbelt ECECs in the future and to provide strategies which will assist them in the short-term.
**Conference Evaluation and Feedback**

The feedback received from Conference participants clearly demonstrates that the Wheatbelt Early Years Conference successfully met its aim by raising awareness of programs and initiatives and encouraging collaboration across service providers.

The opportunity to provide Feedback was provided in multiple forms. Hard copy evaluation forms were provided for handwritten answers on the day, email feedback was received after the event and Twitter provided real-time audience engagement.

Members of the Organising Committee subsequently sought informal feedback from attendees and those who had sponsored attendance eg. Principals and Managers.

Feedback received from participants can be found in [Appendix B](#).

The Committee held a follow-up de-briefing session to capture the important learnings from an organiser’s perspective.
Appendix A
Stream 2 Workshop Notes facilitated by Peter Kenyon

Hand in Hand - together we move forward - Focus on Early Years for the Wheatbelt.

What our region needs to do and how we will achieve it. Do we need an “Alliance” / MOU or other model in the Wheatbelt to guide planning, prioritize resources and support partnerships and collaboration?

The Draft Wheatbelt Regional Children’s Services Plan aims to:

- Work with a range of key stakeholders, including existing networks to increase awareness and understanding of the issues for better outcomes.
- Explore innovative business models and practices that will enhance existing services and facilitate the creation of new ones as needed.
- Support the development of a “fit-for-purpose” regional governance group or think tank that has the capacity to identify and act on key issues impacting on children’s services in the Wheatbelt.
- Provide support for Industry Workforce Development and identify training/workforce development needs.
- Raise awareness and take action as required to respond to external factors that may impact on Children’s Services in the region as a result of legislative or regulatory changes at a State or Federal Government level eg Productivity Commission Report.

What does this look like?

The group was asked to divide up and discuss any topics that they wanted to. They could be “Bumblebees” and drop in at each group they were interested in to cross pollinate ideas or stay in their own group if they wanted to.

Three initial topics were proposed for the group could explore or they could identify their own!

Each group discussed the chosen topic and then come back to the larger group with three key points or nuggets of wisdom to share!

Topics were:

A) What would Regional Governance look like and how would it function?
- MOU/Think Tank/Alliance. Governance, Pilot and Network
- Not just about infrastructure – critical mass, flexibility, administration
  1) Lady Gowrie Workshop – small towns need to be together
  2) Overarching governance framework- NFPs and LGA. Consider that MOU or WDC process too slow. Need support on the ground, let educators do their job.
  3) Communicate and Share passion/information- DropIN! Key stakeholders together- Health, Education and ECECs.
B) **What Service Models would work in the Wheatbelt?**

1) Workshop Lady Gowrie Model- NFP Service over multiple locations Family Day Care Scheme
2) CSSU- A similar private Early Childhood business model in NZ
3) Several centres join together to employ an HR person/resource sharing/administration. Sharing of information/resources between committee run services
4) Local Government – must be resourced

C) **How can we enhance training opportunities in the sector**

1) Greater link with ED over the 0-3 eg Disability and training. Strategic planning- Kindy and Education Department.
2) Training schools. Local Human Resources/people. Scholarships, Local Sponsorship. See the link between child and home environment. Early Years come under Education Department.
3) Are the decisions practical? Need to revisit the framework. Policies are being handed down without understanding of Wheatbelt issues. Funding cuts to training. Diploma between $3-10k now – no incentive- low paid. Blended delivery using technology- CRCs.

D) **How can we engage Low-Socio Economic and Minority Families**

1) Relationships is what will effect positive change. Establish a relationship with someone so that they have a “Buddy” when they attend a service provider
2) Mentoring once they are at the Service provider- what can we do to meet their needs. Match service to individual needs.
3) Value Differences- by our actions, conscious decision to appreciate and be willing to share in the differences of others.

A Vision or Unity of Purpose needs to be set in place to implement this philosophy.

The service/community? needs to be a safe environment.

Some helpful strategies were noted: Assist Aboriginals to run a program themselves; Meet with elders to ask what they want/need; Form relationships with schools and other providers; Use personal invites; Provide someone they can contact to help or advise them who to contact with help; Connecting people and connecting with people; Follow through with Welcome to... Follow through with inclusiveness; Inclusive- go out to talk, survey; Informal settings; Champion back to basics.

E) **How do we influence policies at Federal and State level?**

Policy change is needed!

1) Identify key policy change and who can influence - RDA, WDC, Federal and State politicians
2) Consistent message from all. Create a single voice- be loud and clear not lots of small ones- quiet and jumbled!
3) Planned approach to advocate- Focus on issue and the solution.
F) **How do we break down Silos**

1) Trust – LGAs, areas, need to develop trust as currently there are competing agendas.
2) Identify the key agenda before moving forward
3) Government agencies - receive conflicting message

Concerns raised that due to the delays on project sign-off it has lost momentum.

Next steps- follow-up Workshop on Models of Service, WEYC site evolves to Wheatbelt Early Years Network. Communications platform shared, Champions listed and E-news continued.
Appendix B
Participant Feedback

Sixty seven Conference delegates completed evaluation forms. Of these 67:

98% strongly agreed or agreed that the conference had provided them with interesting and helpful information

96% strongly agreed or agreed that the conference has given them ideas on ways to better support early childhood development which they can implement in their organisation or community.

All participants indicated they felt all sessions of the conference were useful, with 3 of the most useful presenters being Gail Clark (90%), Telethon Kids Institute (87%) and David Zarb (85%)

When asked what they would like to see included or done differently, some of the feedback provided was:

- Bigger room
- Water bottles
- Biscuits or snacks with the first break
- Sit at tables
- Great if a representative from all LGAs attended
- Too many acronyms
- More time for workshop
- More time for networking
- More comfort breaks, morning session a little long
- Fewer more focussed presentations
- Smaller break-out sessions with more focus for attendees (eg. Govt, Nursing, Teaching etc) with more networking opportunities
- More workshop/active/collaborative sessions.
- It felt very rushed, more time needed for longer sessions & breaks.
- 2 day event - one for stakeholders and one for families. Families/parents may be interested in participating in such a conference
- More actions to take away
- Similar information was repeated in the morning and the afternoon sessions
- More audience involvement, more interactive discussions and sharing during presentations
- More focus on education in child care environments, presentations mainly showed statistics for kindergarten nothing for under 4 year olds.
- More on early childhood education in schools, hearing from other teachers and what they do. School based educational strategies – office of early childhood. A perspective from schools in the area. Need a balance between health information and an education perspective. Showcase 0 to 4 programs already running in our local schools.
- More related to childcare
From an educators point of view some of the information was not something that we could take away and use effectively and immediately in our work situation.

Café session to be more related to child development – how can we improve standards? (Teachers). Maybe a focus session specific for teachers

More information on Action Plans rather than research

How can health professionals and other experts work with schools and prior to school programs to improve outcomes for the early years.

Showcase of more local service successes/initiatives.

More time given to the Local Government presentation. Especially the Wanneroo example to explain how they progressed their early years strategies and to promote what they are doing in their areas to improve early years outcomes.

More time for AEDC speaker and understand importance of this data.

More time for DropIN talk

There was no mention/acknowledgement of childcare workers/centres in the Wheatbelt. Include these valuable people

When asked for one key action for early years they will take as a result of attending the conference, comments received were:

NETWORKING

- Networking, follow-up meetings with contacts met regarding childcare opportunities from within our shire
- It’s not what is wrong in your community but what is strong!
- Attend the Brookton EYN meeting and I loved a lot of Paige Rae’s ideas
- Work on staff retention in ECEC’s. Working with other centres
- As a school principal I will connect more with my local shire
- Playgroup ideas. Support through local government
- The amount of programs, organisations, resources available
- Begin to start/setup EYN in Corrigin
- Early years network - need to get more people on board eg. playgroup, shires
- Building on existing York Early Years Hub. Making a strong link between school & community
- Take report card info back to town & school.
- Forming better community relationships/partnerships - especially with parents of preschool children (school readiness)
- Look at report card to assess our school
- Try to increase or improve stakeholder information sharing
- Utilising DropIN as a platform for networking with surrounding ECEC’s
- Being more aware of local networks and what is available to support families in the community
- Building relationships with other professionals to use their expertise in our schools - before it comes too late!
- Being more proactive in the community. Using great resources provided
• New ideas for current EYN (activities & action planning). Advocating with Shires to develop Plans in EY area
• Local community intervention
• Make connections with Triple P & Stepping Stones Programs for our area and facilitate them for the families in our area
• Provide information to my team about studies/data available
• Speak to others about early years more. Greater collaboration between services, not just locally but regionally. Need to all be doing the same/similar thing
• Investigate using DropIN. Investigate resources mentioned
• Attempt to personally engage more people
• Encourage Shire to get involved in the Report Card Project
• Quality improvement projects for implementing FASD in WACHS Primary Health & Hospital & midwives
• More networking with other committee run day care centres
• Perinatal development importance, use of digital networking, running early years networks within communities
• Working towards a more unified Wheatbelt focus (planning/information sharing/service delivery)
• Inspires and excites me more with a greater connection to the Wheatbelt and how I can continue to support, based on the research/stats given today

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

• Ensure we provide opportunities for not only educators to participate in PD but deliver information to parents also
• Keeping at the forefront of parent communication and support in our work with EY educator
• Focus on spreading a message that empowers rather than disempowers parents
• Looking at what we do well. Working better with families
• Include facts and ideas for parents in my kindy class newsletter
• Will increase early intervention programs & playgroup. Better connection with those who aren’t engaging
• Educating mothers on the importance of early years and family time
• How important a healthy pregnancy is
• Link parents into Triple P Program. Offer DSC support for any early years community programs as we have done in past years
• Increase my focus on supporting my Aboriginal families to playgroup. Offer folate to any of my clients not using effective contraception

AEDC

• The fact that I did not realise how many children are not at the language/cognitive level they should be
• Follow-up on 3 year old screening
• Encourage use of AEDC data
• Speaking/meeting with parents and children on AEDC results - future projects to work on
- AEDC – children’s early experiences will shape who they will become
- AEDC website

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

- Playgroup plans.
- Look into 3yo playgroup. Update our outdoor area
- Overarching framework
- Playgroup - partnership with school.
- Try to find a model to run centres
- Playgroup in school space
- Assisting with the overarching governance arrangements

Other feedback received:

- “Very well organised, good format, keep it!”
- “A great conference and passionate people!”
- “Thank you! Fabulous day. I am so enthusiastically motivated at the conclusion of the event”
- “Well organised, good, relevant information”
- “Great concept, well done!”
- “Great speakers”
- “Found café session presented interested stats & information. Had a lovely day, a little tired towards the end. Great speakers - particularly in the morning session.”
- “Fantastic event”
- “The event was great & would love for it to be an annual event”
- “Fantastic, can’t wait to be part of it!”
- “Great information/presenters. Thank you for setting a start/end time that makes it easy for people to travel to Kellerberrin”
- “Telethon Kids Institute presentation very interesting (and alarming), very useful & important. David was very inspiring & motivational. Wheatbelt EYN presentation was interesting and an information packed session.”
- “Short sharp sessions good & keeping to schedule great. Ensure that local government aren’t relied on as provider, can be partner.”
- “Well organised & time managed event. Good variety of presenters in morning session. WEYN a brilliant program great delivery!”
- “Well done! A great effort in getting this conference going. I look forward to seeing it repeated in 2016. I'd love to be involved in supporting organisation of the conference if it were run again.”
- “The organisers did a fantastic job and I feel like it should definitely be an annual event :)”
- “The venue was great. Well organised. Speakers all remained on time and linked well together.”
- “Well done team!!! All your hard work has resulted in a super day!”
- “Excellent event, thoroughly enjoyed opportunity”
- “Great to have something like this locally”
• “It was very good. Congratulations”
• “Thank you for this great opportunity!”
• “Lovely facility, well run & organised”
• “Well done. We need to keep the momentum”
• “A great day, very interesting topics & presenters. Well done.”
• “Good job - well done. Keep the conversation going - happy to help!!”
• “Great resources”
• “Such a fantastic day - can’t wait for the next one!”
• “Sensational day, thankyou”
• “Was very well organised and beautiful kind staff. Thank you for a beautiful, friendly and informative day! I’m really looking forward to the next. I would love to know more about digital & DropIN- great talk!”
• “Fantastic conference.

Highlights from Twitter

Twitter Congratulations to everyone involved in putting together a very successful conference #WheatbeltEYC

Twitter A great, informative day #WheatbeltEYC

Twitter Great to be at the #WheatbeltEYC

Twitter #WheatbeltEYC @PHAIWA connecting the dots in child development, a great day of sharing in Kellerberrin

Twitter Amazing #WheatbeltEYC organisers @viewfromhilltop & @FiHughes84 thanking presenters that need to nip off after lunch

Twitter Thanks to @BronClark1 of @ThrivingRegions for tuning into the #WheatbeltEYC all the way from Horsham, Victoria! #localfocus #globalreach

Twitter #WheatbeltEYC loved the AEDC session from Gail Clark

Twitter #WheatbeltEYC amazing presentation by Gail Clark

Twitter Welcome! #WheatbeltEYC getting underway with energy and enthusiasm
Excited for the #WheatbeltEYC @RDAWheatbelt #NEWROC @MtMarshallShire

Looking forward to many interesting and innovative discussions today at the #WheatbeltEYC @SWMedicareLocal

Super excited for tomorrow’s #WheatbeltEYC in Kellerberrin! Who’s coming? @SWMedicareLocal @FiHughes84 @KellerCRC @ Laurenjc03 @DanelleFoley

Feedback received via email

“Congratulations to you both on the fantastic organisation and presentation on the Early years conference I have heard nothing but rave reviews.”

“A note of great thanks for all your help and support in being able to broadcast from the Early Learning conference in Kellerberrin last Thursday. We truly could not have done it without the generous support of Medicare Local South West, and of course your interview on the day. It was wonderful to work with such a professional team of people leading up to and during the event, and I hope in some small way we were able to help spread the word on this important issues.”

“Thanks so much for inviting us to the Early Years Conference – we really enjoyed our trip to Kellerberrin. We were impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment to early years in the Wheatbelt and only sorry that we could not stay for the afternoon sessions. I do hope it all went well and you have been able to set out plans for progress.”

“I just wanted to say what a wonderful job you did in putting the conference on. It was a great to see representatives from so many difference organisations and towns. – well done.”

“I found the event informative and interesting. I was able to relate much of what was being said to my grandchildren’s learning and development which made it just that bit more enlightening. I particularly enjoyed the census data and the Telethon people. Good luck with moving forward with this project.”

“Just wanted to say thanks for all the organising involved to create the Wheatbelt Early Years Conference. It was an inspiring and informative day and very beneficial to get all the key people together. I know there’s a mountain of behind-the-scenes hard work and thought I best let you know that it was all worth it! My ‘pick of the day’ was David Zarb - thought he had a very simple and powerful message about getting back to basics and empowering parents to do the easy but incredibly important things like talking and reading to their kids.”