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Department of **Local Government and Communities**



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Ways to make a difference

Early Years Network Resource Kit

For starting and sustaining
an Early Years Network

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Supporting partners:



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Contents

Acronyms	4
-----------------	----------

The Purpose of this Kit	5
Sections	5
Sources used	5
Your feedback is welcome	5
Background	5
What are Early Years Networks?	6

1. Contributing Factors to a Successful Early Years Network	8
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2. Establishing and Sustaining an Early Years Network	8
2.1 Forming and strengthening your Early Years Network membership	9
2.2 Using local data to inform the work of the Early Years Network	17
2.3 Mapping local assets	21
2.4 Identifying needs and opportunities	30
2.5 Facilitating community conversations	36
2.6 Establishing a vision, mission and action plan	45
2.7 Creating partnerships	58
2.8 Evaluating the impact of the Early Years Network	66
2.9 Maintaining the interest and involvement of Early Years Network members	69
2.10 Promoting awareness and achievements	71
2.11 Celebrating success	76

3. Resources and References	77
Resources	77
Funding Sources	80
References	81

Disclaimer: This publication is provided as an information source only and is not intended to be a complete summary of all community capacity-building publications. No claim of absolute reliability has been made for any of the information provided in the Early Years Resource Kit. Every effort has been made to authenticate the material used.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
CaLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health
CEYN	Connecting Early Years Networks
COAG	Council of Australian Governments (represents the Commonwealth and the eight State and Territory governments)
CfC	Communities for Children
DCPFS	WA Department for Child Protection and Family Support
DLGC	WA Department of Local Government and Communities
DoH	WA Department of Health
FRRR	Foundation for Rural and Regional Development
NGO	Non Government Organisation
OMI	Office of Multicultural Interests
WACOSS	Western Australian Council of Social Service

The Purpose of this Kit

This Early Years Networks Resource Kit is for community members and service providers from government and non-government organisations to use in establishing and sustaining Early Years Networks in Western Australia.

The kit provides a variety of information on the key processes and outcomes to establish and sustain a successful Early Years Network. The material provided is based on the philosophy that 'the wisdom of the community always exceeds the knowledge of the experts'. Community members and agency staff are encouraged to connect with, learn and build on the experiences of other community builders, especially those within the early years field who have created and facilitated successful Early Years Network development and activities.

Sections

This kit is divided into sections which include stories from the field, information sheets and tools.



Stories from the field

Stories from the field demonstrate the value of an Early Years Network and the contribution it can make to outcomes for young children and their families within a community. The stories illustrate best practice in community engagement and collaboration.



Information sheets

Information sheets offer helpful tips.



Tools

Tools for Early Years Networks, can be used 'as is' or adapted to suit.

Resources and references listed throughout the kit offer contacts, funding and information sources to build on the content contained in the document.

Sources used

Information, processes and tools developed for this kit were inspired by multiple sources, in particular:

- 'Platforms - A Service Redevelopment Framework' document developed and published by the [Centre for Community Child Health \(CCCH\)](#), Royal Children's Hospital/Murdoch Children's Research Institute based in Melbourne.
- [Bank of IDEAS](#) (Initiatives for the Development of Enterprising Action and Strategies) resource collection.

Your feedback is welcome

The aim of this kit is to assist and encourage Early Years Networks, individuals and agencies to exchange information, provide new ideas and stories from their valuable experience, and suggest resources that will assist other Early Years Networks.

To facilitate the ongoing exchange, this kit will be updated from time to time and the latest version made available on the [Connecting Early Years Networks portal](#).

Please send your ideas and feedback to eyn@wacoss.org.au

Background

Research shows that what happens during the first four years of life influences a person's development throughout their life. This includes brain development, social skills and the ability to learn. The early years lay down the child's foundation for later life.

The quality of a child's earliest environments and the availability of appropriate experiences at specific stages of development are crucial in shaping their developmental outcomes.



Child development is influenced by many factors – from the family environment and community to wider influences such as government policies, environmental conditions and the broader social norms, beliefs and attitudes.

Early Years Networks have existed in Western Australia since 2003 with about 50 networks active across the State in 2016.

The former Department for Communities facilitated the development of Early Years Networks to support families and children aged 0-8 years. Today the majority of Early Years Networks are made up of community members, early childhood educators, child health nurses, allied health professionals, library staff, teachers, community development officers and local community service providers who are interested in improving the lives of young children.

For more information or to contact an Early Years Network in your local area, visit the [CEYN Networks portal](#) or email the CEYN team at WACOSS via eyn@wacoss.org.au

What are Early Years Networks?

‘When we dream alone, it’s just a dream. But when we dream together, it’s the beginning of reality.’ Brazilian proverb

Early Years Networks can play an important role in connecting a community by working collaboratively to develop and implement initiatives, services and activities aimed at improving outcomes for young children and families.

They provide a strong platform to build collaborative practices between organisations; increase opportunities to coordinate policies and programs and respond to evidenced based information about children living in their community through the use of tools, such as the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

Each Early Years Network is individual, with its own culture and set of practices based on its members and the needs of the community.

Early Years Networks provide opportunities to:

- share knowledge and experiences collectively to improve communities for children and their families
- engage members to discuss emerging early years issues across their community and advocate solutions to decision makers
- gain insights and perspectives from community representatives to understand what may be influencing early childhood development
- explore the AEDC results together with other information to understand community strengths and areas for improvement in supporting children’s development
- foster a variety of short and long term community initiatives to improve local conditions for children and families

- strengthen community understanding about the importance of the early years
- promote early years' initiatives to the community, for example Children's Week and parenting workshops
- form smaller working groups of members to run the network's activities and events as detailed in the action plan
- invite guest speakers and presenters to meetings to introduce or develop ideas, programs or topics relevant to the network
- offer professional support and advice across Early Years Networks.

'Coming together is beginning; Keeping together is progress; Working together is success.' Henry Ford



Stories from the field 1: Connecting community through working in partnership

The Collie Early Years Network and the Collie Community Garden group decided to form a partnership with the aim of bringing younger and older generations of the community together in an environment where knowledge and experience could be shared in an informal setting. The Early Years Network had identified through the AEDC results the need to support children's physical development and felt that this would be an ideal partnership. The partnership decided to hold a series of events in the community garden which included planting days, story times and movement activities.

Members of the network provided activities and take-home packs showcasing useful information for young children and their families. The garden group provided nutritious food, much of it grown on site.

The events were well attended and provided a wonderful opportunity to bring diverse community groups together in a delightful setting, highlighting the benefits of fresh air and exercise. Positive outcomes of this partnership have resulted in an improved knowledge of the importance of healthy eating, environmental awareness and an increased connection between the various age groups within the community.

It is hard to say who had more fun – the children or the adults!

1. Contributing Factors to a Successful Early Years Network

'There is no limit to the good you can do, if you don't care who gets the credit for it.' Elbert Hubbard

Prior to developing an Early Years Network in your community, it can be useful to consider what makes a community collaborative network successful. The following factors are valuable considerations:

- Confidence that healthy, connected and inclusive communities are built from the 'ground up, inside out' and not from 'top down, outside in'. This approach identifies and uses local assets and capacities, and the active engagement and participation of local families and community members.
- Participating agencies and services committing to the principles of cooperation, partnership and networking. This has resulted in a range of child development services planning and actioning collaboratively, which has created strong synergies. This has been achieved through shared understanding, collective decision making, common language and vision, mutual respect, open communication and negotiation styles, and the willingness to share the credit.
- The creative ability of networks to design, implement and promote a range of initiatives that meet local child development needs and build local strengths, resources and opportunities.

'There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children.' Nelson Mandela

'The start for a better world is the belief that it is possible.'
Norman Cousins

2. Establishing and Sustaining an Early Years Network

'True leadership involves a vision and inspiring those around you and working with you to make that vision a reality.' David Karpin

Any effective community building effort, including Early Years Network development, involves these 11 interrelated processes:

- Forming and strengthening your Early Years Network membership.
- Using local data to inform the work of the Early Years Network.
- Mapping local assets.
- Identifying needs and opportunities.
- Facilitating community conversations.
- Establishing a vision, mission and action plan.
- Creating partnerships.
- Evaluating the impact of the Early Years Network.
- Maintaining the interest and involvement of Early Years Network members.
- Promoting awareness and achievements.
- Celebrating success.

The following information offers a brief explanation of each of the processes, with tools, information sheets and stories that may be helpful when developing and reviewing your Early Years Network.

2.1 Forming and strengthening your Early Years Network membership

'A leader's task is to open doors and windows.' John Gardiner

All successful community projects are driven by a passionate, motivated and committed membership who share a vision and a willingness to translate it into positive and practical outcomes.

The primary task of the membership is to inspire others in the community to work collaboratively to bring about positive change.

Identifying and recruiting new members and continually strengthening the membership is essential for effective Early Years Networks.

It is important that the membership is composed of individuals who:

- represent the critical and diverse range of stakeholders in the local early years sector - including community members and parents (adding the lived experience to the professional experience)
- are willing to commit the time and energy required to develop and sustain the network
- have connections that can be mobilised in the network's activities
- understand the principles and behaviours that build partnerships and collaborative leadership.

Ideally, an Early Years Network will be representative of the different groups in a community with an interest in children's health and well-being. This would include people from formal and informal family and children's services (for-profit and not-for-profit organisations), government services and parents.



Stories from the field 2: Connecting community in the first instance

Never underestimate the power of positive relationships to get things happening.

The Avon Early Years Network focussed on refreshing its activities early in 2016 by listening to the voice of its community. The network wanted to make sure its new vision belonged to the community.

How did it get the community to meet for the first time?

Building positive relationships and flexibility were the key. Members had conversations with parents and carers recommended by the local schools and playgroups and invited them to bring a friend to the meeting. The first meeting was held at a suitable time, when school children had been dropped off and before midday naps of younger children. The venue picked was child friendly, known to community members and comfortable.

The network listened at the meeting. It didn't have a sales pitch. It genuinely respected the ideas of the community members who attended and had fun engaging with them.

The vision and the purpose of the group were captured and at the next meeting members were keen to bring additional community people to make things happen.

‘Leadership happens when you find an issue that you really care about.’ Margaret Wheatley

Strengthening the group needs to be a continuous process and here are some actions that will help:

- Regular group reflections on how the membership and network is functioning and achieving its vision.
- Opportunities for all members to engage in leadership development and training.
- Allocation of times for celebrations and social interactions.
- Inspiration and inclusion of new members.

Nurturing local leadership among people who choose to call the community ‘home’ and know the local community best needs to be a priority strategy. A key question for any Early Years Network must be: ‘What actions need to be taken to support community members to develop and exercise their leadership potential?’

‘If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more and become more, you are a leader.’ John Quincey Adams



Stories from the field 3: Ellenbrook Children and Families Connect

The Ellenbrook Early Years Network was successful for several years but its momentum started to slow. Meeting attendances fell, actions were few and the purpose and direction of the group was no longer clear.

In mid-2015, members decided that the network would either have to fold or significant time and energy would have to be put into reviving it.

A strong commitment from the membership kept the network going as they worked together to reinvigorate it.

In October 2015, they benefited from WACOSS’s Connecting Early Years Networks Program, which facilitated a strategic planning session with the network. This helped the network develop a new mission and vision.

Concerted efforts were made to re-engage former network members and involve new stakeholders, including local parents. Members agreed to expand their network’s focus beyond early years to include older children up to 12 years of age.

The network was renamed and rebranded as Ellenbrook Children and Families Connect. They produced new promotional materials and started a Facebook page managed by a parent volunteer. The Facebook page has gained popularity as a place for parents to find out about local programs, events and services for children and families.



The network has set up promotional stands at large community events, hosted training and engaged speakers. It has rolled out the Paint the Swan REaD an initiative of [Paint the Town Read](#) early literacy campaign in the Ellenbrook area and coordinated a successful stall at a local shopping centre during Families Week which engaged with almost 1,000 children and parents.

The renewed network continues to work on its action plan and meetings now have an average of 20 people attending, including parents, compared to three or four people in 2015. There is a much stronger member commitment.

Engagement tools

Use or modify the following two tools to form, inform and maintain your Early Years Network membership.

1. Community Perception and Assessment Questionnaire – to stimulate discussion about the community environment.

This questionnaire is used for an early conversation with the Early Years Network membership. Ask each member to complete it before the first meeting. Its aim is to stimulate and formulate thoughts about the strengths, limitations and opportunities of the local community and its commitment to children. It will provide valuable insights.

2. Appreciative Inquiry Conversation – to stimulate conversation about the future by starting with the ‘best’ experiences from the network’s life and what is working well.

Each tool is set out on separate pages. The PDF versions are suitable for photocopying and distribution to members. The Word versions have accessible form fields. Alternatively, you can use them as a basis to create your own questionnaire or inquiry.



Tool 1: Community Perception and Assessment Questionnaire

Questions to stimulate discussion about the community environment.

1. What is your perception of the mindset in our community concerning its future?

Progressive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conservative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Middle of the road	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positive	<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comment:

2. What are our community's strengths and assets? List the top five, in order of priority.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

3. What do you consider to be the best two advantages of residing and/or working in our community?

1.

2.

4. What do you consider to be the five main weaknesses in our community, in order of severity?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

5. List the critical players in the early years sector?

1.

2.

3.

- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

6. In terms of early years support and development, what are the key initiatives occurring in our community?

- 1.
- 2.
- 2.

7. In terms of early years, what initiatives or programs are missing from our community?

- 1.
- 2.

8. How supportive do you think our council is of child development issues? Select a number between one and ten, with '1' representing 'Not very supportive' and '10' being 'Very supportive'.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comment:

9. Does our community have a community vision and strategy?

Yes No If yes, what does it say about the early years?

Comment:

10. What collaborative actions or initiatives occur between services operating in the early years sector?

Comment:

11. How does the way that services currently operate support or hinder the needs of children?

Comment:

12. Finally, what changes would you like to see in our community over the next three years regarding the early years?

Comment:



Tool 2: Appreciative Inquiry Conversation

The following questions will stimulate conversation about the future of the Early Years Network by starting with the 'best' experiences from the network's life.

1. Describe a high point experience in your involvement in our Early Years Network – a time when you have been most satisfied and excited about our group.

Comment:

2. Without being modest, share what you value about:

- a. yourself

Comment:

- b. your contribution

Comment:

- c. our network

Comment:

3. What do you believe are the core factors that make our Early Years Network function well?

Comment:

4. What are your three wishes for the future of our network?

Comment:

Notes:



Information Sheet 1: Factors Influencing Early Years Network Sustainability

A common question is 'How can we ensure that our Early Years Network is sustainable?'

Successful experiences in community capacity building and collaboration all point to 11 factors relevant to the creation of strong and sustainable Early Years Networks. They are:

1. A positive and hopeful community

...through a positive 'can do' optimistic and hopeful mindset towards community and what can be achieved for its children.

2. Expanding, diverse and inclusive citizenship

...by increasing the number and diversity of local people participating in activities and decision making. A focus on activities that build social connectedness, inclusion, involvement, a diversity of thinking and a discovery of what people care about is important.

'The more citizen finger prints that can be found on a project, the more likely it is that project will be meaningful and sustainable.' Cormac Russell

3. Greater awareness, development and use of individual skills

...from an increased awareness of the gifts, passions, capacities and skills of local people and their use in building positive futures for children.

4. A growing leadership base

...from a commitment to continuous renewal and the building of a core group of people willing to take on community leadership roles in the early years area.

5. A positive outlook towards assets and opportunities

...through mobilising the 'glass half full' approach to a community's assets, resources, network advantages and windows of opportunity, rather than dwelling on limitations, needs and deficiencies.

'All the historic evidence indicates that significant community development only takes place when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. That is why you can't develop communities from the 'top down' or the 'outside in.'" John McKnight and John Kretzmann

6. Healthy and sustainable community behaviours

... as the practice of behaviours and attitudes that build positive and healthy relationships between network members.

7. Shared community vision and development agenda

... via development of a shared vision of the best community for children and a practical agenda based on community conversations and contributions.

2.2 Using local data to inform the work of the Early Years Network

Understanding and appreciating what makes your community, especially in relation to younger children, is a vital early activity.

By building understanding of how young children are developing, Early Years Networks, in collaboration with your community, can look at ways to positively influence child development.

Discovering, compiling and analysing data provides an invaluable foundation to inform the work of an Early Years Network.

In addition to using the results of questionnaires and inquiry tools, key sources of general research and information are:

- [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) for statistics relating to local government populations and children.
- **Local government websites and publications**, including what local councils commit to children and families in their strategic community plans.
- [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\)](#) which provides Early Years Networks with detailed community focused information about children's development for your local area.

About the Australian Early Development Census

The AEDC:

- is an Australia-wide census of young children's development, providing a snapshot of young children's progress at national, State/Territory and community levels
- has been carried out every three years since 2009

- measures child development using the Australian adaptation of the Canadian Early Development Index
- includes information from schools throughout Australia, who participate through teachers completing the Australian version of the Early Development Instrument for children shortly after they start pre-primary.

What does the AEDC measure?

The AEDC measures the number and proportion of pre-primary children developmentally on track, at risk or vulnerable across the following five key domains:

- Physical health and wellbeing.
- Social competence.
- Emotional maturity.
- Language and cognitive skills.
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

These five domains are considered good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes.

How does the AEDC differ from other measures of early childhood development?

The AEDC focuses on the importance of the whole child including their health, wellbeing, learning, physical health and social development. As a population measure it reports information at the group level rather than at the individual level.

It is not a test or measure of school performance. The results provide information about how communities have supported their children (up to five years of age) and helps to understand how children are doing developmentally compared to other communities in Western Australia and nationally.

How are the results reported?

The AEDC data is reported at the level of suburb or town (local community) where the child lives. The primary output of results is through AEDC on-line community profiles and maps.

How do I access my community's results?

- Visit the data section of the AEDC website and enter the name of your local government area or suburb/town.
- You can refine your search for detailed information on your community profile, how your community is going in the five domains of child development, and access maps and summary tables.
- Understanding the results section of the website explains how to interpret the data for your community. Please [click here](#) to access community data.

How can the AEDC help my community?

- The AEDC provides your community with important information about children's development in your local area.
- It moves the focus of effort from the individual child to all children in the community. The information can be used to understand what is working well in the community. It can also highlight what needs to be improved or developed to provide children with safe and nurturing learning environments where they can thrive.

How can networks use the AEDC to improve early childhood outcomes?

There are a number of ways your network can use the AEDC to improve local early childhood development. These include:

1. To understand children's development across the community and the five domains of development. For example, to:
 - a) understand how local children are doing developmentally compared to children nationally and in other communities
 - b) use with other socio-demographic and community indicators to provide a comprehensive picture of early childhood development
 - c) pinpoint strengths in the community as well as what can be improved.
2. To support community and network efforts and actions. For example, to:
 - a) provide evidence to support strategic planning
 - b) provide a basis for identifying priorities for action
 - c) strengthen collaborations between community agencies and stakeholders
 - d) strengthen transition programs and continuity of learning in partnership with schools and early years services
 - e) mobilise community actions around early childhood.
3. To monitor and evaluate network efforts over time. For example, to track how the community is progressing in improving early childhood development.

Where do I start?

Four practical steps are outlined below to start your Early Years Network to develop an evidenced-based community action plan using the AEDC and other socio-economic and community information.

- **Step 1:** From the AEDC website, download the community profile and maps. Share and discuss the results at an Early Years Network meeting titled Understanding Child Development in Our Community. Key questions to help guide discussion might include:
 - In which domain/s are children more likely to be vulnerable? Are there domains where children are less likely to be vulnerable?
 - How do the results compare to the national and State AEDC results or other communities with similar characteristics to your local community?



- How do the results compare to previous years? Are there emerging trends?
- What might be some possible explanations for the results?
- **Step 2:** Gather community data that will provide a local context to better understand the AEDC results. This project could be titled Building the Community Picture. Context information could include:
 - What challenges might local families be facing that could contribute to child development vulnerability?
 - What early childhood services and supports are available in the local community for families and young children?
 - Are the local services located in the right place?
 - Are vulnerable families accessing services (are services accessible to all families)?
 - Are there long wait lists for services?
 - What are the risk and protective factors in the community for children and families?
- What other indicators are available for the community, including health and education that will help understand how well the community is supporting early childhood development?
- What other information is needed?
- **Step 3:** Use the information gathered and analysed in steps 1 and 2 above to prioritise your network’s actions.
- **Step 4:** Develop an action plan.

The collection and analysis of community data and information will help to determine the network’s understanding of local community needs and goals.

The action plan will map and guide the network’s key actions towards improving outcomes for local children. It will help to clarify what to do, the resources required, who will be involved and what change to expect for children and families.

Developing an action plan is explored further in section 2.6.



Stories from the field 4: Connecting community projects in response to the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

The Midvale Early Childhood and Parenting Centre in collaboration with the Midland Early Years Action Group, City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring formed the Western Australian AEDC Local Champions Project.

Through this joint project, they focused on the need to bring their communities together to understand the Australian Early Development Census and to coordinate a local response to the results.

Local champions worked alongside identified communities to deliver the most appropriate methods for using the AEDC, allowing data to become a catalyst for action towards improving the early developmental outcomes of children.

During 2016, Early Years Networks through a partnership between WACOSS's Connecting Early Years Networks Project and the Department of Education took part in a one-day workshop to look at understanding and interpreting the AEDC.

Participants worked together to determine how information could inform and become evidence to support and guide the actions of Early Years Networks within a community. Attendees reflected and shared stories on how the AEDC informed and supported the work of existing Early Years Networks, which provided valuable learning across the group.



Stories from the field 5: What does data suggest our children need?

In 2016 the City of Armadale library produced 'Brain Boxes' for loan following discussions by members of the Armadale Early Years Network and Library about Naplan results. Brain Boxes enable families to give children a fun way to learn at home. Each box contains a different theme on reading, writing and mathematics, for example, basic equations, fractions, money, measurement, shapes, patterns and time.

Another initiative for parents by the Armadale Early Years Network called 'Chatterbooks' was developed in response to concerns about the length of time children had to wait to see a speech therapist. Chatterbooks are a borrowable item from the Armadale Library which encourage parents to read and play with their children to develop their speech and language skills.

Both Chatterbooks and Brain Boxes were designed to meet the needs of children in the community identified through the Armadale Early Years Network.



2.3 Mapping local assets

'Practical action starts with the understanding that every community has more potential resources than any one person knows.' Mike Green

Communities are built by focussing on their assets, which include capacities, strengths, resources and stakeholders – not on their deficiencies and limitations. This makes it essential to systematically identify and map in detail the resources within the local population.

Mapping is more than an audit of resources. Its fundamental purpose is to find connections and relationships between the identified assets in order to maximise the opportunities they present for Early Years Networks.

Two methods of asset mapping that use different approaches are:

1. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)
2. Appreciative Inquiry.



Information Sheet 2: Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

The fundamentals

Asset Based Community Development seeks to uncover, highlight and utilise the strengths, capacities and resources within communities for sustainable development. Unlike traditional community development, it does not start with a focus on problems, needs, weaknesses and deficiencies.

Any focus on needs and problems to formulate human service interventions usually results in resources to service providers rather than community residents. This fragments efforts to provide solutions, reliance is placed on outside resources and experts, and mindsets tend to talk down the community and create a maintenance and survival mentality.

ABCD's asset-capacities focus is more likely to empower and mobilise the community and its citizens to create positive and meaningful change from within.

The following diagrams and tables illustrate the ABCD approach and its differences from the traditional needs-deficiency model.

Figure: Community Needs Map (traditional approach)

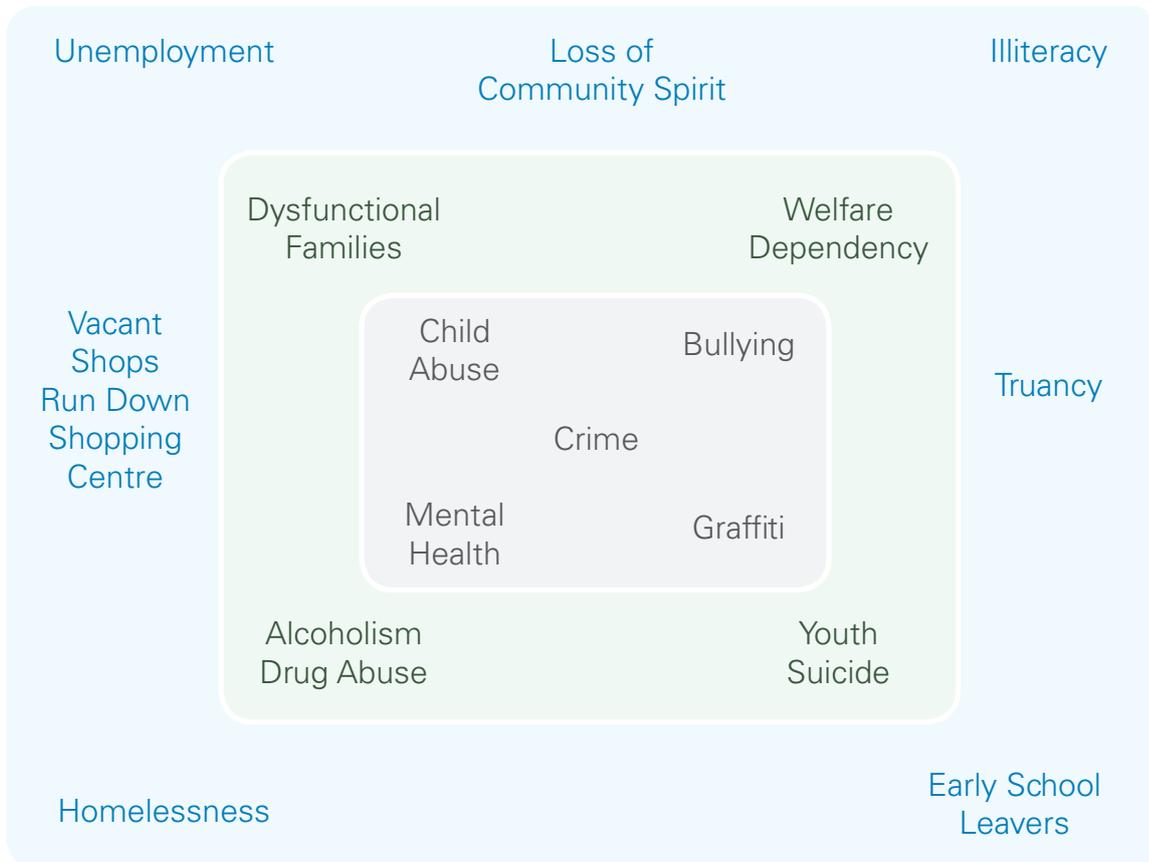


Figure: Community Assets Map

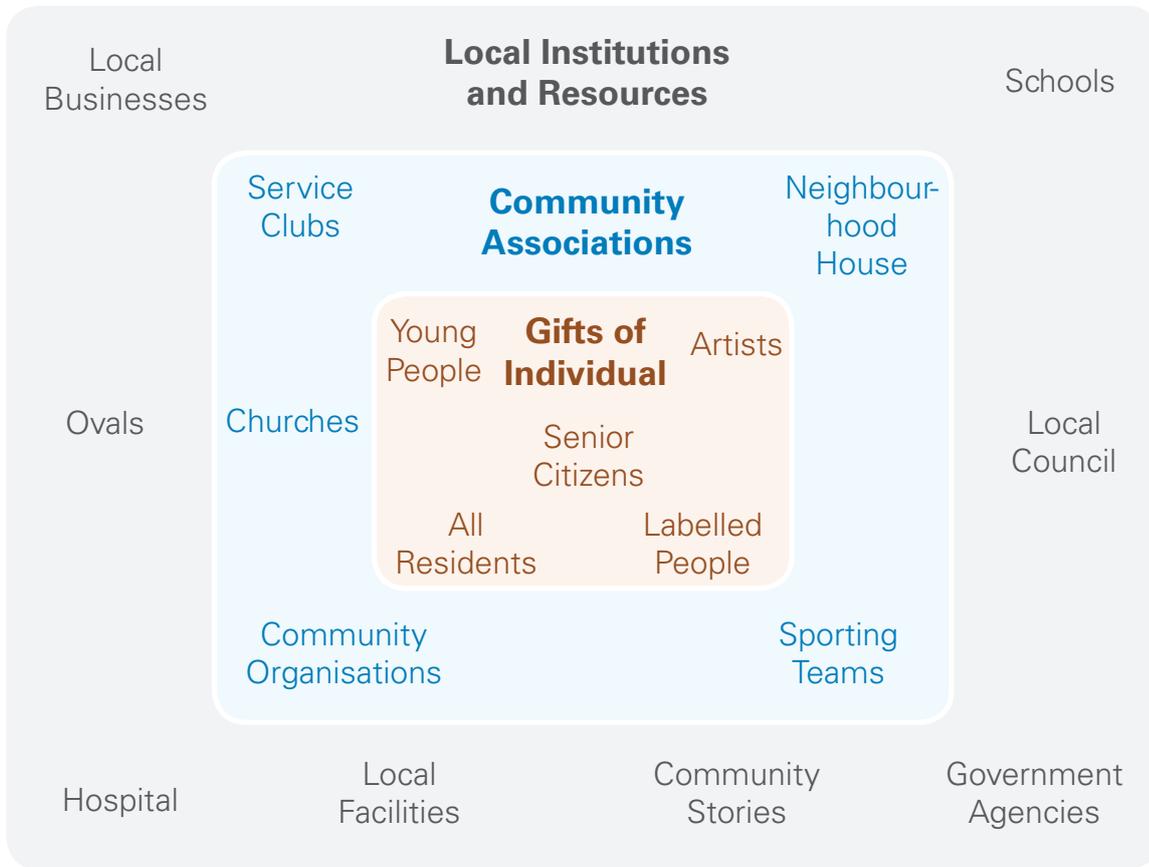


Table: Comparison of Traditional Community Development and Asset Based Community Development

Traditional Community Development	Asset Based Community Development
Top down, outside in	Inside out
Weaknesses	Strengths
Deficiencies, needs	Assets, opportunities
Disabilities	Abilities, capacities
Silo provision	Collaboration
Consumers of services	Producers of services
Dependence on outside professionals	Importance of community initiatives and relationships
Focus on programs	Focus on local people and networking

‘A strong community has a “treasure hunt” mentality in which residents look at everyone bearing gifts.’ Mike Green

ABCD core steps

ABCD implements three steps:

- **Step 1:** Discovering and mapping local assets, which is a systematic process of identifying and detailing resources and strengths in the community.
- **Step 2:** Connecting these assets to work together.
- **Step 3:** Creating opportunities for these assets to be productive and powerful together.

Assets to map

The ABCD approach specifically seeks out the following assets:

- Gifts, skills, passions and hopes within individuals.
- Physical assets—land, buildings, equipment, parks, etc.
- Community groups and networks.
- Government and non-government agencies.
- Economic and business assets.
- Local stories, heritage and values.

Discovery methods

ABCD advocates the following ways to map assets in the community:

- Face-to-face interviewing.
- Self-administered questionnaires.
- Group interviews and focus groups.
- Phone interviews.
- Appreciative Inquiry methods (see the following information sheet).

Notes:



Information Sheet 3: Appreciation Inquiry

The fundamentals

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a method of conversation that seeks out the 'best of what' to help ignite the collective imagination of 'what might be'. It originated from David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University. Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago helped convert it to a powerful community building tool.

AI is a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future. Its approach fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, a community or an organisation. It asks people to tell their stories about their connections with others when those connections were at their best.

The basic idea is to build the future around what works rather than trying to fix what does not. AI is a deliberate counter to problem based and deficiency focused approaches to change. It is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations and their community. It involves systematic discovery of what has happened in the past and what gives a person, an organisation or community 'life' when they are most effective.

AI develops the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen capacity to mobilise potential through crafting '**unconditional positive questions**' that lead to sharing best practice, magic moments and life giving experiences.

Such sharing leads to imagination and innovation. AI assumes that people, organisations and their communities have untapped, rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. When this '**positive change core**' is directly linked to a change agenda, changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilised. This in turn generates hope, optimism, collaboration and energy and focuses them into powerful forces for change.

AI key steps

AI is a tool that will take your network through five key steps:

- **Step 1: Define** – Determine what to focus on.
- **Step 2: Discovery** – Appreciate what you have got.
- **Step 3: Dream** – Imagine what can be.
- **Step 4: Design** – Create what will be.
- **Step 5: Deliver** – Work on making it happen.

Sample questions

AI typically asks:

- What are the strengths and assets of our community?
- Share a time when you felt our community was at its best?
- What do you value most about our community?
- What is the essence of our community that makes it unique and strong?
- What gives you most hope for the future of our community?
- What has happened in our community that gives our children a great start in life?
- If you had three wishes for the future of our community, what would they be?

Key assumptions

AI assumes:

- In every society, organisation or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality—communities grow from what they personally ask questions about.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality.

Practice principles

AI puts the following principles into practice:

- Always work in the affirmative.
- Ask provocative questions. Probe for excitement and possibility.
- Focus on the positive. Look for the budding flower amid the grey backdrop.
- Generate interactive dialogue. Provide space for dialogue and questions.
- Respect the past, live the present and look to the future.
- Seek the root cause of success, not the root cause of failure.

'Communities, individuals and organisations grow and change in the direction of what they focus on. A.I. is a quest to see the glass is half full and how we make it more full.' Peter Kenyon

Sample asset mapping tools

Mapping assets can be achieved through the ABCD, AI methods and Discovery Methods discussed in this publication, and in conjunction with survey tools.

Some sample ready-to-use survey tools for asset mapping are provided in the following section.



Tool 3: Community Passion and Skills–Audit 1

Our community of _____ is incredibly asset rich in skills, interests, work experiences and connections of local residents. This simple survey seeks to identify such assets. We invite you to fill in this form and return it via _____ .

Be assured, no information will be shared with a third party without your permission.

Your contact details

First Name:	
Last Name:	
Street:	
Town/Suburb:	
State:	Postcode:
Home telephone:	
Mobile telephone:	
Email:	

Your interests

General interests (motivations, passions):

Your current employment

Position:
Previous employment positions:
Hobbies:
Groups/clubs which you belong to:
Specific skills you would be willing to share and/or teach:
Specific skills you would like to learn:



Tool 4: Community Passion and Skills–Audit 2

Our organisation, _____, seeks to inspire and support local residents to discover the strengths and opportunities of our local community and to engage in early years community projects that make a difference in the lives of our children. This audit sheet seeks to identify community residents who may be able to share their interests and experiences. Any information shared will only be shared with your permission.

Your contact details and position

First Name:	
Last Name:	
Street:	
Town/Suburb:	
State:	Postcode:
Home telephone:	
Mobile telephone:	
Email:	
Current position:	
Today's Date:	

Your interests and experiences

Please list up to four interests and/or experiences in each category—things you are happy for us to know about you.

Head (things I know something about and would enjoy talking about and/or teaching to others e.g. local history, conservation, business management, etc.)

1.
2.
3.
4.

Your interests and experiences

Please list up to four interests and/or experiences in each category – things you are happy for us to know about you.

Hands (things I know how to do and enjoy e.g. project organisation, gardening, painting, rock climbing, cooking, jewellery making, using the internet, sign language, etc.)

Hearts (things I care deeply about e.g. the environment, intergenerational activities, animal welfare, women's rights, youth unemployment, etc.)

Community involvement (groups, committees, clubs, etc. that I am part of)

2.4. Identifying needs and opportunities

This process provides the foundation for identifying appropriate initiatives for the Early Years Network to put into the action plan.

It involves collecting information from members and stakeholders in the community about what the community needs to support children and families. This includes uncovering potential 'windows of opportunity'. It is important to believe that solutions lie within the community.

People who are useful to consult about these issues are:

- parents, grandparents and carers
- operators/facilitators of child development services (including health, care and education services)
- staff involved in the community development sector
- community members, business and political leaders.

There are two basic ways to collect information to identify needs and opportunities:

- 1. Quantitative methods:** Gathering information in the form of countable data, such as pre-school attendance rates, number of families using local toy library, number of childcare facilities and places.
- 2. Qualitative methods:** Gathering information in the form of descriptions, even as short as a single word. This method often uses open-ended questions to gain more understanding about behaviours, for example, parent feedback about what works well for them, barriers to local services and reasons for their choices.



Tools that may be useful to collect information related to needs and opportunities include:

- analysing existing data
- questionnaires
- interviews
- focus groups
- story dialogue
- appreciative Inquiry informal discussions.

The following pages contain resources to use or adapt for gathering local community information.



Tool 5: **Appreciative Discussion with Parents**

Questions to prompt discussions with parents:

1. What do you value most about raising children in our community?

2. What are the most important sources of information for you as a parent?

3. What programs/initiatives/services have been most helpful to you raising young children?

4. What do you find the hardest part of raising a child in our community?

5. If you could make one suggestion to help make the 'system' work better to support families of young children, what would it be?

6. Finally, if you had three wishes for the future of our community in terms of it being a great place to raise young children, what would they be?



Information Sheet 4: Tips for Conducting Focus Groups

A focus group is a qualitative research technique that supports and stimulates participants to explore issues, feelings and opinions more widely and deeply than is usually possible in a structured interview or formal public meeting.

The focus group is at its best when used to:

- obtain a range of opinions/perceptions on a theme
- identify strengths and weaknesses in programs / services
- inform decisions about where to make improvements
- stimulate new ideas
- interpret research and surveys
- inform policy decisions.

Factors that maximise successful outcomes for focus groups:

- An interviewer/facilitator who is knowledgeable about the subject material as well as skilled in group facilitation.
- The creation of a relaxed informal atmosphere.
- A clearly defined purpose and objectives for the meeting.
- Limited participant numbers (seven to nine).
- A round-table seating configuration.
- Following a predetermined format with a set of structured questions.
- Ensuring questions are:
 - open ended
 - focused
 - move from the general to the specific
 - simple and comprehensible.
- Ensuring the meeting is fun and attendees feel appreciated and positive about participation.
- Setting and sticking to an agreed time arrangement.
- Keeping discussions on track.
- Encouraging participants to talk to each other, not just to the facilitator.
- Watching out for group domination and the loss of input from quieter people.
- Encouraging a range of ideas by giving individuals permission to have different views from the rest of the group.
- Ensuring the meeting is not a forum for bitter arguments, public speeches and confrontations between participants—steer conversations away from potential conflicts.
- Keep a record of the discussion—ask someone not participating in the discussion to come along as a scribe.
- Summarising points often.



Information Sheet 5: Effective Community Brainstorming

‘The best way to get great ideas is to have lots of ideas.’ Linus Pauling

Brainstorming is useful for:

- generating lots of ideas in a short period
- encouraging lateral and creative thinking
- expanding, piggy backing or ‘leap frogging’ on the ideas of others
- helping participants to temporarily suspend judgement or criticism
- helping shy individuals to participate more freely.

Rules for brainstorming:

- Leave old disputes, feuds and ideologies at the door.
- The goal is quantity, list every idea and as many ideas as possible. Defer judgement. No criticising. Evaluation comes later.
- Keep ideas short.
- Encourage creativity. Anything goes. Wild ideas are great.
- Combine and build on ideas. Piggy-backing on another’s idea is allowed and encouraged.
- Do not worry about spelling when listing ideas.

How to set up a brainstorming session:

- Identify the issue, question or problem for discussion.
- If there are more than 10 participants, divide them into smaller groups.
- Select a person to list ideas on whiteboard or flip chart for each group.
- Explain the purpose and rules of brainstorming.
- Brainstorm responses to an issue, question or problem. All ideas should be recorded. Start by asking for one idea from each participant.
- Analyse and discuss unfamiliar ideas (be careful of stopping the flow).
- Establish criteria for selecting the best ideas.
- Allow the group to choose the best ideas. Be creative and consider giving each member five red sticky dots to vote for the best ideas listed.
- Generate action plans for the ideas chosen.



Information Sheet 6: Community Needs Interview Guide

To start constructing a community needs interview guide about the relevance and usefulness of facilities and services for families and children, consider using or modifying the following questions:

1. What services might families with young children need?

- What formal services might families need e.g. maternal and child health services, childcare, pre-schools?
- What informal services might they need e.g. playgroups, mother's groups?
- What facilities might they use e.g. shopping centres, cafes/restaurants, transport, recreational (parks, playgrounds, swimming pools), resources (libraries, toy libraries)?

2. How accessible are these services and facilities?

- How physically accessible are they?
- Are there any eligibility restrictions for these services? Are they universal or targeted services?
- What does it cost to use them? Are they free, means-tested or fee charging?

3. Are there meeting places for families of young children?

- Where do these families, other similar families, meet?
- How many meeting places for families are there in the community?
- Which meeting places are dedicated family venues or facilities, if any?

4. Are the various services facilities and venues family friendly?

- Which places are physically attractive to families with young children?
- Which places are clean and safe?
- Which places are run in a family-centred way?

5. How well do the various services work together?

- Are the formal services available linked/integrated with one another?
- Are the formal services and informal community services linked/integrated?
- Are any of the services co-located or are they all in separate locations?



Information Sheet 7: Tips for Quick Community Surveys

Surveys give a 'snapshot' of the current situation in a community and help Early Years Network members to identify and decide on which project to undertake. Surveys can also show to what existing initiatives are achieving or where they can be improved.

Surveys are typically used to:

- identify specific community resources and needs
- measure community attitudes
- measure whether a project is likely to gain support
- identify new ideas
- measure the progress or success of an initiative
- create publicity or community interest in a new initiative.

Before beginning a survey

- Have a clear purpose for the survey and decide beforehand how the information will be used and processed.
- Where possible, involve people in the community who may know something about how surveys are conducted (marketing professionals, local council staff or students) or consult community-support organisations.
- Keep it simple. Two or three small surveys may give better results than one large complex survey.
- Estimate the resources needed to undertake the survey in terms of people, money, time and data processing. Sometimes local high schools and universities are prepared to support a survey as a learning opportunity for students.
- Choose the most appropriate way of conducting the survey, for example, face-to-face, email, distributing questionnaires and telephone. Take into account whose opinions or ideas you are seeking.
- Test the survey questions to make sure they are crystal clear and easily understood by the people targeted. Confirm that the answers invited really give the information sought.
- Minimise the number of questions to the essentials.
- Ensure the introduction highlights the benefits of the survey and encourages people to take part.
- Consider ways to publicise the survey before launching it.

After the survey

Let people know the key findings as soon as possible. Surveys can raise community interest in an idea or possible initiative, but the benefits are soon lost if results are not published or it takes a long time to process them.

2.5 Facilitating community conversations

'Creating a positive future begins in human conversation. The simplest and most powerful investment any member of a community or an organisation can make is to begin talking with other people as though the answers mattered.' William Greider

Conversation is the basic development tool in any community building strategy. It is the key to creating positive change in the community.

Engaging the most confident and articulate families in community conversation is relatively easy. More effort is required to involve families that are not attracted to, or who feel uncomfortable with, traditional consultation.

It is fundamental to community development that conversations involve groups that are truly representative of the local community. The most useful information may come from those families who are harder to engage or connect with.

Organising and facilitating useful, enjoyable and broad-based community conversations requires vision and creativity, and taking some risks.

The following range of tools and tips have proved extremely helpful in structuring meaningful conversations.

'The power of being heard is a wondrous thing.' Mike Mather



Tool 6: Conversation Café

The Conversation Café method is well known and is a fun, flexible and easy process to foster dialogue, share knowledge and discuss new opportunities for action.

Using the imagery of a café, the Conversation Cafe method creates meaningful conversation around 'questions that matter'.

It assumes that we generate meaning and energy for change out of our participation in quality communications.

How to host a Conversation Café

1. Plan the whole event, including:
 - topic/issue to be explored
 - who needs to be there
 - best available timing
 - best available venue.
2. Craft the question/s to be put to the group. They need to be:
 - simple and clear
 - thought provoking
 - energy creating
 - idea generating.
3. Invite, preferably with personal invitations, people who are interested in the topic.
4. Create a warm and hospitable environment that resembles an inviting café space that can include:
 - interesting décor
 - food and drink
 - background music
 - butcher's paper as table coverings
 - an upper limit of six participants to each table.
5. Open the event by thanking everyone for attending, then:
 - introduce the purpose of Conversation Cafe and the event process
 - display prominently the questions to be discussed, i.e. on a large card on each table or projected on the wall.
6. Start the event process by:
 - asking participants on each table to converse on one question
 - asking participants use felt pens on each table to list, develop and draw ideas on the paper table cloth
 - encouraging everyone's contribution.



Tool 7: Open Space

'Open Space is a brilliant combination of order and chaos. It is a useful tool for any group of people (five to one thousand participants) who are really committed to exploring something that they all care deeply about....' Harrison Owen

Background

Harrison Owens created Open Space Technology in the 1980s as a learning experience from his observation that people attending conferences and workshops preferred coffee breaks and lunchtimes more than formal presentation and planning sessions.

He discovered that in the breaks, participants chose who they wanted to be with and shared conversation about topics that were of interest to them.

In his opinion, if that was true, why not structure conferences and workshops around those realities.

Open Space principles

- Whoever comes are the right people.
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.
- Whenever it starts is the right time.
- When it is over, it is over.
- 'The Law of Two Feet' – if you find yourself in a group where you are not learning, contributing or enjoying, go somewhere else.

Hosting the Open Space process

Open Space events or sessions have no keynote speaker, no schedule of workshops and no panel discussions.

Instead, participants learn initially about a process to create their own learning experience and the availability of a range of discussion stations.

The steps to hosting are simple:

- **Step 1:** Explain processes and key principles to participants.
- **Step 2:** Anyone wanting to initiate a discussion or activity summarises their topic in a few words or a sentence on a large sheet of paper, then stands and has less than a minute to announce their topic to the group. They nominate a timeslot at an available discussion station, then 'post' their topic on a wall.
- **Step 3:** When everyone who wants to post a topic is done, everyone participates in the 'Village Marketplace' session. They mill around the wall of options, prioritise their interest in the topics and put together their personal schedules for the duration of the event.
- **Step 4:** The first discussion time starts immediately.



Tool 8: Checklist for Effective Community Meetings

Community meetings can discover the views of community members and maintain community interest. To ensure their effectiveness, follow a checklist of the things to do and to provide before, during and after these meetings such as the one below.

1. Before the meeting:

- Pick a date and time convenient for most members of the target audience. Avoid the dates of other regular community meetings or major community events.
- Determine the most suitable venue. Consider issues like:
 - proximity to the target audience
 - comfort of seating, acoustics and temperature control, public transport, parking, accessibility
 - opportunities to socialise
 - potential for family amenities such as child-care.
- Ensure the target audience gets early notice. Use all available media to announce the event and encourage attendance. Consider mail outs, pamphlets, posters, personal invitations, and articles in school newsletters, media statements and social media.
- Provide visiting speakers and resource people a written invitation, a map and a written briefing. Ensure they arrive well before the meeting and update them with any changes to expectations on arrival.
- Appoint an experienced chairperson who understands the purpose, has excellent public speaking and facilitation skills and demonstrates confidence in the process.
- Provide an adequate public-address system and test its set-up before the meeting starts.
- Arrive early to arrange the room. People participate best when they can see each other and are close to presenters and resource people. Chairs arranged in a horseshoe formation close to presenters is best.
- Avoid straight rows and placing presenters on stages or behind tables.
- Ensure adequate seating, but do not put out all chairs, otherwise front rows will remain empty.
- Arrange chairs with their backs to the entry point.
- Prepare name tags for everyone who has responded and appoint 'greeters'.
- Set up decor, entertainment and refreshments that reinforce a warm, welcoming and interacting atmosphere for example tea and coffee, background music and displays.
- Prepare and copy enough feedback forms for all potential attendees.

2. During the meeting:

- Have 'greeters' welcome participants on arrival and usher them to registration for their name tags and pre-meeting refreshments.
- Start on time.
- Provide a warm welcome to all, and any special guests. Clearly state the purpose of meeting. Use overheads or a flip chart paper to reinforce the purpose and agenda where possible.
- If you conduct an icebreaker activity, encourage participants to avoid discussing what organisation they work for as this may be off putting to community members.
- Encourage audience reaction and contribution.
- If the meeting involves controversial issues and/or brainstorming functions, establish ground rules. Here's a short example of ground rules:
 1. Anything goes! Don't be afraid of new ideas. Respect the opinions of others.
 2. Keep ideas, opinions and comments short.
 3. Allow everyone to contribute.
 4. Focus on the positive. Avoid spending time blaming others and dwelling on what has not happened in the past.
- Appoint someone as scribe to record the key points and decisions.
- At the end of the meeting, provide a summary of any agreed outcomes and future actions.
- Thank people for coming.
- Acknowledge individuals/groups who have contributed to the organisation of the meeting.
- Provide post-meeting refreshments to encourage participants to stay on and network/socialise.

3. After the meeting:

- Seek feedback from participants. Supply a simply-worded feedback form to each attendee to be completed and left with organisers. Include a privacy (non-identifying or non-disclosure) option in the form to encourage safe, honest and thoughtful feedback.
- Make sure the outcomes are communicated to participants in a meeting report with next steps included.



Information Sheet 8: Tips on Group Discussion Facilitation

A group discussion facilitator is a 'keeper of the process' rather than an 'expert'. Their role is to create a conversation environment where information and ideas are freely shared and discussed.

The facilitator's role is to:

- create an atmosphere of energy, excitement and possibility
- equalise powers ensuring all group participants have an equal chance to provide effective input
- ensure clarity and direction, demystify processes and concepts and ensure group discussion stays on track
- elicit views, ideas and linkages, and maximise opportunities for participants to share and speak freely
- record, synthesise and create a useful and record of the matters discussed.

A good facilitator:

- acts naturally, openly and enthusiastically
- accepts all participant points of view without judgement
- has sound knowledge of the subject under discussion
- listens carefully and tries not to interrupt
- ensures all participants feel valued
- shows respect for cross cultural sensitivity
- presents ideas and opinions as they are presented by the participants
- monitors participation so individuals neither monopolise conversation nor sit back and say nothing
- is comfortable with conflict and conflict resolution
- knows how to stimulate discussion and reflection.

Facilitation is not:

- changing the wording of the participant
- refusing to record an idea (looking tired, distracted, unable to cope with too many ideas coming in at once)
- getting emotionally attached to outcomes
- judging comments of the group or liking some ideas better than others
- flip-flopping the agenda and work processes
- manipulating people and behaviours through their own feedback
- monopolising conversation
- taking sides on issues or with people
- disallowing group suggestions on the process



Information Sheet 9: Partnering with Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities

‘Engaging Aboriginal families in the co-design of children’s services is crucial to greater engagement and empowerment of families who want their children to live good lives. Aboriginal families have a right to contribute their experiences, choices, perspectives and expectations as active decision makers and collaborative partners.’ WACOSS CEO Irina Cattalini

Many Early Years Networks partner very effectively with Aboriginal and CaLD families and young children. Specific projects and programs celebrating diversity have been undertaken that promote inclusion across local programs and services.

Many resources are useful and support effective engagement. An informed approach to engagement is vital.

The following outline relates specifically to engagement with Aboriginal people, and was developed by Aboriginal people and members of Early Years Networks. Networks starting engagement are encouraged to consider this information when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

More resources on engaging with CaLD families can be found on the [Office of Multicultural Interests’ website](#).

Consult widely



No ‘one voice’ represents all Aboriginal people. In developing and providing a sustainable and effective service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the community, Aboriginal people can and should be at the table. ‘Nothing for us without us,’ is a fair call. It is important to speak with many different stakeholders from community, service providers and people to grasp what is most important.

Establish solid relations and networks



Many Aboriginal service providers and community groups could make great partners for networks. Networks should have their own personalised contact database to liaise or partner with in providing services for various Aboriginal families and communities.

Cultural awareness, safety and competency



Every organisation working with Aboriginal people should be proficient in cultural awareness, safety and competency. There are many providers (including WACOSS) who can offer this service and some specifically cater to areas that may resonate with your work and services. It is a solid investment for any Early Years Network to have their members trained and confident in these areas.



Stories from the field 6: Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) young mums

Teenage parents consistently report difficulties in accessing mainstream services for support to successfully raise their babies. Imagine how much harder it must be as a young mum if your own ethnic community shuns you.

An Early Years Network supported a group of mums in this predicament to meet regularly for five months. They enjoyed activities with their babies, had 'time out' as mums and accessed services that came and made personal contact with them. The group has become increasingly confident and now plans to continue running their own playgroup.



2.6 Establishing a vision, mission and action plan

The vision statement of an Early Years Network outlines their desired future and what the group ultimately hopes to achieve. A powerful and inspiring vision will reflect the core values of the membership and the aspirations for children and families. The vision statement will guide the decisions and actions of the Early Years Network and support the group when determining its long term focus.

Vision and mission statements serve two distinct functions but people often confuse them.

The vision captures how the network wants to change the community in the long term. The mission is about the network's purpose, how they will make the change happen in the community.

Compare these sample statements of an Early Years Network's vision and mission:

'Vision – In our community every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.'

The focus in this vision statement is on the result of the Early Years Network's work. It is future-focused and outlines the ultimate outcome the network wishes to achieve.

'Mission – The (insert name) Early Years Network will provide opportunities for children to be actively engaged in learning opportunities throughout their community.'

The focus in this mission statement is on the Early Years Network's purpose and role in delivering the vision and what it will do to help bring about this outcome. It presents and outlines how and what they will do to achieve their vision.



Tool 9: Developing the Vision for an Early Years Network

This is an opportunity for the group to dream big and imagine if the Early Years Network could achieve anything in the community over the next three to five years what would that be?

Meet with the membership group and provide the opportunity for them to think about this question: 'If our Early Years Network featured on the front page of The West Australian newspaper in three to five years' time, what would we want the headline to say?'

To help the members respond, good prompting questions include:

1. What would be different in our community?
2. How would the lives of our children and families have changed?
3. What would children and families be saying about living in this community?

A good vision inspires, focuses on serving the community and is very ambitious – to achieve an ideal result. A good vision statement is memorable, can be easily understood and is no more than three sentences long.

Test the power of your vision statement with the following checklist:

- Does it excite the network members?
- Does it tell the community about the good that the network wants to do?
- Is it simple?
- Is it clear?

Notes:



Tool 10: Developing the Mission for an Early Years Network

Mission steps

To establish a mission statement, it can be helpful to work with your Early Years Network through the following steps.

- Step 1: What is the problem that your network exists to solve?
(Example: Insufficient literacy outcomes.)
 - Who is affected by the problem?
 - How would the community benefit, be different or change if your network solved the problem or responded to the need?
- Step 2: What is the purpose of your network?
(Example: To improve literacy skills in young children.)
 - Why does it exist?
 - What is the ultimate outcome or result you are hoping to achieve?
- Step 3: What activities or programs can your network do to fulfil your purpose? What is the broadest statement of your work?
(Example: Providing opportunities for children to read.)
- Step 4: For whom do you do this work? Who is your target group, your community?
(Example: Children up to eight and their families.)
- Step 5: Where do you do your work? What are your geographic boundaries?
(Example: Local shire boundaries.)

Your mission checklist:

- Does your mission tell the community about the purpose of the network?
- Is it clear and simple?
- Will it help keep you focused on the right things?
- Does it link in well with your Vision and tell people your part in delivering it?
- Does your mission statement pass the t-shirt test, which is a check to confirm if:
 - the group supports it enough to wear it on a t-shirt
 - it is short enough to fit on a t-shirt
 - it is so clear that people 'get it' in an instant.

Elements of the action plan

The vision and mission statements provide the starting point for your network's action plan.

The action plan is the practical 'roadmap' for the group. The network uses the action plan to guide its regular meetings and steer the ongoing work of the group. The action plan should respond to the following questions on behalf of the network:

- Where do we want to go?
- What steps do we need to take to get there?
- How will we know when we have arrived?

A good plan starts with being clear about what we want to achieve and setting an actionable set of objectives that are based on sound information about the situation.

When developing an action plan consider:

1. What is the situation or identified need that we are trying to address?
2. What is the scale of the issue? What do the Australian Early Development Census results show, including emerging trends? What factors may be contributing to the proportion and number of children who are developmentally vulnerable in the community?
3. Is the need supported by the evidence? What supporting data and information do we have?
4. What has already been implemented? What worked? What should continue and/or what needs to change?
5. Who else in the community should be involved in the planning to bring about better outcomes for children?
6. What do we expect to change for children and families as a result of the planned objectives?
7. Is the plan reasonable and achievable?

Standardising our planning terms helps clarify our planning process. Here are terms that become tools when clearly understood throughout the network membership:

Goals are broad statements of interest that direct our efforts towards our vision.

Objectives are statements describing what we must do and when to do it as we work towards achieving our goals.

Strategies describe how we will use our resources to accomplish our objectives. They add clarity to objectives. They assign, allocate, redirect and/or leverage resources.

Action Steps are the individual tasks that we undertake to accomplish our strategies. They define the task, who will be responsible, when it will be accomplished and what resources are required and their possible location.

Performance Indicators are quantitative measures, benchmarks or vital signs that provide insights into how well our organisation is achieving its stated goals and objectives. They help our organisation to monitor, evaluate and refocus our action plan.

Action plan review

An action plan should be reviewed regularly with our network members to ensure that it remains current and reflects the work that we as a group intend to do.



Stories from the field 7: Strategic planning days of the Midland Early Years Action Group

The Midland Early Years Action Group holds a planning day every two years to identify its priorities and action areas. Group members and interested people attend the planning days which enable the group to focus its efforts on identifying priorities for the following two years.

The planning day reviewed the Australian Early Development Census results, Australian Bureau of Statistics data and issues affecting families and young children in the Midland area. As a result of planning days, projects are developed with allocated working parties who meet regularly to progress them and report to the group at monthly meetings.

A positive outcome of the planning day was, 93 per cent of participants stating that the day had helped them to understand the role of the group. In addition, 87 per cent said the planning day helped them understand where the group should focus its efforts.



Vision and mission statement examples

The following are examples of Early Years Networks vision and mission statements that networks have developed and use to set and lead their objectives.

Ellenbrook Children and Family Connect

- **Vision:** Our community is a great place for children to grow and thrive. Ellenbrook Place area is home to well-supported and connected families and our children are happy, healthy, safe and strong.
- **Mission:** To SUPPORT children's development and wellbeing, to CONNECT families to programs and services, and to BUILD a stronger community in the Ellenbrook Place area.

Newman Early Years Network

- **Vision:** Newman is the best place to be a child and to raise a family.
- **Mission:** Newman EYN is committed to supporting our children and community to thrive.

Armadale Early Years Network

- **Mission:** We are committed to the very best outcomes for children, their families and carers. To achieve this, we strive to bring families, agencies and other community members together in a welcoming, dynamic, action focussed network.

In addition to sharing information, we will identify and build on our combined strengths and potential to take effective action together.

Midwest Early Years Network

- **Vision:** Our children are safe, healthy, resilient and optimistic.
- **Mission:** Building strong connections for child and families through networking, education and advocacy.



Link Early Years Network

- **Mission:** To improve and enhance the health and wellbeing of children and their families who live in the Cities of Gosnells and Canning local government areas.
- **Objectives:**
 1. Build an informed and sustainable network
 2. Raise the profile of LINK Early Years Group
 3. Create and strengthen the link between families and community services

Tools for your vision statement and action plan

The following are tools to help your Early Years Network develop its vision statement and to define objectives that fit naturally and effectively into your action plan.



Tool 11: Magic Wand Exercise

This is a useful tool to stimulate a conversation about dreaming of the future. The Magic Wand Exercise will help develop your Early Years Network vision.

It works as a simple reflective exercise to assist a group to answer a particular question – what is our vision – from the viewpoint of ‘what do we hope to achieve?’

1. Let us wave a magic wand. It is now five years on and our community is now actively supporting children and families as a result of our network initiatives. What has happened and why?

2. Imagine what is possible?

3. What do we hope to achieve?

4. What will be different?

5. What would success look like for our network’s initiatives?

Notes:



Tool 12: The 'SMART' Test for Objectives

The 'SMART' Test provides a guide for developing and testing objectives for your Early Years Network.

Composing objectives is not an easy task so spending time and effort to do it well will be an excellent investment.

Objectives enable us to:

- Set out clearly our intentions and define actions.
- Provide reflection on progress.
- Help evaluate impact.

Objectives need to be **SMART** – **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and connected to a **T**imeframe.

Specific: clear and unambiguous.

Measurable: need not be a 'quantifiable measure' but includes words that can be assessed, for example, 'to increase', 'to establish' etc.

Achievable: being realistic in regards to time, resources and effort required to achieve a task.

Realistic: within our power to accomplish.

Timeframe: include time specific information in the wording if appropriate.

The following are examples of SMART testing of objectives.

Sample action plan

The action plan below has been developed by an Early Years Network in regional WA and provides a detailed plan of what the Early Years Network will be focussing on, when the action will be completed, who has responsibility, what resources are needed to complete the action and the expected outcome.

Table: Example SMART Objectives

Example	Objective	SMART?	Comments	Recommendations
1	Provide better conditions for parents to meet.	Specific? Measurable? Achievable? Realistic? Timely?	What sort of conditions? This is not measurable. Should be achievable without too large an input of resources required and given appropriate timelines.	Suggestions of revised objective that could be used: to increase the opportunities for parents in the community to meet each other. Or After a period of three months, families previously unknown to each other in the community will have been provided with several opportunities to meet.
2	Over a one-year period, the rate of babies in the community that are being exclusively breastfed at six months will be increased from 32 per cent to 40 per cent.	Specific? Measurable? Achievable? Realistic? Timely?	Yes Yes Is an 8 per cent increase in the number of babies being exclusively breastfed at six months: Realistic given the resources available? Achievable in one year?	None required

Table: Example Early Years Network Action Plan

Strategies/Activity	Timeline	Responsibility	Resource Requirements (e.g. human, physical, economic)	Monitoring Procedures	Outcomes Achieved (What, When)
Communication Strategy					
Networking	Bi-monthly meetings	All members of Early Years Network	CRC to provide venue	Feedback through network	Increase communication between organisations/community groups related to the early years
Email distribution list	As items arise	Invited participants All members to email relevant information to be distributed to the network	Members forward relevant information on to email list contact, who forwards to rest of group Network members forward information to others as appropriate	Emails sent	Improve communication channels between agencies Promote early years activities/ events/ professional development opportunities as they arise
Parent email distribution list	Ongoing	Parents can sign up at events, on portal or email to join	Nominated member to update parent email distribution list as required	Number of emails sent Number of contacts	Improve communication channels between agencies and local parents
Local parent Facebook page	Mid May 2016	Have four key members from network to monitor page	Members to forward information they would like posted. All information to adhere to guidelines	Page checked daily Number of members Interaction on page	Improve communication channels between agencies and local parents Increase promotion of relevant local events and child development information
Local newspaper articles*	Monthly	Nominated members from networks to source writers for the articles Local CRC to ensure articles are in local paper	Nominated members to create template to be used regularly Articles to be forwarded to CRC	Number of views Local feedback	Improve communication channels between agencies and local parents Increase promotion of relevant local events and child development information

Table: Example Early Years Network Action Plan

Strategies/Activity	Timeline	Responsibility	Resource Requirements (e.g. human, physical, economic)	Monitoring Procedures	Outcomes Achieved (What, When)
Resource Development					
Events calendar	Updated monthly	All members of network	Developed during meetings	Number of attendees at events	Improved awareness of local events
Programs					
Reading program	August 2016	All members of network	To be confirmed	Number of attendees	Provide opportunities for early language and literacy
Second hand books				Parent feedback	Encourage parents to read to their children daily
				Books distributed	Improve access to books for local families
Events					
Annual fun days:					
National Simultaneous Storytime	May	All network members provide planning input	Where relevant representatives from the network will pre present at event to promote network/ their organisation or group	Number of participants and community groups participating	Raise profile of network
Children's week	October			Information distributed Media obtained	Relationship building between services and community Families engaged in child development strategies
Guest speaking:					
External Service Provider	Annually as opportunities arise	All members provide planning input Community Resource Centre to be centralised point of enquiry and provide venue	Network members to promote and assist with planning at meetings	Guest speaking event held Attendance rate Evaluation forms from participants	Raise profile of network Improve parent knowledge and skills

Table: Example Early Years Network Action Plan

Strategies/Activity	Timeline	Responsibility	Resource Requirements (e.g. human, physical, economic)	Monitoring Procedures	Outcomes Achieved (What, When)
Educational workshops	Annually on needs basis	Members to nominate opportunities as they arise	All members to assist in promotion Nominated members to plan workshops	Number of workshops Network supports Number of presentations Evaluation forms post workshop	Raise profile of network Increase skills and knowledge of services and parents
Local Government					
City/Shire early years strategy	July 2016	Nominated member of network to work with local shire/city All network members to have input into strategy	To be confirmed	Strategy established Instances of strategy being used	Secure local government support for the early years Ensure early years are considered in relevant local infrastructure planning and upgrades
Action Plan to be reviewed in October 2017					



Tool 13: Tips for Funding Proposals

Now that your Early Years Network is clear on its vision and mission and has a detailed action plan, translating a good idea into a practical outcome may involve preparing a funding proposal from which your idea can be evaluated.

Funding proposal steps

- **Step 1:** Identify purpose and amount of funds needed.

Be as specific as possible about the community solution the funding will bring. Avoid a vague, generalised proposal. Identify what funded actions you or your network could cope with and demonstrate your ability to complete those actions and establish the expected outcomes. Do not overstretch your resources, human or otherwise.

- **Step 2:** Research and discuss.

Support the key focus of your proposal with detailed research. Contact appropriate individuals and groups for their reactions and support. In general, know what you are doing, why you are doing it and what you are up against before you start applying for funding or support.

- **Step 3:** Confirm direction.

When writing the proposal it is essential that you incorporate your knowledge of the purpose and objectives of the organisation from which you are seeking support. Many organisations have a website and a person who you can contact regarding their funding and it is vital that this is thoroughly read and discussed before you begin writing your proposal.

- **Step 4:** Write the proposal.

When your network agrees that it is fitting to approach a certain organisation for support, stick to any guidelines set by that organisation. Otherwise, use a logical format with numbered headings and a series of attached appendices with detailed information. Some require the use of their application forms. Your proposal must be comprehensive enough for the funding body to make a fully informed decision.

Most funding decisions are made by a committee whose members want to read only the major details of your concept. However, this committee usually receives recommendations from a secretariat that wants to know everything about your projects. The main body of the report must therefore be written for the decision makers. Write the appendices and back-up information for those who advise the decision makers.

An executive summary at the front of the proposal is useful to introduce the proposal or to remind people who have already read it about the key points.

In selecting a particular writing style or approach, remember there are several very pertinent points which need to be raised.

- Avoid abbreviations, jargon, clichés or terminology which may confuse someone unfamiliar with the area about which you are writing.
- Keep it simple and concise. Focus on the benefits of your proposal to both the community and the funding body and the evidence that its outcomes are achievable by your network with the amount of funding sought.



2.7 Creating partnerships

'If you want to go faster, go alone. If you want to go further, go together.' African proverb

A partnership is a relationship between individuals and/or groups that is characterised by mutual cooperation and responsibility and actively seeks the achievement of specific goals.

Early Years Networks will be more successful when they are developed in partnership with key champions, influencers and advocates for the early years within the community.

Evidence illustrates that successful partnerships work when they adhere to the following:

- Partnership relationships are characterised by mutual trust, respect, generosity and communication.

- There is clear agreement by all partners of the mission, goals, values, role responsibilities and outcomes.
- There is development of a common language and understanding.
- The responsibility and authority/ decision-making is shared.
- There is clear, open, regular and accessible connection and feedback between partners.
- Partners share the credit for the partnership's accomplishments.
- Adequate time is allowed for partnerships to develop and evolve.

The following information sheets and tool may be useful in strengthening your partnership process.

'I cannot save the world on my own...it will take at least three of us.' Bill Mollison



Stories from the field 8: Wanneroo and surrounds Early Years Network working in partnership with the Local Government Authority

The Wanneroo and Surrounds Early Years Network and the City of Wanneroo partnership is committed to supporting families and communities to ensure young children get the best possible chance to learn, develop and achieve good mental and physical health.

To achieve this vision, two full-time early childhood officers are guided by the City’s Early Childhood Strategy. The strategy recognises that it really does take a ‘village to raise a child’ and that well-supported communities result in well-supported families and children.

The City is committed to the Wanneroo and Surrounds Early Years Network, which supports the families and children in and around its suburbs.

During times of change in the wider early childhood arena, the City has provided support in a ‘backbone agency’ role for the network. The City maintains direct administrative support in running the network by organising meetings, agendas, guest speakers, weekly distribution lists, training opportunities and minute taking.

The network continues to grow and has more than 100 members who meet every six weeks. The meetings are held and chaired by the members in a variety of venues who actively work towards improving outcomes for children within the local community.



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Information Sheet 11: Running Successful Early Years Network Meetings

Meetings are ultimately about effective time management for everyone. An efficient meeting structured and featuring a steady pace will have a powerful effect on member satisfaction and ongoing participation. If the person is attending on behalf of an organisation then their employer needs to see better value from the time their team member spends at your Early Years Network meeting than from that time spent at their office.

Meetings are better when you:

1. only meet if you have to. Avoid a meeting if the same information could be covered in a memo, email or brief report
2. have a roster set up detailing who is responsible for chairing the meeting and who is responsible for recording the actions
3. set objectives for the meeting before planning the agenda. The more concrete your objectives, the more focused your agenda will be. The meeting should focus on the action plan of the group and dedicate part of the meeting to working towards the actions
4. email out an agenda before members reach the meeting. Your agenda needs to include a one-sentence description of the meeting objectives. Re-state these objectives as you start the meeting. The agenda lists the topics to be covered, who will address each topic and for how long. Follow the agenda closely during the meeting, as that is what you have asked the group to expect
5. to start the meeting on track, summarise what you will cover and what you hope to accomplish during the meeting
6. keep on time. Consider asking someone to keep the chairperson to the timeframe set out in the agenda
7. assign action items to particular members, with their consent, by the end of each topic as it is discussed. Don't finish any discussion in the meeting without deciding how to act on it. Actions can be written and shared with those not in attendance instead of traditional minutes. A format for recording actions items for each agenda can be found in this section as a 'Minutes template' tool
8. recap discussions and resolutions at the end of the meeting. Summarise the accomplishments, decisions and next steps and close on time
9. deliver meeting minutes or the action list in a reasonable time, preferably within a week
10. encourage participation with active listening. Be respectful of people even if you disagree with their opinion. How you respond when people make a contribution can reinforce — or negate — your words. Show that you are open to different points of view by earnestly asking for clarification. Discourage inappropriate behaviour from others. For example, if someone is interrupting say: 'I understand you disagree but let's allow Shawna to finish her thought before we discuss it.'



Information Sheet 12: **Diagnosis and Cure – Changing an Ineffective Meeting into an Effective Meeting**

People are increasingly busy and often need to prioritise attending one meeting over another. The network meeting needs to offer priority information or actions that members feel they must not miss. Larger attendance at productive meetings will support the sustainability of the group and lessen the burden on (and burn out of) the core group of most dedicated members who are often the office bearers of the Early Years Network.

Unsure about the sorts of messages your meetings are sending out? Scan the following scenarios of some common meeting 'ills' and some suggested 'remedies' for each.

Scenario 1. The living notice board

At a 'living notice board' meeting, agenda items are delivered as serial monologues by one or more members.

Members arrive late and some have to rush off early. The last agenda item, 'Any Other Business', is usually a member's only opportunity to bring up that new funding opportunity you all agree should be explored, but time runs out. A funding proposal is postponed again to next month's meeting. You leave the meeting frustrated and de-energised.

The diagnosis

You could extend the time allocated for the meeting and try to fit more in, but this would miss the real cause of the problem which is boredom and a lack of interest. Attendees learn that everything spoken in the meeting could have been sent to them earlier by email.

People attending 'living noticeboard' meetings do so out of an underlying commitment to the Early Years Network and its mission – not because they feel they can make a meaningful contribution.

The remedies

First, re-acquaint participants with the main purpose of meetings.

Meeting agendas should only contain items that require meaningful input from the Early Years Network.

Background papers need to be circulated well before the meeting to allow people to read and reflect on their positions on the issues when they are to be discussed. The papers need to include:

- brief and clear reports that conclude with one or two recommendations. These focus the meeting on key issues for decision making and provide members with meaningful opportunities to contribute
- background documents, which are attached to a particular agenda item's reports as 'information only' and for reference, not discussion.
- an agenda, which clearly states the purpose of the meeting and the expected outcomes of each agenda item.

Timing is everything. Structure the meeting and agenda so that participants are engaged early on the matters of the most importance. This will encourage them to come on time. Estimate how long each agenda item will take and put the planned timing on the agenda.

Ask a participant to keep track of time so that all agenda items are covered in the meeting with sufficient time for focused and informed discussion. Maintain the pace of the meeting to keep up with the time allocated to each agenda item.

Scenario 2. The serious bonding session

At a 'serious bonding session', all participants share their opinions on agenda items and anything else of interest. Passions are shared (or vented) and an abundance of good ideas are thrown into the ring. Everyone leaves the meeting feeling great, but no decisions are made and nobody has any responsibility for any future action.

The Early Years Network does not meet again until next month.

The diagnosis

These meetings are fun but lack focus. The Early Years Network finds it hard to move forward because no one has been encouraged to take responsibility for any action.

The remedies

A skilful chairperson is able to facilitate the meeting so that participants enjoy themselves and still commit to actions and achieve significant outcomes.

Encourage ownership

To broaden ownership of the Early Years Network and its meetings ask or suggest individual members take particular responsibility for specific agenda items. Ask them to prepare background reading materials and lead the discussion for 'their' agenda items. Have them estimate how many minutes' discussion their agenda item is likely to take and to record the expected outcomes of meeting discussion.

Discussion beyond about five minutes becomes more of a workshop and can lose focus. Keep the meeting on track. The point is to make a decision after considering the recommendations of the person who proposed/owns the agenda item.

Recording responsibility

Record the ideas generated and the decisions made during the meeting. Critically, the minutes/actions need to state who agreed to do what by when. At the end of the meeting, review each agenda item and confirm who is responsible for each action item.

Circulate the minutes or action list while the discussion is still fresh, preferably within a week.

A table recording the action resulting from the agenda and detailing people's responsibilities and timelines attached to the front of the minutes is very useful. A tool for this is the following minutes template.



Tool 14: Minutes Template

Early Years Network Minutes

Name:

Location:

Date and Time:

Chair:

Minute Taker:

Attendees:

Apologies:

Agenda Item	Action	By Whom	By When
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Next Meeting

Date and location of next meeting:

Next Meeting Agenda Items

Items to add to the next agenda:

Conclusion Time of Meeting

Time the meeting ends:

2.8 Evaluating the impact of the Early Years Network

Evaluation has a reputation for being technically involved and a difficult exercise. In reality, evaluation is a normal part of everyday life. We engage in it several times each day often without realising – whether it is reflecting on a meal that we cooked or sharing with others an experience we've had. Evaluation is all about questions.

Evaluation for an Early Years Network means monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of your action plan to know if you are making a difference.

Success can be measured in many ways, whether qualitatively, quantitatively or a mix of both. At a minimum any evaluation should ask: 'Has the action or intervention made a difference to children and families in the community?' If so how, if not why?

The key questions to extract supporting evidence for the evaluation might be:

- What works and why?
- What does not work and why?
- What difference, if any, does the network make?
- How have things changed over time and for whom?
- Is the network meeting needs? Whose needs?
- What do local partners think about our initiatives?
- Are we achieving our vision and objectives?
- Have we done what we planned to do? If not why?
- Have we used grants and funding monies effectively? Has it achieved what we stated in the application?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?



- How will we monitor progress? Decide what information you need and how you're going to get it, preferably before implementing the action plan.
- What challenges and/or concerns were encountered?
- What do you need to know more about?

Evaluations can benefit from questions that cover four specific topics of achievement, namely questions about:

1. **Needs and issues** - that our Early Years Network is trying to respond to.
2. **Processes** – how our network operates, how things are done.
3. **Performance** – the outputs, quality of activities and costings.
4. **Outcomes** – the results or benefits of the Early Years Network; what real difference it has made and for whom.

See the following tools that support evaluation.



Tool 15: Early Years Network Satisfaction

This is a useful tool for seeking participant feedback on Early Years Network activities and initiatives.

1. Overall, how would you rate this initiative?

Excellent Very Good Satisfactory Fair Poor

2. How useful was this activity?

Very useful Somewhat useful Not useful

3. What were your expectations for this activity?

Comment:

4. How well did this activity match your expectations?

Above my expectations

Matched my expectations

Below my expectations

5. What could be done to improve the activity for the future?

Comment:

6. Please make any other suggestions or comments you think would be helpful for future planning?

Comment:

Notes:



Tool 16: 'Family Friendliness of Services' Tool

This tool assesses agreement on five features of a service, including: 'took enough time to understand my needs'; 'lectured or talked down to me'; 'was friendly and welcoming'; and, 'respected me and my family'. The tool has been used for assessing services for new mothers in the first eight weeks after birth, but the questions used with the tool can be altered to the relevant group and period of time of interest.

Example services assessment: Still thinking of the first eight weeks after you brought the baby home, how would you rate the staff at the services you used? Tick the relevant box if you agree.

Services Used	Took enough time to understand my needs	Lectured or talked down to me	Was friendly and welcoming	Respected me and my family	Room was suitable for parents and babies
Child Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nurse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctor - General Practitioner (GP)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pharmacist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctor - specialist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone helpline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nurse at hospital	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emergency Department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nursing Mothers counsellor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff at Community Health Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff at DSS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



2.9. Maintaining the interest and involvement of Early Years Network members

Any community initiative needs to be aware of three separate but interrelated 'communities' that need to be kept informed and supportive, namely:

- members/active participants of the initiative
- local community
- wider/outside community, including State and national agencies.

The following tips and tools can inform and, if applied, support your efforts to retain community support and participation in your Early Years Network.



Information Sheet 13: Tips for Maintaining Community Interest and Involvement

The support of the three broad groups of people to keep engaged with your Early Years Network are best engaged with the following three distinctive practical approaches.

1. Keeping members/active participants involved and supportive by:

- keeping in contact with frequent telephone calls/emails
- never stop saying “thank you”
- convening meetings at convenient times
- making meetings fun and social occasions
- creating a newsletter
- having user-friendly minutes
- regularly acknowledging individual and group contributions (comments at public meetings, over radio and within newspaper articles, awards, etc.)
- having regular and fun times to celebrate achievements
- having a crèche facility to support families to attend and participate.

2. Keeping the local community informed and supportive by:

- having a regular news column in local newspapers
- having a regular distribution of media releases
- using any media opportunity to highlight initiatives
- participating in radio talkback programmes
- giving presentations to schools, services clubs, churches and other organisations
- regularly having community consultation and feedback sessions
- frequently publishing ‘user-friendly’ reports, brochures, flyers, posters, etc.
- publicly acknowledging sponsorship and support (quarterly newspaper acknowledgments, acknowledgment on brochures and documents, etc.)
- updating the Early Years Network’s social media pages.

3. Keeping the wider/outside community informed and supportive (including State and national agencies) by:

- identification of champions such as highly supportive politicians, civic leaders, sports people and prominent ex-residents who are willing to regularly ‘blow the trumpet’ for the Early Years Network
- sending a regular mail out or email to a targeted mailing list, including annual progress statements/updates
- regular media exposure on radio, television, newspapers, journals
- participating in regional and national forums and networks
- briefing/lobbying trips to state and national capitals
- getting to know key influential political, bureaucratic and industry stakeholders/individuals
- meeting people on a personal level
- finding reasons for influential people to visit and socialise with members, i.e. to ‘declare something open’
- organising sponsorship of community members to attend regional and national conferences, workshops and training events
- ensuring generous acknowledgment of outside support.



Stories from the field 9: Parenting services information display

The Mirrabooka Early Years Community Group collectively run a monthly shopping centre information morning. It is a successful initiative that raises the profile of the various parenting agencies and their range of services.

It has been a particularly valuable way to connect and communicate with refugee and CaLD families, enabling the network to link families to organisations with expertise to meet their individual needs while also helping local agencies discover more about each other's services.



2.10 Promoting awareness and achievements

To achieve its mission, a network needs to establish visibility within the wider community and among the diverse range of stakeholders connected to child development. Allocation of responsibility for publicity and media liaison to particular member(s) of the network is strongly recommended.

Methods used often include:

- production of a promotional flyer
- creation of a website and social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube
- production of a newsletter/regular email update
- issue of regular media releases
- sponsorship of activities
- organisation of events, launches, 'business after hours' events, celebrations
- instigation of promotional projects, e.g. annual calendar
- regular column in local newspaper
- presentations to local service clubs, churches, local government, chamber of commerce, etc.
- use of special opportunities for conference presentations, participation in talk back radio, etc.
- updating the network's social media content
- welcoming new members with an information pack containing the vision, mission and calendar of activities of the network and how to participate.



Stories from the field 10: Having the community involved

The Bullsbrook Early Years Network finds that involving community members increases the local knowledge and connections of the network. This helps and supports the network to have the needs of the community at the forefront of its work.

Community members know where to promote an event and know influential residents in the area. This involvement recently supported a second successful 'Paint the Swan REaD' event based on the [Paint the Town REaD](#) initiative

The event was a great opportunity for local and external service providers to engage with parents. As a result they experienced a 100 per cent increase in participants in the next year.

Parents engaged with service providers to hear what was available. Meanwhile children had a great time discovering the world around them through interesting activities provided by the services associated with the network.

The whole event raised awareness of the Early Years Network in the community.



Stories from the field 11: A powerful promotional and educational tool

Since 2011, the Zig Zag Early Years Network has provided a quality annual calendar featuring photographs of local families and providing extensive early years information. This free calendar is distributed throughout the Shire of Kalamunda and is made possible through generous local financial and in-kind support.

The calendar was initially developed in response to the network's confirmation that the vast majority of parents were unaware of the extensive range of children's services available in the area. The professional appearance and layout of the calendar ensures that messages and referral information achieves education by stealth in the community.





Information Sheet 14: Working with the Media

The media – newspapers, television and radio – is a very important means of informing the community about Early Years Network initiatives. Effective use of the media is a skill that can be developed.

General principles of media engagement:

- Decide who will deal with the media on behalf of the network. Whether you use one person or a group to deal with publicity, it is essential that reporters know who to contact for a clear, mandated comment or statement. Channel all communications with the media through one spokesperson and ensure all your members know who this is.
- Government departments have specific protocols outlining who can liaise with the media. Network members who are also government staff need to familiarise themselves with these protocols.
- Be careful not to raise local expectations beyond what you can deliver. This will quickly lose your credibility with the community and it will take a long time to get it back.
- Be proactive - seek the media out. Do not wait for the media to chase you. Make a list of local newspapers, radio and television contacts, including local newsletters.
- Identify specialist publications that may be interested in your initiatives.
- Establish relationships. Get to know local reporters, correspondents and editors. Find out about their deadlines and the issues they are interested in. Do not waste their time on topics outside of the scope of their publications.
- Do not play favourites with the local media. Alternate the times you give out stories and media releases so you do not favour one paper or radio station.
- Be open and reliable - give accurate information. Stick to the facts. If you are giving an opinion make sure you state it is your opinion. Provide honest answers to questions and do not be afraid to say that you do not know something. If you are phoned by a reporter to comment on something, feel free to ask for 10 minutes before you respond so you can collect your thoughts, but make sure you phone back within the promised time or request the questions in an email and respond via email after thoroughly checking your reply.
- Invite media representatives to network meetings. Send them minutes but always with a covering media statement summarising the key points you wish to convey. Give them early notice of important events. Always provide an after-hours phone number at the end of any media statement or after an interview and return calls promptly. Go out of your way to report progress.
- Be helpful and to the point – most media organisations are short of time and resources. The more you can help them without being asked the better. Put your main effort into writing newsy media releases (see below). Journalists are usually too busy to spend a lot of time rewriting media releases. Attach photos.
- Be clear about the points you want to make when interviewed. This is your opportunity to promote your network and the importance of its work.

Make sure it's news

The media look for news that is... new! If it is an annual event, at least the date and preferably the star attractions are new. The media want to be first with items that, in their opinion, interest their particular audience of readers, listeners or viewers. Do not bombard them with endless media releases that aren't news or you will soon find the media never returning your calls.

As a general rule, the more local the media outlet, the greater their feeling of obligation and willingness to report events and issues of interest or benefit to the local community.

Make sure your news is fresh and is provided early enough to allow reporters time to meet their deadlines.

Allow time before deadlines to arrange photographic or video opportunities as most media prefer to shoot their own. Provide good quality photographs as back-up to a media opportunity that might not work out on the day. A portrait photo of the 'speaker' in the media release is a good stand-by.

Ways of conveying news to the media:

- Media releases.
- Phone calls/alerts.
- Invitations.
- Media conferences.
- Radio phone-in shows.
- Circulation of documents.
- Letters to the editor.

Media releases

A media release (news statement for public consumption) is one of the most efficient ways of informing the media or making an announcement. It saves your group and media outlets time, gets the facts communicated correctly the first time and enables your group to inform a range of media outlets at the same time. It is simply a statement that tells the 'What, When, Where, How and Why'.

A media release must create a positive response in the critical eyes of the media. Poorly drafted media releases usually end up in the bin and reduce the credibility of your group.

To enhance the effectiveness of your media releases, take the following steps:

- **Step 1:** Use a media release letterhead that identifies your group - keep the design uncluttered and avoid small lettering and fancy fonts.
- **Step 2:** Use a verb that grabs the reader's attention in the headline and the first sentence, for example, open(s), new, launch(es), boost, bid, reading riot for kids, etc.
- **Step 3:** Place the most important newest facts at the top and then arrange your material in descending order of importance. Do not attempt to get everything into the first (leading) paragraph. Keep all sentences at 30 words or less.
- **Step 4:** Ensure every statement is accurate. Check all facts, including the spelling of people's names and titles.

- **Step 5:** Keep it short, preferably to one or two pages. Keep it under 400 words, preferably under 200 words. The shorter it is, the more focussed and powerful its key points will be.
- **Step 6:** Ensure the media release is clearly dated with the day of its distribution and contains a contact name, well attended phone number and email address of both the network's media liaison person and spokesperson (if they are not the same person).
- **Step 7:** Know the deadlines of your target media outlets. Do not call them on the deadline unless you are getting back with urgent information they specifically requested or that significantly changes what you have already submitted.
- **Step 8:** Make sure you issue your release on the best day for maximum coverage. Generally a release issued on a Monday or Tuesday will get better coverage than one released on a Friday. Sometimes providing it earlier can allow more time for the media to arrange the kind of photograph or footage they want.
- **Step 9:** If your media release is not 'for immediate use', state the time and date it is free to be used. Indicate this by marking it on top with "Embargoed until (time) am/pm on (date)".
- **Step 10:** Attach any visual material, photographs, logos, maps, diagrams.

The style of writing for media releases requires:

- simple language and sentence construction - avoid the use of jargon and clichés
- positive words and phrases
- short paragraphs (often one sentence is enough) and limit sentences to 25-30 words
- names of people and organisations written out in full at first reference with the organisation's abbreviation in brackets - if referred to again you can use the abbreviation
- quotes to make it more interesting
- writing in the third person, i.e. 'he said' or 'she said', not 'I said' or 'I was'
- avoiding/removing underlines - this is an editor's instruction to print those words in italics
- spelling out numbers from one to nine in words, except for dates, times, prices, weights and measures - use figures for numbers of two or more digits until their unwieldy size can be reduced to 10 million or 1.5 billion, for example. Numbers before the word per cent are always in numerals
- Do not use the % sign, spell out "per cent" as two words, e.g. 97 per cent.

Social media marketing

Social media is a powerful tool to connect with your community and is a quick and easy way to keep people alert to your Early Years Network activities. The most popular platforms available are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. To be effective in representing the network, your social media content writers must:

- ensure consistency of messages and actions across all media platforms
- ensure Information written is factual and accurately represents the network
- ensure that the network's page is kept up to date with relevant information
- be aware of sensitivities associated with confidentiality.



Stories from the field 12: Connecting the community and the network membership

A powerful resource for local families and services is provided by the Armadale Early Years Network. It is a weekly compilation of professional development opportunities, notifications of meetings, seminars and related events sent out to more than 350 network members.

A separate weekly email is also sent to members and more than 500 families. This email contains parenting information and courses, local events and other events or information considered of interest to families.

Through these resources, the network provides professionals and parents with a point of contact to get more information on specific issues. Families enjoy the resources as they take the effort out of finding what is available locally for their children.



Stories from the field 13: Celebrating the year's successes

In December each year, the four Early Years Networks in the City of Swan – Altona, Bullsbrook, Ellenbrook and Midland – come together to share lunch and discuss their individual achievements and actions over the year. This provides a valuable opportunity for members of all four networks to discover, interact and connect.

During 2016, as an extension of this annual event, the networks agreed to start a conversation about the possibility of working more in partnership with each other and how this might look within each of their communities.

2.11 Celebrating success

We are social beings and it is engaging and affirming for all concerned to bring together the wider community with Early Years Network members to celebrate achievements and deepen social connections. Some networks appoint a member as celebration coordinator to ensure successes are shared and enjoyed.

Potential opportunities for celebration include:

- launches/openings of child centred activities and projects
- a monthly catered 'after business hours' event
- fundraising events
- supporter and volunteer 'thankyou' events
- events marking occasions such as Family Week, Harmony Day, NAIDOC Week, World Children's Day, for example.



3. Resources and References

For more information on the topics covered in this resource kit please see the following resources and references.

Resources

- [‘A Practice Guide for Working with Families from Pre-birth to Eight Years - Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story’](#) (Benveniste, 2013): was created in response to parental feedback asking for more consistent and less confusing information. It provides practitioners and professionals with a guide on how to consistently and compellingly share information with families about caring for their young child.
- [An e-learning course for working with families from pre-birth to eight](#): is a free course based on ‘A Practice Guide for Working with Families from Pre-birth to Eight Years’. It is hosted online by the Department of Education and Child Development, South Australia.
- [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\) website](#): has a range of online resources, including fact sheets, videos and research articles. These can assist you with how to respond to AEDC data as an Early Years Network. For more support, email Gail Clark, Western Australian AEDC coordinator via gail.clark@education.wa.edu.au.
- [Community Builders website](#): contains many tools relevant to the process of collecting community information.
- [‘Community engagement: A key strategy for improving outcomes for Australian Families’](#) CFCA Paper No 39. (Tim Moore, 2016): is a resource produced by the Child Family Community Australia Information Exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- [Community Toolbox website](#): is useful for evaluating community programs and initiatives. It is hosted by the Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas.
- [Connecting Early Years Networks portal](#): a useful online resource to collaborate and share information with other Early Years Networks.
- [‘Consulting Citizens: Engaging with Aboriginal Western Australians’](#) (Department of Indigenous Affairs, Government of Western Australia, 2005): is a guide which intends to assist the development of Aboriginal community and public sector capacities to fully engage in effective partnerships.
- [‘Engaging Queenslanders: A guide to community engagement methods and techniques’](#) (Department of Communities, Queensland Government, 2010): is a resource with information intended to assist public sector employees and other practitioners in choosing the most appropriate community engagement processes.
- [Family Action Centre](#): is a research, teaching and practice centre focused on families and their communities. It supports Aboriginal communities and service organisations to deliver strength-based approaches when working with families.
- [Kulunga Research Network](#): this network provides information ‘to empower Aboriginal people, families and communities to control their own health futures’.
- [Moving Forward Together: A guide to support the integration of service delivery for children and families](#) (Centre for Community Child Health, VIC and Same Page Organisational Development Consultancy, WA, 2010): is a paper based on the experience of the Learning and Development Strategy for the Tasmanian Child and Family Centres Project.
- [Office of Multicultural Interests website](#): has useful resources including Diverse WA; a training package that assists communities to better engage with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds.

- **Platforms – A Service Redevelopment Framework:** has been developed by the Royal Children’s Hospital, Centre for Community Child Health (CCH) to help communities support childhood development. Platforms can help communities to build community partnerships to lead the reconfiguration of services; identify, plan and respond to the needs of their children; monitor and evaluate their work to ensure outcomes for children are improving. More information including a resource order form and training are offered online.
- **Raising Children Network website:** offers parents and practitioners reliable information and resources to support them in the day-to-day work of raising children and looking after their own needs. It covers a broad range of topics including child development, useful profiles, information for Aboriginal parents and raising a child in a different culture. It was created by a partnership of member organisations of Australia’s leading early childhood agencies; with the help of an extensive network including the Australian Government.
- **RTI Action Network’s ‘Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families’ page:** provides useful information on achieving ‘cultural competence’ to meet the needs of children and families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds. RTI stands for Response to Intervention.
- **Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC):** represents the interests of, and provides practical resources for, Indigenous children and families.
- **Survey Monkey:** is an online service for creating surveys/questionnaires and calculating basic summary statistics from results.
- **‘The Social Audit Cookbook’ (Cox, 2002):** an invaluable tool for understanding strategies for collecting information on community demographics as well as assets, needs and opportunities. This publication has ‘recipes’ for auditing the way we connect.
- **Yorganop Association:** provides programs and resources that support Aboriginal children and young people in foster care and child care to grow strong and healthy in their families, their communities and their culture.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) resources

- **‘Asset Based Strategies for Faith Communities’ (Susan Rans, 2002):** is a workbook that aims to advance the effectiveness of congregations as community builders. It includes stories of faith-based initiatives.
- **‘Building Communities from the Inside Out - a path towards finding and mobilizing a community’s assets’ (John Kretzmann, 1993):** is a guide to ABCD which summarises lessons learned from successful community-building initiatives in hundreds of neighbourhoods across the United States.
- **‘From Clients to Citizens - Communities Changing the Course of their Own Development’ (Alison Mathie, 2008):** is a book of case studies of communities that first built on their own assets, before seeking assistance from outside. It is aimed at community workers, researchers and policy makers who want to take a fresh look at community development.
- **The Asset-Based Community Development Institute website:** offers a range of resources including videos and tools. The institute is located at the Center for Civic Engagement, Northwestern University Illinois.

- [‘The Power of Asset Mapping – How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts’](#) (Snow, 2004): shows congregational leaders how to help a group recognize its assets and gifts, and to act on them in ministry and mission.
- [‘When People Care Enough to Act’](#) (Mike Green, 2006): is by two master practitioners of Asset-Based Community Development whose work has advanced the field by focusing on citizens as the primary asset and activators of assets in local communities.
- [‘Talking Up Our Strengths’](#): is a set of 22 cards designed to promote discussion, build self-esteem and help connect community for Aboriginal children and young persons. They also act as a cross-cultural educational and conversation building tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare services and groups seeking to talk through cross-cultural issues. The cards were produced in partnership between the SNAICC Resource Service and St. Luke’s Innovative Resources.

Appreciative Inquiry resources

- [Appreciative Inquiry Commons portal](#): is devoted to the sharing of academic resources and practical tools on Appreciative Inquiry and the rapidly growing discipline of positive change. This online resource is hosted by Case Western Reserve University’s Weatherhead School of Management.
- [‘Appreciative Inquiry in the Catholic Church’](#) (Paddock, 2003): offers cases studies and how-to information from those who use Appreciative Inquiry in Catholic communities.
- [Imagine Chicago](#): encourages and equips people to become engaged in creating hopeful futures for their families and communities through discourse and action. It has been the inspiration for a self-organizing global Imagine movement on six continents; including rural parishes in Western Australia.
- [‘Lessons from the Field: Applying Appreciative Inquiry’](#) (Royal, 1998): is a book of case studies written by practitioners for practitioners about their experiences applying Appreciative Inquiry.

- [‘The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry’](#) (Hammond, 2013): introduces the organisational change philosophy called Appreciative Inquiry, which is useful in systems being overwhelmed by a constant demand for change.

World Café resources

- [‘Open Space Technology: A User’s Guide’](#) (Owen, 2008): details what needs to be done before, during, and after an Open Space event.
- [OpenSpaceWorld.ORG](#): is an online resource with information on Open Space (Technology), a simple way to run productive meetings, for five to 2000+ people. Open Space is considered a powerful approach to leadership in everyday practice and times of change.
- [The World Café](#) (Foundation, 2016): is a simple yet powerful social technology for engaging people; offering a process for thinking together, evoking collective intelligence and creating actionable results.
- [‘The World Café: Living Knowledge Through Conversations that Matter’](#) (Juanita Brow; David Isaacs; The World Cafe Community, 2001): is a useful journal article written by the co-founders of The World Café.
- [‘The World Café – Shaping Our Futures Through Conversation that Matter’](#) (Brown & Isaacs, 2005): offers tools that can convert analysis into change and provides a structure for connecting people. It is written by the co-founders and includes stories from World Café practitioners.

Funding Sources

The more useful funding sources for community projects to benefit children and families are listed below. Please note, this list is not exhaustive. Start with these two grant directories:

- WA Department of Local Government and Communities hosts the [Grants Directory](#) online but has no role in funding the grants listed.
- [Our Community](#) Funding Centre.

Western Australian Government sources

- Department of Local Government and Communities' [community grants programs](#) provide for an ever-evolving range of purposes. Some grants are available at specific times of the year and others accept applications all year round.
- [Healthway](#) Arts Sponsorship Program provides sponsorship support for community based arts and culture activities such as festivals, theatre and dance productions, concerts, exhibitions and workshops. Also where there is a significant opportunity to change behaviours and environments to improve health. Funding from \$5,000 to \$50,000 is available.
- [Healthway](#) Health Promotion Project Grants provides grants to organisations engaged in health promotion campaigns and projects in Western Australia. Community groups are among organisations that may apply for grants to fund new approaches to health promotion and illness prevention through changing community attitudes and behaviour, and creating environments that support people to make healthier choices.
- [Lotterywest](#) provides funding for a wide range of purposes. It aims to support people with special needs, disadvantaged people in the community, and initiatives that contribute towards the quality of life for all members of the Western Australian community. Grants are available to community groups, not-for-profit

organisations and local government authorities.

- Office of Multicultural Interests' [Community Grants Program](#) promotes an inclusive and cohesive society drawing on the cultural and linguistic diversity of its people to enhance the social, economic and cultural development of the State. Details about workshops and grants available are on the website.
- [Royalties for Regions](#): In the 2014-15 State Budget the Government committed a further \$1 billion each year, over the next four years, into agriculture, regional revitalisation, health, community services, education, sport, transport and tourism through Royalties for Regions.

Foundation funding sources

- [Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal](#) (FRRR) is the only national foundation dedicated to stimulating the renewal of rural and remote communities. It administers 12 different funding programs, including:
 - Small Grants for Small Rural Australian Communities – offering grants of up to \$5,000 for purposes that contribute to development in social and community welfare, economic, environmental, health, education or cultural areas.
 - FRRR/John T. Reid Charitable Trusts CATCH (Culture Arts Tourism and Community Heritage) Program – provides grants from \$1,000 to \$20,000 to not-for-profit organisations pursuing projects that contribute to the development of communities in welfare, economic, environmental, health, education or cultural areas.
 - FRRR / Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) REACH Program - The Rural Early Childhood Program offers grants of up to \$20,000 for not-for-profit community groups in rural and remote Australia that offer early childhood services.



- [Inger Rice Foundation Grants](#) aims to foster activities and programs concerned with improving parent/child relationships in Australia. It offers grants from \$500 to \$5,000 for training, research and provision of material and equipment to persons and groups through incorporated organisations and public bodies.
- Diers, J. (2004). [Neighbor Power - Building Community the Seattle Way](#). Seattle, Washington, United States: University of Washington Press.
- Green, M., & Moore, H. (2009). [ABCD in Action: When People Care Enough to Act](#). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Inclusion Press.

References

- Born, P. (2008). [Community Conversations: Mobilizing the Ideas, Skills, and Passion of Community Organizations, Governments, Businesses, and People](#). United States; Canada: BPS books.

For more information, please contact:

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