

Case Study

Sherbrooke Family and Children's Centre

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Case Study 10: Sherbrooke Family and Children's Centre



Victoria, Australia

Overview

The Sherbrooke Family and Children's Centre is an integrated family and children's centre, located in the Dandenong Ranges south east of Melbourne. The hub was borne out of a community need for increased access to long day care, responding to the needs of children at risk, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and working parents.

For the service to be viable, the Council sought to collocate the long day care with other services and, in consultation with the community, the hub was established in 2013, collocating a number of important complementary services to meet the needs of the children and families of the area.



Source: Yarra Ranges Council

Context/setting



Education



Health



Community infrastructure



Community services



Brownfield



Rural



Public

Service mix



Education, including a long day care facility with an integrated preschool, and a standalone preschool^{1,2,3}

Health, including the Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCH), and an occupational therapist¹ and visiting speech pathologist

Community infrastructure, including a toy library, commercial kitchens, consulting rooms and meeting spaces/community hall available for hire^{1,3}

Community services, including youth and adult counselling services

Level of integration

Inter-organisational partnerships and client pathways are embedded into the hub, with strong relationships between services driving collaboration and coordination, however on an ad-hoc basis². The collocation of services is reported to be an important facilitator of this interaction between services. There is evidence that the location of the MCH service within the centre and the strong relationships between the nurses and families generated a large volume of referrals of vulnerable families to the child care service

Site characteristics



Brownfield, purpose-built to integrated a number of early childhood facilities that had previously been in the area

Rural.

Funding



Public, through an integrated children's centre grant²

Partners (inc. lead agency)

Lead agency: Yarra Ranges Council

Partners: Yarra Ranges Council, Inspiro, Department of Education oversees the legislative requirements of the two preschools

Foundations for success

This hub exhibits four success factors that were identified in the literature review.



Leadership and management



Focus and vision



Collaborative and detailed planning



Governance and culture

Leadership and management

Sherbrooke demonstrated highly visible and supportive leadership and explicit commitment to a vision of integration. This resulted in staff feeling enabled and supported pursue different and new ways of working, which were not possible under the pre-integration service model. To optimise staff retention, there is a focus on good working conditions and benefits for team members, including investment in professional development.

Focus and vision

The Sherbrooke Centre, in close collaboration with the community, had a clear goal and vision for the service and the value it would deliver to the children and families in the area. It was noted that flexibility was also important in this sense, having a community-led purpose, and continuing to evaluate and evolve to identify how services can be delivered differently to get the best experience and outcomes for the community.

Collaborative and detailed planning

A community-minded approach was taken with community members actively engaged and heavily involved in the planning and establishment of the centre. These community user groups, comprising parents and other community members, were identified as key influences in the planning process. A lot of consideration was given to the layout and design of the infrastructure itself, such as the reception area, ensuring it was inclusive, welcoming and culturally sensitive. This was reported to have led to a sense of community pride and co-ownership of the facilities³. A business plan was developed in 2011 with representation across various stakeholders including multiple government agencies.

Governance and culture

Governance over the planning, including the development of the business plan, was overseen by the Council with contribution from other key stakeholders and community members. Transitioning to operation of the infrastructure, a centre director was appointed to oversee the facility and long day care, with a second in charge, managing the team of educators.

The staff themselves have demonstrated a disposition of being open to learning from other professionals and there was a common philosophy at the service that involved the commitment to supporting the development of children across the range of services².

Outcomes

Reduced operational costs

There has been a reduction in overhead costs for partners. There is a reduction in staffing costs, having the one reception at the centre for all services, as well as shared staff and utilities. There are also reductions in costs for holding activities at the centre and from shared administrative services including shared memberships of professional bodies, support for accreditation between the two educational services and shared office costs such as paper and photocopying². It is reported that the long day care service would be operating at a loss, but is now cost-neutral in the centre, with any revenue generated being invested back into the facilities. Reduced maintenance costs of the new building was also cited as an operational capital cost saving.

Increased revenue

The multi-purpose room available for hire saw increased utilisation, and the hub recognised there was still considerable potential for additional generation of revenue². This included the hiring of other communal spaces by the council and community, and providing catering from the commercial kitchen. The hub expected a 20% increase in revenue from venue hire and catering fees since initiation of the hub².

Service awareness and access

There has been an increase in awareness of service, leading to increased service utilisation, particularly among vulnerable families with the allied health services. By providing a safe and welcoming hub, families are more aware of certain services, and feel more comfortable when accessing them. It was reported that the services have had an increase in engagement with child protection and other such services through opportunistic interactions with families and children, and strong relationships between the early education and maternal and child health services, with two way 'introductions' between these services. In addition, external agencies use the facilities to meet members of the community as is it considered a safe and familiar space.

Stakeholders suggested that collocation facilitated improved professional learning and the centre facilitates a number of shared training sessions aimed at enhancing collaboration among partners.

Education Outcomes

There was improved identification of developmental issues in children as a result of improved professional learning and an integrated approach to addressing issues, making families feel more comfortable in seeking help². Specifically, social skills in children were suggested to improve with increased interaction between the kindergarten and preschool³. This also was suggested to result in the children's increased willingness to ask for help or permission from adults.

Civic Involvement

Community involvement in the development of the centre resulted in heightened levels of pride and greater parental involvement³. The space in general provides greater community participation that was limited when the services were offered at distinct facilities.

A Facebook group was also set up by the parents in the community; the centre provides information to the administrators to share, raising awareness about services offered at the hub, as well as upcoming events and activities.

Lessons

- Facility design is key to optimising service utilisation, and having a design that incorporates flexibility into spaces allows services to adapt to changing needs
- Engaging with other established hubs who have previously faced the same challenges and can share learnings is valuable
- Beyond collocation of services, effective integration is dependent on the initial understanding of the implementation context, and facilitated by strong leadership and governance in guiding change
- There were difficulties with attracting staff at first given the rural location, however, by offering attractive packages and having state of the art facilities, high calibre staff were attracted and retained
- Initially, there were difficulties with collaboration as partners were wary of losing autonomy. Having a clear and shared vision can be effective in overcoming these challenges
- Each of the preschool providers has its own license, despite operating within the same facility. However, they work together where practical and appropriate, for example sharing equipment, professional development opportunities, events and activities, and by having an integrated emergency plan in place

References

1. Yarra Ranges Council, 2017, <https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Community/Family-children/Family-childrens-centres/Sherbooke-Family-Childrens-Centre>
2. Urbis, 2014, Co-Location and other integration initiatives: Strategic Evaluation.
3. Department of Education & Training, Victoria, 2015, Co-location and other integration initiatives: Strategic Evaluation, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/colocation/Co-location%20Services%20Summary.pdf>

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