# About ARACY

ARACY champions the wellbeing of all Australian children and young people. We drive systemic change, collaborate with communities, and amplify young voices to create a healthier future. Our work focuses on prevention, early intervention, and equity. Our purpose is for every child and young person to thrive. ARACY and our initiatives - the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children (IDAC), Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) and Western Australia Children's Funders Alliance (WA CFA) - are focused on holistic health and wellbeing for all. We aim for sustainable system changes to prevent disease and promote early intervention. Our commitment to the complete wellbeing of children and young people drives us to seek meaningful and continual systems improvements. Learn more at www.aracy.org.au

# Executive Summary

ARACY welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DSS's proposed changes to the Families and Children grant streams and structures.

Broadly ARACY is in agreement with and supports the Department's intent and direction with these changes. They are reflective of the current evidence base of "what works" for communities and for community service organisations, ultimately benefiting children and families.

ARACY commends the Department for recognising and privileging the importance of services being deeply connected into communities, and the opportunities this brings to encourage community governance, subsidiarity, and flexible responses to local needs. We note that this "connective tissue", as a critical element of successful local service provision and community strengthening, needs to be explicitly and adequately resourced.

We see an opportunity for this reform to lay the groundwork for extension beyond DSS-owned funding streams into harmonising other investment, whether these be different levels of government, philanthropy or corporate.

We urge the Department, alongside implementing relational contracting with early adopter organisations, to consider the potential for a number of "bellwether" sites with existing infrastructure and funding activity to align additional investments as part of this work, generating valuable learnings for how relational contracting and commissioning can be expanded. A number of communities are currently engaged in significant development and additional investment, presenting an opportunity for the Department to align this review with the work of other departments and central agencies. Opportunities lie with complementary investments such as the Building Early Education Fund and jurisdictional investments such as NSW's Brighter Beginnings.

ARACY-supported initiatives such as the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children and Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership would be pleased to discuss these opportunities further.

# Discussion Questions

## Vision and outcomes

**Does the new vision reflect what we all want for children and families?**

*(Vision: All children and young people are supported by strong families who have the skills and confidence to nurture them.)*

The proposed vision broadly reflects the outcome we want for all our children and families. It should also explicitly address the role of strong communities in supporting children and families. This wider vision may help mitigate triggering the "frame" or mental model of "parenting as choice point". In other words, that good parenting as a choice that is up to the individual's discretion and willpower.

This perception puts the onus on the individual to overcome challenges and leaves little room for people to think about how context and circumstance limit and shape people's choices. In contrast, the mental model of "what surrounds us, shapes us" opens up people's perceptions to considering the influences on a child's life beyond their own or their family's individual resilience, and the importance of strong communities in creating better and fairer outcomes for all of us.

We suggest amending the vision to read: All children and young people are supported by strong families <u>and</u> <u>communities</u> who have the skills and confidence to nurture them.

**Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families? Why/why not?**

**Outcome 1: Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children.**

**Outcome 2: Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.**

While raising resilient children is a worthy goal, "resilience" can trigger the same individualistic mental model. It implies that sufficient individual resilience can mitigate structural inequities that have been generations in the making. Our goal should be to reduce *toxic stress[i]* on families and children – the kind of chronic, long term activation of the stress response systems in brain and body that disrupt healthy child development (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2016). Supportive relationships with caring adults can help buffer a child's stress response, promoting resilience and healthy development, however adults experiencing their own toxic stress have lessened capacity to offer these warm, responsive relationships consistently. Children's caregivers also need to be supported, and strong and supportive communities benefit all of us.

Using a frame of "what surrounds us, shapes us" and emphasising that strong and supportive communities benefit us all helps to situate children in the context of not only the people, but the places and systems that influence their ability to thrive.

# Program structure

**Will a single national program provide more flexibility for your organisation?**

**Does the service or activity you deliver fit within one of the three funding streams? Do these streams reflect what children and families in your community need now – and what they might need in the future?**

**Are there other changes we could make to the program to help your organisation or community overcome current challenges?**

As we are not a FaC service provider, ARACY will not respond to this section other than a general comment that we strongly support the Department's move towards flexible funding models that allow for innovation and seek to share decision-making with communities.

# Prioritising investment

**Do you agree that the four priorities listed on page 4 are the right areas for investment to improve outcomes for children and families?**

ARACY supports these four priorities as consistent with the evidence of best supports for children, families and communities. The program would benefit from recognising the differences between Prevention and Early Intervention and ensuring that there is sufficient investment in prevention, noting the challenge of demonstrating improvements in outcomes. When it comes to outcomes for children, prevention must have the greatest focus, given the importance of the first 2000 days of a child's life.

**Are there any other priorities or issues you think the department should be focussing on?**

ARACY recognises that the Department is constrained by their remit and notes that a holistic approach to the social and economic drivers of disadvantage, alongside practical activities and individual supports, is required to shift outcomes for children, families and communities. This makes the Department's intended approach to supporting services that can demonstrate deep connections into communities and with other locally based services even more important.

# Improving family wellbeing

**Do the proposed focus areas – like supporting families at risk of child protection involvement and young parents – match the needs or priorities of your service?**

ARACY is deeply committed to prevention and early intervention as core principles. We are pleased to see this focus from the Department. Recognising and addressing the upstream drivers that put families at risk of child protection involvement – the social and economic determinants – is the most effective way to improve outcomes for children, families and communities. To be effective, this needs to be done holistically, contextually, and in partnership with families and communities. ARACY believes that the Department's proposed approach will support stronger prevention and early intervention and improve outcomes for children and families over time.

Effective approaches to prevention and early intervention are community-led and place-based. Community leadership is the key to sustainably delivering better outcomes for children, families and the communities that support them.

This requires:

- community voice – through voice collection, a community collective plan or co-design
- building trust – through investing time and resources in relationships
- collective governance – including community
- shared decision making – at all stages from design, delivery and reporting
- asset-focus – building on what exists and is already working in communities

Young parents, especially young parents who have their own experience of the child protection system, are statistically far more likely to experience adverse outcomes for themselves and their children. Indigenous young parents are not only more likely to have their own experience of the care system but typically face a "triple stigma" that contributes to significantly poorer outcomes for them and their children. There are multiple points in the journey of young parents where additional, targeted supports can strengthen the likelihood of better outcomes. Please see ARACY's 2022 report Showing the Light[ii] for more detail on where and how interventions can be targeted to support young parents and prevent engagement with child protection.

For transparency, ARACY and our auspiced Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership, along with other partners, are currently exploring the potential for a five year Innovation and Outcomes Fund designed to leverage, strengthen and promulgate existing good practice in supporting young parents. The proposed funding approach would see investment in young parent services to add evidence-based elements to enhance the effectiveness and capacity of existing services, or new services in areas of need. This approach offers advantages including:

- leveraging existing Federal, state and philanthropic investment to maximise value for money from each project
- reducing the cost and time needed for infrastructure and establishment
- bringing a systems lens to strong local service delivery
- harnessing existing place-based knowledge and relationships
- demonstrating how enhanced investment can increase the impact of existing infrastructure to achieve long-term change.

**Are there other groups in your community, or different approaches, that you think the department should consider to better support family wellbeing?**

Taking a holistic approach to wellbeing as far as possible, that considers the social and economic drivers of child, family, and community wellbeing, will support positive outcomes.

The Department may wish to consider adding a specific focus on Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) to their priorities, to leverage the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and ensure families and communities are supported to reduce and end violence.

# Connected, co-located, and integrated services

**What are other effective ways, beyond co-location, that you've seen work well to connect and coordinate services for families?**

Co-location alone, does not guarantee integration of services or a seamless experience for families. Optimal support requires coordinated efforts within and across services, especially for those children, young people and families experiencing life challenges. No individual, organisation, agency or sector has all the levers and solutions needed to achieve a positive change, therefore a collective approach is required.

Integrated services that connect deeply into community and leverage each other to be "more than the sum of their parts" are best supported with explicit commitment and resourcing for this purpose. Many of the case studies and beacon sites and services we look to for inspiration achieved their connection and integration goals through an ad hoc combination of exceptional individuals, philanthropic funding, sympathetic rule-owners and gatekeepers, and sheer luck. This is not a recipe for scaling. Intentional allocation of time, funding and expertise will be required to *consistently* create connected and integrated services that respond to the needs and context of the community that house them.

At community level, organisations need to be explicitly resourced to do the work of "the glue", bringing together the actors in a community to listen, share, and respond collectively. This work is deeply relational and cannot be hurried; it is essential to establishing the pre-conditions for success.

Key parts of effective integration include:

- Dedicated staff who build strong relationships between families, services, and partners – such as community facilitators, navigators, and linkers
- Operational systems and processes that enable collaboration – such as integrated referral processes and IT platforms, shared data systems and joint case management, and
- Access to shared evaluation capability to help define, measure, and continuously improve their integration service dose, quality and participation (Investing in equity through Early Childhood Hubs: SVA 2025)

Collective governance drives integration. Local leadership tables where community, government, services and facilitating partners come together to monitor activities across the community and identify system gaps or issues are powerful integration tools.

If connected, co-located and integrated services are the goal, contracts must enable a non-competitive environment and include time and funding for communities and services to attend shared planning, training and/or governance meetings.

The maturity of the organisations in the community is another important factor, demonstrated by their experience of working together.

To meet the needs of the four investment priorities, ensure appropriate funding is made available in each place for the roles and functions required to do this work (i.e. integration, co-design, collaboration, navigation, evaluation and data collection).

Investment in time will also be required under contracts to allow locally led approaches, acknowledging that investment in relationships and fundamentally different ways of working takes

time. Adequate investment in this capability also recognises the role of systems in facilitating change and such investment is needed to truly shift the dial on persistent disadvantage.

The DSS, through its FCSi grant stream, can also leverage the power of peak organisations and advisory bodies to bring together the different components of the system and support reflection, alignment, innovation, and capability building to support better integration with communities.

**What would you highlight in a grant application to demonstrate a service is connected to the community it serves? What should applicants be assessed on?**

Local context or key principles should influence how services and communities work together and demonstrate their connections, rather than specific formats or templates. Community service organisations can demonstrate strong relationships with their community through co-governance models and robust mechanisms for consulting with a wide range of service users. Demonstrating engagement with other service providers can cover co-location or formal MOUs to regular catch-ups, shared impact frameworks, shared journey mapping or joint community events.

The [Child and Family Hubs Framework](#)[iii] developed by Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership offers a comprehensive approach to the principles and underpinnings of effective integration of services and their communities.

## Responding to community need

**Beyond locational disadvantage, what other factors should the department consider to make sure funding reflects the needs of communities?**

While locational disadvantage is a common approach to targeting investment, it should be coupled with a strengths-based approach to understanding and supporting community need. Approaches that focus on cycles of advantage, community assets, and what is working in a community that can be built upon, avoid top-down, deficit-based approaches that alienate communities and impair strong relationships.

The Department's proposed reform already speaks to the need for flexible and responsive grant funding that enables community service organisations to react to changing community needs, which will help to ensure that funding and services respond to the *changing* needs of communities.

The aim to create more flexibility for service providers is welcome. The streamlining into a single national program assumes organisations have the capacity and capability for the organisational, cultural and practical shift required to focus across a person's life course. This comes with risks to the community if the organisation is not able to make that transition well.

We advocate for flexibility for the community to receive services in the way that works best for them. This is a strength of the CfC FP model – that a range of smaller local services can deliver to the community they know well, with the coordinating support of the CfC FP. This strength should not be lost in the new model.

The cultural diversity of a community is an important consideration as it can indicate hidden complexities that increase a community's need. For example, a community can appear to have adequate services based on the population, but if services are not culturally safe, or interpreters are not available in the community, services can be under-utilised, and families are left without support.

Measures of community cohesion would also provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of a community and insight into need. The Social Cohesion Compass (Scanlon Foundation) provides insights into social cohesion and democratic resilience for each LGA. (Social Cohesion Compass - The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute) The ABS indicators under Cohesive in the Measuring What Matters Framework could also provide insights at the LGA or SA2 level.

The Department may wish to consider a proactive approach to supporting communities where specific change and corresponding changes to relative advantage and need can be anticipated. For example, known changes like energy transition or changes to major employers which are likely to influence the protective factors against community disadvantage.

The Department should further consider a community's readiness for investment – what kind of existing community leadership, resources, infrastructure and momentum for change exist and can be fostered.

### What's the best way for organisations to show in grant applications, that their service is genuinely meeting the needs of the community?

Many community service organisations have historically lacked the funding to invest in building capacity and capability for evaluating and understanding impact. The DSS should consider how evaluating and demonstrating impact can be supported in relational and other contracting in this grant reform, drawing upon the work of Social Ventures Australia, Centre for Social Impact and others in taking a "pay what it takes"[iv] approach to funding.

This should include an explicit approach to how the Department will support organisations to change or correct course, where community needs change or the planned approach/Theory of Change does not show the expected early effects. In return, grant applicants should be able to demonstrate how they will evaluate their own progress and how they will identify and respond to changing needs or emerging opportunities in their communities.

Organisations should also look to demonstrate co-governance models, clear mechanisms for consulting with community, and processes for monitoring and evaluating the impact of their activities. Given the long-term and contributary nature of services supporting families and children, organisations should be able to provide a coherent theory of change or equivalent way of explaining how the services delivered are expected to support the goals of the Department. Lead and lag indicators, "distance travelled" tools such as outcomes stars, and collaboration health or progress tools are other ways organisations can demonstrate impact.

Community-led approaches that applicants should be assessed on include:

- Experience co-designing with community,
- Experience capturing and adopting community voice to inform action,
- Reference to a community collective plan,
- Demonstrated authentic engagement with community through culturally responsive approaches, and
- Shared governance models and demonstrated shared decision making
- Strong existing relationships and endorsement from local providers and community leaders.

Reference to a co-designed community collective plan would be a strong way to demonstrate the needs of the community have been understood. More mature communities and organisations could provide demonstrated actions aligned to achieving that community collective plan.

The Department should be cognisant that much of the work of organisations delivering services in communities, especially when seeking to embed a connected and coordinated approach, needs to include building the relationships and pre-conditions for effective integrated working, and "green shoots" or intermediate indicators as well as service delivery activities and end-point outcomes should be part of analysing impact.

## Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

**How could the grant process be designed to support and increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to children and families?**

Adopting a "pay what it takes" approach to service commissioning is the best way to strengthen a diverse and vibrant community sector and to support more ACCOs to effectively compete for contracts and deliver services.

When funding "what it takes", all funders, including governments, should consider the positive impact long-term, stable funding can have on ensuring community sector organisations remain fit for purpose. Having the breathing room to develop strong strategic direction, evaluate their own work, and enhance both their understanding of the landscape and their own offering within the landscape, strengthens individual organisations and the sector overall.

To strengthen and support ACCOs in delivering services to children and families, the Department should adopt the six recommendations of SNAICC's 2024 report Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families report[v]:

1.  Embed community-led decision-making at every stage of funding development and allocation
2.  Prioritise ACCOs as providers of children and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
3.  Invest in the growth, development, and sustainability of ACCOs through core-functions funding
4.  Reduce administrative burdens across the system
5.  Increase investment in and support for ACCO-led research and evaluation
6.  Build government capacity to work better with ACCOs.

Our partners in Queensland, through the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership, further recommend DSS should consider exemptions to the use of DEX and SCORE, instead working with ACCOs to develop measurement and reporting tools that are culturally safe. There is a risk identified by service partners that some ACCOs would reject funding if measurement tools were inappropriate. In the same way that service design and delivery should be co-designed with community, so too should the monitoring and measuring of outcomes be co-designed as part of this program.

**What else should be built into the program design to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?**

As well as privileging and supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as service providers for Indigenous families and in communities with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Department can support all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families by resourcing community service organisations to invest in the cultural competency of their workforces and put in the time and effort required to build strong and trusting relationships with Aboriginal community leaders and families. These relationships develop at "the speed of trust" and the Department can send a strong signal to community service organisations and communities by explicitly requiring and resourcing sustained investment in community relationships and cultural competency among its grant recipients.

## Measuring outcomes

**What types of data would help your organisation better understand its impact and continuously improve its services?**

Multiple types of information and insights will give the richest picture of impact and guide services towards improvement. As touched upon earlier, a clear theory of change or equivalent, that considers the preconditions and enablers of change, will provide a roadmap for services to understand how their activity is contributing to short, medium and long term outcomes. Explicitly funded qualitative data that considers re-conditions and enablers, "distance travelled" for families and children receiving support, and mapping and health of relationships and connectedness will all give a fuller picture of how services are contributing to the community's thriving.

For this to be most effective, we need to think beyond "data" to shared learning and feedback loops that contextualise activity and seek to understand the changing dynamics of the community.

This will support the Department's aims to make the reformed grant funding more flexible and responsive. The Department should actively consider how grants will assess and support "course correcting" by organisations where needs change, or the Theory of Change doesn't work as intended, or the community requires a different pace or tempo of activity.

Finally, an active approach to co-learning with community to provide case studies, impact reporting or similar will provide an important contribution to promulgating good practice and sharing learning. This could be coordinated through PLACE.

To support a learning system to work on the ground:

- Recognise that people, families and communities know what matters for them.
- Invest in learning how to strengthen the system at all levels.
- Actively involve people, families and communities in innovation, learning, and policymaking.
- Measure the wellbeing impacts that matter for individuals, families and communities.

An overly narrow emphasis on what the system has delivered to individuals, families, and communities (such as services) – especially when determined by proxy measures in administrative and survey data – is simplistic and can lead to stigmatising views of people and their experiences.

Using a holistic wellbeing framework like ARACY's The Nest, which considers all aspects of a child or young person's wellbeing, will keep focus on the intended purpose of supporting families to raise thriving children. Using a holistic framework ensures that children's and families' needs and progress, the contributions of community service organisations towards these, and the interactions between them, are fully captured and understood in context.

**What kinds of data or information would be most valuable for you to share, to show how your service is positively impacting children and families?**

As above

**What kinds of templates or guidance would help you prepare strong case studies that show the impact of your service?**

Using a framework like The Nest to structure case studies or impact reporting, along with a clear Theory of Change or equivalent, and considerations of enablers and pre-conditions for success, will support effective sharing of knowledge and understanding of impact.

## Working together

**What does a relational contracting approach mean to you in practice? What criteria would you like to see included in a relational contract?**

**What's the best way for the department to decide which organisations should be offered a relational contract?**

**Is your organisation interested in a relational contracting approach? Why/why not?**

We welcome the Department's interest in relational contracting. We see relational contracting as an essential shift from a traditional transactional approach to procurement, focused on protecting the purchaser, to a model of ongoing cooperation, focused on the best interest of both parties and the end beneficiaries.

In recent years there has been a growing movement towards a more relational approach to designing and investing in social services according to community need. In a distillation of knowledge across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, Sydney Policy Lab noted that good commissioning needs to adopt four key principles[vi]:

- centring on the need to build relationships and trust
- elevating the role of communities in planning and delivery
- embedding learning and flexibility to allow for experimentation, reflection and evolution
- rethinking funding models to invest in people and communities.

Delivering these reforms requires flexibility to adapt program design and delivery to the local context, which cannot be achieved through traditional grants management. It is welcome that the Government has considered that it will require more relational approaches such as local commissioning, relational contracting, and shared decision-making.

- *Relational contracting* is a specific legal agreement with shared goals and an expectation of open communication and data sharing. It includes agreed values, guiding principles,

governance arrangements as well as required outcomes of both parties, target groups and delivery timeframes.

- *Local commissioning* is about how an organisation involves the community in shaping what the service should look like.
- *Co-commissioning* usually means parties pooling funding and planning together.
- *Joint commissioning* goes further by adding shared governance and oversight of a service or group of services after the execution of the contract.
- *Shared decision making* is power sharing with community to enable self-determination. It involves flexible thinking, collective problem solving and having a diversity of voices in the room that represent the community.

As this is a new way of working for government and services, we encourage Government to invest in building capability in relational contracting – both within government procurement teams and service delivery organisations – and engaging in ongoing learning, evaluation and improvement around the process.

Key success factors for relational contracting include:

- **Community participation**: involve communities in the development of the proposed outcomes of the relational contract and ensure reporting of results/outcomes to community.
- **Government capability:** train government contract commissioning and management teams on formal relational contracting and how to work differently with communities.
- **Service provider capability:** train service providers or facilitating partners on formal relational contracting and enable sharing of lessons across providers.
- **Evaluate and learn:** establish learning approaches to build capability across communities and government and prepare early for an effective evaluation of the approach.

Relational contracting should be in collaboration with community partners, and therefore will require resourcing, governance and capability uplifts, and leadership across all stakeholders (government, agencies and community partners).

Along with enhancing governance, skills and resources, the success of this approach will also require removal of system-level obstacles via policy, process, legislative and/or funding changes, along with addressing the inevitable centralised power imbalances so that relational contracting of services and flow of resources into communities can be more collaborative between funders and providers.

To achieve these goals, DSS can lean into the expertise of organisations and places already demonstrating success in implementing relational contracting/commissioning such as:

- Communities for Children and other place-based initiatives such as Stronger Places, Stronger People
- Primary Healthcare Networks (PHNs)
- The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), for Indigenous communities (especially Empowered Communities).

DSS should explore lead commissioning partners for each community that have:

- strong relationships with the community
- experience in commissioning, relational contracting and service coordination
- are committed to community led, place-based approaches.

Building on the longer funding terms already identified, extending funding to 5 + 5 year funding would give community and providers assurance of consistency, with flexibility to adapt to changing contexts and continuously improve performance. Building in gateways and making second-term funding subject to satisfactory performance and community endorsement protects DSS as the commissioner and demonstrates effective stewardship of public monies.

At a systems level, DSS can also focus on better supporting the capability shifts required across the system to strengthen co-governance, work more relationally, empower communities, and share decision-making. DSS can be supported in this work by organisations such as ARACY, IDAC, Thriving Queensland Kids Partnerships, PLACE, the Strengthening Communities Alliance and The Possibility Partnership.

Capacity building for less mature locations or organisations must be part of DSS responsibilities – building the capability and capacity of all to work under relational contracts in the long-term.

The responsibility of DSS for outcomes needs to be clearly articulated in relational contracts. This includes:

- Adequate funding for the relationship building and integration work
- Authority for data collection to be designed and managed by community (where there is capacity)
- Funding flexibility provisions
- The use of evidence informed programs – allowing co-designed by community for adaptation to fit context
- Timing flexibility in line with community rhythms
- Provide support for effective evaluation
- Enact systems or policy change responses in response to community need

Commissioning partners responsibilities in a relational contract should include:

- connections to community
- demonstrated good stewardship
- funding what delivers outcomes
- monitor and evaluate in line with program outcomes
- enact systems change responses in response to community

Recipients of Families and Communities Service Improvement (FCSI) grants, including ARACY, can play a role in leading, promoting and supporting this work through our deep connections to the different actors within the child and family system. ARACY would be pleased to discuss a relational contracting approach to our work with the Department.

## Other

**Is there anything else you think the department should understand or consider about this proposed approach?**

ARACY sees an opportunity for this reform to lay the groundwork for extension beyond DSS-owned funding streams into harmonising other investment, whether these be different levels of government, philanthropy or corporate.

The inclusion of choice for providers to adopt relational contracting demonstrates the potential for a tiered approach tailored for both more mature sites/services and those developing. This would benefit from a formalised framework in implementation (such as the three-tiered approach described below) to ensure those that are ready can operate with a truly community-led approach and others are supported to build their capability while operating under a more traditional contract. The aim of the reform should be to have all communities activated to adopt community-led approaches over time.

The new program should be a mechanism to build those strong communities - placing community leadership at the centre and supporting communities to build their leadership capacity. Each place will be on a continuum of maturity and will look different, requiring a different approach:

1. Mature place-base initiatives (including some Stronger Places Stronger People, Empowered Communities and Connected Beginnings sites) and Communities for Children FP sites with strong community leadership should lead and be entrusted to design and deliver solutions in partnership with local providers.

2. Emerging place-based initiatives should be engaged in local co-design of program delivery and supported to continue to build their capacity for shared decision making and adaptive governance to build on community-shaped approaches.

3. Communities without existing place-based initiatives should be consulted on service design and supported to build capability to organise community-led governance, with providers adopting place-focused, community-shaped approaches to delivery.

We urge the Department, alongside implementing relational contracting with early adopter organisations, to consider the potential for "bellwether" sites with existing infrastructure and funding activity to align additional investments as part of this work, generating valuable learnings for how relational contracting and commissioning can be expanded. A number of communities are currently actively engaged in significant development and additional investment, presenting an opportunity for the Department to align this review with the work of other departments and central agencies. ARACY and our supported initiatives the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children and Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership would be pleased to discuss these opportunities further.

# References

[i] https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/toxic-stress/

[ii] Barker, B., Harris, D., & Brittle, S. (2022). Showing the Light: Young Parents with Experience of the Care System. Canberra: ARACY.

[iii] Morson, S., Davidson, M., & Meany, R. (2024). Child and Family Hubs Framework. Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership, Brisbane.

[iv] Social Ventures Australia and the Centre for Social Impact (2022) Paying what it takes: funding indirect cost to create long-term impact. Social Ventures Australia

[v] SNAICC (2022). Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families. SNAICC, Melbourne.

[vi] Goodwin, S.; Stears, M; Riboldi, M.; Fishwick, E.; Fennis, L. "All together: A new future for commissioning human services in New South Wales," Sydney Policy Lab, University of Sydney (April 2020)

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