Position Paper: Wrap Around Services

Introduction

QASSP in ‘Five to Thrive - Directions Plan for Queensland State Primary Schools’ advocates for, ‘a re-allocation of existing State Government health and community services funding to provide local health professionals at schools.’ This Position Paper goes further and argues that a whole of government approach is required to address the ‘cycle of deprivation, educational underachievement and failure’ (New Communities School Prospectus, 2008, p.1) that is stopping children from reaching their full potential.

This example highlights the current situation for students in Queensland primary schools. The name of the school, child’s name and his family are not included to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

The school is situated in a low socioeconomic area. The boy lives with his mother in a single parent family. The mother works two jobs to support her family and relies on public transport. The mother had a difficult life herself and bears the scars of this life both emotionally and physically. She has two older children, both of which have issues at home and at school. All of her children are identified as having school refusal, behavioural and learning issues.

Currently, the family receives help from ten different sources. Education Queensland provides support at the school site through the guidance officer, learning support teacher, and the intensive behaviour support team. The school is serviced by a chaplain who works with the boy. A local church volunteer, trained in the World Vision mentor program supports the child at the school. A Red Cross parenting program, based out of a room at the school, is accessed by the mother for her own development. The mother also accesses support from other government agencies off of the school site through mental health, health, child safety, housing and Centre Link. She needs to communicate with many different people, some government, and some voluntary.

At no time has the case been looked at in a holistic sense. Every person or agency does their own bit. The school has continually requested a joint meeting. Unfortunately, the mother is unsure of her role when attending the different departments and organisations. Despite requests by the school for consent forms to be filed with each agency the mother often forgets. Due to her busy life and limited appointment times at the agencies, she finds it difficult to return to complete the paperwork in a timely manner. She tries, she is not negligent, and her children are not at risk of harm from her in a physical or sexual sense therefore the boy is not rated as a priority for the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect team (SCAN) so she gets no help from anyone to coordinate what he needs.
If something happens to this child a combination of ten government and non-government agencies would have been involved in his case never having communicated together directly.

**Research on the topic**

Many countries around the world, including Australia, are fighting to combat poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that many children living in disadvantaged families and communities are not able to learn until a range of welfare and health services are in place (Smith, 2004).

The British and New Zealand Governments have both recognised that a whole of government approach is required to meet the complex needs of children and their families.

The New Zealand Government believes, as written in their guide to implementing the whole child approach, ‘the whole child approach should be the basis for child policy and service development’ (Ministry of Social Development, n.d., p.3).

This approach means:

- Focusing on the big picture, on the child’s whole life and circumstances and the links between individual issues and other aspects of their lives.
- Focusing from the outset on what children need for healthy development and wellbeing.
- Looking across the whole of public service at what can be done to support children’s healthy development.
- Considering multi-level interventions in the settings of family, friends and peers, school and the wider community.
- Viewing children as having valuable knowledge to contribute to develop and evaluate policies and services that effect them.
- Considering ways that children can be involved in decision making on issues that affect them.

The United Kingdom Government is taking a similar approach through the implementation of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda. The Children’s Act 2004, ‘provides the legislative foundation for whole-system reform’ (Every Child Matters, n.d., p. 2).

The national framework is underpinned by:

- Improvement and integration of universal services in the early years, schools and health services.
- Specialised help to promote opportunity, prevent problems and act early and effectively if problems arise.
- The reconfiguration of services around the child and family in one place, for example children’s centres, extended schools and the bringing together of professionals in multi-disciplinary teams.
- Dedicated and enterprising leadership at all levels of the system.
- The development of a shared sense of responsibility across agencies for safeguarding children and protecting them from harm.
- Listening to children, young people and their families when assessing and planning service provision, as well as in face to face delivery.

Research into how these whole of government reforms have been implemented revealed a range of facilitators for success.
Firstly, the reforms were embedded in all levels of government from policy to practice (Ministry of Social Development, n.d). In the United Kingdom, a new emphasis was placed on community consultation and services being responsive to the needs identified by the community. A strengths based approach was promoted which encouraged community members to become involved as service providers to build social capital and sustainability in the community (Broadhead, Meleady, Delgado, 2008). Collocation of service was seen as an important factor in helping children and families to access services (Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2004) and to enable professionals to work together in multiprofessional teams (Anning, Cottrell, Frost, Green and Robinson, 2006).

**The Situation in Queensland**

The Queensland Government is currently organised in a silo structure (Department of Education, Training and The Arts, 2008). This structure has created a culture of ‘compartmentalisation and competition’ (Atwool, 2006, p. 32). Each department is under different pressures, with different priorities which lead to fragmentation in service delivery and more importantly a fragmented view of children, our responsibilities to them and their needs (Atwool, 2006).

The Queensland Government is guided by a privacy policy which is an administrative requirement of the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988. The Queensland Department of Education Privacy Plan is supported by the Department’s Code of Conduct which ensures that protection of personal information is adhered to for every student.

The SCAN system ‘provides forums for consultation on complex child protection cases where a multi-disciplinary and inter-agency approach will result in better outcomes for the child and family’ (Education Queensland, n.d.) A SCAN team member is required to have been nominated as an authorised officer by the Director General of Education. Unfortunately, after these meetings, schools are not often provided with information about the outcomes.

At a school level, within the staff employed by the Department of Education and Training, staff can share relevant information about students freely within the bounds of the Code of Conduct. Schools hold regular special needs meetings to coordinate and evaluate what they are doing for identified children.

School based guidance officers, although employed by Education Queensland, are also bound by similar issues based on their code of ethics about sharing.

School staff can share information with guidance officers but they are not obliged and often bound by confidentiality, to share information, other than relating to specific assessments and how the results can be used to cater for their needs in the classroom.

**Healthy Children for a Smart State**

The Queensland Government has trialled a number of initiatives aimed to address the problems of disadvantage over the past ten years. The fact that they have supported these trials is an acknowledgement on their behalf that a problem exists in Queensland.

The Queensland Government does not currently have a whole of government approach to delivering services to children. The trials that the government supported allowed for the exploration of interdepartmental partnerships to form a collaborative approach to improve service delivery and ultimately outcomes for children, families and communities. Unfortunately, the government chose not to continue funding the projects, most of which are not able to be sustained without financial support.
The outcomes of the trials highlighted the need for there to be flexibility in any approach due to the diversity in the geographic areas of Queensland which are a challenge to staff appropriately.

The trials also highlighted the need for changes to our current code of conduct and information sharing plans to allow for an integrated approach to be successful.

**Recommendations for Action**

QASSP calls for a sustained fully resourced wrap around service for Queensland children, collocated in primary schools in communities identified as needing this support through data such as the AEDI.

QASSP recommends:

- The Government examine their current organisational structures and ascertain if a whole of government strategic plan incorporating Education Queensland, Queensland Health and the Department of Child Safety can be used so that a whole child approach can be developed and used to base decisions on for the wellbeing of children - funded appropriately.
- Education Queensland fund research into models of best practice from around the world for implementation in Queensland state schools.
- The Government examine the privacy and information sharing policies and protocols that prevent the sharing of information between child support agencies.
- Education Queensland examines the use and effectiveness of multi-professional teams to support child development and examines the training and development that will be required to support and sustain this type of interagency approach.
- Education Queensland staff schools with a lead professional to coordinate the wrap around services.

**Bibliography**


Atwool, N. (2003). If it’s such a good idea, how come it doesn’t work? The theory and practice of integrated service delivery. *Childrenz Issues*, 7 (2), 31-35


