Social exclusion and social inclusion

Resources for child and family services

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CAFCA Resource Sheets are designed for practitioners and policy-makers who plan and/or deliver services to children and families in Australia, especially within disadvantaged communities. This resource sheet provides practitioners and policy-makers with information about social inclusion and social exclusion and how this impacts upon children and families in Australia. It also provides links to further resources on the topics of social inclusion and social exclusion.

The information in this Resource Sheet is organised according to the four social inclusion “domains” of opportunity, as outlined below. It provides statistics from the latest Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010) on How Australia is Faring, and points to further online resources which are freely available and relevant to the Australian child and family services context. Each domain is accompanied by examples from the CAFCA Promising Practice Profiles database of programs/projects undertaken by child and family services that have led to improvements in those specific areas.

Further details about research pertaining to social inclusion, social exclusion and how this research can be used to plan and deliver services to children and families is provided in the CAFCA Practice Sheet entitled, What Role can Child and Family Services Play in Enhancing Opportunities for Parents and Families? Exploring the Concepts of Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion (McDonald, 2011).

What is social inclusion? What is social exclusion?

In the Australian policy context, social inclusion is conceptualised as four key domains of opportunity—the opportunity to:

- participate in society through employment and access to services;
- connect with family, friends and the local community;
- deal with personal crises (e.g., ill health); and
- be heard (Australian Government, 2010).

Social exclusion, on the other hand, is defined as the “restriction of access to opportunities and [a] limitation of the capabilities required to capitalise on these [opportunities]” (Hayes, Gray, &
Edwards, 2008, p. 6). Social exclusion is not the equivalent of poverty (i.e., inadequate economic resources) or deprivation (i.e., an enforced lack of social perceived necessities) (Saunders, Naidoo, Griffiths, & 2007; Hayes et al., 2008). Rather, social exclusion is fundamentally about a lack of connectedness and participation.

Social exclusion is a useful concept because it can enrich our understanding of social disadvantage, highlighting, for example, the way in which the experience of disadvantage may not only involve financial difficulties but also extend to a sense of disconnection from the broader community. Social inclusion, when viewed as a series of opportunities, provides a framework for enhancing participation and connectedness and, as such, can be seen as a goal to work towards; a way of raising the bar and understanding where we want to be and how to get there (Friendly & Lero, 2002).

Although other countries’ understandings of the terms social inclusion and social exclusion may differ from the dominant Australian definition (outlined above), international resources on these topics can provide further insight into the meaning of the concepts.

### Further resources

**Australia**
- The Australian Social Inclusion Board resources page includes publications and online videos that provide a good introduction to the topic of social inclusion: <www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Pages/Resources.aspx>
- The Social Inclusion Agenda: Where it Came From, What it Means, and Why it Matters: Catholic Social Services has produced a report that investigates the “social inclusion agenda”, highlighting the benefits and risks of the Australian government’s social agenda: <catholicsocialservices.org.au/system/files/CSSA_The_Social_Inclusion_Agenda_2010_FINAL_low_res.pdf>
- The Social Policy Research Centre has published a range of documents related to the Left Out and Missing Out project that sought to enrich understandings of the nature and extent of disadvantage in Australia: <www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/publications/reports/left-out-and-missing-out-towards-new-indicators-of-disadvantage-project>

**International**
- The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) (UK) produces a range of publications including in-depth papers based upon research undertaken at the centre and CASE Briefs which provide research summaries: <sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/_new/publications/default.asp>
- The Laidlaw Foundation (Canada) has produced a Working Series of papers on social inclusion: <www.laidlawfdn.org/working-paper-series-social-inclusion>
- The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) in the UK has a range of e-learning tools on the topic of poverty, parenting and social exclusion. The resource is a good basic introduction to some of the concepts relating to social exclusion: <www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/poverty/index.asp>
Participating in society through employment

- In June 2009, 15% of all Australian children aged less than 15 years (619,000 children) lived in jobless families.¹
- Two-thirds (67%) of jobless families were single-parent families.
- When compared to the general population, lone parents appear to have been more significantly impacted by recent decreases in employment and lone parents whose youngest child is less than 5 years old appear to be even more significantly affected than other lone parents.

Source: Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010)

Research demonstrates that work is beneficial to individuals and their families, enhancing people’s health and wellbeing, self-esteem and financial prospects (Millar, 2010). Parents can face barriers in securing and maintaining employment as a result of issues such as a lack of necessary skills and/or education, structural barriers (e.g., transport difficulties) and personal circumstances (e.g., physical and/or mental health issues) (Butterworth, 2003; Perkins, 2006; Millar & Ridge, 2008). Single parents can find it especially challenging to secure and maintain employment (Millar, 2010; Millar & Rowlingson, 2001).

Improving parents’ opportunities for employment

The following are examples of programs/projects undertaken by child and family services that have led to improvements in employment opportunities for parents.

Gateways

A community-based organisation in a metropolitan area initiated a project that provided people from the local community with an opportunity to work as volunteers in the organisation (Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, 2008). Of those volunteers who were surveyed when they exited the program half \( (n = 43) \) left the organisation because they had found paid work.

For more information about the Gateways project see: <www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/PPP/Profiles/cfc_gateways.html>

Fairfield Refugee Nutrition Project

An independent, non-profit social enterprise employed bilingual community educators (BCEs) to assist with data collection process and community consultation for a food security project (The Smith Family & NSW Refugee Health Service, 2009). The skills the BCEs developed through their involvement in the project led to increased work opportunities.

For more information about the Fairfield Refugee Nutrition Project see: <www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/PPP/Profiles/cfc_fairfield_nutrition.html>

Further resources

- Addressing Barriers for jobless families: Presents an overview of jobless families in Australia, along with examples of approaches to address social exclusion amongst jobless families and key elements likely to achieve best results in supporting jobless families: <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Documents/AddressingBarriersforJoblessFamilies.pdf>

¹ The ABS defines a jobless family as a family with at least one child under the age of 15 years, where both of the parents or a lone parent are either unemployed or not in the labour force. This measure therefore includes families where the parent(s) have chosen not to work, are not actively seeking work, are not available to start work or are unable to work. There may be another person aged 15 years or over in the family who is employed (although this is not common) (ABS, 2009).
Participating in society through access to services

- In 2006, 22% of Australians reported having difficulty accessing services.
- The primary reason why people had difficulty accessing services was a lack of adequate services in their local area.
- People living in one-parent households with dependent children had more difficulty accessing services when compared to the general population.
- Thirty-nine per cent of people living in outer regional and remote areas had difficulty accessing services; 28% of people living in inner regional areas had those difficulties; 18% of people living in major cities had those difficulties.

Source: Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010)

Families can find it difficult to access services (Carbone, Fraser, Ramburuth, & Nelms, 2004). Research demonstrates that those families that are most in need of child and family support services are also the least likely to use them (Centre for Community Child Health, 2010).

The reasons why families can find it difficult to access services include:
- a lack of private transport or poor public transport infrastructure;
- a fear or distrust of service providers; and
- not knowing a service exists or that they are eligible to use it (Carbone et al., 2004).

Improving families’ opportunities to access services

The following are examples of programs/projects undertaken by child and family services that have led to improvements in parents’ and children’s opportunities to be heard.

Playgroups Rule OK!

A partnership between two agencies in a highly culturally diverse neighbourhood sought to increase the number of universal, accessible playgroups provided in the languages of local community members (Banksta Gardens Community Centre & Victorian Cooperative on Children’s Services for Ethnic Groups, 2011). The strategy led to an increased number of playgroups in the local community, from 55 playgroups in 2005 to 116 in 2009, representing an increase in choice for local parents.

Immunisation Storytime

A project that specifically targeted “hard-to-reach” families to engage them in early literacy activities involved librarians making contact with parents after immunisation sessions (Frankston Library Service, 2009). Subsequent to the project, there was a significant increase in the number of board books and picture books that were borrowed from the local library service, indicating that the strategy had improved families’ access to library services.

For more information about Immunisation Storytime see: <www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/cfc_immunisation_storytime.html>

Further resources

- **Families’ Experiences of Services** (Occasional Paper no. 30): The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) published a paper on low-income families’ experiences of services: <www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/publicationsarticles/research/occasional/Pages/op30.aspx>

- **A Literature Review on Multiple and Complex Needs**: The Development Department of the Scottish Executive has collated and evaluated existing research evidence to understand the processes through which people with multiple and complex needs engage, or do not engage, with services: <www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/163148/0044342.pdf>

- **The Breaking Cycles, Building Futures** report was produced for the Victorian Best Start initiative and provides information on how to improve families’ access to early childhood services: <www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/resources/evaluation_reports.htm>

- **Engaging Marginalised and Vulnerable Families**: The Centre for Community Child Health produced a Policy Brief which focused on engaging marginalised and vulnerable families: <www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB18_Vulnerable_families.pdf>


Connect with family, friends and the local community

- In 2006, almost all Australians (96%) had contact with friends and family outside the household at least once a week.

- Self-reported health status appears to have an impact upon contact with friends and family—people who reported having excellent health were more likely to see friends and family at least once per week compared to people who reported having poor health (97% and 92% respectively).

- Jobless couple families with dependent children were less likely to have contact with friends of family at least once per week than jobless one-parent families with dependent children (92% and 96% respectively).

- Sixty per cent of people living in the most disadvantaged regions participated in at least one community group (e.g., sport/physical recreation group, social club, religious or spiritual group) compared to 81% of people in the least disadvantaged regions.

Source: Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010)

Positive connections with family, friends and the local community are important to families because they provide a sense of support and belonging. Families that lack these connections can experience social isolation and this has been demonstrated to impact negatively upon a range of
factors including maternal mental health and thereby child development (Mulvaney & Kendrick, 2005). Children benefit from interactions with their peers. For primary school aged children, for example, friendship is associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Bishop & Inderbitzen, 1995; Franco & Levitt, 1998). Children also benefit from a sense of belonging in their community (Holmes, 1993; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). Supportive neighbours, for example, can provide children with positive role models (Wilkenfield, Lippman & Anderson-Moore, 2007).

Improving families’ opportunities to connect with family, friends and the community

The following are examples of programs/projects undertaken by child and family services that have led to improvements in parents’ and children’s opportunities to be heard.

Creating Capable Communities – Keith Street Community House

A community-owned and managed family and youth service agency established a community house in a neighbourhood with a high proportion of public housing residents (Family Life, 2009). Over a 3-year period, 80% of parents attending the community house indicated that they had increased informal support networks. Eighty-seven percent of parents attending a specific program provided at the community indicated that they had developed and maintained community connections. A 6-month follow-up indicated that sustaining those informal links was one of the most significant outcomes of the program.

For more information about the Creating Capable Communities project see: <www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/la_keith_street.html>

Interactive CALD Parents’ Support Services

A parent support service for CALD parents who look after children from home who have not yet reached school age offered a range of social, educational and recreational activities for parents and children (Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Services, 2009). Eighty percent of parents attending one of the groups provided as part of the service indicated that the most important benefit of the group was the opportunity socialise and make new friends.

For more information about the Interactive CALD Parents’ Support Services project see: <www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/la_holroyd.html>

Further resources


- Community Builders NSW Research and Resources page provides links to case studies, discussion papers and toolkits relating to community building: <www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/resources.html>

Deal with personal crises

- In 2006, the vast majority (93%) of the Australian population had someone they could turn to during a time of crisis.
- The proportion of people able to rely on someone outside their household in during a time of crisis decreased with income—97% of people in the top income quintile had support, compared with 87% of the bottom quintile.²
- In 2008, 89% of Indigenous Australians reported having someone to turn to in a time of crisis.

Source: Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010)

Personal crises within families such as serious illness (for either parents or children), parental job loss, divorce/separation, homelessness, natural disasters and bereavement can have long-term damaging effects upon children and families (Sivec & Masterson, 2009; Limburg, Shaw, & McBride, 2008; Kalil & Zio-Guest, 2008; McFarlane, 1987). Families who do not have adequate resources to deal with higher than average levels of stress may experience negative outcomes such as post traumatic stress disorder (Landau, Mittal & Wieling, 2008).

Improving families’ opportunities to deal with personal crises

The following is an example of a project undertaken by child and family services that has led to improvements in connections to family, friends and the community.

Manage Your Income Manage Your Life

A welfare agency operating in a rural/remote area provided access to quality financial counselling services at no cost for low-income groups experiencing financial crisis due to circumstances such as unemployment and family breakdown (Centracare Wilcannia-Forbes, 2009). Four-hundred-and-eleven of the 472 clients who accessed the service reported an increased understanding of money management.


Further resources

- The Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network Resources Directory page provides links to a range of resources for practitioners: <www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/connections/all_resources>
- Facts sheets about drug and alcohol use are available through the DrugInfo Clearinghouse: <www.druginfo.adf.org.au/druginfo/fact_sheets.aspx>
- Information about domestic and family violence is available through the Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse: <www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au>
- Information for professionals who work with clients experiencing homelessness is available through the Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse: <www.homelessnessinfo.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7&Itemid=8>

² Income quintiles are defined as “groups that result from ranking all households in the population in ascending order according to their household income, and then dividing the population into five equal groups, each comprising 20% of the estimated population” (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2010).
Being heard

- In 2006, 23% of the Australian population aged 18 years and over reported that they felt that they were able to have a say within their community, at any time, about issues that were important to them.
- People born overseas who were not proficient in English were more likely to report difficulty in having a say in their community at any time on issues that were important to them, compared to people born in Australia (70% and 45% respectively).
- A high proportion of people living in one-parent families with dependent children found it difficult to have a say in issues that were important to them (52%) compared to the general population (46%).

Source: Australian Social Inclusion Board (2010)

A common experience of social disadvantage is the feeling of not being heard (Peel, 2003). People experiencing social exclusion are often left out of decision-making processes that relate to issues directly impacting upon them (e.g., decision-making about public transport) (Dibben, 2006). Children are often viewed as incapable of contributing meaningfully to decision-making processes (Qvortrup, 1997). Children benefit from being listened to as valued citizens in their own right (Tranter & Pawson, 2001).

Improving families’ opportunities to be heard

The following are examples of programs/projects undertaken by child and family services that have led to improvements in parents’ and children’s opportunities to be heard.

Animation Project

A program established in a public housing estate focused on supporting community members to discuss and act upon the needs they identified as important (e.g., alteration of a bus route, installation of three public telephones) (St Vincent de Paul, 2008). The project has led to the development of a community arts program that provided local residents with opportunities to tell their own stories through a community mural and a community writing project.

For more information about the Animation Project see: <www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/la_animation.html>

Port Augusta: A Child-Friendly Community – Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire

A group of organisations working in a rural community undertook consultation with the local community and identified the need for an inclusive, volunteer group of parents of young children who were concerned with creating a more child-friendly community (UnitingCare Wesley Port Pirie, 2009). The development of the group led to an increase in parent activism and engagement in the local community, including undertaking an audit of local playgrounds to identify improvements needed, the development of a monthly “family friendly business” award and the development of a relationship with local council.


Further resources

Adopting a Strengths approach in Child Care Service: A summary of the strengths-based approach is available through the National Childcare Accreditation Council: <www.ncac.gov.au/pcf/Adopting_a_strengths_approach_Mar08.pdf>


References


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