

Working with and through parents NOT to and for them: Transformations through peer led parenting interventions

Paint the Town REaD Conference, NSW, 27 March, 2015

What we do

- Why do our services exist?
- Who do they “SERVE”?
- Who decides when, where and how they operate?
- Have we thought about power as a dynamic in our relationships with families? (evident in job titles, how we speak about families, environments where we encounter families, language...)



Changing what we do and how we do it

“If you really want to find out what needs to change in your service, or its practice, find and truly listen to parents who came once and chose not to return – they have a powerful story to tell!”

Dr. Margy Whalley, (2010), Tasmanian Child and Family Centre Forum



ENGAGEMENT

Why is there such a
divide between
rhetoric and practice?



Engagement

There is no clear definition of engagement in the literature ([Yatchmenoff, 2005](#)),

Engagement has been defined in terms of:

- “involvement” ([Randolph, Fincham, & Radey, 2009](#)),
- “collaboration” ([Altman, 2008](#)),
- “compliance” ([Littell, 2001](#)) and,
- “participation” ([Darlington, Healy, & Feeney, 2010](#)).

(as cited by Gladstone, 2014)

Australian context

‘Engagement’ is often interpreted in different ways:

- Making sure parents can access services
- Parent involvement in child’s learning
- Services engaging each other for the benefit of families
- Consulting families to check service thinking or planning

Barriers to engagement

Why do some parents not use or access services?

1. Service level (or structural) barriers
2. Family level barriers
3. Relational or interpersonal barriers

Moore, (2010), Engaging vulnerable families. Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice. Melbourne: Centre for Community Child Health.

**What are the characteristics of a truly
engaging program or service?**

Characteristics of the engaging service

Characteristic	Experienced by family through:
Informal, relaxed environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming • Warm • Casual encounters with worker
Flexibility in operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hours of operation • Adaptability to individual need • Policy enables responsiveness
Locally credible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilisation of programs by other parents • Community members not just recipients
Softly purposeful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care-filled progression • Partnership with family • Learning & activity pathways beyond service

What are the characteristics of
an engaging worker?

Characteristics of the engaging worker

Characteristic	Experienced by family through:
Communication & interpersonal skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warmth • Purpose • Trust • Interest • Authenticity
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding • Genuineness • Suspended judgement
Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared responsibility • Shared power / level playing field • Welcome feedback • Co-learner

Reflection as a necessary component of change

What is the effect *of* me on families I encounter through my work?

How do I know how I am seen and perceived by others?

ARACY / TEYF Early Years Conference, June 24-26, Hobart

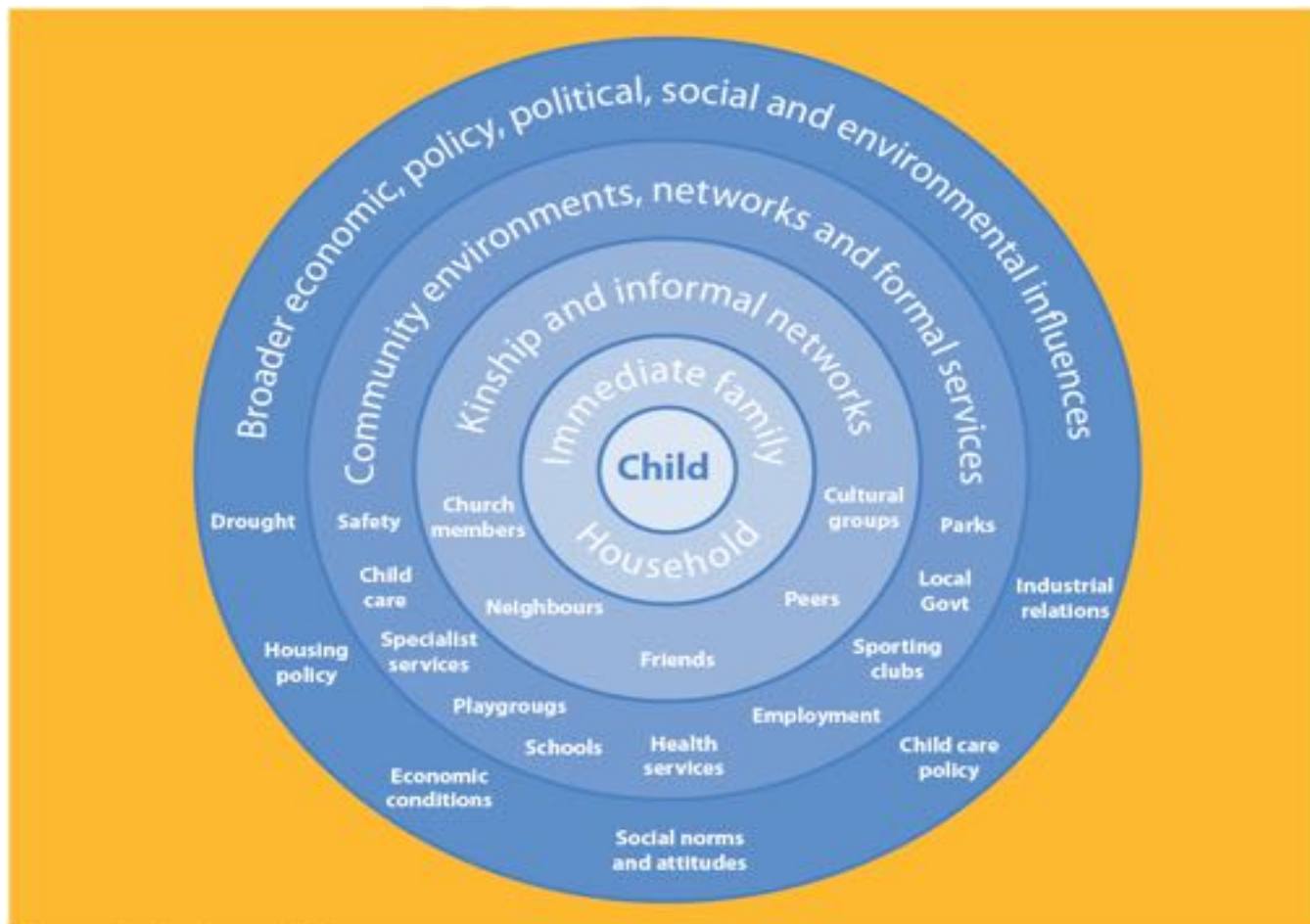


What influences the child and family that we encounter and work with

When thinking about supporting the best possible outcomes for the child, what are the **STRENGTHS** and **DIFFICULTIES** encountered by the:

1. Child
2. Family
3. Wider community
4. World

The systems that influence the developing child



Reference: Bronfenbrenner (1979).



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Empowering Communities.**

TASMANIA



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Excellence in
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**Empowering Parents,
Empowering Communities.**
TASMANIA

A program that trains, supervises and supports parents to run the “**Being a Parent**” course in their local communities.



Parent facilitators



“I’m doing something important in my community”

“I’ve now kinda done the course 3 times ...and now doing stuff differently. Even the kids notice it!”

“If you’d told me I’d be a paid facilitator before last year I would have fallen over. Now I’m making a real difference.”

“I think more now. I don’t just react – I think and explain how I feel about things that have happened”

Most common participant comments

I'm not alone

“I know other people in my community who are experiencing the same things as me”

I think more

“I think about my children and I know that they have feelings too. Just like me, they can feel sad and lonely and angry. I can talk about these feelings with them now”

I'm good enough!

“I don't have to try and be the perfect parent because no one is or ever has been”

I'm not alone

- Others like me
- Belonging – to something
- Straddling communities of practice
- Contributor to shared service culture
- Co-deliverer
- Co-learner
- Assuming a place within the local service system



Course graduation - photo used with permission, 2013

Thinking more

- Reflective rather than just reactive
- Parents as ‘reflective practitioners’ (Penney, 2010) wondering – “what is behind his behaviour?”
- Discovering and learning through reflection:
 - about child
 - about themselves
 - new skills



Labelling exercise in BAP course

Good enough parent

'Good Enough Mother' (Winnicott, 1953)

- A renewed & more realistic lens on parenting
- Reduced pressure on self
- Increased confidence
- Self efficacy (capacity for beneficial change)

A learner

- Learning alongside my child
- The cycle of embedding new knowledge and skills
- Competency based knowledge and skills
- A peer facilitator
- A co-worker

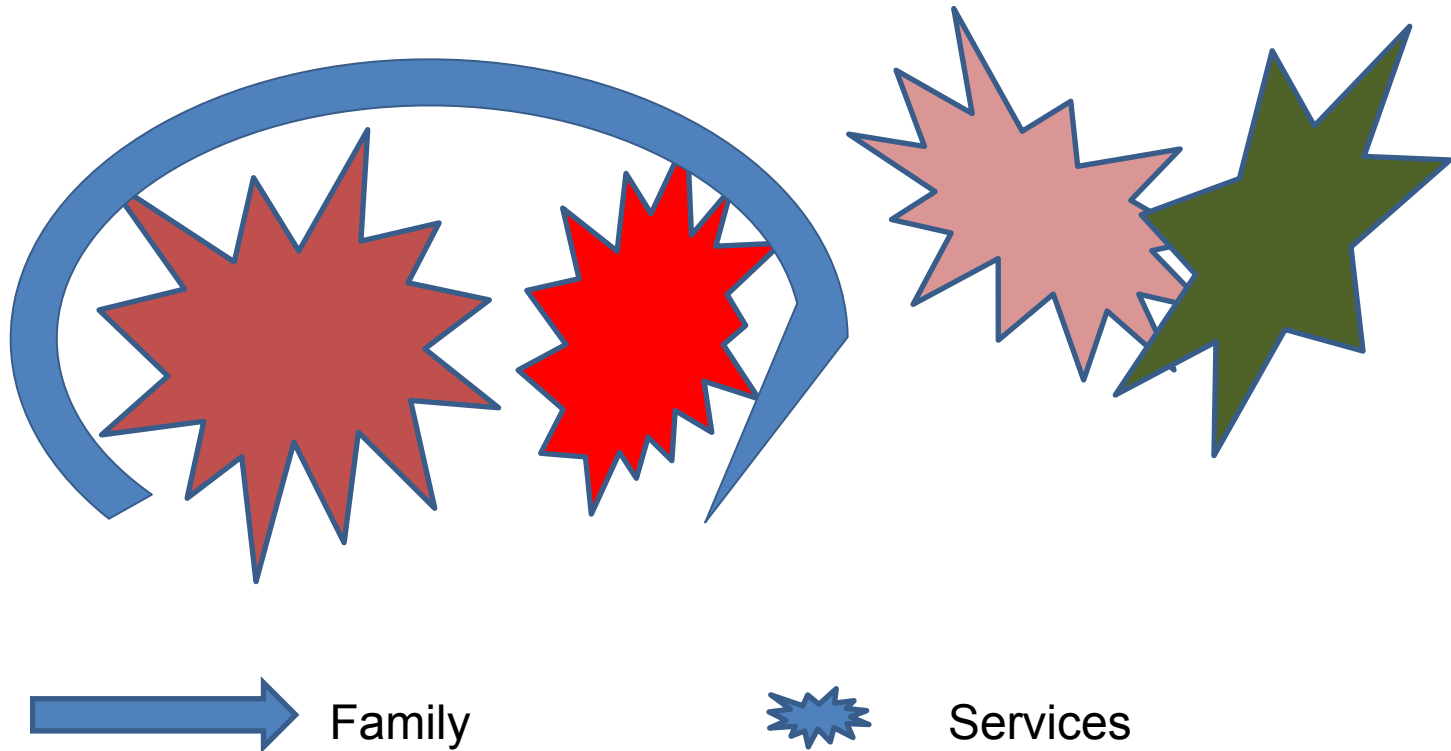


Sharp edges of services

Wound the relationship (parent/worker). They can be seen in:

- Practitioner & organisational behaviour
- Service structure & inflexibility
- Policies and processes
- Service environment

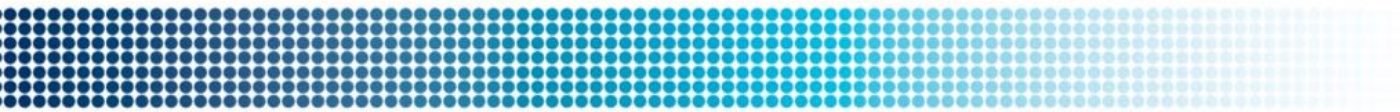
Families disengage from sharp edged services



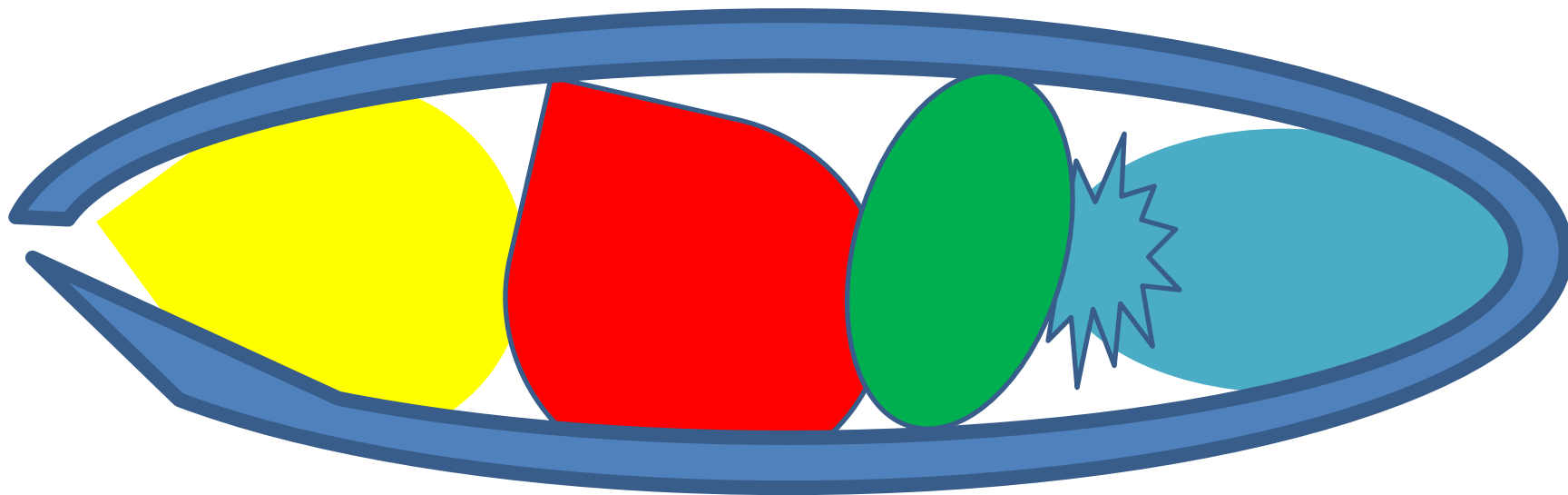
Soft edges of services

- Enable the reparation of relationships.
- Provide a buffer for families to cope with occasional sharpness in the local system

Those things that characterize sharp edges within services, when rounded (softened), are the same things that can present as the soft edges of services. (Worker behaviour, physical environment, service culture.....)



Families engage with soft-edged services



Peer facilitators

Can perform a role in improving conditions in services. They:

- ‘Round off’ or ‘soften’ the sharp edges of the service,
- Enable the participation of the previously disengaged parent in services by making the encounter, and the rebuilding of trust, possible.
- Insulate disengaged parents in re-engagement attempts

This softening role provides fertile ground for a profound shift or transformation for the parent participant making the previously impossible – possible.

To genuinely engage the disengaged...

- Requires SYSTEM HUMILITY.
- From distrust to trust. What is required?
- Re-learn how to *really* do relationships

All these require a collective buy-in from
all local stakeholders in the long term

Tasmanian Child and Family Centres

A culture of engagement.
Community members as:

- Co-planners
- Co-designers
- Co-deliverers
- Co-researchers
- Co-managers
- Advocates

Discovering new ways of doing things



Rather than taking the same old path

Change agents
and innovators
take occasional
risks



Risk taking isn't
applauded in
bureaucratic
structures



"This really is an innovative approach, but I'm afraid we can't consider it. It's never been done before."

Acknowledgements

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