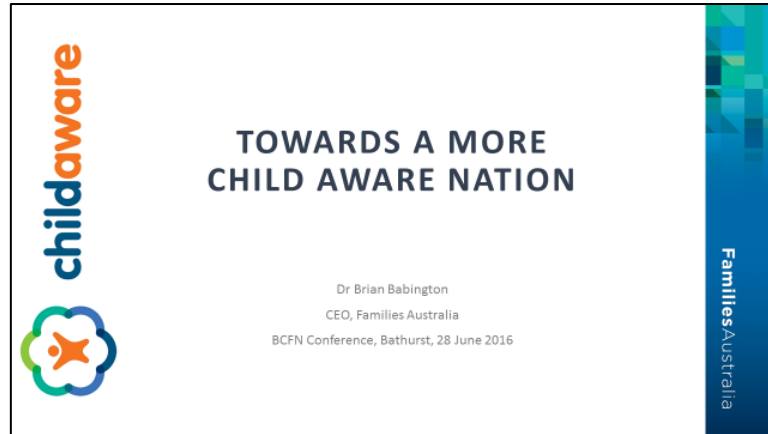


TOWARDS A MORE CHILD AWARE NATION

Dr Brian Babington, Chief Executive Officer, Families Australia
Address to the Child-Safe, Child-Friendly Conference
Bathurst NSW, 28 June 2016



I'd like to spend a little time talking about a very promising stream of national work that has been started under the banner of 'Child Aware'.


At the highest level, this work aims to build community and sectoral support for child safety and wellbeing, and is an important part of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 which I talked about this morning.



I'd like to acknowledge the many people and organisations who have contributed so generously to the Child Aware National Initiative to date.

CHILD AWARE: ORIGINS

- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- Building Capacity Building Bridges
- Innovation
- Place-based
- Community-driven



The logo for Child Aware features a stylized figure of a person with arms raised, enclosed within a cloud-like shape. The figure is orange, and the cloud is composed of blue, green, and yellow segments. Below the logo, the words "childaware" are written in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with "child" in blue and "aware" in orange.

As I mentioned earlier today, the National Framework is a long-term collaborative agenda to improve the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children.


It takes a public health approach under which greater emphasis is placed on assisting families early to prevent abuse and neglect occurring by making available universal supports for all families and children and more targeted supports when required.

An important early direction of the National Framework was a project called Building Capacity Building Bridges. That project sets about trying to boost the capacity of community sector workers to identify and respond early to families and children who were at risk for child abuse and neglect. It was also sought to strengthen collaboration across sectors to improve the ways in which families with multiple needs experience the service system.

It became apparent early on in the National Framework, too, that we should increase our emphasis on place-based initiatives that were driven mainly by local communities. So, we set about exploring new ways of mobilising communities around protecting children; hence the name emerged 'Child Aware'. Essentially it was part of the Phase 2 thinking I referred to earlier today to improve the impact of existing systems and to explore new approaches.

KEY CONCEPTS

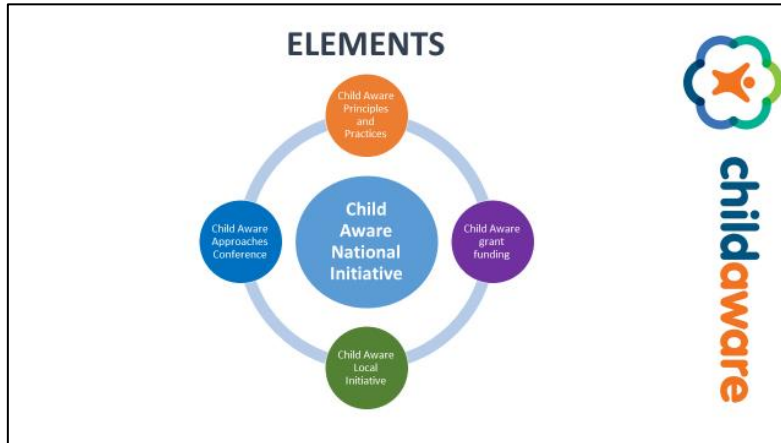
- Building child and family resilience
- UNCRC, child-centred
- Embedding National Framework messaging



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The design of this new approach was influenced strongly by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and was also meant to complement, rather than compete with, existing 'child safe' and 'child friendly' strategies. Importantly, it was designed to embed and promote the National Framework's key message at local levels that protecting children is everyone's business.

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The Child Aware initiative was announced by the Commonwealth Government in 2012. It has four main elements. First, there was an initial Commonwealth Government grant round to help community sector organisations further develop an evidence base about best practices in working with children and families. Second, the Australian Institute of Family Studies was commissioned to develop a Child Aware Principles and Practices guide.

Families Australia was also supported to run a series of annual Child Aware Approaches Conferences. Finally, the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia and Families Australia were funded to develop and roll-out the Child Aware Local Initiative, or CALI.

I'd like to spend just a few moments briefly talking about the three last aspects.

The table, titled "10 PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES", is presented in a light blue and white color scheme. It lists six philosophies and the principles included under each. To the right of the table is the Child Aware logo, identical to the one in the previous diagram.

Philosophy	Principles included:
Family-sensitive	identify and respond to the needs of adults who are parents; acknowledge and build on family strengths while responding to family stressors and risk factors for child abuse and neglect
Child-inclusive	understand and apply knowledge of children's needs at each stage of their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development
Strengths-based	enable parents by promoting their parenting role as a motivator for positive change
Collaborative	develop and maintain connections between adult-focused services and child- and family-focused services
Culturally competent	understand cultural influences on family and parenting practices and respond in a culturally sensitive way

The Australian Institute of Family Studies prepared an excellent Child Aware Good Practices Guide in 2014, which has provided the foundation for subsequent work under the overall Child Aware initiative. It was based on a set of philosophies, such as being family-sensitive, child-inclusive, collaborative, and cultural competent.

Under each of the philosophies were suggested one or more principles to help guide organisations, practitioners and individuals. Under the heading of 'family-sensitive', for example, principles included the importance of acknowledging and building on family strengths while responding to family stressors and risk factors for child abuse and neglect. Under 'child-inclusive', emphasis was placed on understanding and applying knowledge of children's needs at each stage of their development. And, in terms of strengths-based approaches, a key principle was that parents ought to be enabled by promoting their parenting role as a motivator for positive change.



The second main Child Aware element is the annual Child Aware Approaches Conference. Families Australia has convened four conferences to date, supported by the Commonwealth Government and others. These have been great opportunities for practitioners, researchers and policymakers from around Australia to discuss new ways of supporting child safety and wellbeing and to forge new links. Each year we adopt a slightly different theme, but all are based around approaches needed to make the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children a shared responsibility.



Last month in Brisbane, around 350 people attended the 4th Child Aware Approaches Conference. We focussed on the three main themes of the Third Action Plan under the National Framework, namely, advancing children's development and wellbeing in the first 1000 days, supporting young people in out-of-home care to flourish in adulthood, and building child-safe organisations.

Amongst many outstanding presentations, Professor Kerry Arabena talked about her work on the first thousand days for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, June Oscar discussed how she and her service was reducing foetal alcohol disorders in Fitzroy Crossing, and a panel of young people talked about their experiences of the out-of-home care system. We are expecting to run the conference again. Please consider attending.

CHILD AWARE LOCAL INITIATIVE

- Community-led, innovative, practical
- Seven trial sites
- Enhance community awareness and develop local action plans



childaware

Finally, I'd like to talk about the Child Aware Local Initiative, or CALI. This initiative has been going for the past few years and centres around work in seven trial sites. The central aims in each of the trial sites are to enhance community awareness of the range of issues affecting child wellbeing, to develop local plans of action to promote and act on children's issues, and to support communities to make 'child aware' the focus of community action.

CHILD AWARE LOCAL INITIATIVE



childaware

The initiative is being implemented in each trial site through a partnership between CALI lead agencies, the community sector and the Commonwealth, State or Territory Government. The trial sites are in Tasmania, NT, NSW, Victoria, SA, ACT and Queensland. As a community-led local initiative, CALI activities were designed and enacted in a variety of ways.

Apart from the high-level Child Aware principles, project design was the responsibility of our local partners. Hence the final activities and achievements were necessarily varied and depended on local needs and aspirations. They included activities such as conducting surveys of parents and children to obtain information about major community concerns; interviewing and filming children about what they understood about children's rights; supporting children to develop artwork about children's rights; and coordinating a forum where children took the lead in discussing issues important to them, such as bullying and self-image.

The Murdoch Children's Research Institute has just evaluated CALI, and this shows very promising results. We are hoping to secure funding to expand the initiative to other sites, as well as continue to support the initial seven locations. I like to leave you with this You-tube clip of impressions about CALI from our wonderful and committed partners in some of the trial sites.

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I hope that gives you a snapshot of the Child Aware initiative. I hope you'll agree that it's a promising initiative on several fronts. Our hope is that it will continue to gain momentum and complement other initiatives that concentrate attention on child safety and wellbeing.

Check against delivery