AFTER THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK:
Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020

Consultation with the Northern Territory Government
Office for Youth - Youth Roundtable
21 November 2019

On behalf of the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, Families Australia led this consultation on the successor plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (National Framework). Families Australia greatly appreciates the support and engagement of staff within Territory Families and the Office for Youth in facilitating this session that included Youth Roundtable representatives from Nhulunbuy and Alice Springs.

Members of the Roundtable emphasised the importance of forming authentic relationships with children and young people as part of the co-design of the successor plan. They called on governments and non-government organisations to listen to, and work in partnership with, children and young people to ensure their voices are elevated and their views are included in an ongoing way.

Roundtable members identified education as a fundamental building block and an essential element to support the wellbeing and safety of children and young people into adulthood. They spoke passionately about the importance of strategies to strengthen the engagement of children and young people with school, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and those in remote areas. They gave two examples of education initiatives in the Northern Territory that are working well and achieving good outcomes and advocated for programs like these to continue to grow and expand into other locations:

1. The Clontarf Foundation that works with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys to improve their education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects and equip them to participate more meaningfully in society.
2. The Stars Foundation that works to improve education and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women at risk of disengagement from school.

Access to health services and health education including sexual health and mental health were also key areas of concern. Clinic 34, a free and confidential sexual health service operating in five major centres in the NT, was seen as a positive example of a support service that could be further improved and enhanced as a 'safe' place for young people seeking help and advice. Lack of availability or limited access to mental health services such as Headspace was identified as a critical gap that needed to be addressed, noting the particular issues and challenges faced by children and young people in regional and remote areas in the Territory. The importance of mental health to wellbeing and safety, engagement in education and positive peer relationships was discussed in some length during the consultation. In this context, the influence and impact of mainstream media reporting and social media on the wellbeing and safety of children and young people was also a key point of discussion. Roundtable members called for actions to change attitudes towards young people – to counter the pervasive impact of negative stereotyping and stop the negative reporting about young people occurring in the mainstream media.

Other key elements identified as critical for the successor plan included:

- a much stronger and ongoing engagement with children and young people in all aspects of the successor plan including development, implementation and reporting on outcomes;
- dedicated resources and a specific national focus on the needs of children and young people to help address issues such as increasing rates of stress and anxiety, negative body image, depression, alcohol and other drugs, bullying, barriers to engagement with education, training and employment; and online safety concerns;
- linking up actions across health, mental health and education recognising the significant intersections that exist in these areas in relation to wellbeing;
- innovative approaches including reliable technology to overcome the access barriers to resources and services for children and young people in areas more remote from larger centres;
- ensuring the successor plan is written and structured in a way that makes it accessible to, and understood by, children and young people.

Many insightful and powerful contributions were made by participants in response to the consultation questions. These have been collated and are summarised under each question in the attachment.

1. What should be our vision for Australia's children?

'All children and young people in Australia have the opportunity and resources to be healthy and happy.'

'Children and young people have a voice and are believed, listened to and respected.'

'All children and young people have the resources and support to stay connected to education.'

'The contributions of children and young people are recognised and celebrated.'

'All children and young people are valued in all their diversity.'

'Children and young people are included in decisions that affect them.'

'Children and young people have access to the services and support they need to grow up happy and healthy no matter where they live.'

'All children and young people are empowered to be the best they can be.'

'A bright and better future.'

'Children and young people are encouraged to celebrate their gifts and talents in their own communities.'

'The positive contributions of children and young people are promoted in mainstream media instead of the negative stereotypes.'

2. What are the main <u>barriers</u> to making Australia a nation where all children grow up safe and well?

'Access to services in rural and remote areas, particularly mental health services and emotional support. Some communities don't have services like Headspace at all, or only have fly-in fly-out services. It's too expensive to travel to a major centre to get access to a service so you just have to wait and this can be months.'

'The negative influences in media reporting, that come through social media, that are out in the community and even at home. These influences have a negative impact on the development of children and young people. It's very hard to stay positive when there are so many negative influences around you. '

'Children and young people living in Indigenous communities can be out of school for long periods of time because of ceremonies for family members and they fall behind. They struggle to catch up and risk disengaging from education because it gets too hard.'

'Young people don't always gel with a counsellor and if there's only one available in your school or community, you miss out.'

'The negative stereotypes and negative attitudes towards young people that are used by the media. There are so many young people who are doing great things and making valuable contributions but they aren't recognised in the mainstream media or acknowledged by the broader community.

'Information and resources available from some services aren't engaging for children and young people so we don't read them or we don't understand them.'

'We need more services for children, young people and communities dealing with drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health issues.'

3. What <u>initiatives</u> are showing promise in overcoming these barriers?

'Clontarf is a great program that empowers and celebrates the achievements of boys and young men at risk of dropping out of school. They really listen to young people and work with us by establishing genuine relationships.'

'The Stars program for girls and young women. It's achieving some great things in helping change the way the girls think about themselves and their futures. The mentors and activities offered through Stars help to build confidence and improve health and education outcomes.'

'Opportunities to share good news stories and celebrate the diversity of children and young people. We need more of these.'

'Involving children and young people in things like Regional Youth Action Plans. This gives young people the opportunity to have a real say in the development and implementation of regional solutions to improve outcomes for young people.'

'The Arnhem Allied Health Centre in Nhulunbuy is a good example of an initiative that is helping overcome the geographical and other barriers to health services for people in our region. It acts a one stop shop with all the services working together and available in the one location.'

'Technology helps with access to services like mental health support and counselling but technology doesn't always work. It needs to be more reliable and accessible to make a real difference. Maybe schools could be set up as technology hubs to enable greater access to services and information for children and young people, particularly in more remote areas.'

'Headspace Kids teaches meditation and helps children understand their feelings. This service is available on line but not face-to-face through Headspace in Darwin or Alice Springs. Technology can be unreliable and a barrier to online support.'

'Clinic 34 provides sexual health services for young people in a confidential and safe way. You don't need a Medicare card to be able to access their services.'

4. What should be the <u>key elements</u> of national policy for child and family wellbeing and safety beyond 2020?

'Greater engagement with children and young people in the new plan. Consider forums through schools or youth centres, surveys, through existing youth networks like the Youth Roundtable.'

'Actions to improve the general conversation about young people that is currently so negative. We need to change community attitudes and perceptions and provide opportunities to showcase the value of young people.'

'Include in the national policy, actions specifically aimed at meeting the needs of young people and their safety and wellbeing so they can reach their full potential in all areas as adults.'

'Link health, mental health and education as key elements of the new plan as they are essential for safety and wellbeing.'

'Provide opportunities for youth engagement platforms and organisations to promote and celebrate the diversity and value of young people. This will support their wellbeing and safety.'

'Actions to increase the engagement of children and young people in education and help them catch up when they fall behind.'

'Innovative actions to reduce the isolation of young people in remote communities and ways to help them access early support. This would help to prevent or reduce the negative impacts of isolation on safety and wellbeing.'

'Health literacy to teach young people what they need to know and do to be safe and well.'