

Early Years Network Support Program

This document¹ outlines a proposed model of support for Western Australia's Early Years Networks. It is based on an analysis of information received through an extensive consultation process with members of all WA's Early Years Networks and associated early year's professionals alongside research into other models of network support.

Proposed model of support

The aim of this model is to provide a baseline level of support that all networks can access that will enable them to become or remain sustainable and fulfil their full potential. The model aims to provide support that is realistic, practical and builds the capacity of the networks.

During the consultation process, a number of network members expressed a strong desire for their network to have a funded coordinator. This model does not provide for funded coordinator positions for the following reasons:

1. It is unlikely that funding coordinator positions for 40 networks throughout WA is feasible.
2. There are examples of networks functioning well *without* a paid coordinator, where responsibilities are shared or the coordinator has taken on the role voluntarily.
3. There are examples of where a paid coordinator position has led to diminished capacity and instability within a network. Groups frequently became reliant on this person and there was significant loss of knowledge when the coordinator left or funding for the position ceased.

This proposed model takes the form of an *Early Years Network Support Program* with two components:

1. an advisory and network development service
2. a professional development service

At a minimum, the *Early Years Network Support Program* will be delivered by one full-time Early Years Networks Support Coordinator, with knowledge of WA's early year's sector and experience of working with networks; and a part-time Early Years Networks Program Officer with experience of managing a website, developing newsletters and administration. The program will be available to all WA Early Years Networks that register for membership.

The Early Years Network Support Program will be hosted by an organisation (yet to be determined) and the staff employed to administer the program will be managed by that organisation. The ongoing development, delivery and evaluation of the program will be overseen by a reference group or steering committee, comprised of early year's professionals from both government and not-for-profit organisations.

¹ This is a stand-alone document for the purposes of discussion. A more detailed document including information about the project and first phase consultation is available for review.

Advisory and network development service

The advisory and network development service will offer be-spoke support to Early Years Networks upon application. The coordinator will work flexibly with networks to build their capacity and maximise sustainability. The service may include assistance with the following:

- Clarifying the purpose of the network; which may include development of a vision, a strategic plan and terms of reference
- Identifying key stakeholders and developing an engagement plan; this will include identifying what stakeholders can both contribute to and gain from being involved with the network
- Initiating a dialogue with local government to gain their support and involvement in the network, where this is desired by members
- Promoting the importance of the early years to the organisation's of individual members, where needed, in order to facilitate an increase in their capacity to participate in the group
- Identifying and defining key roles within the network and who will fulfil these, giving due consideration to individual capacities
- Network succession planning to maximise sustainability; this will specifically address inevitable membership and/or funding changes
- Developing and/or streamlining network administrative practices, such as document storage, agenda and minutes templates, meeting structures and information sharing
- Provision of best practice case studies and examples from Early Years Networks that have faced similar challenges
- Identifying sources of funding where appropriate

The coordinator's focus will be assisting the network to develop strategies that enable them to become sustainable. Taking on tasks, even in a temporary capacity that should be fulfilled by network members, will not be part of the support offered.

Networks will work with the coordinator to a mutually agreed exit point. Networks may access the service multiple times should they require support again later on down the track.

There may be occasions where a network decides to merge with another similar network in the area, such as an Education and Care Network. The coordinator can assist groups with this process.

Existing networks, former networks and new and emerging networks are all eligible to access the service.

It is anticipated that this service will support the development of a strong knowledge base and a central repository of information about WA's Early Years Networks.

Professional development service

The professional development service will provide networks with access to up to date early year's information and facilitate greater collaboration and information sharing. The professional development service incorporates several components to maximise assistance to diverse organisations and individuals involved with Early Years Networks throughout WA.

Early Years Networks portal

The Early Years Networks portal is a website that will be the go to place for information about the Early Years in WA. It will be publically available, therefore able to be used by anyone with an interest in the early years; however information will be delivered with Early Years Network members as the intended audience. Content for the portal will be scoped out in full in consultation with Early Years Networks, but could include:

- information about the *Early Years Network Support Program* and how to access the advisory and network development service
- a list of all WA's Early Years Networks and contact details for each network
- a suite of templates, i.e. agenda, minutes, attendance list
- resources, such as the *Resource Kit for Starting and Sustaining Networks* (Department for Communities)
- links to current early years research and practice
- links to other relevant organisations
- what's new in the early years; this could be presented in the format of a blog
- a calendar of early years events
- a list of potential guest speakers for network meetings
- an early years forum, where early years questions can be posted and answered
- early years webinars

Frequently changing content of a website, such as a calendar of events, a blog or a forum relies on users visiting the site regularly, therefore hyperlinks to this content will provided in a quarterly newsletter to optimise reach.

Early Years Networks newsletter

An Early Years Networks newsletter will be developed and delivered quarterly via email to all of the networks registered as members of the program. The newsletters will also be accessible from the portal. Content for the newsletter will be scoped out in full in consultation with the Early Years Networks, but could include:

- an Early Years Network in focus; this section might feature one metro and one regional network per edition and focus on their purpose, challenges, strengths and successes
- an update from relevant Government Departments, i.e. DLGC; Education; DCPFS; Health and other key organisations, i.e. ARACY; ECA, about their current work in the early years
- hyperlinks to new content on the Early Years Network portal
- a Q&A section; network members could send questions about challenges they are facing or information they would like from other networks to be posted in the newsletter and readers with advice or information could make contact directly with their suggestions.

Early Years video-conference network

The video-conference network will be a voluntary network of Early Years Network members interested in connecting up with members of other networks on a regular basis to talk about current early year's research and practice, to share ideas and support one another with challenges.

The coordinator will facilitate a monthly video conference for interested members. It is anticipated that this network will primarily be accessed by regional members.

Early Years Networks forum

An Early Years Networks forum will be convened bi-annually, providing opportunities for members of all networks and associated early years professionals to come together, meet and share ideas. Content for the forum will be scoped out in full consultation with the Early Years Networks, but could take a similar format to the successful Early Years Forum in 2011 and include:

- formal networking opportunities
- opportunities to show Early Years Network's successes
- high profile early years speakers

Part of the forum organisation will include identifying funding to enable attendance by regional members of Early Years Networks.

Membership

Access to the Early Years Network Support Program is via membership. Membership will be free to all Early Years Networks in WA. As part of the membership, the network will agree to provide information about their group on an annual basis via a short survey. The information requested will include:

- contact details for two members of the group, including phone number and email address
- a list of members
- how they have used the program
- benefits of the program to their network
- recommendations for program improvements

The provision of this information will ensure a quality program is delivered that meets the needs of members and enable program evaluation.

Other support

There are also a number of other supports available to the Early Years Networks, including:

- Child and Parents Centres located on public school sites in 16 WA communities
- AEDC Local Champions Program administered by the Department of Education
- Regional Community Child Care Development Fund administered by the Department of Local Government and Communities, including a regional children's service plan for each region developed by a non-government organisation

The program coordinator will work with the networks to ascertain how best to link with and make use of these supports where appropriate.



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