Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

Sustainability of Services for Young Children and Their Families: What Works?

This topical paper has been developed for the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners.

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Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

ABOUT ARACY

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) was founded by a group of eminent experts and organisations in reaction to increasingly worrying trends in the wellbeing of Australia's young people.

ARACY is a national organisation with members based across Australia.

ARACY asserts that by working together, rather than working in isolation, we are more likely to uncover solutions to the problems affecting children and young people.

ARACY is a broker of collaborations, a disseminator of ideas and an advocate for Australia's future generation.

ARACY has two primary goals:

1. To promote collaborative research and agenda setting for children and young people
2. To promote the application of research to policy and practice for children and young people.

This paper is one of a series commissioned by ARACY to translate knowledge into action. This series of papers aims to convert research findings into practical key messages for people working in policy and service delivery areas.

The ARACY topical papers may also be the focus of workshops or seminars, including electronic mediums.

Developed for the Facilitating Partners of the Australian Government Communities for Children initiative, this paper is now being made available to a wider audience via the ARACY website: www.aracy.org.au

Sustainability of Services for Young Children and Their Families: What Works?

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SUMMARY

Decisions to invest time, funding and other resources into limited-term projects are based on the expectation that these projects will leave some lasting legacy after funding ends. Sustainability, in this context, refers to the likelihood of achieving benefits from a time-limited intervention (project, program or policy) that are sustained after the intervention has formally ended. This report explores what we have learned about producing sustainable change for families and young children, drawing on evidence from published research and the experiences of Communities for Children (CfC) projects funded under the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009.

From this research, it is clear that sustained benefit does not always involve continuing project activities. Although it is sometimes important for these activities to continue, through securing alternative funding, or through their incorporation into the activities of an ongoing organisation, other types of sustainability can be important instead or as well:

- **Sustained capacity of families** – including skills and knowledge about parenting and about local services

- **Sustained capacity of organisations** – including processes to improve accessibility and co-ordination, as well as the skills and knowledge of staff about effective practice with families

- **Sustained idea or service model** – including general approaches to working with families and specific programs

Importantly, these different types of sustainability, whether sustaining project activities, capacity or ideas, are not ends in themselves, but different ways of achieving sustained results. Often projects will address more than one of these.

While it may not be necessary, or even desirable, to sustain the project activities, it is often, however, necessary to have some ongoing activities to ensure that the capacity that has been built through the project is developed and maintained, or that information about service models is appropriately communicated and used.

Since what is sustained is not always the same as what has been done in the initial project, achieving sustainability will often involve a process of transition, including letting go of some activities which will not be sustained, while maintaining commitment to sustain or begin other activities.

Actual sustainability is only evident some time after funding ends, and can be greatly influenced by factors beyond the control of an individual project or organisation. While it is too soon to assess the overall sustained impact of CfC projects, it is clear that many of them are addressing the issues that have been identified in previous research as predictors of sustained activities.

Sustainability, in terms of the likelihood of sustaining activities after the initial period of funding, is affected by factors concerning the project, the organisation(s) where it has been implemented, and the broader environment.

Strategies that CfC projects have enacted to increase the likelihood of sustaining activities, which both build on and add to the strategies outlined in previous research, include:

- Identifying organisations that could support activities in the future

- Developing Networks and Partnerships

- Supporting skills development

- Demonstrating results and promoting the project

- Creating an overall strategy that incorporates sustainability

- Responding to external factors

The report outlines these ideas in more detail and provides illustrative examples from CfC projects.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE PAPER

The methodology for this paper has involved a combination of 'Evidence into Action' and 'Evidence from Action'. It involved four related pieces of work: a literature review; an online questionnaire of CfC Facilitating Partners; telephone interviews with a purposeful sample of CfC Facilitating Partners; and a webinar with CfC Facilitating Partners.

Previous empirical and theoretical research into sustainability (in terms of projects with time-limited funding) forms the basis of the conceptual framework for the paper. It builds on a literature review undertaken as part of the evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004 [1], and a subsequent Evidence into Action paper [2], supplemented by more recent research.

The development of the questionnaire for projects was informed by a checklist and interview schedule [3, 4] developed by Pluye and colleagues at the University of Montreal based on their earlier research. Since Pluye's frameworks tend to focus on organisational factors that promote sustainability in stable and knowable situations, the questionnaire was also informed by recent work by Voß, and others [5] which has explored how initiatives can be sustained under turbulent and unpredictable conditions, and the conceptual framework developed by Elsworth and Astbury [6], in their report on the sustainability of health promotion projects, which described the dynamic relationship between a project and an organisation that subsequently incorporated project activities. The literature review was also informed by Schroeter's recent checklist [7] for evaluating sustainability, which highlighted the need to assess the relevance of sustaining project activities. The review for this paper also included descriptions of the activities undertaken by Communities for Children projects, including a description of the Parent Advisory Group Extraordinaire component of the 'Port Augusta: A child Friendly Community' CfC project prepared as a Promising Practices Profile.

A web-based questionnaire was developed, drawing from the issues raised in the sustainability literature, and sent to all CfC Facilitating Partners. These organisations have responsibility for planning and managing the separate projects, within each of the 45 CfC areas. They therefore were in a good position to provide an informed overview of sustainability issues within their area.

The questionnaire collected both quantitative and qualitative data and respondents could add comments on aspects of sustainability not addressed by the survey questions. Respondents were also invited to self-nominate for a follow-up telephone interview to discuss their strategies for sustainability in more detail. Within the time period available, 28 of the 45 CfC projects responded to the questionnaire.

Follow up interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of three Facilitating Partners to further explore three issues that were highlighted in the analysis of questionnaire results::

When in the project lifecycle was it important to consider sustainability?

How did projects combine different sustainability strategies?

How did projects handle important factors that were outside their immediate influence or control?

Project were selected for interview that, from their survey responses, appeared to have addressed these questions with some degree of success, and which represented a range of environmental contexts and strategies. Interviewees were also invited to share general insights about what they had learned about sustainability.

A webinar in the CfC series was held on the topic of Sustainability. Before the webinar, a draft report was circulated to all CfC projects, pooling the results of the survey and the interviews. The CfC Facilitating Partners together with Community Partners and representatives from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) were also invited to attend the Webinar to discuss sustainability issues in general and the draft report in particular. Comments and contributions from the Webinar were incorporated into this version of the report, together with feedback from reviews of the draft report.

THINKING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Different definitions of sustainability

The term 'sustainability' is often used to refer to various aspects of sustainable development, frequently in terms of the definition developed by the Brundtland Commission [8] "development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This report, however, focuses on 'sustainability' in terms of projects that receive time-limited funding. In this context there has been considerable variation in what is meant by 'sustainability'.

Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone [9], in their review of health promotion literature, identified six different ways in which the term was used:

- The capacity to service (i.e. support) coverage at a level that will provide continuing control of a health problem;

- The capacity of a project to continue to deliver its intended benefits over a long period of time;

- The ability of a program to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major assistance from an external donor is terminated;

- The long-term viability and integration of a new program within an organisation;

- The process by which new practices become 'standard business' in an organisation (i.e. their routinisation, institutionalisation or incorporation into an organisation); and

- The development of the capacity (knowledge, skills and resources) of the organisation to conduct effective programs.

To this list, Scheirer [10] added two additional types of sustainability:

- Sustaining the "ideas, beliefs, principles or values underlying the initiative";

- The sustainability of the implementing organisations themselves.

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The earlier Evidence into Action paper on Sustainability [2] simplified this list to focus on 'what' was sustained:

- Participation of families, participating organisations, and staff

- Results for families

- Community capacity

- Project activities

- Project idea or service model

This paper has further developed these conceptualisations of sustainability to focus on sustained results for families as the overall intended benefit from sustainability, and to consider the other types of sustainability as means to this end.   This is consistent with the definition of 'sustainability' used for conceptualising and measuring the sustainability of the Children and Families at Risk Initiative in the USA [11]:

> "The key element of sustainability is providing continued benefits, regardless of particular activities delivered or the format (institutionalization versus independence) in which they are delivered. Thus it is more important to sustain benefits to families and communities than to sustain program activities per se."

Pathways to sustaining results

Sustained results for children and families are the overall intended outcomes for projects but these can be achieved in different ways. Sometimes sustained results can be directly achieved through a project– for example; preventing Foetal Alcohol Syndrome has a permanent positive result for children and families.

More commonly, sustained results are achieved through pathways which involve one or more of the following:

- **Sustained capacity of families** – including skills and knowledge about parenting and about local services

- **Sustained activities by organisations** – including direct service delivery, support for community networks, and development of capacity of families; these might be the same activities undertaken during the project or different activities

- **Sustained capacity of organisations** – including processes to improve accessibility and co-ordination, as well as the skills and knowledge of staff about effective practice with families

- **Sustained idea or service model** – including general approaches to working with families and specific programs

For example, a project may build the capacity of participating families, which is then sustained and leads to sustained results. Or the activities undertaken by the project may continue after initial funding ends, leading to sustained results. Or the project may have built the capacity of organisations which has made a permanent improvement in the way they deliver services, and hence the quality of results for families. Or the project might have ended in one location but the idea has been picked up and implemented in another location, leading to positive results for other families. These different pathways to sustained results are shown in the following diagram.

Figure 1 Different paths to achieving sustained results
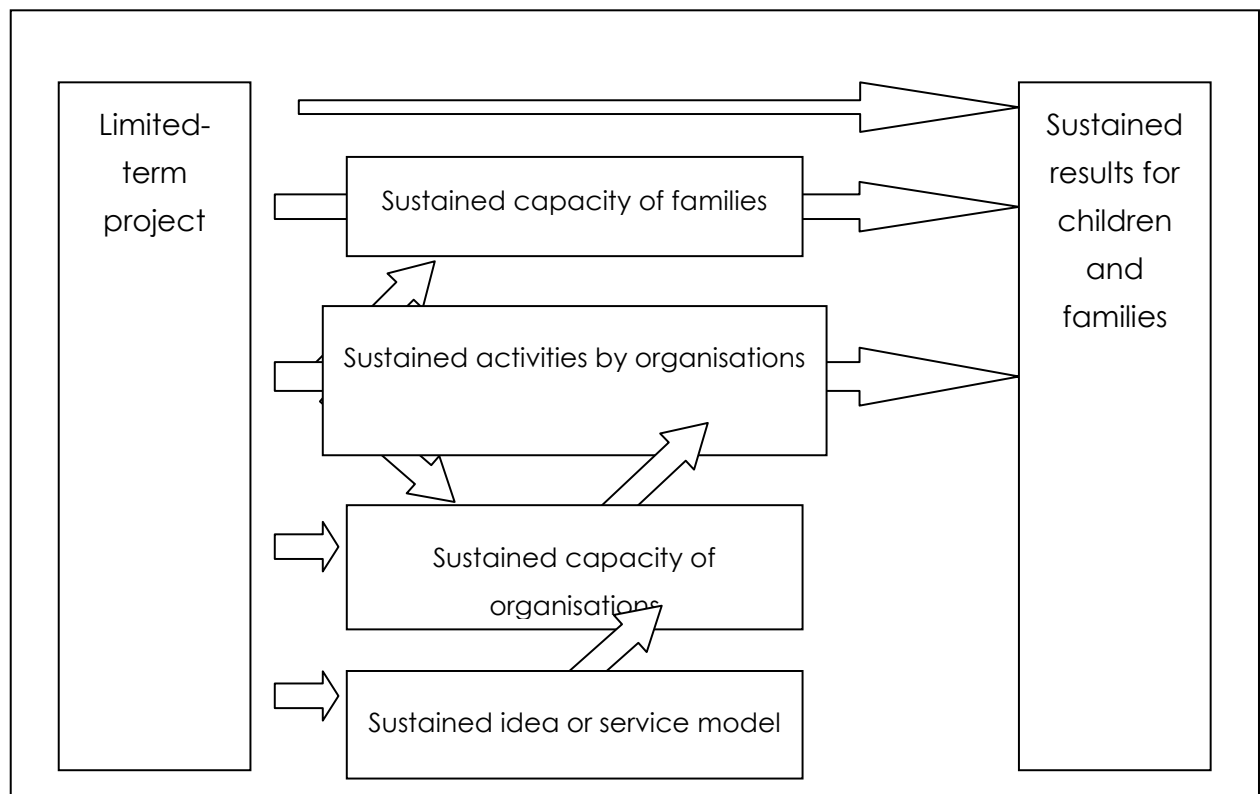
In practice many strategies for sustainability address several of these pathways. For example, sustained results (in terms of effective parenting) may be achieved partly through sustained family capacity (such as knowledge and skills in age-appropriate parenting), which is supported by sustained activities by an organisation (such as a playgroup), which also build families' capacity (such as supportive networks between parents). It can, however, be useful to consider each of these pathways separately and the next section of the paper discusses each of them in turn and provides examples from Communities for Children projects.

Sustained results for children and families

The intended sustained result of projects, programs and policies for families is the sustained wellbeing of children and families. While sustained well-being may only be evident in the longer-term, even inter-generationally, results that might be evident in the short- term include: effective parenting; good family relationships; and connection to community and use of services.

The following examples from CfC projects illustrate the types of results for children and families that might be evident in the short-term, and which are indicative of longer-term positive results.

Table 1 Examples of types of results achieved by CfC projects

Effective parenting

- *Evidence through our local evaluator has demonstrated that families are changing their routines and behaviours at home e.g.: one family stated how now instead of having cool drink and chips when they are chilling out watching a DVD, they now cut up fresh fruit instead and drink fruit juice. There have been reports from facilitators on mothers now paying more attention to their little child and participating in activities with them, whereas before they would not participate but just watch or chat with other mothers/carers.*

Good family relationships

- *Through supported playgroups in the parks, relationships between parents and child have improved, as well as improving parenting skill and child social skills.*
- *The families that participated in the fast program reported significant improvement in their family interactions. They also reported improved behaviour of their children .*
- *There is an increase in the value of family e.g.: child friendly communities, family participation in parent child interactive activities increase in father participation particularly aboriginal fathers*
- *A culture of education has improved outcomes for aboriginal children, including hygiene, language acquisition, nutrition, social skills, and attending school on a regular basis.*

Connection to community and use of services

- *There is greater service-user support & friendship, increased satisfaction with services & programs and, seamless referral to other services*
- *More families have been accessing information & services*
- *There is greater participation and connection - in community events, playgroups, early literacy activities, workshops enrolment in child care and pre-school*
- *Families are feeling positive about their community.*
- *There is confidence in parents as parents, and confidence to approach other agencies for services.*
- *Parents have confidence to ask, to approach, to do something for themselves and their children. It could be about information and knowledge, about a service and where to go, or about attending an event.*
- *There is increased satisfaction with services & programs*
- *There are stronger relationship between families and family/children services*
- *There is increased school retention amongst teenage parents*
- *There is increased preparedness of children for school*
- *There has been some success with establishing links with families previously deemed 'hard to reach'. The 'playgroup in the park' has been very beneficial for this.*
- *Families that have concerns about their children's development are using strategies developed by an early childhood teacher, or have obtained help for their child from relevant early intervention services/therapists.*

Sustained capacity of families

Another pathway to sustained results is through sustaining the capacity of families built through the project. This capacity refers to the establishment and sustenance of personal resources so they can respond to challenges and seize opportunities. It enables people to identify and address elements they would like to change and empowers them to do so.

It can be helpful to distinguish two different types of family capacity:

- **human capital** - skills and knowledge (e.g. families' knowledge of available services)

- **social capital** - supportive relationships between families and/or organisations (e.g. young parents who meet informally for peer support)

Sustained capacity of organisations

For time-limited projects, a very important pathway to sustained results is through developing sustainable capacity of organisations. It can be helpful to distinguish four different types of organisational capacity:

- **human capital** - skills and knowledge (e.g. staff's skills in strengths-based approaches to supporting families)

- **social capital** - supportive relationships between organisations (e.g. networks of service providers)

- **economic capital** - money and other resources (e.g. physical infrastructure such as facilities)

- **institutional capital** - organisational systems, processes and non-physical infrastructure (e.g. consultative committees and service directories).

Table 2 Examples of family capacity achieved by CfC projects

Human capital

- *There have been reports from families that have seen the educational resources as assisting them to finally understand the importance of iron in the diet of children and adults. Many families have expressed surprise that tea is not a good drink for children. Some women have reported significant improvement in their capacity to play with their children and to see the importance of children participating in structured activities for little children.*
- *Parents are also more aware of resources in the community related to children in their early years.*
- *Families have increased awareness of the importance of the early years e.g. The importance of: providing appropriate nutrition and opportunities for physical activities; reading stories and singing rhymes to the children; playing with the children; children attending preschool; role modelling appropriate behaviour; accessing early intervention as they become more familiar and comfortable with early years service providers.*
- *Some women have reported significant improvement in their capacity to play with their children and see the importance of children participating in structured activities.*
- *Aboriginal families with pre-prep children are becoming familiar with the education system. Mothers are learning the benefits for themselves and babies of antenatal and postnatal care. There is greater awareness of the impact of violence on children.*

Social capital

- *Families are supporting each other through social connections /support groups and activities developed through the project.*
- *There is an increased sense of community connectedness*

Table 3 Examples of organisational capacity achieved by CfC projects

Organisational capital

- *Human capital - including. skills developed through CfC training and participation in CfC activities   Social capital - inc service/service and community/community and service/community connections and networking established with CfC activity and committee and Facilitating Partner support.   Institutional capital - as above, including service/service and community/community and service/community connections and networking established with CfC activity and committee and Facilitating Partner support; and also including contribution to Local Government planning processes.*
- *Staff's/community members' skills in strengths-based approaches to supporting families/self/others * service integration (not just collaboration) * facilities- open, functional and available * Early years committee*
- *We have a year or so to achieve sustainable outcomes for [a language outreach] project, and we have made a detailed and multi-layered action plan, which has a flexible approach as each step/component inter-relates. For example we plan to have an amalgamated Council working-party to see what components of early literacy can be embeded across the new Council boundaries (building institutional capital), while at the same time building relationships with local Industry.*

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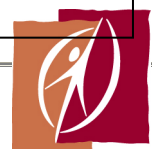
Focus of CfC projects

Based on the assessment by Facilitating Partners most of the CfC projects contributed towards the establishment of community capital. However there was an important difference between the forms of capital. Table 4 shows how Facilitating Partners rated their project's success to in terms of establishing the four kinds of capital

As the highlighted figures below show, projects considered themselves generally successful in generating human and social capital but having had mixed success in building institutional and economic capital. This is entirely consistent with the focus and scope of CfC projects that did not have an emphasis on building economic capital, and which did not include funding for capital works.

Table 4 Rated success in establishing different types of capacity [Figures in brackets are frequencies]

	Very successful	Successful	Mixed success	Unsuccessful	Very unsuccessful
Human Capital	**39% (9)**	**39% (9)**	22% (5)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Social Capital	**39% (9)**	**44% (10)**	17% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Institutional Capital	13% (3)	17% (4)	**65% (15)**	4% (1)	0% (0)
Economic Capital	22% (5)	26% (6)	**52% (12)**	0% (0)	0% (0)

Sustained activities

Another pathway by which a project can have sustained results is through sustaining activities. These might be the activities undertaken in the project (providing they have been effective and are still needed) or different types of activities that are needed after the project ends.

Activities may be sustained either through:

- obtaining alternative funding (short-term or ongoing) from one or more sources

- incorporating the activities into the functions of an ongoing organisation

When project activities are incorporated into the functions of an ongoing organisation, this often requires adaptation of project activities to fit the procedures, values and rules of an existing or alternative organisation (sometimes referred to as 'routinisation')

Table 5 Examples strategies used by CfC projects to sustain activities

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Securing alternative funding

- *The Early Years Information Service and Network in Townsville was this CfC's largest project. The strategy was to embed the project in the local authority for whom the cost of the project was relatively small in their overall budget. Success in this case will be persuading the body to continue the activity at the end of the CfC funding, hopefully having seen the benefits to the community for which has responsibility.*

Incorporating into functions of an ongoing organisation

- *The Dubbo "Baby Book Bag" has involved a wide range of organisations, but the main sponsor is the local library. The library may be able to incorporate this service into their usual business fairly easily, or at least is large enough to seek alternate funds now it has evidence the Baby Book Bags works*

Sustaining ideas

Sometimes the key legacy of a time-limited project is the sustained ideas that underpin a particular intervention or a specific service delivery model.

Table 6 Example of ideas from CfC projects that can be sustained

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- *"We are doing a whole lot of community events that are not sustainable, but the idea was to get people together and also influence how other community events happen …The kids interact amongst themselves and their parents at those events rather than run riot.. . so [for instance the Council organised] Community Fun Days [now follow] a particular mode of doing something that is more beneficial to the community [and] … cultivate interaction between parent and child."*

SUSTAINING ACTIVITIES - BUT MAYBE DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES TO PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Why some level of activities may be needed

Most types of capacity requires maintenance – whether this is mowing the grass at a playground (physical capital), updating a community directory (institutional capital), or refreshing skills and knowledge or updating them to address changes in the service environment or developmental stage of children (human capital). There may therefore need to be some level of activity to maintain the capacity, even if it is not at the same level as the activities undertaken to initially build the capacity.

A number of CfC projects rated their success at building community capacity as mixed because of various factors that limit the building of capacity that can be sustained without some level of ongoing activity:

- More time needed to build capacity given the starting point for communities

- Turnover of staff and community members, taking away the human and social capital that has been established

- Need for ongoing activities to maintain capacity

Similarly, the sustainability of an idea or service model may depend on the availability of advice and assistance to organisations that are seeking to take it up. CfC projects identified a range of organisations that might pick up ideas and service: local government; community based organizations; NGOs; various State government agencies; various Commonwealth agencies; health/welfare agencies; early childhood organisations; schools; individuals; other education agencies; businesses; churches/faith based organisations; libraries; trusts & philanthropic organisations.

Table 7 Examples from CfC projects of need for ongoing activities

More time needed to build capacity

- *"The development of community capacity in all its forms will take much longer than the funding period of four years for this region allows. The Indigenous communities in this region have had to contend with many changes over the last few years. Staff continue to be very transient. Ongoing mentoring has been found to be the best way of building community capacity but is costly and time consuming."*

- *4 year funding is not enough time to make real systems change. This is a disadvantaged community and long-term changes take more than short term funding. The high percentage of indigenous families , the increase in new arrivals and the entrenched systemic attitude of the dominant culture that are negative (racism) need long term commitment and focus by all levels of government on a bi/partisan approach*

- *As Prof Richard Wilkinson has shown, those who have been left behind, in the process of economic advancement were marginalised and kept at the peripheries. They have very little capital to sustain. Once CfC funding ceases, unless there are other strategies, programs etc very little will be sustainable. 3 years of activity from a strategy that does not address some of the fundamental issues for people living in CfC sites is not enough to build sustainable capital (Sure Start shows this). Many of the people living in these areas are poor and with petrol and food prices rising dramatically, the threat of a recession, they are getting poorer. T*

Lack of locally based ongoing services and organisations

- *There are very few early childhood services other than what CfC is offering. When the funding stops, these will cease to exist too. What might exist in 3-5 years is the memory of a time when families living in the CfC sites, for once in their lives, had some support and services."*

Turnover of staff and community members

- *"Recruiting, training and retaining skilled staff in remote areas are huge problems that appear unresolvable."*

- *"Even though we were training parents in a particular community – if parents move on they take the knowledge with them. There's nothing to stop people applying what they learn in a new setting"*

Need for ongoing activities to maintain capacity

- *You can work very hard to increase capacity of the community but when working in a very disadvantaged community there still needs to be some resources going into to maintain that capacity. [We are] training people to run playgroups, as a transition to community playgroups. However because of higher need the playgroup coordinator is going to be required on an ongoing basis, but maybe not at the level she is working at the moment. .*

- *The role of Facilitating Partner is essential to an ongoing holistic approach*

Need for ongoing activities to support uptake of ideas and service models

- *There are however, risks with sustaining ideas. Expertise can be lost or diluted*

- *[We need to consider the [role] of the Facilitating Partner in that leadership role in the move towards sustainability. [There is a] real danger that the early childhood education expertise is lost as things are filtered out to other organisations. We cannot afford to lose this in order to ensure that our goals continue into the future. It is a very complex aspect of what we do.*

The need to manage transition

If the activities that are needed after the project ends are different to those undertaken during the project, there will need to be a process of transition. This is not an issue that has been raised in the research on sustainability, which tends to focus on continuity, but came from responses to the CfC survey:

Table 8 Examples from CfC projects of need to manage transition

- *In the notion of sustainability there needs to be something about transition to another model, another organization delivery mode etc etc. I thought back to the comments on transition in a past ARACY paper, Bridges [11] quoted in Building a Solid Foundation for School: a Communities Approach:*

  Transitions are different to changes because they involve not only the outcome, but also a process of letting go of the way things used to be and then taking hold of the way they subsequently become. However, it is the community/ families/local orgs, not necessarily the project staff or facilitating partners, who remain to really see what will subsequently become, thus there is a need to 'trust' that the work done previously will transform into something equally meaningful".

  This paper added, that

  in 'Bridges, view, leaving behind the old implies a sense of loss; that is, to progress from one stage in life to another requires losing something or leaving it behind.'

  It seems to me that we are working diligently towards sustainable outcomes, without recognizing the sense of loss that may be a 'useful' part of this process to acknowledge.

- *We have found in our discussion group with all people involved in CfC there are some things people are not ready to let go of yet. We need to work through that.*

- *Part of my process is to tell people/families, co-workers that I will be gone in a year...as they seem to think, I will be in the area for ever."*

FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE CHANCE OF SUSTAINED ACTIVITIES

Overview of factors

Previous research has identified various factors that increase the chance of sustained activities. As shown below in Figure 2, these factors can be grouped into three clusters: those that relate to the project; to the organisation; and to the wider community and policy context.

Figure 2 Factors that increase the likelihood of sustaining activities
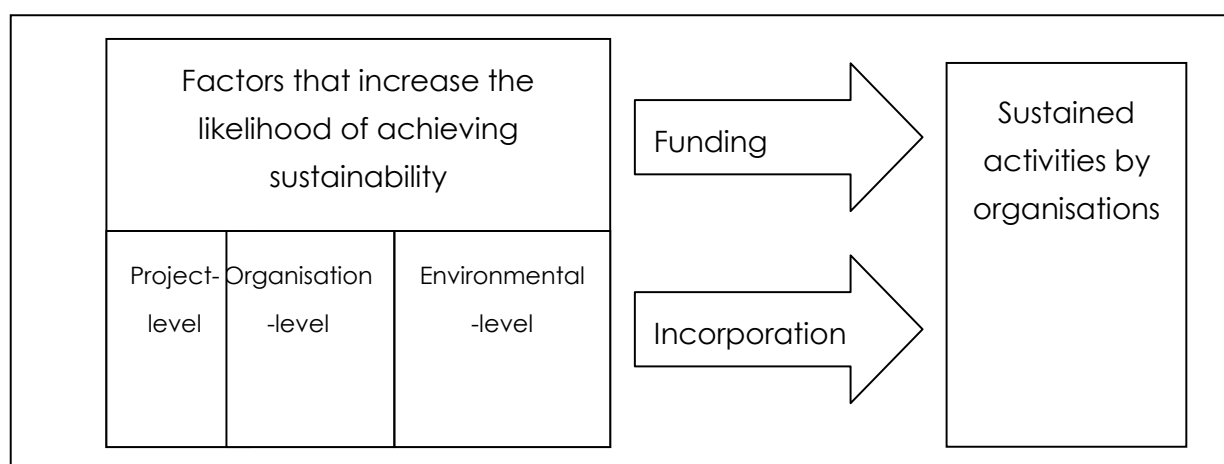
Table 9 below summarises the factors associated with a greater chance of sustainability, drawing from a wide variety of sources (see references in square brackets), using different research methods, including actual follow-up of sustained activities. The list therefore has more than the six factors identified by Mancini and Marek's research [11] which were associated with projected sustainability of the project: leadership competence; effective collaboration; staff involvement and integration; demonstrating program results strategic funding; and program responsivity.

While much of this research has focused on sustaining project activities, many of the factors appear relevant to sustaining other activities (such as maintaining capacity or supporting uptake of a service model).

Table 9 Characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of sustaining activities

THE PROJECT	
Project satisfies a need	Program/project activities adapted to local context according to their effectiveness and to population needs [3,4]
Funding sources	Projects with diverse funding sources. This may reflect broader support from a range of organisations or increased opportunity to secure subsequent funding from other sources. [1, 14, 15]Projects where fundraising started early on. [3, 4, 16, 17]
Forward planning	Projects that start planning for sustainability early. [3]
Transparency	Transparent communication between the people involved. [3,4]
Adequate resources	Adequate resources to accomplish program/project activities (financial, knowledge and skills, material, training). [1,3,4, 11]
Scope for activities to be incorporated in existing organisations	Project activities that can be readily incorporated into the everyday activities of existing organisations and ongoing programs. [13]
Project effectiveness	Projects perceived to be effective, addressed an acknowledged local need and with credible evidence of their effectiveness. [1,3,4,9, 17, 18, 19]
Regular monitoring and evaluation	Projects that regularly monitor and evaluate their progress. This may help focus their efforts, to identify problems early so they could be resolved, and/or provided better evidence of effectiveness. [20]
Marketing	Projects that effectively communicate their achievements. [1,3,4,9, 17, 18, 19]
ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT	
Organisational stability	Projects that operate in a stable organisational context, with well-developed procedures and goals. [16, 21]
Organisational flexibility and adaptability	Projects that operate in an organisational context that is flexible, with opportunities for mutual adaptation. [16, 21]. Projects that can "steer" their way through ambiguous and changing external policy contexts, uncertainties about the environment and handle shifting power structures [5]
Project/Organisation alignment & routinisation	Extent to which the project is aligned with and incorporated into organisation's policies and procedures and establishes resources that preserve lessons learned [3]
Incorporation	Projects are incorporated into existing or larger organisations or projects. [1, 9, 16, 22]
Project champions and effective leadership	Projects with internal and external champions, support from senior leadership of the organisation [10, 11]. Effective leadership (11)
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	
Community support for the project	Projects that develop community support. [16] Projects that engage in diverse activities to engage community support. [1]
Partnerships with other organisations	Projects with diverse and effective partnerships. [14, 17, 19, 21, 23]
Sense of community ownership	Projects with a greater sense of community ownership. [14, 17, 19, 21, 23]
Alignment with political & economic climate	Projects aligned with current policy and funding priorities. [10].

Research into the sustainability of projects funded under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004 [12] found four factors that were strong predictors of actual continuation of activities and the scale of continuation: diverse funding sources; diverse activities to engage community support during project development; effective support from the auspice organisation during project development; and the effectiveness of the project. These four factors, when combined using multiple regression, accounted for half the variation in the rate and scale of continued activities.

However, since sustainability is so dependent on context, it is likely the relative importance of these factors would vary for different types of projects and different situations.

Communities for Children attention to these factors

The questionnaire to Facilitating Partners included seven self-rated items relating to these factors. These ratings were generally high, particularly in terms of the levels of participation. The factors that were relatively lower were the level of existing resourcing, the availability of skills and expertise, and the availability of adequate evidence of effectiveness. The following table summarises these results, with the factors grouped in terms of whether they relate to the project, the organisation, or the wider context.

Table 10 CfC project self-ratings in terms of key factors that increase the chances of sustaining activities

Factor	Questionnaire item	Combined Strongly Agree and Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree/ Partly disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
THE PROJECT							
Adequate resources	We were able to access sufficient resource for program activities	**64%**	20% (5)	44% (11)	24% (6)	8% (2)	4%
	The available skills and expertise effectively support program activities	**63%**	21% (5)	42% (10)	29% (7)	8% (2)	0%
Project effectiveness	There is extensive evidence that the activities have been effective	**60%**	28% (7)	32% (8)	36% (9)	4% (1)	0%
ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT							
Project champions	The people and institutions involved strongly promote program activities	**80%**	44% (11)	36% (9)	20% (5)	0%	0%
Project/ organisation alignment and routinisation	The organisational structures and processes strongly support program activities of partner organisations	**80%**	28% (7)	52% (13)	20% (5)	0%	0%
Project/ organisation alignment and routinisation	The formal policies and procedures strongly support the program activities	**76%**	16% (4)	60% (15)	24% (6)	0%	0%
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT							
Community support for the project	We have had excellent participation of families, staff, partner organisations and the community throughout the project	**96%**	48% (12)	48% (12)	4% (1)	0%	0%

NB: Figures in brackets are frequencies Not all respondents answered every question, hence differences in percentages

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability strategies that CfC projects reported they were using, or which would be needed, were clustered into six categories. They are listed here in order of the frequency with which they were identified by CfC projects.

1. Identifying organisations that could support activities in the future

2. Developing Networks and Partnerships

3. Supporting skills development

4. Demonstrating results and promoting the project

5. Creating an overall strategy that incorporates sustainability

6. Responding to external factors

Other strategies mentioned but less broadly and less frequently were the development of community leadership and time to allow things to develop.

There were some differences between the kinds of activities. For instance, activities relating to building healthy family relationships tended to lean more toward funding than those focused on building networks and partnerships. Projects that promoted group based parenting skill development (e.g. playgroups) also tended to be focused on resource acquisition but had a greater emphasis on internally generated funding or incorporation into other activities (e.g. become part of a school's broader function). In relation to the features associated with sustainable activities, the above strategies tend to place more emphasis on resourcing and support than issues of internal organisation and evidence.

The following sections provide illustrations of these strategies and specific advice from CfC projects for future projects.

1. Identifying organisations that could support activities in the future

For activities that needed to continue in the future, identification and involvement of an organisation that could support these activities in the future was the most frequently mentioned strategy among CfC projects, in line with the issues raised in the sustainability literature. This support could come in the form of funding for activities or incorporation into the organisation's activities. Possible sources of funding for the future included Commonwealth, State, and Local Government, Trusts and Foundations, Libraries, Schools, Local businesses, Rotary, Corporate Sponsors, and large NGOs (e.g. PV, CGD, Mission Australia, Best Start).

Within this cluster of strategies, CfC projects had four following specific approaches:

- Begin early to identify possible sources of subsequent funding

- Select a partner that was carrying out an associated activity

- For a large project seek a larger partner

- Find an established partner

Table 10 Examples from CfC projects of identifying organisations that could support activities in the future

> *Begin early to identify possible sources of subsequent funding*
> - *If subsequent funding was required to sustain activities, planning to secure this needs to begin early:,*
> - *"They need ongoing funding for the early years.   when asking how do we sustain this [we need to ask] who do we need to be courting right now, sending information to … applying for grants [well ahead of time]"*
>
> *Select a partner that was carrying out an associated activity*
> - *If the activity is seen to be successful then it can be incorporated into other activities. For instance: The Dubbo "Baby Book Bag" has involved a wide range of organisations, but the main sponsor is the local library. The library may be able to incorporate this service into their usual business fairly easily, or at least are large enough to seek alternate funds now they have evidence the Baby Book Bags works.*
> - *In Townsville, there was a great need for playgroups. The Facilitating Partner could have established a playgroup with a separate identity, but it would need separate resources at the end of three years to continue. However, the more sustainable option was set it up as part of a local school. This used the existing school resources and once the playgroup proved its worth, it has a greater chance of being sustained. It also allowed the school to see that investing in playgroups helped the settlement of kids once they started attending school.*
>
> *For a large project seek a larger partner*
> - *For instance: The Early Years Information Service and Network in Townsville was this CfC's largest project. The strategy was to embed the project in the local authority for whom the cost of the project was relatively small in their overall budget. Success in this case will be persuading the body to continue the activity at the end of the CfC funding, hopefully having seen the benefits to the community for which has responsibility.*
>
> *Find an established partner*
> - *If possible select a partner that has been in the community for a while, that has an established track record, has the knowledge how to keep projects running.*
> - *In the case of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Years Community Group in the Townsville CfC, the partner was a skilled and experienced organisation that helped establish the interested community as a legal entity and then assisted in governance training and the establishment of playgroups and parenting workshops. It did so in a way that built social capital and more importantly the capacity of the Indigenous community so that they had the skills to continue the Activity post CfC and the ability to source funding which will still be needed to continue the project.*

2. Developing Networks and Partnerships

Developing networks and partnerships was the second most frequently listed sustainability strategy used by CfC projects. This was also in line with the sustainability literature. Developing networks and partnerships was an explicit focus of a wide range of CfC projects – in some cases establishing entirely new structures and processes.

In many cases as well as linking projects into a wider network, the Facilitating Partners often established networks and partnerships as a support mechanism for projects in the area.

> *At the start consult with the community and respond to what they say. This builds ownership.*
>
> Advice from a CfC project to future projects

> *Get the support of community based partners*
>
> Advice from a CfC project to future projects

Table 11 Examples from CfC projects of developing networks and partnerships

- *Resourcing of networks/collaboration and sharing of tasks between agencies,*
- *Co-ordinated parent sessions in partnership with childcare and maternal & Child Health*
- *Establishment of structures/mechanisms to continue to develop capacities of families, communities and organisations*
- *Strong mentoring and partnerships with indigenous groups that have the skills to respond to the needs as expressed by the women and men of these communities*
- *Continually create opportunities for people in the community to meet and connect with others*
- *Establishment of Memoranda of Understandings between relevant organisations*
- *Ongoing commitment to work in a more collaborative manner incorporation of activities and strategies into other programs and services*
- *Early years sector working in partnership to improve outcomes for children and families.*
- *Non-duplication of services; transparency around availability of services and supports*
- *Services and institutions working effectively as a system in supporting families Cooperation and collaboration between all service organisations and governments.*
- *Sustained networks of local workers.*
- *Sustained networks of local parents.CfC*
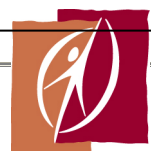
Many felt that building and sustaining relationships were the key to sustainability, and that this work was continuous rather than a one-off task.

> "If an organisation suddenly changes and grows, you have to work with that larger organisation again to ensure that the idea is embedded. This highlights the importance of relationships. We have council amalgamations in our sector. A project was sponsored by one third of what is now a big super-council. We are now building relationships with a wider range of staff.".

> "You need to build relationships with CEOs of industry if they are going to come on board and support emergent literacy. It's not good enough to have a good idea; you have to build the relationships with people."

3. Supporting skills development

Training, professional development and the acquisition of skills and knowledge of all stakeholders was the third most frequently mentioned strategy. .While the sustainability literature highlights the need for adequate skills and knowledge, there has been less explicit attention to the logical corollary – that developing skills and knowledge will be an important strategy for sustainability.

Be prepared to bring evidence from elsewhere

Advice from a CfC project to future projects

Build the capacity of the community to continue their activities including being able to source new funding

Advice from a CfC project to future projects

Provide on the ground support and advice to Community Partners and encourage Community Partners to support each other.

Advice from a CfC project to future projects

Table 12 Examples from CfC projects of supporting skills development

Family members

- *We would like to see improved physical, emotional, social, cognitive & spiritual development in the children of our community continue to be sustained by improving parent competence & style*
- *Families with children 0-5 have easy access to knowledge and skills appropriate for raising healthy, happy, and well adjusted children.*

Service providers

- *Improved staff skills in strength based approaches*
- *Two local ladies currently employed at the centre are completing their cert 3 in childcare*
- *NGO's who know how to listen to and work with Indigenous women.*
- *Ongoing investment in strategic professional development for the sector*
- *Strengthen the utilisation of community development thinking/practice increasing community capacity*

Community members

- *Training of local people and giving them the feeling of ownership to the programs they are facilitating. Focusing on their confidence so they will continue doing the fantastic work that they are currently doing.*
- *Increase in social capital in the community; universal understanding of the importance of the early years, cooperation and collaboration between all service organisations and governments.*
- *What we did was provide funding support for a series of projects with one community partner that also built the capacity of our other community partners to handle drug and alcohol issues.*

4. Demonstrating results and promoting the project

This strategy includes promotion and demonstration within the community (as a means of developing community capital) and externally (as a means of generating wider support). In some cases, this promotional activity was carried out by individuals (often identified as "champions") and in other cases more indirectly by reports and more general publicity.

Table 13 Examples from CfC projects of demonstrating results and promoting the project

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Promotion and marketing

- *There needs to be appropriate marketing of the message during the life of the project, e.g. a community partner marketing the project to that organization's board*
- *We built capacity, particularly with the committee, to enhance the opportunity for communities to advocate for themselves for programs that they want in their communities… as four years is insufficient to achieve the outcomes set for us.*
- *We are working more with the business community with a view to establishing partnerships for sponsorship of some activities. We are also publicising the outcomes of activities.*
- *Promotion and delivery of strategy outcomes at local level to all our Community Partners. I believe we have a responsibility to do this 1:1 with each CP strategy(as they may use some of time in future planning), as well as on a larger scale via a forum locally and for all state and national funded site. We need to make time to promote all the above with key people at CGD and other identities that have an influence on planning, policy development, submission writing.*

Evaluation and demonstration of results

- *Documentation of effective activities and practice.*
- *Allowing the employees to see the benefits of what they are doing in the community (for the children and families they are working with) and their personal gain.*
- *Access to Evaluations; recommendations, challenges, learnings, insights Access to collations on MSC Stories Access to topical papers and AIFS Promising Practice Profile Papers (best practice)*
- *Through such measures as evaluation of data against starting point/baseline measures (e.g. Australian Early Development Index mapping) for example.*
- *Increased awareness of outcomes based evaluation.*

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5. Creating an overall strategy that incorporates sustainability

Survey respondents wrote extensively about the importance of strategising, planning and promoting policies that supported sustainability. In line with the recommendations from the sustainability literature, some had started strategising for sustainability from the very beginning of CfC, whilst others have started a couple of years into the projects.

These issues were explored to greater depths in our interviews with three Facilitating Partners. All three acknowledged that some of the activities in their area were not going to be sustainable. However all three were investigating ways of sustaining something from those activities; especially sustaining the idea or the capacities built up during those activities. One mentioned that the ARACY paper was helpful in getting people to understand that sustaining activities was not the only kind of sustainability but maybe not the ideal form of sustainability.

The sponsoring agency FaHCSIA stressed the importance of sustainability from the beginning. As the three interviews explored whether this meant they chose to support local activities on the basis of their probable sustainability or selected the activities on other criteria and sought to make that activity sustainable. All three interviewees stressed that the activities should emerge from a stated need within the community. This built ownership and commitment from day one of a project and formed a springboard for the development of other sustainability-focused strategies. They considered it the Facilitating Partner's job to help guide that activity towards sustainability.

> *"Think of the long term when putting things together"*
>
> Advice from a CfC project to future projects

> *Hire good people who think strategically*
>
> Advice from a CfC project to future projects

> *Model the way in which you believe promotes sustainability. Be open and provide advice when requested,*
>
> Advice from a CfC project to future projects

> *Explore the capacity to achieve multi-layered outcomes*
>
> Advice from a CfC project to future projects

Table 14 Examples from CfC projects of creating an overall strategy that incorporates sustainability

- *We are currently working on establishing [a strategy group]. It has received widespread 'in principle' support from broad range of family and children's organisations (both government and non-government). Working with this group to establish strategic directions for next 5 to 10 years and to establish appropriate governance arrangements etc.*

- *We have a strong focus through the committee and with contracted community partners to be working towards sustainability. It has a realistic appreciation of just what can be sustained and works to shore that up. This includes promoting market desired outcomes to identified potential longer-term drivers and ensuring a realistic appreciation in the community around the longevity of the project. We always talk about the dollars being seed funding only.*

- *We have a groups called the Sustainability Task Force who are working together to build a picture of what we want to sustain from CfC, what else we need in the CfC sites to provide support for parents with young children and the sorts of services that 0-5 year olds require.*

- *All Community Partners are being supported now to develop their understanding and commitment to sustaining aspects of their activity as appropriate through workshops and support from the Facilitating Partner's project manager as well as each other. All activities were designed to interrelate and have aspects of sustainability built in from their inception.*

Table 15 More detailed examples from CfC projects of creating an overall strategy that incorporates sustainability

- *Townsville*
- *"It's important to be clear that this will all end after the period of funding. So right from the start the questions was "what can we do to make a difference within the time frame, including building the capacity of the community"; initiatives that would deliver on expectations within 3yrs, or will have developed to such a stage that would have a chance to be sustainable without ongoing Federal Government funding.*
- *In the partner contracts is an obligation to have a sustainability plan by the end of December. So the message to partner organisations has been "At the end of this year we are going to ask you as it says in your contract to finish a sustainability … So you are going to be working towards a sustainability plan, so let's start thinking about it now". "We had a very set plan about assisting our community partners towards sustainability. I gave them all today just an outline of a table of their activities and a breakdown of their outcome column and a blank "activities sustaining" column and then a blank "challenges" column…. who will be need to be courted right now [or applied to for grants].*
- *The Communities for Children Committee that was established and was a mandatory component of the funding model proved to be very effective in breaking down community sector silos during the initial consultation period. As a result, we sought to ensure the Committee was sustainable by embedding it in one of our Activities, the Early Years Information Management Activity, to be renamed and continue after CfC finishes."*

Launceston and EastTamar

- *The main focus started a couple of years ago. The history is for projects to come and go – the consequence is that sometimes local communities are left high and dry. The projects were on annual contracts and started to include "sustainability" in the contracts. The ARACY paper on sustainability was useful; it gave a framework plus highlighted that sustainability was more than keeping activities going. More recently there was no idea coming out of the new government about the future of the program, so there was a risk of projects being left high and dry. Felt under pressure to address sustainability.*
- *What this means in practice is that we have met with each of the community partners in turn to draw up a sustainability plan. This included an evaluation of projects that was drawn together. It also identified which kind of sustainability looked likely for which project. For those where continuing resources were going to be required things were drawn together and submitted to the previous government's minister essentially saying that these things would end without continued funding. We felt we needed to flag these issues.*

6. Responding to external factors

Most of the above strategies are essentially internally focused - creating sustainability by using resources (in the broadest terms) drawn from within the community.

However, projects and their communities do not exist in isolation. There are factors beyond their control that have considerable influence over their sustainability. As was discussed earlier, the sustainability literature shows that sustainability is about strategising for changes in their environment as well as building internal capacity and capability. The questionnaire asked projects what external factors might help or hinder sustainability.

The external factors identified by projects as potentially helping sustainability were:

- Awareness in importance of early years - is being seen as both fashionable and vital (8 responses)
- Broad community support (4 responses)
- The good reputation of the project
- General acceptance that CfC has been a successful project
- The focus on collaboration being pushed by State Governments
- Improving relationships between the Commonwealth and the States

The external factors identified by projects as potentially hindering sustainability were:

- No obvious alternative funding/uncertainty (e.g. State Government trying to get projects to leverage Federal Government while projects are trying to leverage the State) (3 responses)
- Lack of formal direction at National/State level (2 responses)
- Funding not centred around infrastructure development but on project funding (i.e. like the preCfC days). New projects coming along will attract funding (2 responses)
- Size of area (2 responses)
- Nature of community (e.g. transient, poor) (2 responses)
- Short term mentality
- Movement from community to Shire focus
- Downturn in economy with all the attendant issues
- Anticipated expansion of the local community

Projects also described their strategies to exploit the "helping" factors and address the "hindering" factors.

To exploit the factors that could potentially help sustainability, one significant strategy was to exploit the current interest in childcare

> "There appears to be an increased awareness of the importance of the early years by both state and federal governments this is an important time for the early years sector. Ongoing promotion of key issues is important."

Another strategy was to build on the national and regional structures that have been developed:

> "We need to build on [the Facilitating Partner's] direction and commitment...we capitalize on the opportunities that have been given to us and really work on them to achieve something."

One project combined both strategies

> "The recent establishment of [State] Early Years Foundation is helping to ensure spotlight stays on children and families. The state government review of child protection and family support service system focuses on keeping children out of care. We are endeavouring to capitalise on these factors by establishing the Northern Early Years Group and developing mechanisms to ensure all players continue to work together and build on relationships that have been fostered."

Another project leveraged off a concerns about related indigenous issues ...

> "The Australian government intervention in the Northern Territory is the biggest chance impacting on indigenous families in this site. [Our agency] is working to advocate with the Australian and Northern Territory governments to work together to reverse the unacceptable outcomes for young children in this region. The intervention has been instrumental in focussing the attention of NT and Australian government attention on [local] communities. We have been assisting where we can to share the knowledge that we have developed over the life of communities for children initiative."

... or "whole of government" ideas

> "NSW government policy is funding 'whole of government' activities and communication. There is a push from local agencies, local govt, politicians and community groups to encourage all agencies to effectively work together and across State, Commonwealth, NGO divides."

Not all external factors lay outside the geographical community. Sometimes the strategy was to bring into the project those who would normally see themselves as "outside" a family welfare program. Several projects mentions examples from the local business community

> *"We have now got a member who is the manager of the local shopping complex."*

Projects described few strategies for addressing external factors that might hinder sustainability. Few identified how they might seek to influence the factors and non-identified how they were trying to make their projects less vulnerable to them.

Some examples include:

- *We cannot directly influence these issues but attempt to remain as up to date as possible to take advantage of any opportunities.*

- *In relation to the move from individual community government councils to a local Government Shire …. I am seeking to work in conjunction with Intervention business managers and including them in some of the CfC activities.*

- *Currently state government departments are wanting us to lever the Federal government in terms of commitment to investment in early childhood while at the same time we are attempting to lever State government departments to invest in a very effective hub development in our site. We are facilitating working groups from participating Community Partner organisations to develop proposals to break this deadlock.*

- *We are trying to understand what is going on with our economy. We are being realistic, pragmatic and promoting discussion.. We are considering ways that local communities can survive if petrol goes up to $3 a litre and there is very high unemployment.*

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