

Submission to the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

The City of Playford welcomed the establishment of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care and is appreciative of the opportunity to provide a submission for the Commission's consideration, to advocate for the Playford community in the reform of early childhood education and care.

In Playford, there are distinct residential areas where a significant portion of the population is heavily and intergenerationally disadvantaged, while other areas are relatively better off. It is crucial that we take steps to reduce the socioeconomic disparities in Playford.

It is pleasing to note that some of the issues that particularly impact upon disadvantaged communities, families and children have been recognised and addressed in the Commission's *Interim Report*. Achieving the successful delivery of the proposed reforms is of vital importance and an immediate priority for our community, as this will have significant positive and long-lasting outcomes for families and children. It is imperative that we address the issue of youth engagement and early intervention in the education system, as we cannot afford to have yet another generation of youth that is not fully equipped to participate in society and thrive.

As such, the City of Playford supports the recommendations put forward by the Commission in its *Interim Report* and aims to provide additional community insights and suggestions within this submission to assist the Commission in contextualising future recommendations and responses to the communities supported by the City of Playford.

About the City of Playford

The City of Playford, located in Adelaide's outer northern suburbs, is a significant residential growth area which will see its current population grow from 105,663 to well over 150,000 in the next 20 years. The scale and relative affordability of housing development will continue to draw young families to settle in the region. Ensuring that infrastructure and services are available and accessible to support the needs of a rapidly growing population is a primary concern for the Council now and into the future.

The Playford community is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, contributed to by the settlement of humanitarian and skilled migration into the area, and the availability of affordable housing. In 2021 4.2% of the Playford population identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, a much higher proportion than Greater Adelaide (1.7%) or South Australia (2.4%). The increase in cultural diversity is also reflected in the increase in population groups for whom English is not spoken at home, this is notably higher in Playford for residents who speak Nepali, Hazaraghi, Dinka, Swahili and Kirundi¹.

The age profile of the City of Playford's population is significantly younger than that of Greater Adelaide, with a much higher proportion of children and young people (under 18 years) and a lower proportion of persons aged 60 years or older. With a median age of 33 in 2021 - compared with 39 for Greater Adelaide and 41 for South Australia – the City of Playford's population reflects a large proportion of households that are in the family formation stages of their lives, as is demonstrated in the following age pyramid figure²:

¹ Profile.ID, 2021, *Community Profile*, <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/language>.

² Profile.ID, 2021, *Community Profile*, < <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/age-sex-pyramid>>.

Age-sex pyramid, 2021



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, selected years between 1991-2021 (Enumerated data). Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id (informed decisions).

The high proportion of families and young children living in the Council area suggests the need for early childhood services is also proportionately higher for our community³. City of Playford recognises that supporting children and families is a high priority. Building its focus on early childhood and family support the Council has dedicated additional staff resources to developing a layered approach to the programs, services and resources that we provide for our community. Working holistically and in collaboration with a broad range of local organisations to develop wrap around supports and respond to community need is key to this approach.

Alongside the high proportion of young families and the rapid rate of population growth, some of Playford's residents also experience greater disadvantage than many other parts of Adelaide and Australia⁴. Although the Council area overall is recognised as being home to highly disadvantaged communities, it is less widely known that it is also home to communities that are significantly more advantaged than many other Australian communities. This presents a challenge to the Council in service provision and advocacy across a broad breadth of needs and expectations.

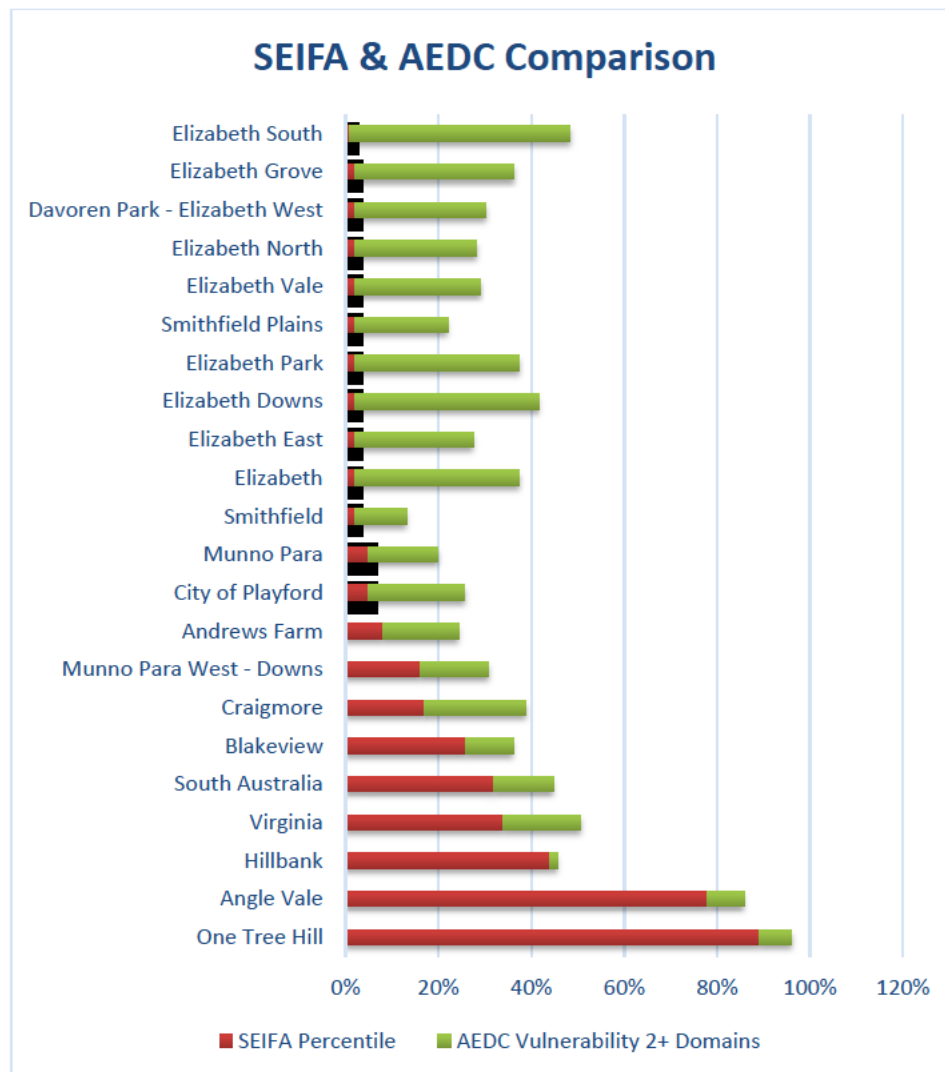
However, it is well documented that higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage reduces the developmental health, wellbeing and educational outcomes of children, limiting their potential, decreasing their life chances and ultimately creating a greater social and economic

³ Profile.ID, 2021, *Community Profile*, < <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/age-sex-pyramid>>.

⁴ Profile.ID, 2021, *Community Profile*, < <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/seifa-disadvantage-small-area>> .

burden for communities. The 2021 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)⁵ results for Playford reveal a much higher overall percentage (20.7%) of children vulnerable on two or more domains compared with South Australia (12.7%) or Australia (11.4%). At a finer grained level, many suburbs within the Council area show substantially higher proportions of children vulnerable on two or more domains - such as Elizabeth South - at 47.4%.

The close relationship between SEIFA index outcomes and AEDC results across the City of Playford is demonstrated at the suburb level in the table below (noting that a higher SEIFA percentile represents a lower level of relative disadvantage):



The World Health Organisation considers early childhood development as one of the social determinants which can influence health equity throughout the life-course, alongside other conditions such as income, housing, unemployment and education⁶. Research undertaken

⁵ Australian Early Development Census, 2021, *Community Profile 2021 – Playford, SA*, <<https://aedc-qov-au-static-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/community-profiles/40039.pdf>>

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022, *Social Determinants of Health*, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/social-determinants-of-health>>.

by the Australian Institute of Family Studies⁷ indicates that children from financially disadvantaged families are at greater risk of poor school readiness due to higher rates and the accumulation of risk factors, suggesting that reducing the disparity between children from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged families will improve school readiness for vulnerable and at-risk children.

In its *Interim Report* the Commission has acknowledged feedback from stakeholders that the important work of Dr Fraser Mustard and Professor Carla Rinaldi as Adelaide Thinkers in Residence needs to be considered and built upon. Of foremost importance for Council, and reflected in the work of the Thinkers, is involving local communities, local organisations and local government in the construction of solutions within their local contexts. Successful implementation of the Commission’s reforms will be predicated on a very deep understanding of local contexts and variations and issues that exist within local families and communities.

One of the Commission’s lines of enquiry relates to the extent to which families are supported in the first 1,000 days of a child’s life. The Commission’s focus on redressing disadvantage and barriers to families accessing early childhood education and care is especially relevant to families in the City of Playford. As the closest level of government to community, local Councils typically possess extensive knowledge about the issues experienced by their communities. As a significant provider of services to children and families (particularly through local library / community centre programs, community events, sport and recreation programs and immunisation services), and a primary provider of child relevant infrastructure – such as playgrounds and local parks – local Councils are well positioned, experienced and resourced to contribute to the planning and steering of reforms in this area.

Council’s numerous relationships and networks with regional early childhood, education, family support and social support organisations has highlighted widespread concern about the low levels of engagement (or superficial engagement) of vulnerable families with existing support organisations. These organisations report low levels of developmental health checks of young children, high levels of speech and developmental delays amongst preschool children compounded by impacts relating to high levels of disadvantage.

The City of Playford plays a key role in providing information and support to families through various community services in the fields of education, health and wellbeing, growth and development, food and nutrition and culturally appropriate offerings for our Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and First Nations peoples as outlined in the following table:

Community Service	Services Provided to Families
Library Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly programming specifically aimed at children aged 0-5 years including Book Bugs, Story Time, and Tree Tots. This programming encourages language and literacy skills, learning through play, sensory, tactile and fine-motor skills development, as well as cognitive development and social-emotional growth fostering school readiness. • Extensive library collection providing a suite of resources available to assist parents and families with navigating early childhood development for loan. • Mobile and home library services catering for remote or vulnerable members of the community.

⁷ Edwards, B, Baxter, J, Smart, D, Sanson, A & Hayes, A, 2009, 'Financial disadvantage and children’s school readiness', *Family Matters*, vol. 83, pp. 23-31, https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm83c-EdwardsEtAl_0.pdf.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering opportunities for parents providing social connections and gaining new skills and experience that can create pathways to employment.
Immunisation Clinic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City of Playford immunisation clinic follows the National Immunisation Program that provides free vaccines against a number of diseases, to increase national immunisation rates and reduce vaccine preventable disease. Vaccines are available at no cost to those who hold or are eligible for a Medicare card. • Council's immunisation clinic offers a Newly Arrived Refugee Immunisation Program at no cost to individuals. • Provision of immunisation information for women during pregnancy. • Clinics are held in community spaces to support accessibility and connection to broader community services and programs.
Healthy Food Co	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service provides low-cost nutritional food products and grocery items to the community and is available across two sites, Elizabeth Downs and Smithfield Plains. • Provides food and nutrition education, Easy Meal Kits, low-cost food products and grocery items. • Volunteering opportunities for parents providing social connections and gaining new skills and experience that can create pathways to employment.
Playford Wellbeing Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Adelaide's first Wellbeing Hub was developed in partnership between the City of Playford and Wellbeing SA. • Delivers a range of programs and services to support community physical, social and mental health and wellbeing. Initiatives include a focus on supporting children, young people, families and older residents to stay socially connected and active, with a focus on wellbeing through food, physical activity and other health and wellbeing supports. • Activities at the community centre include come and try sports, school holiday programs, healthy eating through gardening and cooking programs, family open days, kinder-gym, playgroups for pre-school children and art projects.
Marni Waiendi Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally safe community centre offering a whole of person approach, for First Nations people to increase participation in health and wellbeing programs, and a variety of services and courses that lead to employment pathways.
Playford Healthy Communities Network (PHCN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by the City of Playford, the PHCN's goal is to provide efficient and effective services that foster opportunities, increase skills and knowledge and support and enable the Playford Community to enjoy a healthy lifestyle with improved outcomes. • The Network brings together like-minded service providers within a community development and wellbeing context in the north to provide opportunities for networking an information sharing, collaborative partnerships and to identify and respond to localised community needs and gaps with a children and family focus.

Playford Early Childhood Healthy Development (PECHD) Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated by Council, the PECHD Working Group is a collaborative service network developed in response to localised community concerns regarding early childhood health and development. In collaboration with other key stakeholders including children’s centres, preschools, CaFHS, Novita, Anglicare and other early childhood community service providers, the aim is to work collaboratively at a regional level to advocate and raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development and learning. Actions within the working group involve a localised needs analysis, service mapping and localised projects aimed to increase attendance at health checks and support developmental milestone education.
Elizabeth Rise Community Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community centre uses strengths-based community development principles and works in direct partnership with the community and partner agencies to deliver a wide range of community programs, activities and events. Services to support families include playgroups, Circle of Security, a support and educational program for parents focused on early childhood attachment, bonding and development. A range of outreach services that are supportive and inclusive to increasing social connections, as well as Women’s legal and financial counselling services free of charge.

Issues Impacting Early Childhood Development in the City of Playford

Through its various service delivery arms, community connections, stakeholder relationships and networks Council understands that there are multiple, complex and interconnected issues and barriers that impact people’s participation and willingness to engage with early childhood services and programs. Some of these issues and barriers relate to the overall experience of disadvantage and may be more comprehensively understood through a social determinants of health lens.

To ensure successful delivery of the Commission’s early childhood education and care reforms due consideration needs also to be given to the broader socio-economic conditions that communities, families and children live within, and which has a very real bearing on the ability to participate in child development activities, access universally targeted settings, and engage meaningfully with services and supports. This includes additional supports to alleviate the compounding stressors associated with:

- Low-Income Households** – The Playford community has a much higher proportion of households in the lowest (31.2%) and medium lowest (29.4%) income quartiles than Greater Adelaide (23.1% and 24.3% respectively) or South Australia (25% and 25% respectively)⁸. In 2021 21,906 people in Playford were considered as living in low-

⁸ Profile.ID, 2021, Equivalent Household Income, < <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/equivalised-household-income-quartiles>> .

income households, defined as households falling into the bottom 20% of equivalised incomes across Australia⁹.

Lower rates of educational attainment¹⁰ coupled with higher rates of unemployment¹¹ are significant contributors to lower household incomes in the Playford area. Combined with rising inflation, increasing cost of living, escalating housing costs, fuel costs and climbing utility costs – the capacity of low-income households to participate in community life or activities outside of the home is becoming increasingly limited.

- **Housing Stress and Insecurity** – For lower income households in the private rental market there are compounding cost of living pressures driven by an extremely competitive and insecure rental market characterised by high and increasing rental costs and extremely low levels of rental availability. The relatively high cost of rental payments as a proportion of household income places considerable financial stress on all households – but most particularly those with less financial resources to absorb the increasing rental costs.

The rising rates of homelessness and housing stress currently being experienced across Australia has drawn attention to the vulnerability of many households (not just low-income households) to growing housing stress and insecurity. The ability of families experiencing housing stress and insecurity to engage with services not directly related to resolving their basic need for housing is understandably diminished.

The following figure depicts the proportion of rental households across the City of Playford that pay greater than 30% of their household income on rental costs. It should be noted that rental costs have increased significantly since the Census data collection, as such it is speculated that the proportion of households experiencing rental stress (and those experiencing mortgage stress) has substantially increased since 2021.

⁹ Profile.ID, 2021, Low Income Profile, < <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/equivalised-household-income-quartiles> > .

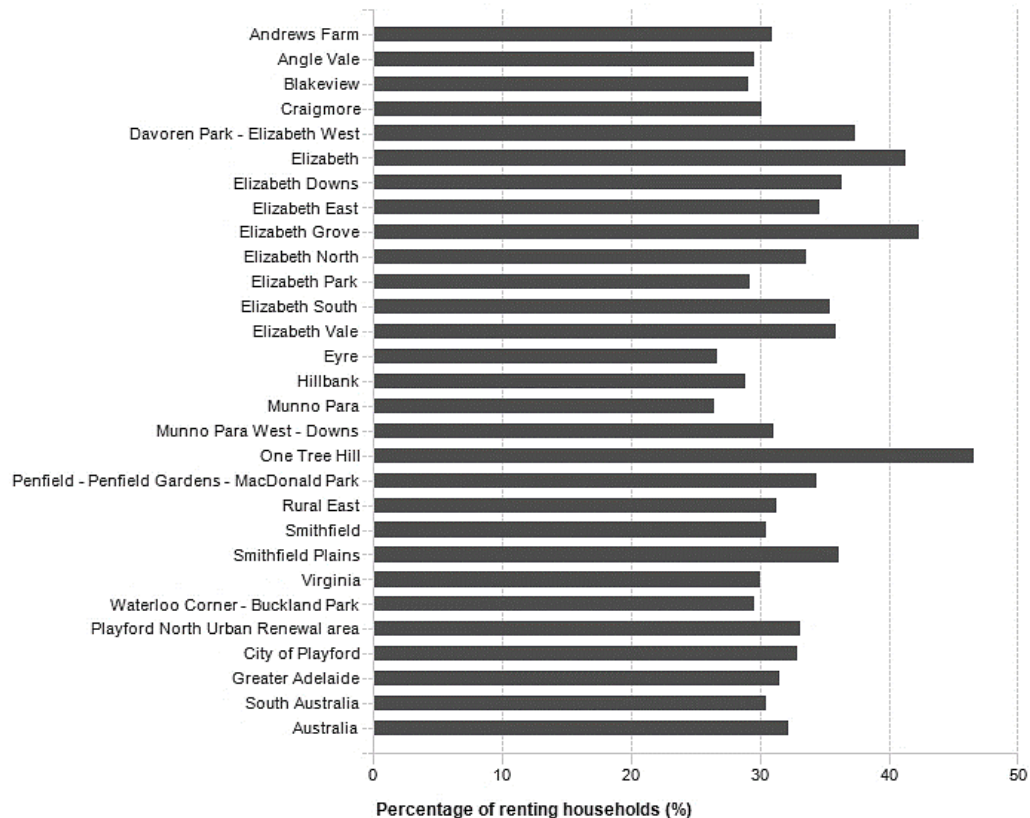
¹⁰ In 2021 40% of Playford residents had completed year 12, compared with 57% for Greater Adelaide. 15.2% of Playford residents had attained post school qualifications at the Diploma level or above, compared with 34.9% in Greater Adelaide. 25.4% of Playford residents had vocational qualifications, compared with 19.7% for Greater Adelaide. 50.7% of Playford residents held no qualifications, compared with 39% in Greater Adelaide. Source: <<https://profile.id.com.au/playford/Who-are-we>>.

¹¹ Small Area Labour Market figures for the December 2022 Quarter show an unemployment rate of 10.2% for Playford, compared to 4.5% for South Australia and 3.7% for Australia. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/work/small-area-labour-markets>.

Dept. of Social Services data for March 2023 shows 14% of Playford residents received JobSeeker or Youth Allowance payments, compared with 6.6% for Greater Adelaide and 7.3% for South Australia. < <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/job-seeker> >

Rental costs >30% of income, 2021

City of Playford



- Transport Issues** – The City of Playford overall had a higher proportion of households without a car in 2021 (8.8%) than Greater Adelaide (7.5%)¹². In areas of higher socio-economic disadvantage across the Council area over a quarter of households did not have a car¹³. When considered alongside the increasing fuel prices and cost of living since 2021, the proportion of houses that either do not have a car or are unable to afford to run a car has increased.

The lack of access to a car for some households creates a greater reliance on public transport to access necessary services and supports. This can be problematic for families with multiple children, the aged, those experiencing health issues, or in areas where public transport connectivity is poor or where service is infrequent. Outside Playford’s main urban areas access to public transport is often limited or non-existent, and even within the main urban area many areas have very limited services during off peak periods and weekends¹⁴.

Adding to the transport issues in the City of Playford, the transport network is under increasing pressure due to the rapid scale of residential growth. It is expected that the

¹² Profile.ID, 2021, *Community Profile*, <https://profile.id.com.au/playford/car-ownership>.

¹³ Atlas.ID, 2021, *Social Atlas*, <https://atlas.id.com.au/playford>.

¹⁴ Parsons Brinckerhoff, 2011, Strategic Passenger Transport Plan, https://cdn.playford.sa.gov.au/general-downloads/Council-Documents/SC-SP_1810_StrategicPassengerTransportPlan.pdf.

population will grow from 105,663 to 150,000 by 2041, further exacerbating the situation.

- **Reluctance to Engage with Services and Institutional Settings** – Mistrust in services and institutional settings is a common concern amongst people who may have had past trauma and negative experiences of places such as schools, medical facilities, childcare centres and service organisations. The fear of interactions with the child protection system is not an uncommon concern among some parents and caregivers. This can be triggered by a variety of factors, including past experiences with child protective services, or family factors that may increase the likelihood of child protection notifications (such as domestic and family violence, mental health, drug and alcohol misuse). In families and communities with higher rates of child protection notifications the unintended consequences can result in reluctance to interact with services, or engage only in superficial ways.

The level of trust and engagement of families with education, health and support services is compounded¹⁵ by additional factors, such as:

- Restrictive service eligibility requirements;
- Poor or undeveloped relationships with staff;
- Lack of child-minding options to facilitate access (particularly for larger families);
- Lack of culturally safe service offerings;
- Mental health issues.

As acknowledged by the Flinders Caring Futures Institute¹⁶ children, families and caregivers who arguably have the most need for the early years and family support systems miss out on accessing these services because of these issues.

- **Mental Health** – Mental health problems were estimated to have affected over a fifth of males (21.1%) and females (22%) in the City of Playford in 2019, markedly more than in Greater Adelaide overall (16.8% and 19% respectively)¹⁷. It is recognised that there has been an increase in people experiencing poor mental health since the COVID pandemic, however the supports that are available in the community are reported as having long waiting lists or are otherwise difficult to access.

Poor mental health contributes to, and is exacerbated by, incidences of domestic and family violence, substance misuse, social isolation, and withdrawal from services and other supports.

¹⁵ As reported by stakeholders in the Playford Early Childhood Healthy Development Working Group.

¹⁶ Middleton, G., Hunter, S.C., Johnson, B.J., & Golley, R.K. 2022, *Navigating the Early Years System in South Australia: Exploring the Caregiver Journey from Multiple Perspectives*, Flinders University, <https://doi.org/10.25957/C5S8-RF16>.

¹⁷ SA Health & LGA SA, 2019, *Population Health Profile – City of Playford*, <https://atlasesaustralia.au/LGASA/Profiles/Playford.pdf>.

- **Limited Service Awareness and Difficulties Navigating the System** – As found in research undertaken by the Flinders Caring Futures Institute many people in the community are unaware of the services and supports that may be available to them, or find the system overwhelming and difficult to navigate. This is exacerbated by:
 - Information not being provided in ways that are accessible in terms of language and literacy issues;
 - Over-reliance on digital communication;
 - Lack of internet connection and/or poor digital literacy;
 - Complex and fragmented service offerings;
 - Lack of relationships with and trust in service providers;
 - Lack of touchpoints and help with navigating the Early Years system;
 - Lack of family outreach and community connection approaches.

- **Service Operation Hours** – Service availability can be difficult for working parents and caregivers to access due to the hours-of-service availability being predominantly within business hours. This restricts working parents/caregivers from accessing a range of programs and supports.

Areas of Priority Action

In its *Interim Report* the Commission recognises that vulnerable children gain greater benefit from good quality early childhood education and care - but are also less likely to access it. Addressing the reasons why this is so lies at the heart of effecting a profound change to how early childhood education and care is planned and implemented in South Australia, which is particularly important to the City of Playford and its community.

The City of Playford fundamentally supports the Commission's aspiration to disrupt disadvantage, and the recognition that attending to the social context and determinants of health is equally as important as changing the way that early childhood education and care is organised and delivered. The Commission may wish to also consider the following areas of action that are relevant to the Council and Playford community:

- **Implementation of Local Planning and Governance Models** – Research undertaken by the Centre of Research Excellence in Childhood Adversity and Mental Health¹⁸ indicates that combining health, allied health and social care practitioners in the planning and implementation of child and family supports is a more effective model for identifying and acting upon the factors contributing to family adversity and mental health problems.

To enable a holistic approach to early childhood education and care, we need to look beyond just the early childhood care, education and allied health sectors to also incorporate other organisations that interface with, and support, families and communities – particularly in areas with higher rates of early childhood vulnerability. This includes non-government community and family support organisations, culturally specific support organisations, mental health service providers, domestic violence services, housing support providers, employment and training providers and local Councils. Local Councils are an important stakeholder because they are well placed to provide strategic insights into the barriers experienced by their communities, as well as emerging trends and issues.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - LOCAL PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE MODELS

Planning and delivering upon the intent of the Commissions reform recommendations will be more effective if it adopts a holistic approach involving health, allied health, early childhood education, social care practitioners and local Councils in the planning and implementation of child and family services. Planning needs to be tailored to each local context to ensure that delivery of the reforms appropriately considers and responds to the unique local circumstances and issues. Stakeholder engagement and co-design processes should be embedded in the model to generate and test strategies and drive implementation.

Governance models should include representation from all stakeholders involved in the planning of local service delivery, seeking also to incorporate community and lived experience representation within its structure. The Commission may look for appropriate examples such as Child Friendly Leeds¹⁹, and the Child and Family Hubs referenced in this submission.

¹⁸ Centre of Research Excellence in Childhood Adversity and Mental Health, <<https://www.childhoodadversity.org.au/>>

¹⁹ Child Friendly Leeds, <<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/childfriendlyleeds>>.

- **Sustainable Funding Models Based on Local Collaboration and Service Integration** – The Commission has identified the potential for base funding to be provided to disadvantaged areas. Consideration should also be given to how this funding model can best reinforce collaboration and partnerships between agencies. This is on the understanding that competitive tendering models frequently work against the collaboration, information sharing and holistic service delivery that is needed to improve early childhood outcomes.

Collaboration with partners across multiple sectors, locations, and environments is a vital component of effective redesign of programs and achieving common goals. By working in partnership with others, organisations can leverage the strengths and resources of different sectors and settings to deliver better outcomes and improve the lives of the target population. For example, partnering with community organisations, government agencies, educators, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders can help to identify gaps in childhood learning, services and implement solutions that address complex social and health issues. Effective collaboration requires strong communication, shared goals and objectives, mutual respect, and a willingness to work together to achieve common aims.

RECOMMENDATION 2 - SUSTAINABLE AND COLLABORATIVE LOCAL FUNDING MODELS

Improving early childhood development outcomes for vulnerable children requires a long term and collaborative commitment that is adequately and securely resourced to deliver services and programs relevant to local issues. The most appropriate funding model will seek to reinforce collaboration, complementary partnerships and information sharing between organisations.

- **Integrated Child, Family and Community Hubs** – The Commission has recognised that complex issues require integrated approaches to effect positive change and better child development outcomes. Having a diverse range of child and family services and supports in the one location has the potential to support child development, improve child and family wellbeing, provide supports to families, and build relationships between service providers and families.

Research on child and family hubs²⁰ suggests that the two most critical roles that child and family hub models play are:

- improving equitable access to a range of health, education, and social services using a family centred approach; and
- providing opportunities to build parental capacity and for families to create social connections.

However, the location or primary emphasis of the child and family hub can give greater prominence to particular outcomes over others. For instance, hubs in early care and

²⁰ Honisett S., Cahill R., Callard N., Eapen V., Eastwood J., Goodhue R., Graham C, Heery L., Hiscock H., Hodgins M., Hollonds A., Jose K., Newcomb D., O’Loughlin G., Ostojic K., Sydenham E., Tayton S., Woolfenden S. and Goldfeld S. (2023). Child and family hubs: an important ‘front door’ for equitable support for families across Australia. National Child and Family Hubs Network.

school settings lead to greater improvements in academic outcomes; hubs in health care settings lead to greater improvements in health outcomes, coordinated supports and family engagement; hubs in community settings lead to greater improvements in the identification of vulnerability and access to support for families – particularly amongst those that are reluctant to engage with other services.

This research suggests that the most beneficial outcomes may be achieved in areas with higher levels of early childhood vulnerability if the model of integration combines education, health with community services. Local government is an important stakeholder in such a model by merit of its extensive local connections and experience working with community and engaging vulnerable community members in a broad range of programs and activities that build strength, connections and capacity.

A community led integrated hub model may be a more effective model to address some of the issues experienced by vulnerable, at-risk families because the “soft entry” approaches associated with community centres create a more holistic and less threatening environment. Examples of such models include:

- Wyndham Vale Child and Family Hub²¹
- Westall Community Hub²²
- Manning Community Hub²³
- Glenroy Community Hub²⁴
- Leopold Community Hub²⁵

RECOMMENDATION 3 - INTEGRATED CHILD, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HUBS

The development of Child and Family Hubs provides a valuable opportunity to integrate services to improve equitable access, build parental capacity and develop family social connections. Research supports that integration of education, health and community services achieves the best outcomes for vulnerable and at-risk children and families.

Local Councils have considerable skill and experience in providing community centres, community programs, community education and social connection programs. The inclusion of a community centre within the Hub model provides a safe entry point for families to engage in a range of programs, services and activity to build skills, capacity and connection.

An integrated Child and Family Hub model is the preferred option for the Playford area. The Commission is asked to consider the role that the City of Playford can play in the development, implementation and governance of this model.

²¹ Wyndham Vale Child and Family Hub, <<https://www.ipchealth.com.au/child-and-family-hub-at-wyndham-vale/>>.

²² Westall Community Hub, <<https://www.mycommunitylife.com.au/Clubs/Westall-Community-Hub>>.

²³ Manning Community Hub, <https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/33405/case-study-manning-community-hub.pdf>.

²⁴ Glenroy Community Hub, <<https://www.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/glenroy-community-hub/>>.

²⁵ Leopold Community Hub, <<https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/hubs/article/item/8ce25755a8e8b92.aspx>>.

- **Layering Support** – Recognising that some families and children have multiple and complex needs, the interventions and supports required need to address this reality. Different levels of support based on individuals needs and the complexity of their issues, a multi-tiered support system is needed that includes various levels of support across a diverse range of issues. This can build from basic support, such as self-service resources through to more intensive and complex supports. It is important to include issues relating to housing, transport, income, employment supports, mental health and domestic and family violence as part of a layered support approach.
- **Family Supports in the Community** – The Commission recognises that parts of the community are reluctant to engage with services and supports. Strategies that focus on reducing fear and building trust are particularly important with disadvantaged, marginalised and hard to reach populations. Community settings such as libraries, community centres, playgrounds and recreational facilities are often considered “safer” places by many community members. They are good venues to host outreach and “pop-up” services in tandem with community programs and activities – such as story time at the library and immunisation clinics at community centres.

There are a broad range of family supports that can be developed and implemented in community settings to increase awareness of the importance of early childhood development, which may include:

- Increasing support for parents by establishing parent support groups and connecting individuals *before* the birth of a child. This provides opportunities for individuals to participate in parent/support groups, which can reduce isolation and provide support networks after the birth of the baby;
- Education and training programs to provide parents and carers with information and skills related to child development, parenting, and family well-being. Building the knowledge and abilities of parents and carers can help to promote positive parenting practices and improve the well-being of children;
- Regular reminders and follow-ups to keep families engaged and avoid them ‘falling through the cracks’. By providing these supports, parents can receive the necessary guidance and assistance to navigate the challenges of parenthood and ensure the well-being of themselves and their children. Regular check-ins and reminders can also help parents to feel supported and connected, reducing feelings of isolation, and improving overall mental health and well-being;
- Social marketing campaigns (for example, the Words Grow Minds ²⁶ campaign), developmental messages and activities promoted in playgrounds and other public places frequented by children and families. There is potential for such initiatives to be scaled up and augmented with community based and co-located services to provide locally tailored place-based approaches to family support services.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – LAYERED SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

²⁶ The Early Years Taskforce’s *Words Grow Minds* (regional trial / pilot in Whyalla and Mt Gambier) provides messaging backed by the latest research, consistent with the early childhood development domains of the AEDC. The campaign focuses on the importance of brain development in the early years and shows families simple things they can do to support their children. Pilot evaluation results identified that this campaign was able to shift the perceptions and attitude around engagement in early years, resulting in an increase in engagement behaviour when compared to pre-campaign levels.

Engaging vulnerable and “service averse” families is best supported by building trusted relationships and touchpoints in community settings through which service navigation and referrals may occur. This approach lends itself to layering information, resources, programs and outreach services that both complements, and provides a trusted introduction to, early years services in the local area. The Commission is asked to consider that local Councils can play a key role in providing this layer of support through its network of community centres, libraries and community programs.

- **Place Based “Cradle to Career” Approaches** - While the Implementation of early childhood education and care reforms is a very significant and positive step towards improving outcomes for children growing up in Playford, this impact could potentially be increased if also combined with complementary programs that seek to engage children and young people in a “cradle to career” approach.

The education system has a central role to play in supporting the development of children and young people beyond teaching of curriculum. Schools are important community hubs that have great potential to capitalise on local partnerships and resources to develop initiatives that support the development of children and young people, supporting them to connect to the broader community, through a place-based approach that is tailored to local needs and local contexts.

A significant place-based initiative could be developed focusing on “cradle to career”, based on the *Challis Model*²⁷ and building on existing programs such as the Playford 10 program²⁸, the Northern Sound System²⁹, Playford Alive, and connections with the local schools, industry, and other services.

In particular, the Playford 10 Project was created to provide children and young people growing up in Playford, aged 10 years old, with structured and supported extra-curricular opportunities (arts, sport, music and volunteering) and to connect the children to safe and trustworthy networks of adult role models. Commitment from the City of Playford, the Department of Education and state government to support and continue to fund the program would enable longer-term outcomes of this program, providing an articulated model of childhood development opportunities to children in the Playford community.

²⁷ Minderoo Foundation, *A Pathway from Early Childhood Disadvantage for Australian Children*, < [A Pathway from Early Childhood Disadvantage for Australian Children - Challis Case Study high res V4 20170119 Digital FNL \(minderoo.org\)](#)>.

²⁸ The City of Playford, in collaboration with the Playford Data Observatory, commissioned a research project in 2016, investigating the various supports and opportunities young people had in Playford. The research was designed to understand the various elements that allowed a young person to successfully transition to a positive social and economic outcome. The research found that individuals who had successfully transitioned to a positive social and economic outcome had access to opportunities to develop life skills and were involved in extra-curricular activities, and by extension had opportunities to form trusted relationships with adults.

²⁹ Northern Sound System, <<https://www.northernsoundsystem.com.au/>>.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – FUNDING FOR COMPLEMENTARY PLACE-BASED “CRADLE TO CAREER” PROGRAMS

The impact of early childhood reforms can be increased if complementary programs are supported that also provide additional opportunities for children and young people throughout their formative years. Secure funding and support for programs such as Playford 10 and the Northern Sound System, which aim to develop networks and career opportunities for children and young people, provides an articulated and place-based approach to improving the outcomes of children and young people in Playford.

- **Incentivising Family Engagement** – The Commission recognises that restrictions in accessing Child Care Benefit payments is a critical barrier for many families in accessing supports provided through childcare settings. While addressing this issue will alleviate some cost pressures for families, it may not fully overcome the complex and inter-connected barriers experienced by families who are reluctant to engage with early childhood services and supports. For those families an incentivised approach to engagement and participation may need to be considered to overcome their service reluctance. Ideally this should be paired with a family engagement and support approach to build relationships and trust.

RECOMMENDATION 6 - INCENTIVISING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Recognising that complex and interconnected barriers reduce the opportunities of disadvantaged and service averse families to access early childhood and family support services, the Commission is asked to consider additional strategies to incentivise engagement and participation.

- **Addressing Transport Issues** – The City of Playford occupies a large geographical expanse, combining a central residential core skirted by vast tracts of rural / horticultural lands and residential growth areas – with limited access to regular public transport in some of these areas. Transport issues can be an insurmountable barrier to accessing services and supports for some families in the Playford community. Recognising the transport and connectivity needs of its growing community the City of Playford is currently undertaking a comprehensive gap analysis to assess the current state of the transportation system throughout Playford. This will identify barriers and areas where improvements can be made to the existing transportation system, including areas that require immediate attention and potential opportunities and insights into long term solutions for the future.

To improve access to early childhood services and supports consideration needs to be given to accessible and affordable transportation options that provide easy access to key locations (health, community and education settings) and the integrated hubs proposed by the Commission.

RECOMMENDATION 7 - ADDRESSING TRANSPORT BARRIERS

Recognising that access to affordable, reliable and accessible transport is a critical facilitator of access to early childhood education and care services for many families, the Commission is asked to consider strategies for facilitating transport accessibility for disadvantaged families and communities as part of its reforms.

Closing Comments

The City of Playford has appreciated the opportunity to contribute a submission to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, for its consideration. We believe the work of the Commission signifies an important turning point in South Australia's approach to early childhood development, one which carries the promise of effecting positive and generational changes for our community.

The Playford community experiences higher levels of disadvantage and complex needs than many other areas and welcomes reforms that will disrupt this cycle, as a matter of urgency. The City of Playford advocates, on behalf of its community, for early consideration in the implementation of the reforms recommended by the Commission.

We look forward to future opportunities for input and opportunities to contribute to the planning, steering and implementation of early childhood development reforms within the City of Playford.



Mr Sam Green

Chief Executive Officer

City of Playford

10 May 2023