

SOUTH WEST REGIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN

This plan has been developed through the Regional Community Child Care Development Fund administered by the Department of Local Government and Communities and funded through the State Government Royalties for Regions program.



Acknowledgements

The *South West Regional Children's Services Plan* includes information obtained from education and care services, children's services based in the South West region, and associated professionals representing a broad range of agencies. Investing In Our Youth are very appreciative to those who took time to share their thoughts and experiences with the Regional Development Officer.

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South West Regional Children's Services Plan

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Executive Summary

The South West Regional Children's Services Plan is an analysis of challenges faced by organisations that provide Children's Services and Education and Care Services (formerly child care) for children aged birth to 12 years across the region. It aims to identify short and long term strategies to support children's services, initiatives and networks for families and children in the region. It is important to note that the plan does not focus on national education and care reforms or policy (such as the Australian Government Productivity Commission Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning), but rather seeks to identify actions to address local issues raised during evidence collected as part of the planning framework.

The development of the South West Regional Children's Services plan has been undertaken by Investing In Our Youth Incorporated, the successful contractor for the State Government's Royalties for Regions Regional Community Child Care Development Fund (RCCCDF) project in the South West. The organisation is a community managed not-for-profit organisation that promotes the healthy development of children and young people in the South West Region (WA) with a focus on early intervention and prevention and is well placed to undertake the development of a children's services plan for the region.

The South West Regional Children's Service Plan is a component of the State Government's Royalties for Regions Regional Child Care Development Fund (RCCCDF). This project is managed by the Department for Local Government and Communities. The RCCCDF project has been funded in recognition of the challenges faced by community managed education and care services operating in regional Western Australia.

The plan incorporates the ideas and thinking of key stakeholders, parents and carers, networks and services and is heavily based on consultation (semi-structured qualitative interviews) and evidence obtained from quantitative data and a literature review of research reports and web based information.

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It is important to note that the plan does not focus on national education and care reforms or policy (such as the Australian Government Productivity Commission Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning), but rather seeks to identify actions to address local issues raised during evidence collected as part of the planning framework.

Various types of education and care services are offered across the South West region which include Long Day Care (LDC), Family Day Care (FDC), Outside School Hours Care (OSHC), Occasional Child Care (OCC), Vacation Care and 'In-Home' care in a range of different settings (including private residents, schools, community and recreation centres).

All education and care types are well represented in the South West region. These include those coming under the umbrella of large incorporated organisations such as the YMCA and Good Start Early Learning (providing Long Day Care, Family Day Care and In-Home Care services); commercial (for-profit) businesses with single or multiple sites – for example centres located in Harvey, Collie, Bunbury and surrounds, Capel, Busselton, Dunsborough, Margaret River, Cowaramup plus Family Day Care services based in Dunsborough and Albany; small community owned (not-for-profit) centres in Donnybrook, Bunbury, Busselton, Harvey, Binningup, Collie, Margaret River, Nannup, Pemberton, Northcliffe, Walpole; and Local Government managed services in Bunbury and surrounds, Busselton, Harvey and Margaret River.

Providing education and care services for children in regional and rural areas such as the South West can be challenging. In some parts of the region, services need to contend with geographical distance, smaller numbers of children, isolation, limited resources and a lack of access to training and professional development opportunities.

A summary of trends and issues for education and care services have been itemised as:

- Professional isolation (nil or limited networking between services and other agencies);
- No confidential debrief opportunities for Directors outside of the service or community (resulting in high rates of burn-out);
- Professional development is limited (and very limited for contact staff) – requires travel, unpaid hours to attend, only after hours can be considered, no qualified back-fill staff and what professional development is available is not considered relevant to own circumstances or services are required to identify trainer and organise training;
- Consistent and reliable information from Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) and informal professional support has ceased since Children's Services Officer role changed and both positions for the region became vacant (Dec 2013 and Feb 2014);
- Lack of coordination for training / professional development opportunities which has seen services in the region missing out, unless willing to travel to Perth;
- Operational demands reduce capacity to explore funding sources to enhance program and environment development across the community managed education and care sector; and
- An advocacy role with local (South West) representation is needed – peak bodies appear to represent only the metropolitan perspective – a culture of isolation within the sector and within the community is increasing.

Future education and care service development needs in the South West will almost certainly vary between each local government area due to the spread of population throughout the region, projected growth rates, and other location specific variables.

Children's services, in addition to education and care services, that are most available in the region are child health clinics, playgroups and toy libraries, with the majority of South West communities having access to one or all of these services. Individual communities also offer localised services such as rhyme time and story time at the local town library, Kindy Gym's, Child and Parent Centre programs and many other supported mothers groups and family support services.

Children's services, including playgroups are an important part of the fabric of a vibrant community. It is important to note that playgroups are different to education and care services (child care) and kindergarten programs. Parents and caregivers attend with their children and retain responsibility for supervising their children.

Playgroups are not subject to any specific government legislation, quality frameworks or workforce standards.

Being predominantly run by parents, playgroups also offer opportunities for active citizenship through an emphasis on volunteering and peer support.

Playgroups are particularly useful in areas of new development and population increase as they offer a positive, cost effective and simple way to build community connection and engagement.

Playgroup WA – the peak body for playgroups in Western Australia, reports that in 2014 (January to September) there were 40 registered playgroups in the region, with *656 families and *914 children participating.

*This data does not include information on membership numbers for Associate members of Playgroup WA or non-affiliated Playgroups and numerous Play Café's operating in local primary schools.

The importance of providing ongoing and effective support to all children's service types cannot be underestimated. A large body of evidence exists to support what many early childhood educators have observed for many years, is that..."high quality early childhood services have a positive impact on children's cognitive development and learning, both in the short and long term...they make a positive contribution to the development and school readiness of all children who participate." (*Policy Brief No. 26 July 2014: The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia; Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute*).


Research also shows that experiences early in life, not only impact significantly on children's learning and development, but also into adulthood in the areas of education, emotional wellbeing, and physical and mental health outcomes.

Four key strategic areas were identified in the development of the Plan, to address the regional trends and issues based on analysis and data and on information gathered through consultation and reviews:

1. Networking and professional development
2. Business support and development
3. Coordination and linkages
4. Advocacy

The Plan addresses each of these four key strategic areas by recommending actions to improve support to all children's services, initiatives and networks for families and children in the region.

It is intended that the actions identified in the South West Children's Services Plan will be implemented in both the short and long term. The plan will be regularly reviewed and monitored to address changing trends and issues as they arise.



IT IS INTENDED THAT THE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED IN THE SOUTH WEST CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG TERM. THE PLAN WILL BE REGULARLY REVIEWED AND MONITORED TO ADDRESS CHANGING TRENDS AND ISSUES AS THEY ARISE.

The key actions will remain flexible to accommodate emerging economic and political variables.

A full list of recommendations is provided in Parts 9 and 10 of this Plan. Implementation of the recommended actions is expected to commence in late 2014 and to continue until December, 2015.

Carmen Gregg

Executive Officer

Investing In Our Youth

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1. Introduction

The South West Regional Children's Services Plan is an analysis of challenges faced by organisations that provide Children's Services including Education and Care Services (formerly child care) for children aged birth to 12 years across the region and has aimed to identify short and long term strategies to support all children's services, initiatives and networks for families and children in the region. It is important to note that the plan does not focus on national education and care reforms such as the Australian Government Productivity Commission Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning, or state or federal government policy changes, but rather looks to identify actions to address the issues based on the evidence collected as part of the planning framework.

The Plan also acknowledges the important role these services play in supporting the community and future economic growth of the region, especially parent's choice to participate in the workforce (particularly women) and in addressing children's learning and development needs.

"Numerous studies have shown that high quality education and care services lead to large returns on investment. Access to child care (education and care) benefits all families when they enable participation in the workforce; contributing indirectly to the economic benefits for families and society as a whole through higher productivity and life-time earnings and increased taxation revenues. (*Policy Brief No. 26 July 2014: The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia; Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute*).

Results from economy-wide modelling undertaken by Price Waterhouse Coopers outlined in the report "Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia" looks at three economic impacts on the Australian economy:

1. impacts of an increase in female labour force participation
2. productivity impacts of participation in quality education and care
3. impacts of increasing vulnerable children's participation.

The South West Regional Children's Services Plan

The plan acknowledges the important role education and care services play in supporting the community and future economic growth of the region, especially parent's choice to participate in the workforce (particularly women) and in addressing children's learning and development needs.

The total combined benefits for all three impacts would be an estimated \$7.0 to 9.3 billion increase in Australia's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050 if all three scenarios eventuated to their fullest potential. (*Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia, Price Waterhouse Coopers, September 2014, www.pwc.com.au*)

High quality early childhood services have a positive impact on children's cognitive development and learning, both in the short and long term...they make a positive contribution to the development and school readiness of all children who participate." (*Policy Brief No. 26 July 2014: The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia; Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute*)

Significant evidence shows that by increasing participation in high quality education and care services by children from a disadvantaged or vulnerable background is particularly beneficial.

Price Waterhouse Coopers state 'the return on investment can be measured in savings to taxpayers through decreased government expenditure on remedial education, criminal justice and youth offending and health services'. In the report "Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia", estimates that if children whose parents are in the lowest income bracket and who are currently not likely to attend an early childhood service, were to attend a high quality education and care program, the net benefit to the Australian economy would be \$13.3 billion by 2050. (*Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia, Price Waterhouse Coopers, September 2014, www.pwc.com.au*)

Research shows the importance of the early years in shaping and influencing lifelong outcomes and development. Experiences early in life not only impact significantly on children's learning and development, but also into adulthood on education, emotional wellbeing, and physical and mental health outcomes.

Children's services including playgroups are an important part of the fabric of a vibrant community. Playgroups assist the development of social capital by promoting supportive relationships within and between families. Being predominantly run by parents they also offer opportunities for active citizenship through an emphasis on volunteering and peer support.

Playgroups are particularly useful in areas of new housing development and population increase as they offer a positive, cost effective and simple way to build community connection and engagement.

They also support the development of human capital by promoting the healthy development of children prior to school age, as demonstrated by the fact that areas in WA with high playgroup participation also had better Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results.

Source: Supporting Community Playgroups – A Resource for Local Government, WALGA and Playgroup WA Inc. May 2011

The Australian Early Development Census (formerly AEDI) provides a national measurement to monitor Australian children’s development and gives each community a snapshot of children’s development as they arrive at school. The results can support communities to understand the degree and concentration of developmental vulnerability within their community.

According to the AEDI (2012), the South West region’s rates of vulnerability across one or more of the developmental domains ranges from 11.1% to 59.4% comparative to 23.0% for the state and 22.0% nationally (AEDI 2012) – refer for more detail www.aedc.gov.au

Investing In Our Youth, the successful contractor for the Royalties for Regions Regional Community Child Care Development Fund (RCCCDF) project in the South West, is a community managed not-for-profit organisation based in the South West, that promotes the healthy development of children and young people in the South West Region (WA) with a focus on early intervention and prevention.

Investing In Our Youth and a Project Reference Group made up of representatives from government, local government and not for profit agencies located in the region, have jointly developed the South West Children’s Services Plan.

The Plan incorporates the ideas and thinking of key stakeholders, parents and carers, networks and services and is heavily based on consultation (semi-structured qualitative interviews), quantitative evidence and literature reviews.

The Australian Early Development Census (formerly AEDI)


AEDC provides a national measurement to monitor Australian children’s development and gives each community a snapshot of children’s development as they arrive at school.

The South West region’s rates of vulnerability across one or more of the developmental domains ranges from 11.1% to 59.4% comparative to 23.0% for the state and 22.0% nationally (AEDI 2012).

The evidence base of the plan is derived from:

- Analysis of individual geographical areas and related demographics within the South West Regional Development Commission boundaries;
- Mapping service type, coverage and location of approved education and care services, relevant service providers and networks across the region.
- Analysis of state and national trends that may impact on future sustainability of education and care service models;
- Analysis of key planning and research documents at Commonwealth, state and local level and;
- Analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) associated with the key elements of service coverage, recipient and provider experience, financial sustainability and community assets and strengths of each geographical area.

Children’s service providers will need to consider emerging demand, especially in those areas with a high concentration of young families and areas reflecting changing patterns of work.



THE PRIMARY INTENT OF THE PLAN IS TO PRESENT RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THE IDENTIFIED REGIONAL TRENDS OR ISSUES IMPACTING ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES ACROSS THE SOUTH WEST AND TO GUIDE FUTURE INVESTMENT AND DECISION MAKING TO SUPPORT THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EARLY YEARS NETWORKS

There are a wide range of children's services available within the South West region. These include education and care services and other children's service types with the majority of South West communities having access to child health clinics, playgroups and toy libraries. Individual communities also offer localised services such as rhyme time and story time at the local town library, Kindy Gym's, Child and Parent Centre programs and many other supported mothers groups and family support services.

Children services that sit outside the National Quality Framework – national law and regulations - usually but not always, require a parent or carer to be in close proximity to their child/ren. These include: playgroup, play café, crèche, and activities for children in a library, toy library, school holiday activities and family support groups.

For the purpose of mapping service coverage and gaps for families and children - school operated kindergartens and child health centres have also been included as children's services.

Playgroup WA reports that in 2014 (January to September) there were 40 registered playgroups in the region, with *656 families and *914 children participating.

*This data does not include information on membership numbers for Associate members of Playgroup WA or non-affiliated Playgroups and numerous Play Café's operating in local primary schools.

Early Years Networks promote the importance of the early years and positive experiences for very young children. These voluntary groups focus on supporting families with children aged up to eight years and aim to coordinate and support local activities and projects. The South West region currently has four active networks operating in the sub-regions of Harvey, Collie and Manjimup (Warren/Blackwood region).

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) has undertaken an Early Years Networks project (August 2014) and has produced a research and consultation report to inform the development of a model of support to WA's Early Years Networks. A proposed model of support has been distributed for public comment (www.wacoss.org.au).

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

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

With the support from the proposed Support for Early Years Networks project (WACOSS), encourage existing and potential Early Years Networks to focus on:

- i. developing partnerships between agencies and families to strengthen collaboration to address the developmental domains of children identified as vulnerable through the 2012 AEDI;
- ii. raising awareness of the importance of the early years, the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework across the wider community; and
- iii. importance of play in the early years including nature based play; and

EDUCATION AND CARE SECTOR (formerly child care)

A range of education and care services are offered across the South West region which include Long Day Care (LDC), Family Day Care (FDC), Outside School Hours Care (OSHC), Occasional Child Care (OCC), Vacation Care and 'In-Home' care in a range of different settings (including private residents, schools, community and recreation centres). A definition for each service type is included in the Appendices document as Appendix B (pages 8 – 10).

All education and care types are well represented in the South West region. These include those coming under the umbrella of large incorporated organisations such as the YMCA and Good Start Early Learning (providing Long Day Care, Family Day Care and In-Home Care services); commercial (for-profit) businesses with single or multiple sites – for example centres located in Harvey, Collie, Bunbury and surrounds, Capel, Busselton, Dunsborough, Margaret River, Cowaramup plus Family Day Care Schemes based in Dunsborough and Albany; small community owned (not-for-profit) centres located in Donnybrook, Bunbury, Busselton, Harvey, Binningup, Collie, Margaret River, Nannup, Pemberton, Northcliffe, Walpole; and Local Government managed services in Bunbury and surrounds, Busselton, Harvey and Margaret River.

The capacity of education and care services varies greatly in each location, ranging from Family Day Care services with seven licenced places up to ninety-nine licenced place Long Day Care services to care for children aged birth to twelve years.

Education and Care Types – distribution by Local Government Area (Dec 2014)

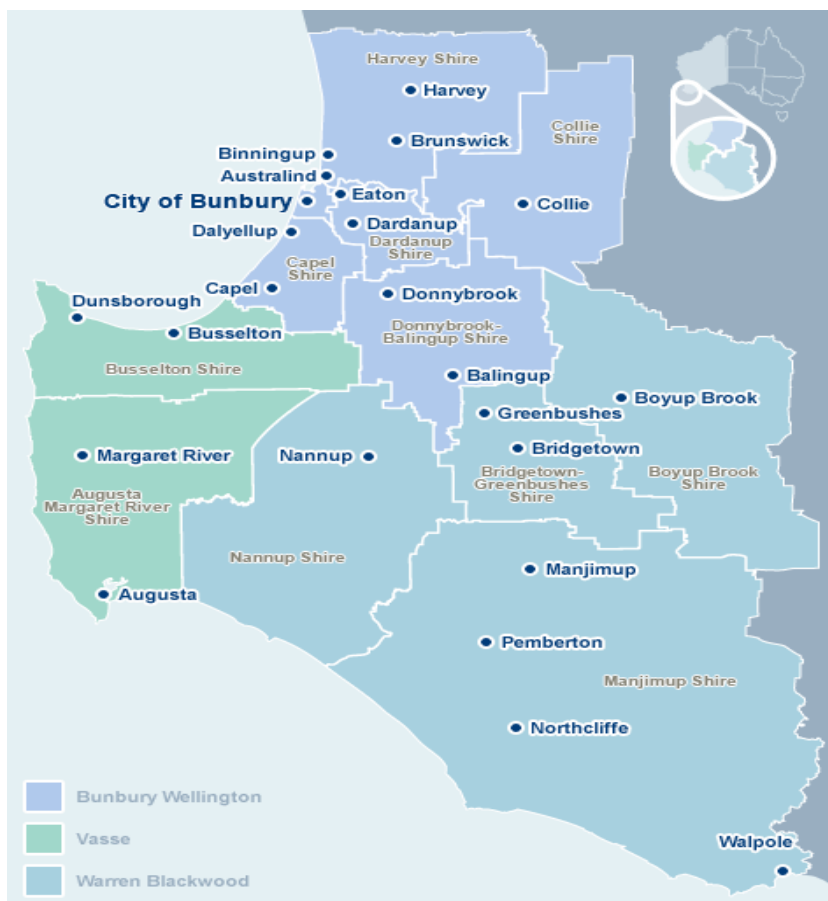
Local Government Area	Service Type	Number of services
City of Bunbury	Long Day Care	7
	Outside School Hours Care	4
	Vacation Care	1
	Family Day Care (Greater Bunbury region)	13
Shire of Harvey	Long Day Care	5
	Outside School Hours Care	4
	Vacation Care	1
	Family Day Care (inc In-home Care)	1
	Occasional Care	2
Shire of Dardanup	Long Day Care	2
	Outside School Hours Care	1
	Vacation Care	1
	Family Day Care	1
Shire of Capel	Long Day Care	2
	Outside School Hours Care	3
	Family Day Care	2
Shire of Collie	Long Day Care	2
	Family Day Care	2
City of Busselton	Long Day Care	8
	Outside School Hours Care	2
	Vacation Care	1
	Family Day Care (inc In-home Care)	19
Shire of Augusta – Margaret River	Long Day Care	4
	Outside School Hours Care	1
	Family Day Care	3
Shire of Bridgetown	Long Day Care	2
	Family Day Care	1
Shire of Donnybrook - Balingup	Long Day Care	1
	Family Day Care	1
Shire of Boyup Brook	Long Day Care	1
Shire of Nannup	Long Day Care	1
Shire of Manjimup	Long Day Care	4
	Outside School Hours Care	1
	Family Day Care	3
TOTAL		105

Source: South West Children's Services Plan 2014

2. Regional Overview

The South West is one of Western Australia's nine recognised regions located outside the Perth metropolitan area and is the most populated and economically diverse of WA's regions. The region covers 24,000 square kilometres with the population spread over around twenty four towns and two city areas.

The region has twelve different local government areas and three identified sub regions – Bunbury-Wellington, Vasse and Warren-Blackwood. Areas around the City of Bunbury include suburbs that fall under the jurisdiction of the Shire of Harvey, the Shire of Dardanup and the Shire of Capel. This area is commonly referred to as the Greater Bunbury region (SUA 5003) and stretches from Lake Preston in the north, Peppermint Grove Beach in the south, and eastwards to the Darling Scarp.



Source: South West Development Commission 2012

The region has an estimated resident population of almost 164,000 people or 6.7% of the state's total population, making it the most populous region of the State behind the Perth metropolitan area.

The South West Development Commission (SWDC) and Regional Development Australia – South West (RDA-SW) draft Blueprint report the following demographics:

“At the 2011 Census, the estimated regional population was 158,615. In the period 2006-2011, the region grew by 22.1% compared to 14.3% for WA as a whole, and 8.3% for Australia over the same period. It has one of the fastest growing regional populations in the whole country.

WA Tomorrow (WAPC, 2012) forecasts that by 2026 the population is expected to reach between 193,000 and 267,000 (Table 1).

Current trajectories indicate a population of 230,000 by 2026. In the past two decades, most of the population growth has occurred along the coastal areas. The WAPC expects this trend to continue.

These trends have been extrapolated out to 2050 based on historical and forecast growth rates using low, medium and high growth scenarios. This analysis shows a range in expected population between 290,000 and 630,000. Based on historical growth rates being maintained, population in 2050 would be in the order of 490,000.

The South West Development Commission Blueprint has adopted an aspirational increase of 0.17% Annual Average Growth rate (AAGR) to arrive at a possible population figure of 500,000”.

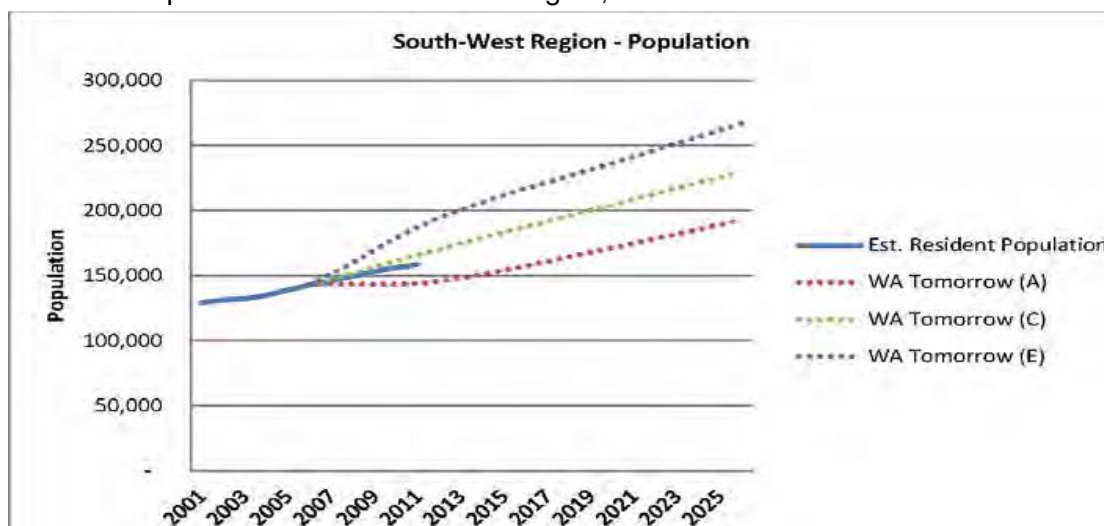
This clearly demonstrates that an exponential increase in education and care services will be required to meet demand in coming years.

ESTIMATED POPULATION IN 2050

The South West Development Commission Blueprint has adopted an aspirational increase of 0.17% Annual Average Growth rate (AAGR) to arrive at a possible population figure of 500,000”.

This clearly demonstrates that an exponential increase in education and care services will be required to meet demand in coming years.

Table 1: Population of the South West region, actual and forecast:



Source: *Western Australia Tomorrow* (WAPC, 2012)

A large percentage of the population in the region is located along the coastal strip between Australind in the north and Augusta in the south and in the two city areas (Bunbury and Busselton) with some of the inland towns experiencing minimal growth. Therefore some education and care services are operating in weak markets, while some are operating in strong competitive markets. This diverse spread of population can impact on access to resources, staff, and professional development.

WA Tomorrow (WAPC, 2012) forecasts based on historical and forecast growth rates using low, medium and high growth scenarios estimate a range in expected population of children 0 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years and 10 to 14 years (Table 2).

Table 2: WA Tomorrow (WAPC, 2012) population forecasts

AGE	2016	2021	2026
0 to 4	11 000 to 13 100	12 100 to 14 200	12 800 to 15 100
5 to 9	12 200 to 13 700	12 900 to 15 000	13 900 to 16 200
10 to 14	11 500 to 13 000	13 500 to 15 100	14 200 to 16 500
TOTAL	34 700 to 39 800	38 500 to 44 300	40 900 to 47 800

Source: *Western Australia Tomorrow* (WAPC, 2012)

The resident population of the South West region has been growing steadily and is projected to increase by 22% between 2010 and 2016. This will increase need for children’s services and infrastructure within the region.

- 20.9% OF THE SOUTH WEST POPULATION IS MADE UP OF CHILDREN AGED 0 TO 14 YEARS COMPARED TO THE STATE AVERAGE OF 19.2%.
- IN 2011 THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE REGION AGED 0 TO 4 YEARS WAS 10,760 AND CHILDREN AGED 5 TO 12 YEARS WAS 17,695.

Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage scores are calculated from responses to the ABS Census. It has been shown that more disadvantage areas have higher proportions of low economic factors such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations and other risk factors including ill-health or risks for ill-health. A score below 1000 indicates an area is relatively disadvantage.

Based on the 2011 Census, for the South West the lowest score is 816 and the highest is 1072. This provides an indication of where access to high quality children's services may need to be in close proximity to residential populations and be readily accessible to families with young children. Children's services have an important role to play in supporting children's development in all learning environments and in supporting parents and families.

The Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute state "children's development is a product of all their learning environments, and the benefits to be gained from high quality early childhood programs can be steadily undermined if the home environment continues to be chaotic, neglectful or unstimulating".
(Policy Brief No. 26 July 2014: The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia; Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute)

American economist and Nobel prize winner James Heckman argues that once children fall behind in their learning, they are likely to remain behind. Gaps in children's performance levels open up early, and stay mostly constant after eight years of age. Beyond eight years, school environments can only play a small role in reducing these differences.

Significant evidence shows that by increasing participation in quality children’s services is particularly beneficial for children from a disadvantaged or vulnerable background.

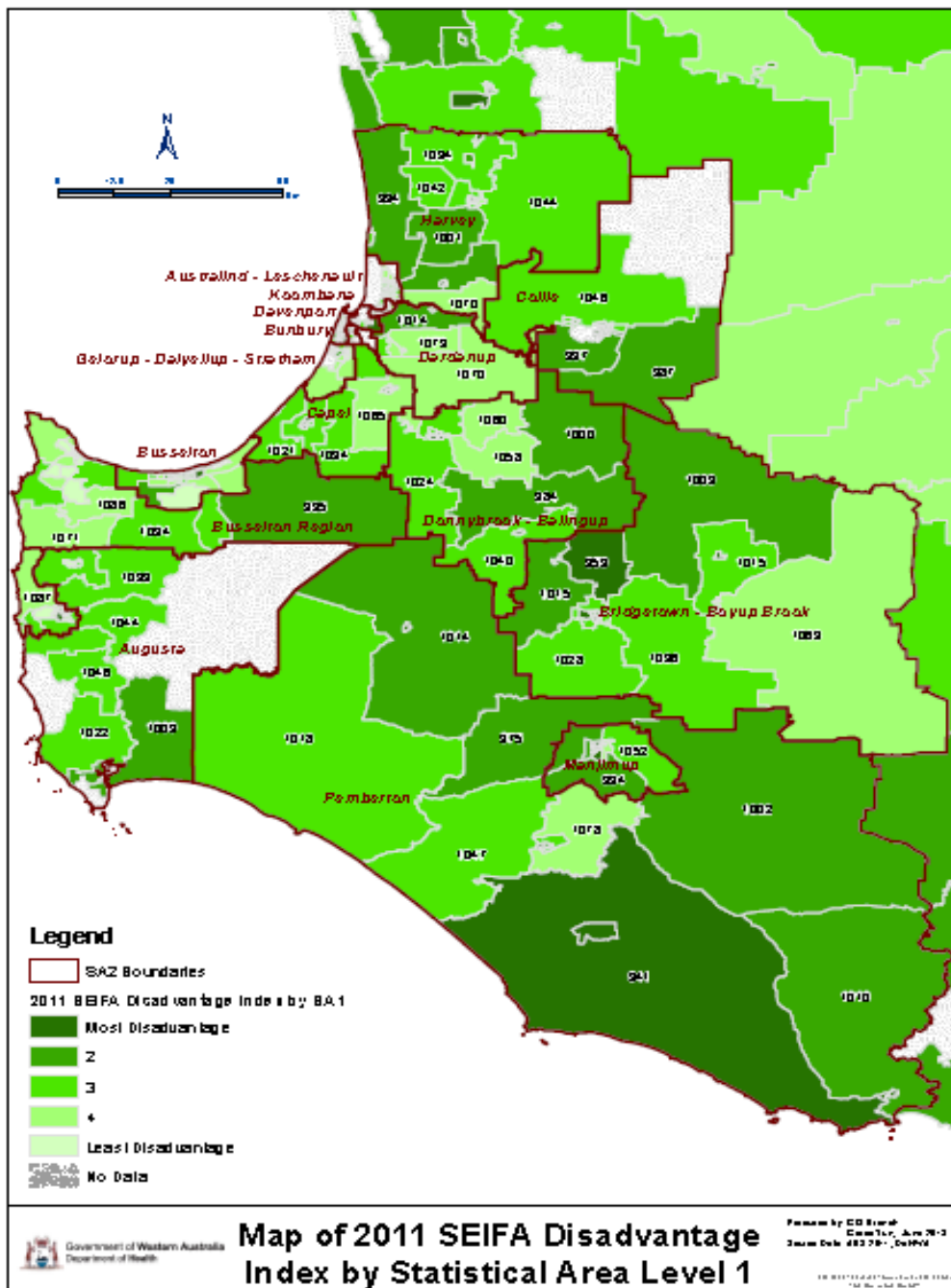
One of the benefits of universal services such as playgroups and Education and Care, are that they are non-stigmatising (Cortis et al., 2009). In other words, if all families are eligible to access a service, the service will not be viewed as “charity” or “welfare”



ONE OF THE BENEFITS OF UNIVERSAL SERVICES SUCH AS PLAYGROUPS AND EDUCATION & CARE, ARE THAT THEY ARE NON-STIGMATISING. IN OTHER WORDS, IF ALL FAMILIES ARE ELIGIBLE TO ACCESS A SERVICE, THE SERVICE WILL NOT BE VIEWED AS “CHARITY” OR “WELFARE” – A FACTOR THAT CAN INFLUENCE WHETHER OR NOT PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO USE A SERVICE.

– a factor that can influence whether or not people are willing to use a service (Cortis et al., 2009; McDonald, 2010). The way in which a service is viewed by people can influence whether or not they are willing to use it (Carbone et al., 2004; Cortis et al., 2009).

The SEIFA distribution across the region can be seen in the map:



Source: Department of Health

Mapping demographics across the region (refer to attached appendices document - Appendix A) clearly illustrates the diversity of the communities located in the South West. The mapping includes the following information (at July 2014):

Demographics:

- geographic area (refer to rationale in point 2 below);
- numbers of 0-4 year old children (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011);
- numbers of 5-12 year old children (ABS 2011);
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander census population- ABS 2011 children aged (0-4 years) and (5-14 years),
- ABS 2011 census data of single / lone parent families
- 2012 Australian Early Development Census results – percentage of children in first year of school identified as being vulnerable in 1 or more developmental domain;
- Social-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) based on 2011 ABS census - more disadvantage areas have higher proportions of low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations A score below 1000 indicates an area is relatively disadvantage; and
- WA Tomorrow (WA Planning Commission, 2012) forecasts based on historical and forecast growth rates using the medium growth scenario for 2016 and 2021.

NOTE: The rationale for the division of the south west region into the identified geographic areas of Significant Urban Areas (SUA) and State Suburb Codes (SSC) rather than Local Government Areas (LGA) or Significant Area (SA4) is to clearly illustrate current service coverage and gaps. The region has three identified sub-regions, twelve LGA's and in excess of twenty three communities (SSC) and two city areas (SUA). A large percentage of these communities are geographically isolated and many families wanting to utilise children's service are either unable to do so or it is impractical to access these services outside the town site.

ESTIMATED SERVICE DEMAND

Future demand in the South West for children's services, including education and care services, will almost certainly vary between each local government area due to the spread of population throughout the region, projected growth rates, and other location specific variables.

The major regional specific variables that will have a direct impact on demand for children's services include:

1. Regional Centres Development Program, Phase 2- a program to transform towns into SuperTowns was announced in July 2011 as part of preparing for future growth expectations and working to decentralise Western Australia's future population.

The SuperTowns vision is to create well-connected communities with access to services, affordable housing, and a diverse range of lifestyle and employment opportunities.

This is expected to result in more choices for people living in regional areas and provide an attractive alternative to residing in the metropolitan area.

Of the nine towns initially given SuperTown status, three are in the South West region ie Collie, Manjimup and Margaret River.

2. Ageing population - The South West is projected to have a higher proportion of older people than any other region in WA. The impact will see a significant increase in demand for services, initially through active retirees and transitioning to high need and health care related services. Historically more women than men have been employed in health, aged care and support services and the demand for flexible delivery of education and care services (child care) is expected to increase to meet these employment opportunities in the future.
3. Tourism - The value of the tourism sector was \$800 million in 2012 (Tourism Futures, South West Action Plan 2013 – 2018) and it is estimated to directly employ 5,600 people across the region. Tourism is a major driver for the retail sector, while tourism marketing complements promotion of other core industries such as agriculture. The attraction of tourists to the region is its highly varied travel and holiday experiences, including old growth forests, whale watching, world-class surfing, fine food and wine and the natural environment. Fast train links between Perth and Bunbury are currently being planned and expansion of Busselton Regional Airport are likely to be major drivers for national and international tourism growth. The hospitality industry attracts part-time employment and often outside business hours. Access to flexible education and care services to support these future employment opportunities will be in demand.

4. Fly-in Fly-out (FIFO), Drive-in Drive-out (DIDO) or Long Distance Commuters (LDC). It is difficult to ascertain exact numbers of families and individuals living in the region, who are involved in this type of employment. This is mainly due to the 2011 ABS census only collecting data based on usual place of residence ie location where person spends more than 6 months of the year – a FIFO worker may be included in the resident population of their FIFO community while others may be included in the population of their home city or town (ABS 6105.0 Australian Labour Market Statistics July 2013).

However, research undertaken by Hoath and Pavez (2013) clearly shows that many employees who are Busselton and Augusta - Margaret River residents work at mine sites in the Pilbara region. FIFO throughput in Busselton was 9,566 passengers in 2011-12, rising to 14,914 in 2012-13 and prompting a terminal expansion. Virgin airlines presently operates direct flights for FIFO workers and planning is well underway to assess the feasibility to national and international carriers operating at the airport.

The annual population growth in Busselton for the year ending June 2011 was approximately 5% placing it amongst the highest rates in Australia.

Children's service providers will need to meet emerging demand, especially in those areas with a high concentration of young families and areas reflecting changing patterns of work.

EMERGING DEMAND

Children's service providers will need to meet emerging demand, especially in those areas with a high concentration of young families and areas reflecting changing patterns of work.

1. Background and Methodology

The purpose of the RCCCDF project is to establish a more strategic, long-term approach to supporting services, initiatives and networks for families and children in regional Western Australia.

The South West Regional Children's Services Plan is an integral part of the RCCCDF Planning Framework to develop a localised Regional Plan taking into consideration local forecasting and community, economic and workforce profiles. This has been undertaken by Investing In Our Youth under the umbrella of the Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC). The planning framework is consistent with the principles of asset-based community development, a methodology that seeks to identify and use the strengths within communities as a means for sustainable development.

Analysis and planning has resulted in the implementation of agreed strategies to support the development and sustainability of regional children's services, with a focus on education and care services (formerly child care services).

Development of the South West Regional Children's Services Plan has involved face-to-face consultation with individuals and group consultation with relevant stakeholders and education and care services over a period March 2014 to June 2014.

The consultation interview questions were based on the key components of the RCCCDF planning framework, including analysis of service coverage (demand and supply estimate), community assets and strengths (established collaborations and partnerships), trends and issues impacting on service delivery and initiatives, ideas and programs to address any challenges faced in the past or could address in the future. (refer to Information Collection Tool in the Appendices document (Appendix C pages 11 -14)

A qualitative evidence base through consultation was chosen as the basis for the development of the regional plan for the South West, to enable a comprehensive, in-depth study of any factors or possible perceptions that could lead to identifying the major issues and trends facing the diverse forms of children's services across a large geographical area. The premise for this face-to-face engagement was based on the belief that within the limited timeframe and without a long lead in to promote the aims of the RCCCD project, it was unlikely a large enough cohort of children's service providers and in particular the more geographically isolated services across the region, would respond to an electronic or paper based survey.

The consultations involved semi-structured qualitative interviews with individuals and groups with 45 children's services encompassing Long Day Care, Occasional Care, Family Day Care, In-Home Care, Out of School Hours Care, Vacation Care and Family Centres.

More informal consultations took place with a variety of groups, networks and individual stakeholders. These included Early Years Networks, Education and Care Directors Networks involving services located in the Margaret River region and OSHC specific services, Schools of the Future Network, Child and Community Health, Child and Parent Centre Coordinators, local Registered Training Organisations, Playgroup WA, South West Development Commission, Local Government representatives (Collie and Manjimup), Parenting WA, Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia (CHILD Australia), Department of Local Government and Communities, and Australian Government Department of Education.


Working from transcripts and notes taken during consultations, an analysis was undertaken to draw out key themes and trends emerging from this data. A summary of findings from the consultations and a desktop review of key planning and research documents, provided substantial knowledge and information to undertake a S.W.O.T analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses and future opportunities and threats to determine a comprehensive assessment of what the community impact would be of the relevant strategies and actions identified in the plan.

Investing In Our Youth invited a number of key stakeholders representing a broad range of agencies located across the South West region, to form a Project Reference Group.

The role of the Project Reference Group (PRG) was to provide guidance and advice with regard to the project and to provide information from a regional or community perspective.

The following organisations are represented on the PRG and have a wealth of knowledge and experience not only of the sector, but also of the South West region as all members either work and/or live in the region:

- South West Development Commission
- Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia Inc. (CHILD Australia)
- Department of Local Government and Communities
- Playgroup WA
- YMCA Resource Centre
- Early Years Consultant – formerly Children’s Services Officer
- Australian Government Department of Education
- Shire of Collie
- Shire of Manjimup
- Investing In Our Youth (Management)



INVESTING IN OUR YOUTH BELIEVES THAT BY INVOLVING A PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP THROUGHOUT THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, PROMOTES GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

Table 3: Project Reference Group members 2014 / 15

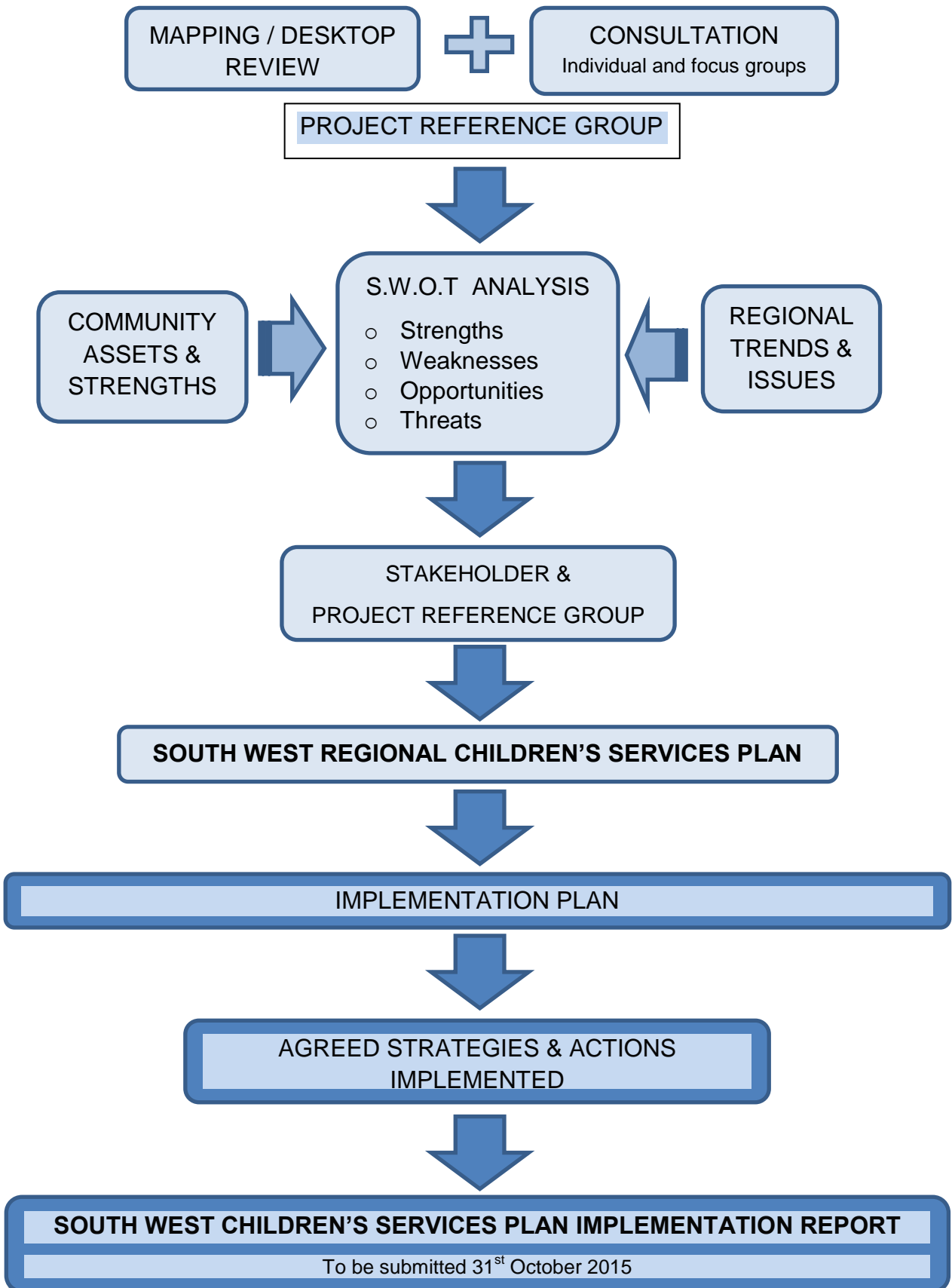
AGENCY REPRESENTED	POSITION FOCUS	LIVE OR LIVED
South West Development Commission	South West Region	Bunbury / Donnybrook
CHILD Australia	South West Region	Cowaramup / Yallingup
Department of Local Government and Communities	South West Region	Mandurah
Playgroup WA	South West Region	Bunbury
YMCA Resource Centre	South West Region	Busselton
Early Years Consultant – formerly Children’s Services Officer	Lower South West Region	Yallingup
Shire of Collie	Collie LGA	Allanson, Mumballup, Bokerup and Harvey
Shire of Manjimup	Manjimup LGA	Bridgetown
Investing In Our Youth (Management)	South West Region	Donnybrook
Investing In Our Youth – Regional Development Officer – SW Children’s Services	South West Region	Bunbury, Bridgetown
Australian Government Department of Education <i>(6 months in 2014)</i>	South West Region	Bunbury

The PRG has assisted with the development of the South West Regional Children’s Services Plan by:

- having input on existing and potential trends and issues that affect the children’s services sector;
- helping to identify suitable actions to address these trends and issues; and
- reviewing and evaluating the preferred actions to be recommended for implementation.

Investing In Our Youth believes that by involving the Project Reference Group throughout the planning and development process, encourages local engagement, maximises broader community acceptance and it also promotes greater transparency and accountability.

The process to be undertaken to complete the South West Regional Children’s Services Plan and Implementation Report is outlined below:



2. Desktop Review

A desk top review was undertaken to identify and record the demographic information and all services in each geographical area including service details and their type. These include both local and regional service providers.

A comprehensive list of service types and service sub-type within each Significant Urban Area (SUA) and State Suburb Code (SSC) is included in the attached appendices document (Appendix D pages 15 - 41). The service type was identified using the definitions listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Service Types

	SERVICE TYPE	SERVICE SUB-TYPE	
1.	Approved / regulated education and care services	1. Family Day Care 2. Long Day Care 3. Occasional Care	4. Outside School Hours Care 5. In-home Care 6. Mobile services 7. Vacation Care
2.	Other care	1. Nanny, au pair 2. Relative care 3. Informal care eg babysitting	
3.	Child, parent, family and community support	1. Early Years Networks 2. Parenting Services 3. Child and Parent Centres 4. Child and Family Centres	5. Child Health Services 6. Disability Support
4.	Children's activity groups	1. Playgroups 2. Toy Libraries 3. Literacy programs 4. Children's activities in libraries	
5.	Aboriginal specific services	1. Homework programs 2. Playgroups 3. Best Start programs 4. Literacy programs	
6.	Other	Defined by community	

Other relevant information was gathered from a range of sources including websites, reports and publications. These are listed:

1. **Document:** Western Australia Tomorrow: Forecast Profile for the South-West Planning Region, Population Report No 7, 2006 – 20126, Western Australian Planning Commission, December 2012
2. **Document:** Western Australia Tomorrow: Forecast Summary for Local Authorities, Population Report No 7, 2006 – 20126, Western Australian Planning Commission, December 2012
3. **Website:** South West Development Commission – www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/population
4. **Draft Report:** South West Development Commission (SWDC) and Regional Development – South West (RDA-SW), South West Regional Blueprint DRAFT, 2014
5. **Report:** South West Development Commission Tourism Futures South West Action Plan 2013 – 2018 – predicted growth in the tourism industry and possible impact on the region.
6. **Summary of Proceedings Report:** State of the Regions – Regional Development in WA Committee for Economic Development Australia (CEDA) Part 1: Future of the South West, August 2014.
7. **Document:** Pathways to Settlement: Population Mobility in Regional Western Australia (2001-2011), Regional Australia Institute (2014) – regionalaustralia.org.au
8. **Document:** South West Health Profile April 2012 – Western Australia Department of Health, Report produced by WACHS Planning Team – provides a broad overview of the health of the South West region residents and highlights areas that may need to be considered in the planning of health services.
9. **Document:** Department of Regional Development; Living in the Regions 2013. A survey of attitudes and perceptions about living in regional Western Australia.
10. **Website:** Australian Bureau of Statistics – statistical material ABS 6105.0 Australian Labour Market Statistics July 2013, QuickStats Data and Analysis, Community Profiles and Socio Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)
11. **Website:** Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (formerly AEDI)– national collection data of children’s development.
12. **Website:** Western Australian Government; Department of Education, Schools Online and Find a School website; www.det.wa.edu.au
13. **Website:** Australian Government; My Child, Find a Child Care Service www.mychild.gov.au

5. Mapping and Service Coverage

The diverse forms of children's services are well represented in the South West region. Appendix D in the attached appendices document, provides a comprehensive list of service types and sub-types within each geographic area.

A glossary of terms (Appendix B) is also provided in the attached appendices document and has a description of each of these service types. It is important to note the difference between education and care services and other children's services. This is best described as:

- Education and care service – is any service providing or intended to provide education and care on a regular basis to children under 13 years of age other than a service that is excluded under the National Quality Framework (NQF), comprising of National Law and Regulations. In Western Australia, the Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) is responsible for the operations of the National Quality Framework.

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is the national authority responsible for guiding the implementation and ongoing administration of the Framework across Australia.

There are two types of approved services under the National Quality Framework:

- Centre-based service: which includes long day care, outside school hours care and vacation care services;
 - Family day care services: where a number of educators formally linked to an education and care service provide education and care to children in their own residence or approved venue.
- Other children's service types that sit outside of the National Quality Framework – Law and Regulations (education and care services), usually require a parent or carer to be in close proximity to their child/ren. These include: playgroup, play café, crèche, activities for children in a library, toy library, school holiday activities and family support groups.

For the purpose of mapping service coverage and gaps for families and children, school operated kindergartens, and child health centres have also been included as children's services.

- Early Years Networks - promote the importance of the early years and positive experiences for very young children. These voluntary groups focus on supporting families with children aged up to eight years and aim to coordinate and support local activities and projects. The south west region currently has three active networks operating in the sub-regions of Harvey, Collie and Manjimup (Warren-Blackwood).

DEMAND AND SUPPLY ESTIMATE

An analysis of demand and supply of service types was undertaken to identify gaps where demand is greater than current services can deliver and where supply is meeting current and future demand.

This information was gathered from consultation with stakeholders and in some cases from the Australian Government My Child website www.mychild.gov.au. The important factor to consider in reading this summary is that this information is a “snap-shot” in time and many factors can change the results very quickly. These factors can include, change of staff and/or ownership of service, seasonal employment opportunities, closure or opening of new services, population migration and numbers of births ie increase or decline.

A summary of the overall coverage of education and care services for each geographical area across the region is represented in Table 5.

Table 5: Coverage of education and care services in the south west region

Geographic Area	Current Demand (Met)	Current Demand (Not Met)	Analysis
SUA 5003 Bunbury			Thirteen FDC, twelve OSHC / Vacation care services and twelve LDC operate across the city area. Three LDC services offer early education programs and have waiting lists. A high percentage of services report demand is for part-time care which reflects employment status. Three services go against this trend and demand is higher for full-time care.
SSC 50206 Dardanup			One FDC service operates in the town site and is currently meeting demand.
SSC 50321 Harvey			Current services are meeting demand. Vacation care activities are fully utilised each school holiday period.
SSC 50880 Yarloop			No education and care service operates in the town site. Families access services in Harvey
SSC 50102 Brunswick			No education and care service operates in the town site. Families access services in Australind (Bunbury).
SSC 50071 Binningup			Current service is meeting demand. Service operates 3 days per week. Families access services in Australind.
SSC 50130 Capel			Education and care services are meeting demand. FDC, LDC and OSHC services operate in the town site.
SSC 50084 Boyanup			Only one education and care service operates in town site (In-home care). Families access services in Capel or Bunbury.
SSC 50200 Dalyellup			Places for children aged birth to 3 are in high demand. Demand for children 4 – 12 years is currently being met.

Geographic Area	Current Demand (Met)	Current Demand (Not Met)	Analysis
SSC 50163 Collie			Two LDC services and one FDC service operate in town site. One LDC has a waiting list the other has vacancies. New service being built to replace existing LDC and increased places will become available. Two FDC operate and are meeting demand. No OSHC service operates in town site.
SUA 5004 Busselton			Sixteen FDC, six LDC and two OSHC / Vacation care services operate in city area. No services are fully utilised with waiting list.
SSC 5232 Dunsborough			Two LDC services and one FDC service operate in town site and are currently meeting demand.
SSC 50471 Margaret River			All three LDC services are holding waiting lists. One FDC service operates in town site and also has waiting list. The OSHC / Vacation Care service is currently meeting demand.
SSC 50023 Augusta			Two FDC services operate. One in town site and the other Karridale. Both services have waiting lists.
SSC 50873 Yallingup			One education and care service operates in town site (In-home care). Families access services in Busselton area.
SSC 50185 Cowaramup			Education and care service (LDC) has waiting list for children in the birth to 3 age group.
SSC 50088 Bridgetown			Two LDC and one FDC operate in town site. Services currently meeting demand.
SSC 50223 Donnybrook			Education and care service (LDC) has waiting list for children in the birth to 3 age group.
SSC 50032 Balingup			No education and care service operates in town site. Families access services in Kirup (FDC) or Donnybrook (LDC).
SSC 50085 Boyup Brook			Current LDC service not meeting demand. Service operates 3 days per week. Premises are shared with other user groups.
SSC 50561 Nannup			LDC service meeting current demand.
SSC 50462 Manjimup			One LDC and three FDC services operate in town site. All services meeting current demand.
SSC 50634 Pemberton			One LDC service operates in town site and meeting current demand.
SSC 50597 Northcliffe			One LDC / OSHC service operates in town site and meeting current demand.
SSC 50794 Walpole			One LDC service operates in town site and has high vacancy. Meeting current demand.

6. Consultation and engagement

Development of the South West Regional Children's Services Plan has involved face-to-face consultation with individuals and group consultation with relevant stakeholders and education and care service providers over a period March 2014 to July 2014.

Consultation interview questions were based on the key components of the RCCCDF planning framework, including analysis of service coverage (demand and supply estimate), community assets and strengths (established collaborations and partnerships), trends and issues impacting on service delivery and initiatives, ideas and programs to address any challenges faced in the past or could address in the future. Refer to Appendices document (Appendix C) for the Information Collection Tool that outlines the questions used to gather relevant information and data.

A comprehensive synopsis of the information gathered through consultation for each State Suburb Code (SSC) and each Significant Urban Area (SUA) in the region can be found in the attached appendices document (Appendix E – SWOT pages 42 - 78). An overall summary is outlined as:

- Education and care services have developed and fostered positive relationships within the sector. Generally services assist each other and share information.
- Financial viability issues exist in Collie (loss of sustainable operational subsidy), Walpole (point of closure – negotiating change of service model), Nannup (relies totally on sustainable operational subsidy), Pemberton (low numbers), Harvey (low numbers in one service), Manjimup (Vac Care / OSHC – closed April 2014) and YMCA OSHC Glen Iris (closed May 2014) – refer to pages 46,55,72,73, 75 and 78 of the SWOT analysis in appendices document (Appendix E).
- Part time employment to meet demand of part-time care or because of employee choice is evident in all areas except a small number of services in Bunbury that contradict this trend.
- A number of centres across the region identified as having no access to, or the inability to employ a suitable Early Childhood (ECT) trained teacher. Services report that it is difficult to employ trained EC teachers who are willing to accept industry conditions. Concerns were raised, that by offering different employment conditions could be perceived as double standards.
- Difficult to attract qualified relief staff due to Certificate III now the minimum requirement – estimated cost of \$2000 to attain Certificate III and \$5000 - \$6000 for Diploma level qualification.

- Recent budget announcement of changes to National Quality Fund to increase wages has been transferred to training and professional development for EC training. Services reported it is a struggle to find appropriate training / professional development locally and no relief staff are available to back-fill existing staff if training does become available. Owner/operators raised concerns at risking investment in staff with high possibility of losing existing Diploma qualified staff to school based employment. The education and care services sector identified they are unable to match working conditions or salary.
- Fly-In-Fly-Out / Drive-In-Drive-Out and shift work is an increasing trend across the South West region – results in respite care for stay at home partner and cancellation of place when partner returns. Services unable to back-fill places results in reduced financial viability and ability to retain staff.
- Impact on small regional education and care services with 3 and 4 year old programs offered at local primary school. Many services have started to offer before and after kindergarten rates to attract families. Concern reported of community / parent perceptions of education and care services credibility – parent’s perception is children will miss out on education experiences if they don’t attend school based programs, even though it is a requirement of centres to employ Early Childhood teacher which has resulted in kindergarten program offered in service and avoids drop-off and pick-up between school and service.
- Family playgroups are well attended, although a general decline in numbers has occurred in some areas. This could be due to a number of factors including Play Cafes being facilitated on school premises, increased choice of participation in children’s activities eg story time, rhyme time in local libraries, social and language development programs (Smart Start), and kindergarten programs for 3 year old children.
- Suitable venues for children’s activities are in high demand. Community and Family centres are fully utilised with waiting lists in some areas with no access to funding to extend existing buildings. New housing estates are not being provided with sufficient spaces for community usage as part of their initial development, resulting in added pressure on existing premises outside of the developing estate.

Education and care services overwhelmingly reported:

- Professional isolation (nil or limited networking between services and other agencies);
- No access to confidential debrief opportunities for Directors outside of service or community (burn-out rates high);
- Professional development is limited (and very limited for contact staff) – requires travel, unpaid hours to attend, only after hours can be considered, no back-fill staff and what is available is not relevant to own circumstances or services are required to identify trainer and organise training;
- Consistent and reliable information from Education and Care Regulatory Unit (ECRU) and informal professional support has ceased since Children's Services Officer's role changed in December 2013. In the late 1980s saw the introduction of the child care regulations, the establishment of the Child Care Services Board and the appointment of children services officers. These officers were initially responsible for professional advice, support and education for applicants and providers. Children services officers are now senior assessment officers and focus on addressing the demand for prompt assessments and ratings of education and care services (www.dlgc.wa.gov.au).
- Lack of coordination for training and professional development opportunities results in the region missing out on access – unless willing to travel to Perth;
- Operational demands reduce capacity to explore funding sources to enhance program and environment development across the community managed education and care sector; and
- Advocacy role with local (South West) representation is needed – the perception is peak bodies represent only the metropolitan perspective – a culture of isolation within the sector and within the community is increasing.

7. SWOT Analysis

The results of the SWOT analysis supported the identification of key trends and issues in the South West with regard to sustainability of the children's services sector. These trends or issues are the focus of the recommended actions in the children's services plan.

A summary of findings from the consultations and a desktop review of key planning and research documents provided substantial knowledge and information to undertake a S.W.O.T analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses (considerations) and future opportunities and threats to determine a comprehensive assessment of what the community impact would be of the relevant strategies and actions identified in the plan.

Appendix E in the attached appendices document, provides a comprehensive S.W.O.T analysis that relates to the strengths relating to children's services in each Local Government Area, the weaknesses (things to consider), and the opportunities to build on existing strengths or actions to address the regional trends or issues documented in the Plan. The identified threats are those that may inhibit the opportunities being successful. The community impact outlines the possible effect if no action is taken both in the short and long term.

Table 6 provides a summary of the key findings from South West regional S.W.O.T analysis.

S.W.O.T ANALYSIS

The results of the S.W.O.T analysis supported the identification of the key trends and issues in the South West with regard to sustainability of the children's services sector.

These trends or issues are the focus of the recommended actions in the children's services plan.

Table 6: Key findings

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong growth across the region and is expected to be a growth 'hotspot' in the next 15 years. • A broad range of services for children and families are accessible across the region. • An extensive range of service providers including local government, commercial businesses (for-profit), community managed, school based and large incorporated agencies. • Current supply of services is meeting demand in most areas across the region. • Education and care services have fostered positive relationships within the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of services are in the highest populated areas with less options available in the more regional areas. • Lack of qualified relief staff to meet growing demand. • Networking opportunities diminished without regional coordination. • Limited opportunities to network across agencies, resulting in professional isolation. • Numbers of children vulnerable in one or more developmental domains (AEDC) is high in some areas. • A number of town sites (SSC) have inadequate or no access to local education and care services or suitable venues for children's services. • Lack of capacity to seek and access relevant information.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional promotion of gaps and trends in service demands. • Registered training agencies deliver flexible Early Childhood qualifications and training. • Regional networking and professional development opportunities. • Develop partnerships between agencies and families to strengthen collaboration to address the developmental domains of children identified as vulnerable. • An electronic web based portal as a "place to seek" information and activities for agencies and families. • A business resource and support model to generate funds from commercial business, government, non-government agencies to provide ongoing support to the sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to meet the demand for qualified staff across the region. • Growing population and insufficient infrastructure investment from both commercial developers and governments. • Insufficient capacity of key staff across all professional agencies to attend networking or professional development forums. • Competitive environment for funding opportunities. • Limited recurrent funding options to develop alternative models of service delivery support and to ensure current and responsive information is provided to sector and relevant agencies.

8. Regional Trends and Issues

REGIONAL TRENDS AND ISSUES

A number of trends and issues have been identified that are generic across the region:

- Professional isolation;
- Professional development;
- Workforce development;
- Infrastructure;
- Financial viability;
- Accessibility.

Analysis of the qualitative evidence obtained through service provider consultation, stakeholder consultation and review of research reports and web based data, has led to identifying the major issues and trends currently facing the diverse forms of education and care services and children's services across this large geographical area.

There were number of trends and issues identified as being generic across the region and are outlined below:

8.1. Professional isolation

Networking between education and care services and other professional agencies is non-existent in some areas or is limited in others. Lack of a central coordination role has impacted on staff and management including both volunteer committees and owner-operators of services, feeling professionally isolated.

Limited support and networking across the sector and between relevant professional disciplines, inhibits connectedness within the community. Providing networking opportunities increases partnerships and collaboration resulting in higher quality services for families and children. It also reduces the risk of duplicating services or programs for the intended target audience.

8.2 Professional development

Access to professional development is limited and very limited for some education and care services particularly for educators who are required to be included in the staff-child ratio (contact staff). Currently, professional development requires staff to travel with little or no recompense and in the main staff attend in their own time ie unpaid hours.

Limited availability of qualified educators to back-fill inhibits access to professional development through business hours and services have reported being required to identify local trainers and organise sessions if requesting specific areas of professional development to be run in-house or locally.

Limited access to ongoing professional development reduces skill and motivation levels of educators and support staff. Longer term, this reduction in skill level required for quality education and care, reduces outcomes for families and has the capacity to limit the ability of attracting and retaining staff and families in the area.

8.3 Workforce development

Access to qualified educators for relief or back-filling staff to attend training and professional development is very limited across the region. Education and care services reported they have been unable to attract a pool of qualified educators for relief and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to attract diploma qualified educators and Early Childhood trained educators because of the associated costs and accessibility of training in some areas of the region.

Attracting and retaining early childhood trained educators is proving to be difficult in some areas of the region. Many services struggle to find early childhood qualified educators who are willing to accept industry conditions. Generally, early childhood trained teachers have an expectation to receive the same conditions they would be eligible for in a school based early childhood program. Concerns have been raised that providing different hours and conditions could be perceived as double standards between diploma and early childhood trained educators.

Reduced numbers of qualified educators will impact on compliance in meeting the National Quality Framework (national law and regulations) requirements and risk closure of services. Without sufficient supply of high quality education and care (child care) parent's choices and capacity in workforce and study participation options will be inhibited resulting in reduced economic output across the region.

8.4 Infrastructure

Access to suitable venues for education and care and children's services, including playgroups, activities and support services for children and parents, is very limited in many areas across the region. This has impacted on a number of services being unable to expand existing licenced premises or for agencies to expand programs to meet increasing demand.

8.5 Financial viability

A number of community managed education and care services are experiencing financial difficulty and risk closure or have closed over the last twelve months. This is due mainly to low numbers of children in the birth to 3 age group, competition with perceived "free" education based pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs on school sites, stress on management committee members and local government operators to comply with National Quality Framework compliance requirements, lack of access to qualified educators, professional isolation and for some the geographical isolation from other like services.

At time of writing, financial viability issues exist in Collie (loss of sustainable operational subsidy), Walpole (point of closure currently exploring possible change of service model), Nannup (relies totally on sustainable operational subsidy), Pemberton (low numbers), Harvey (low numbers in one service), Manjimup (Vacation Care / OSHC – closed April 2014) and YMCA OSHC Glen Iris (closed May 2014) – refer to pages 45,54,72,74, 76 and 77 of the SWOT analysis in the attached appendices document (Appendix E).

8.6 Accessibility

A number of town sites have limited or no access to education and care (child care) services due to the close proximity to a larger population and has not attracted a commercial service provider.

Those communities that lack access to approved education and care services may result in families not being attracted to settle in the area or unregistered services may commence operating which has the capacity to impact on the health and safety of children. Without access to high quality education and care (child care) options will

inhibit parent's choices and capacity in workforce and study participation or maintaining career options, resulting in reduced economic output for the region.

9. Key Findings and Recommendations

The recommended actions outlined in the South West Regional Children's Services Plan reflects the key issues identified in the SWOT analysis which has been assessed

THE FOUR KEY STRATEGIC AREAS TO ADDRESS THE REGIONAL TRENDS AND ISSUES BASED ON THE S.W.O.T ANALYSIS AND DATA AND INFORMATION GATHERED THROUGH CONSULTATION AND REVIEWS ARE:

1. NETWORKING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
2. BUSINESS SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT
3. COORDINATION AND LINKAGES
4. ADVOCACY

THE PLAN ADDRESSES EACH OF THESE KEY STRATEGIC AREAS BY IDENTIFYING ACTIONS IN BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG TERM, TO IMPROVE SUPPORT TO ALL CHILDREN'S SERVICES, INITIATIVES AND NETWORKS FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN THE REGION.

against the data and information gathered through consultation, review of relevant reports and documents and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Specifically the purpose of the plan is to prioritise actions to address the issues based on the evidence collected through the planning framework.

It is important to note that the plan does not focus on national education and care reforms such as the Australian Government Productivity Commission Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning or state or federal government policy changes, but rather looks to identify actions to address the issues based on the evidence collected as part of the planning framework.

The plan includes the four priority strategic areas and recommended actions to address or capitalise on these trends and issues. It is intended that actions will be implemented in both the long and short term and in order of priority as assessed by the Project

Reference Group. The plan will be regularly reviewed and adapted to address the changing trends and issues as they arise.

Table 7 provides a summary of the four key strategic areas and actions identified to address the trends and issues.

Table 7 KEY STRATEGIC AREAS AND ACTIONS

<p>1. NETWORKING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Coordinate networking opportunities in sub regional areas – across relevant professional disciplines and specific service type eg OSHC, LDC, FDC. ➤ Ongoing professional development needs assessment to achieve skill development, retention of staff and quality services. ➤ Professional development – undertake, coordination role of facilitators, attendance and participation. ➤ Newsletter / email / network group - focussed information / shared experience and knowledge. ➤ Project development – “on-the-job” professional coaching and development. 	<p>2. COORDINATION & LINKAGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development of a web based portal with a focus on promotion of South West education and care services, coordination and dissemination of information, for example job seekers details, Professional Development, and education information for staff and agencies relevant to education and care of children birth – 12 years. ➤ Develop partnerships with other agencies and commercial business sector – local and regional promotional and professional development events. ➤ Invite participation from the education and care sector to present / attend existing interagency and professional agency network forums. ➤ Strengthen links between children’s services and other early years networks.
<p>3. BUSINESS SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Design and develop a “South West Children’s Services Support and Resource” model to potentially include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of resource for recruitment, operational information and templates; • recruitment support – information register and portal (advertising); • prospectus development – investor information; • support to community managed services through operational support and resources; • locating funding sources / coordinate strategic funding applications and acquittals; and • identifying potential sustainable revenue through advertising ie resources and products (commercial and no cost), training agencies and other relevant ancillary organisations. 	<p>4. ADVOCACY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Raise awareness of trends and issues relating to children’s services located in the South West and possibly refer to relevant agencies, parents and communities. ➤ Promote services and raise importance of education and care from an economic and productivity perspective and as an important family support and child development role. ➤ Promote importance of the early years, National Quality Framework, Early Years Learning Framework across the wider community. ➤ Build partnerships with training agencies to deliver flexible courses to meet workforce demands and trends – engage with SW Workforce Development Alliance to include in SW workforce development plan 2013/16. ➤ Raise awareness of issues with relevant non-government and local government agencies to enable delivery of children’s services in communities with limited access.

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10. Regional Plan

10.1 KEY STRATEGIC AREA 1: Networking and Professional Development

Regional trend or Issue: Networking opportunities between education and care services and other professional agencies is non-existent in some areas or is limited in others, resulting in professional isolation.

Recommended Actions	Resources Required	Priority
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore and initiate the coordination of networking opportunities in smaller sub-regional areas across professional disciplines and specific service type eg OSHC, LDC, FDC to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. create a regular forum for dialogue among education and care services to develop and share best practice in education and care; b. engage relevant agencies across professional disciplines to attend regular education and care services forums to share new best practice information on a specific discipline; and c. assist with implementing a seamless transition process for children and families from education and care services to other early education settings. 2. Increase partnerships with existing interagency forums in each sub-regional area to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. establish a stronger relationship between education and care services and other human service agencies with an aim to develop targeted programs in the region. 3. Develop a regular communication method such as electronic bulletins, website interactive posts or e-newsletter to focus on disseminating information and shared experience and knowledge relevant to children's services across the region. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 0.5 FTE over 12 months (2015). 2. Travel costs 3. IT and communication costs. 	Medium
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investing In Our Youth (include in Regional Development Officer role). 		

Regional trend or Issue: Access to professional development is limited and very limited for some education and care services, particularly for educators who are required to be included in the staff: child ratio (contact staff).

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop partnerships with relevant agencies and registered training organisations to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. undertake a professional development needs assessment to achieve skill development; retention of staff and quality services. b. coordinate professional development across the region – undertake a coordination role of a data base of local facilitators, staff attendance and participation register; c. develop partnerships with other agencies and the commercial sector to coordinate and promote local and regional professional development events; 2. An opportunity exists for an agency to lead an initiative to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. provide education and care services with easier access to on-the-job professional development and to foster stronger partnerships between local service providers; b. develop a project template to trial and to use as a basis for future funding submissions to expand access to on-the-job professional development across all education and care services within the South West region; and c. identify a trial site and coordinate with relevant agencies / private service providers across a range of professional disciplines to provide hands-on coaching and provide strategies to be implemented in a child care setting to increase better health and developmental outcomes for children aged birth to 12 years. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. External strategic funding eg RCCCD strategic funding, LDCPDP (Long Day Care Professional Development Programme funds through local Long day Care services. 2. 0.5 FTE over 36 months (2016 – 2018) – external funding to be sourced for the period beyond 2015 	High
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investing In Our Youth –with relevant agencies and private service providers. 		

Regional trend or issue: Limited support and networking across the sector and between relevant professional disciplines has inhibited connectedness within the community.

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage participation from the education and care sector to present / attend existing interagency and network forums. These may include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Schools for the Future b. Local Advisory Committees for the Child and Parent centres in both Carey Park and Collie; c. Interagency meetings in their local community. 2. Encourage participation and connectedness to foster stronger partnerships between education and care services and Early Years Networks in the sub-regions of Harvey, Collie, Manjimup and Bunbury. 3. With the support from the proposed Support for Early Years Networks project (WACOSS), encourage existing and potential Early Years Networks to focus on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. developing partnerships between agencies and families to strengthen collaboration to address the developmental domains of children identified as vulnerable through the 2012 AEDI; ii. raising awareness of the importance of the early years, the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework across the wider community; and iii. importance of play in the early years including nature based play. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No additional human resources required over 2014/15 – include in Regional Development Officer role. 2. Activity money for Early Years Networks to implement activities (EYAM) 	Medium
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
1. Investing In Our Youth		
2. Early Years Networks		
3. Relevant health and nutrition providers		

10.3 KEY STRATEGIC AREA 3: Business Support and Development

Regional trend or issue: Information relating to education and care service management and operations is ad hoc and not always reliable. Management and staff have reduced capacity to seek information and are uncertain where to locate a relevant starting point.

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop of a “South West Children’s Services Support and Resource” model; 2. Identify key stakeholders in the region to establish an initial coordinating committee to explore potential operating and business models for an information and resource hub to support all children’s services across the South West region. <p>The coordination committee to consider the possibilities of the model to potentially address:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. resource development for recruitment and operational information / templates; b. community management operational support and resources; c. potential investor information (prospectus) relevant to the education and care sector in the South West region; d. business and governance support to financially struggling not-for-profit children’s service providers; and e. identification of funding sources and a coordination role for strategic funding applications and acquittals. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implemented over 36 months: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1.0 FTE over 12 months - 1.5 FTE over 24 months - Accommodation costs; - Resource development funding - Travel costs 	<p>High</p>
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project Reference Group (Design) 		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Investing In Our Youth 		

10.4 KEY STRATEGIC AREA 4: Advocacy

Regional trend or issue: Services report both geographical and community isolation as a major challenge to the development and future growth of the sector. A lack of coordination and with little or no representation on peak bodies that advocate sector support, results in issues relating specifically to the South West region not being raised or are overshadowed by a metropolitan perspective.

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create opportunities to raise awareness with relevant agencies, parents and communities to find solutions to South West specific issues and trends, through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. coordination of written submissions as appropriate; b. attendance at meetings or events and present on behalf of service providers unable to attend due to distance or the inability to comply with National Quality Framework requirements if absent; and c. appropriate communication with relevant government agencies on specific issues affecting services in the region. 2. Develop a document and conduct presentations with each of the twelve Local Government Areas (LGA's) in the region to provide a summary of the key findings relevant to the early years and relevant trends and issues relating to children's services for each specific town site or area. These documents will be available as a published hard copy and be available on the Investing In Our Youth website www.investinginouryouth.com.au for public access. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No additional resources required in 2014/15 – include in Regional Development Officer role. 	Medium
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
1. Project Reference Group		
2. Investing In Our Youth		
3. South West education and care services		

Regional trend or issue: It is the perception of some South West education and care services that parents, other educational institutions and the wider community undervalue the professional standard of educators and the importance of education and care services in comparison to other early childhood service providers.

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<p>1. There is an opportunity to build partnerships with relevant stakeholders to initiate or build on an existing coordinating committee to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. develop marketing strategies to counter the perception that the education and care sector is less valued than any other early education or education providers; b. develop strategies to promote the importance of the National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework across the wider community; c. promote education and care related employment opportunities and the role they play in local schools from a child development and an economic development perspective; d. promote the importance of education and care services with each local government authority across the region and the related economic growth impact; and e. develop strategies to raise the profile of educators within the sector (for example support to expand the current “South West Star Awards” to include talent spotting that is linked to development programs supported through scholarships, sponsorship or other financial support). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 0.2 FTE in 2016 – 2018 2. External funding to be sourced to develop or purchase educational and promotional resources. 	Medium
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
1. Investing In Our Youth		
2. (Potential) “South West Children’s Services Support and Resource” model		

Regional trend or issue: Access to qualified educators is limited across the region with an inability to attract a pool of educators for relief work because of associated training costs and accessibility to training in some areas. Reduced numbers of qualified educators will impact on compliance with meeting the National Quality Framework requirements and risks service closures.

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<p>1. Investing in Our Youth in partnership with the Project Reference Group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. undertake a course availability and demand assessment to identify and map any major gaps in local course delivery to meet minimum qualification requirements in the education and care sector; b. link with the South West Development Commission who undertake a three yearly review of the South West workforce development plan to ensure the education and care sector requirements are not overlooked in university offerings; c. build partnerships with both private and government training organisations to deliver bridging courses locally between diploma qualification and an early childhood teaching degree to enable service providers to succession plan and to provide incentive to long term Diploma qualified educators to stay within the sector; and d. engage with the South West Workforce Development Alliance to ensure the needs of the education and care sector are not overlooked (example flexible course delivery to enable practical access by educators located in rural areas of the region) and are included in the South West workforce development plan 2013 – 2016. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No additional resources required in 2014/15 – include in Regional Development Officer role. 2. 0.2 FTE in 2016 and beyond. 	High
Collaboration / Responsibilities:		
1. Project Reference Group		
2. South West Workforce Development Alliance		

Regional trend or issue: A number of communities have limited or no access to education and care services and children’s services due to close proximity to a larger population and does not attract a local service provider or where there is a lack of infrastructure for service expansion or additional services.

Recommended Action	Resources Required	Priority
<p>1. Investing In Our Youth in collaboration with the Project Reference Group and relevant agencies, raise awareness on behalf of the South West communities where there is limited or no access to children’s services (including education and care) by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. developing a presentation to highlight the benefits of quality children’s services from a child development, family support and economic perspective; b. delivering the presentation to promote the importance of children’s services with relevant local government authorities, state government and local business; c. raise awareness with relevant government agencies and land developers to substantially increase the availability of “free” or low cost access to community venues suitable for children’s services and family events; d. supporting relevant community groups or not-for-profit service providers to access capital funding to expand existing premises or to construct new premises to deliver education and care services in areas of increasing demand; and e. designing a prospectus to promote areas across the South West where services are currently not being provided with potential service developers and providers. 	<p>2. No additional human resources required in 2014/15 – include in Regional Development Officer role.</p> <p>3. External funding to be sourced for resource development to a professional standard.</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Collaboration / Responsibilities</p>		
<p>1. Project Reference Group</p>		
<p>2. (Potential) “South West Children’s Services Support and Resource” model</p>		

11. References

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3. **Website:** South West Development Commission – www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/population
4. **Draft Report:** South West Development Commission (SWDC) and Regional Development – South West (RDA-SW), South West Regional Blueprint DRAFT.
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7. **Document:** Manjimup SuperTown: Townsite Growth Plan – Government of Western Australia 2012
8. **Document:** Pathways to Settlement: Population Mobility in Regional Western Australia (2001-2011), Regional Australia Institute (2014) – regionalaustralia.org.au
9. **Document:** South West Health Profile April 2012 – Western Australia Department of Health, Report produced by WACHS Planning Team – provides a broad overview of the health of the South West region residents and highlights areas that may need to be considered in the planning of health services.
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13. **Research paper:** Hoath, A. & Haslam McKenzie F (2013) The socio-economic impacts of long distance commuting on source communities. Perth, Co-operative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation and Curtin Graduate School of Business.

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18. **Website:** Australian Government; My Child, Find a Child Care Service www.mychild.gov.au
19. **Website:** Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority; ACEQCA NQF Snapshot; www.acecqa.gov.au
20. **Submission:** Early Childhood Australia's Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Child Care and Early Childhood Learning; Early Childhood Education and Care: Creating Better Futures for Every Child and for the Nation (Feb 2014).
21. **Document:** Policy Brief No 26 (July 2014): The future of early childhood education and care services in Australia, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne – Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.
22. **Report:** September 2014: Putting a value on early childhood education and care in Australia, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Tony Peake and James van Smeerdijk (www.pwc.com.au)
23. **Submission:** Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Child Care and Early Childhood Learning; Early Childhood Education and Care: Creating Better Futures for Every Child and for the Nation (Feb 2014).
24. **Submission:** Professor Charles E Pascal – Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at University of Toronto and special advisor to Australian Goodstart Early Learning Organisation Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry on Child Care and Early Childhood Learning; Early Childhood Education and Care: Creating Better Futures for Every Child and for the Nation (January 2014).

12. Appendices

APPENDIX A – Demographics and Population – South West Region

APPENDIX B – Glossary of Terms

APPENDIX C – Information Collection Tool.

APPENDIX D – South West Children’s Service Types and Location

APPENDIX E – S.W.O.T Analysis

Appendices can be viewed in the document – “South West Regional Children’s Services Plan – Appendices”.