

Grow learn live well

Promoting the health of Victoria's children and
young people

healthy together Victoria
Consultation - December 2013



Association for Children with a Disability

Suite 2, 98 Morang Road, Hawthorn 3122

www.acd.org.au

Contact: Elizabeth McGarry

elizabethm@acd.org.au

(03) 9818 2000

Introduction

Established in 1980, the Association for Children with a Disability (ACD) is a non-profit community based organisation representing children with a disability and their families living in Victoria. Our current membership includes over 2,000 families.

Statement of Purpose

- To empower parents of children with a disability to be as self-sufficient as possible in advocating on behalf of their child and family.
- To promote and advance the rights of children with a disability and their families.
- To advocate on behalf of children with a disability and their families to ensure the best possible support and services are available.
- To work collaboratively with other organisations to improve the service system for children with a disability and their families.

Guiding Principles

- To be responsive to the needs of children with a disability and their families.
- To provide a professional, quality service.
- To be proactive by raising issues with government and building awareness in the community about the rights of children with a disability and their families.

Introduction

ACD appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge that will inform the implementation of Grow Learn Live Well, its policy goal, reform areas and objectives – *“to ensure that Victoria’s children and young people will experience optimal physical health and wellbeing and social and emotional development.”*

ACD fully agrees with the need for supporting and nurturing all children’s health, learning and development and applauds both the Victorian and Australian government for their wisdom in recognising the value and preventative nature of intervening early to enable effective outcomes that are long-lasting.

ACD applauds recognition within the consultation paper that *“to enable more optimal use of resources and a more effective focus on policy priorities”*, greater policy and program coordination is required.

General Comments and Recommendations

Although the consultation paper refers to “all children” ACD notes that particular attention is given to those considered in need of a special focus, that is, *“children from lone-parent families, those from areas of most social-economic disadvantage and Aboriginal children”*. ACD holds the view that children with a disability or developmental delay are also vulnerable as their unique needs are regularly overlooked. Therefore we recommend that children with a disability are also acknowledged in Grow Learn Live Well, so that their developmental needs and overall wellbeing is not overlooked.

Often there is an assumption that due to the nature of a child’s disability or developmental delay there are professionals in their life and therefore their health needs are being met and their wellbeing is being addressed. However in many instances this is far from the reality as the focus of support/intervention inevitably becomes very specific – addressing the particular presenting need only. Equally a child’s general wellbeing is often overlooked due to the pressing nature of other health, developmental or behavioural issues impacting on their life.

Serious consideration needs to be given to the best way to raise awareness in those supporting children with a disability or developmental delay, to minimise the temptation to exclude these children from promotion messaging and preventative strategies based on the assumption that because there are a few “specialists” in their life, preventative interventions will already be in place. In and of itself disability and developmental delay require closer examination to identify key factors that run counter to achieving health and wellbeing comparable to the general population.

The best way to ensure that the health and wellbeing of a child with a disability or developmental delay are not overlooked, is to better support their family to address these key components of their son or daughter’s life. Too often the time and energy it takes parents to attend to the presenting needs of their child means that broader preventative actions fall by the wayside. Therefore it is all the more important for professionals working in health, community services and early childhood education and care settings to take the initiative and engage with parents in a manner that acknowledges the uniqueness of their situation while at the same time respectfully supporting the broader health and wellbeing of their child. In the case of disability and developmental delay, it often really does “take a village to raise a child”.

Grow Learn Live Well will ring true for children with a disability or developmental delay as long as everyone supporting them, guards against an overwhelming focus on disability jeopardising their broader health and wellbeing needs.

Although ACD is not directly involved in promotion of health and wellbeing, we are in a position to promote the activities of others, via our regular member magazine, and online with uploads to our website and social media sites.

Consultations question

Grow Learn Live Well seeks to identify opportunities for collaboration and reorientation of existing initiatives toward prevention and health promotion

What opportunities for collaboration do you see for your agency or organisation with the reform areas in Grow Learn Live Well?

ACD constantly provides advice to policymakers, government officials and community service agencies on the best way to reach parents of children with a disability or developmental delay. We have extensive experience in deconstructing bureaucratic language that is often too alienating for those it seeks to inform. Our community educators, qualified professionals in their own right as well as parents of children with a disability, hold guest lecture positions in all our major universities, presenting pre-service training and professional development on the best ways to engage with families who have a child with a disability or developmental delay and with the children themselves. Informed by the body of literature on family centred practice, the key to success is a deeper appreciation of family perspectives and learning to build and sustain respectful and effective relationships.

Conclusion

ACD appreciates the commitment that Healthy Together Victoria has demonstrated in setting the goal of achieving improved health and wellbeing in all Victorian children.

If this reform is to be fully successful we believe that the needs of children with a disability and developmental delay require greater recognition and a more targeted response.

Professionals supporting children with a disability and developmental delay need to remain mindful of the fact that for many, any attention they may be receiving might not be holistic, as often such attention is very specific and interventionist rather than preventative.

Finally to achieve success with Grow Learn Live Well, activities and promotional models will require a greater recognition of the need to reach children with a disability or developmental delay which may require specific adjustments.



Elizabeth McGarry
Chief Executive Officer

Conclusion