Introduction

The wellbeing of children and young people is our shared responsibility.

The Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework (the framework) provides a contemporary definition of child and youth wellbeing. Its primary aim is to ensure that everyone, in all parts of Tasmania’s service system, as well as in the broader community, has a strong, common understanding of child and youth wellbeing. We need to build capacity and strengthen our families and communities across Tasmania to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. By doing this, it is possible to prevent problems from occurring and reduce the impact of problems that could otherwise escalate.

The framework uses the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth’s (ARACY) The Nest as the foundation for an evidence-based definition of child and youth wellbeing.

Just as child and youth wellbeing is a shared responsibility, the framework has been developed in partnership with people who work with children, young people and their families.

All services that contribute to child and youth wellbeing are invited to embrace and implement this definition and incorporate it into their own services, policies and procedures.

The framework will also provide the basis for more detailed work on outcomes that will be used by Government agencies to set goals, monitor and report their progress, identify areas where they can improve, and inform the design and delivery of services. The outcomes framework is scheduled for release in 2018.

The framework is intended to provide the foundation for an ongoing discussion about child and youth wellbeing. It is a living document that will evolve over time to reflect our maturing, collective understanding of this critically important topic.
Background

The March 2016 report, Redesign of Child Protection Services Tasmania, ‘Strong Families – Safe Kids’ (the report) outlined the essential components for redesigning the service system to more effectively protect children from harm.

The report aligns with the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020 in recognising that ‘the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place.’

The importance of focusing on child and youth wellbeing was recognised in the Tasmanian Government’s response to the report: the Strong Families – Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2016-2020 (the implementation plan).

Action 2 of the implementation plan commits to the development of a robust and common understanding of child wellbeing by relevant stakeholders.

The framework is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory. This sets out obligations to protect children and young people at different stages in their lives, including creating opportunities for wellbeing and to help them realise their potential. It states that children and young people have a right to be heard and need to be recognised and treated as active participants in the development of their own wellbeing.
Why Child and Youth Wellbeing is so Important

The wellbeing of Tasmania’s children and young people is of critical importance.

Wellbeing influences the way that children and young people interact with other people and their environment. When a child has a strong sense of wellbeing they will be more resilient and more able to approach their interactions with others in a positive and optimistic way. They will learn better, be healthier, happier and more confident.

Children and young people's wellbeing does not exist in isolation and is not determined by them alone. An ecological model of human development helps us to better understand child and youth wellbeing (see Figure 1: The Ecological Model of Human Development).

It places the child at the centre and recognises the influence of relationships within the settings of the family, the community and the wider society and environment. Children and young people’s wellbeing is heavily shaped by their relationships with their family and wider community. These relationships are critical to the development of wellbeing; and secure, predictable and loving attachments from early life are of particular importance.

Figure 1: The Ecological Model of Human Development
Defining Child and Youth Wellbeing

Wellbeing is the state where a child or young person feels loved and safe; has access to material basics; has their physical, mental and emotional health needs met; is learning and participating; and has a positive sense of culture and identity.

Tasmania’s definition of wellbeing is based on six ‘domains’. It is inspired by The Nest, a national, evidence-based initiative on child and youth wellbeing developed by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).

The Six Domains of Child and Youth Wellbeing

- Being loved and safe
- Having material basics
- Being healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Having a positive sense of culture and identity

The six domains are a simple way of presenting a complex concept. There are significant inter-relationships between the domains; and it is highly likely that services will be focused on improving outcomes across multiple domains, due to these inter-relationships. A child’s participation in education falls within the learning domain; but their ability to confidently engage with education will rely heavily on their having a supportive home environment (being loved and safe) and having access to educational materials (having material basics).

A number of descriptors are listed against each domain to help define what wellbeing includes. These descriptors are capable of application to various purposes across the service system. This includes informing service design and delivery; and supporting consistent outcomes measurement.

The descriptors focus on those things that are required to support the wellbeing of children and young people. Some of these things we already do well, while others require further work. Future priorities can be guided by further consideration of each of these domains and descriptors.

Service providers are encouraged to develop additional descriptors to help the framework to develop over time.
Being loved and safe

Being loved and safe means that children and young people:

- have a safe, stable and supportive home environment
- feel safe, secure and protected at home and in the community
- feel valued and respected
- have positive, trusted relationships with other people
- have a voice and the ability to raise concerns and have these concerns addressed

Having material basics

Having material basics means that children and young people:

- have access to adequate, stable housing
- have access to nutritious food and clean water
- have access to education and training materials
- have access to adequate clothing and footwear
- have access to materials to support participation in activities
- have access to adequate heating and cooling

Being healthy

Being healthy means that children and young people:

- are mentally and physically healthy
- are emotionally well, happy and supported
- are as physically active as they can be
- have access to appropriate health and care services
- are immunised
Learning

**Learning means children and young people:**

- are attending and engaging in education, training or employment
- are participating in early childhood education
- are developing literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to age
  
- are supported to learn by their caregiver and education providers
- receive assistance for additional needs

Participating

**Participating means children and young people:**

- are engaging with peers and community groups
- are taking part in organised activities, including sport
- have access to and use technology and social media
  
- are an active participant in their own life; including being able to have a say and have their opinion heard and valued

Having a positive sense of culture and identity

**Having a positive sense of culture and identity means children and young people:**

- can find out about family and personal history and are supported to connect positively with their culture
  
- feel like they belong
- have a positive sense of self-identity and self-esteem
- are in touch with cultural or spiritual practices and have these practices valued and respected
### Table 1: Child and Youth Wellbeing Developmental Focus Areas

#### 4 Years and Under

**Being loved and safe**
- The child or young person feels safe in their home and community environment. Their caregiver provides a safe, stable and nurturing environment.
- The child demonstrates an attachment to their primary caregiver and their caregiver regularly initiates and participates in positive interactions with the child.
- The child demonstrates strong positive relationships with certain individuals, particularly their primary caregiver.
- The young person has a growing level of independence from their caregiver and is able to identify at least one person who they can rely on for support and assistance.

**Having material basics**
- The child or young person is provided access to adequate clothing and footwear, appropriate housing, clean water and adequate heating and cooling.
- The child has access to healthy food in sufficient quantities.
- The young person has access to healthy food in sufficient quantities. This includes meeting their increasing need for certain nutrients such as calcium and iron.
- The child’s caregiver provides access to mental stimulation.
- The child has access to educational materials. The young person has access to education and training materials.

**Being healthy**
- The child or young person is fully immunised; a healthy weight for their age and height; and is emotionally and mentally well, happy and supported.
- The child’s caregiver encourages and provides opportunities for unstructured physical exercise and play, including in the natural environment.
- The child is supported and encouraged to engage in structured or unstructured exercise and play, including in the natural environment.
- The child’s caregiver engages with health services as needed, including the Child Health and Parenting Service.
- The child’s caregiver engages with health services as needed. The young person has access to health services as needed.
- The young person avoids smoking and engaging in risky alcohol and drug use; or is supported to give up smoking and risky alcohol and drug use.

**Learning**
- The child is accessing early learning and developing age-appropriate language, literacy and social skills.
- The child’s caregiver is engaged in the child’s early learning and provides a stimulating play environment appropriate to the child’s age.
- The child is participating in compulsory education, developing life-long learning skills, and is developing age-appropriate language, literacy and social skills.
- The child’s caregiver is engaged in the child’s early learning and provides a stimulating play environment appropriate to the child’s age.
- The young person is participating in compulsory education and developing age-appropriate language, literacy and social skills.

**Participating**
- The child or young person is provided with opportunities to meaningfully participate in decisions and have a voice about issues that affect them.
- The child’s caregiver encourages and facilitates participation in social activities, whether structured eg play group, or unstructured eg visits to a park or library.
- The child is participating in organised activities, including sport. They are able to form positive relationships with peers and are encouraged to engage with their community.
- The child or young person is provided with opportunities to meaningfully participate in decisions and have a voice about issues that affect them.
- The child or young person is participating within their community; is able to satisfy emotional or social needs outside of their family group and has a strong support network.

**Having a positive sense of culture and identity**
- The child or young person’s environment, including their learning environment, is culturally respectful, appropriate and free from bullying or victimisation.
- The child is forming relationships with family members as appropriate and their emerging sense of personal identity is supported and encouraged.
- The child or young person’s environment, including their learning environment, is culturally respectful, appropriate and free from bullying or victimisation.
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### Table 1: Child and Youth Wellbeing Developmental Focus Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Years and Under</th>
<th>5 to 12 Years</th>
<th>13 Years and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Being loved and safe</strong></td>
<td>The child or young person feels safe in their home and community environment.</td>
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<td>Their caregiver provides a safe, stable and nurturing environment. Their caregiver regularly initiates and participates in positive interactions with the child.</td>
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<td>The child's caregiver provides access to mental stimulation. The child has access to educational materials.</td>
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<td>The young person has access to education and training materials.</td>
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<td><strong>Being healthy</strong></td>
<td>The child or young person is fully immunised; a healthy weight for their age and height; and is emotionally and mentally well, happy and supported.</td>
<td>The young person is physically active and socially engaged. They are supported and encouraged to engage in structured or unstructured sport and recreation activities, including in the natural environment.</td>
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<td>The child's caregiver encourages and provides opportunities for unstructured physical exercise and play, including in the natural environment.</td>
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<td>The child's caregiver engages with health services as needed, including the Child Health and Parenting Service.</td>
<td>The young person has access to health services as needed.</td>
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<td><strong>Learning</strong></td>
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<td>The child's caregiver is engaged in the child's early learning and provides a stimulating play environment appropriate to the child's age.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The young person is developing skills to be independent, resilient and transition successfully from school.</td>
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<td><strong>Participating</strong></td>
<td>The child or young person is provided with opportunities to meaningfully participate in decisions and have a voice about issues that affect them.</td>
<td>The young person is participating within their community; is able to satisfy emotional or social needs outside of their family group and has a strong support network.</td>
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<td>The child or young person is engaged in organised activities, including sport. Positive relationships with peers and are encouraged to engage with their community.</td>
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<td>The young person is participating within their community; is able to satisfy emotional or social needs outside of their family group and has a strong support network.</td>
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<td><strong>Having a positive sense of culture and identity</strong></td>
<td>Their environment, including their learning environment, is culturally respectful, appropriate and free from bullying or victimisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The young person is supported to understand their family history and satisfy any interest in their identity or culture. Their sense of personal identity is supported and encouraged.</td>
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</table>
Developmental Focus Areas

There has been a recent rapid expansion of knowledge on child development, particularly in relation to the detrimental impact of neglect and abuse on the developing brain.

Brains develop over time, beginning before birth and continuing into adulthood. Prenatal events and the child’s relationships and environments in the first few years of life have a major impact on the development of the architecture of the brain. This forms the foundation for the child’s future learning, health and behaviour.

Identifying and responding to developmental issues will vary depending on a range of circumstances, including the age of the child. Wellbeing promotes the strengths of all children regardless of their different abilities and different needs.

The framework considers developmental stages in three focus areas: prenatal, infancy and the early years (4 years and under); the middle years (5 to 12 years); and adolescence to young adulthood (13 years and over) (see Table 1: Child and Youth Wellbeing Developmental Focus Areas).

These broad developmental focus areas have been presented against the six wellbeing domains, to provide some guidance as to what wellbeing encompasses at each stage of a child’s development. These focus areas don’t provide a comprehensive account of the various areas that make up a child’s overall wellbeing at each stage of their development. That’s why it is intended that this section will be subject to the most development as the framework continues to evolve over time.

4 Years and Under

From the prenatal period the brain undergoes rapid development and many determinants that impact later health and wellbeing are activated.

The first four years of life include rapid development in motor skills, language development and emotional regulation. Children learn to walk and develop their fine motor skills. They rapidly acquire the ability to verbally communicate, modulate their emotions and interact with their peers.

Early childhood is a time for children to develop attachments and bonds with caregivers that will assist them in developing their self-esteem and their ability to relate positively to others. Early experiences and relationships impact on brain development during this period and can have a long-term effect on the lifelong wellbeing of the child.

In this developmental stage, while the focus of service responses will be on the needs of the child, this will generally include a focus on improving the primary caregiver’s capacity to provide the child with stable, positive relationships and environments.

5 to 12 Years

School-aged children gradually gain their independence during these formative years. They learn how to make good choices, exercise self-discipline and fine tune their gross and fine motor skills. As the brain matures it has a reduced capacity for plasticity and becomes more specialised so it can deal with more complex tasks.

In this developmental stage, the focus of any service response will often be on supporting the caregiver and the child as a family unit. If the child has been exposed to trauma or toxic stress early in life they may suffer developmental delays that continue to impact their development throughout their school years. This may reduce the child’s ability to communicate, learn, be mobile, make good decisions, manage stress and care for themselves.
13 Years and Over

The adolescent years are characterised by a surge in independence, changes to body shape and an influx of hormonal changes. Young people will have a strong urge to start defining who they are and developing their skills in preparation for entry into the workforce or further education. Adolescence is a difficult time for many young people.

Promoting positive health practice during adolescence is critical for the prevention of health problems into adulthood. While young Tasmanians enjoy good health compared to people in other age groups, they are particularly vulnerable to some health conditions and risk behaviours.

In this developmental stage, the focus of any service response will often be on supporting the young person themselves. Intensive interventions may be required to deal with behaviours and developmental problems that have become entrenched, underlining the need for early intervention wherever possible. While supporting a positive family environment is still important, the focus of support services will shift towards supporting young people to overcome trauma, and to make positive choices as they transition into adulthood.
Using the Framework

The Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework provides a common language for everyone providing services to children and young people; across Government, non-government organisations and the private sector.

The framework has many applications. It will be used as a foundation tool for talking about child and youth wellbeing, designing programs that promote wellbeing and for holding ourselves collectively to account for delivering better outcomes for children and young people in Tasmania.

Embedding a shared commitment that all services focus on the wellbeing of children and young people will mean that services are less fragmented and that fewer children will fall between the cracks in the service system. A strong commitment to wellbeing will empower everyone to take action to better support the needs of the child and to ensure children receive the support they need to meet the critical developmental milestones required for lifelong wellbeing. All organisations that work with children and young people are invited to adopt the framework’s definition of wellbeing and in doing so, become an alliance partner of the framework. Alliance partners will continue to evolve the framework, ensuring it is contemporary and relevant to the Tasmanian community.

As outlined in action 3 of the Strong Families — Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2016-2020 the framework will provide the foundation for a more detailed outcomes framework, which will be used to set goals, monitor and report progress, identify areas where improvement is needed, and inform the design and delivery of services.

Similarly, as outlined in action 4 of the implementation plan, the framework will provide the basis for the development of materials on child and youth wellbeing that are accessible for the general public, as well as professionals and service providers, to ensure that everyone understands the role they can play in supporting child and youth wellbeing.
References


Notes
The Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework is based on The Nest, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People’s (ARACY) national initiative on child and youth wellbeing. The Nest is supported by a significant evidence base and was a product of collective action involving more than 4000 Australians. Further information on The Nest, including the Action Agenda, Technical Document and Literature Review is available at www.aracy.org.au.

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