

## CREATE-ing Pathways to Child Wellbeing in Disadvantaged Communities

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### The Problem

Children living in economically deprived areas, especially First Nations children in these areas, are more likely than those from more affluent communities to drop out of school, become trapped in inter-generational cycles of poverty and welfare dependence, or get caught up in the child protection or youth justice systems.

Despite the best efforts of governments and caring organisations, and the billions of dollars they have spent over several generations, the gap is not narrowing. Today, *where* children live has an even greater impact on their life chances than it did 30 years ago.

The promise of the *collective impact movement* is to unite our fragmented services to achieve common goals, but *the movement needs to make greater use of rigorous science to realise this promise.*

*Prevention science* is built on carefully designed and closely evaluated evidence-based programs. These programs yield large benefits for disadvantaged children that persist from early childhood into adolescence and beyond, including less crime and drug use and improved school performance. Nevertheless in disadvantaged regions few evidence-based innovations have been implemented by the social and education sectors on a large scale.

### The Opportunity

*The challenge now facing Australia is to build prevention science methods and insights into large scale, sustainable, economically efficient, early prevention delivery systems. This will achieve measurable, ongoing improvements in wellbeing across the life course.*

### Project Aims and Approach

We are working through *Communities for Children* (CfC), a well-established national program for children aged 0-12 years living in 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia. CfC operates through local coalitions of Non-Government Organizations (NGO) service providers, funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS).

We are using *prevention science*, partnering with DSS and ten NGOs and state government departments to make CfC more effective in improving child wellbeing. We are doing this by implementing and evaluating a highly innovative *Prevention Translation and Support System (PTSS)* in 9 of the 52 CfC sites in NSW and Queensland. The PTSS consists of *state-of-the-art electronic resources* — such as outcome measurement tools, with dashboards to facilitate their independent use in planning, decision making, and service delivery — all supported by 9 on-site specialist *Collective Impact Facilitators* provided through our partner NGOs.

To achieve a wider collective impact, *primary schools* in all our CfC areas are being invited to join with community agencies to serve on local coalitions, while also providing data on child outcomes. In addition, we are including *support services for vulnerable families* that are part of state government child protection strategies.

Our principles are captured in the acronym **CREATE** (**C**ollaborative; **R**elationships-based; **E**arly in the pathway; **A**ccountable through shared, measurable goals; **T**raining-focused; **E**vidence-based)<sup>1</sup>. The PTSS is designed to help practitioners put these principles into practice; they have evolved out of the influential 1999 report *Pathways to Prevention* and 15 years of work in a disadvantaged community in Brisbane in the *Pathways to Prevention Project*<sup>2</sup>.

Our project is ambitious, but builds on well-established community prevention research in the United States, adapting insights on implementation and sustainability to Australian conditions.

### Innovation

1. **Economic accountability:** Electronic modules will be used both to explain how local services can be delivered to achieve outcomes in an economically efficient manner, and to support *local coalitions to achieve measurable and sustainable improvements in outcomes with tangible economic benefits*.
2. **Organisational capacity:** We are building a series of sustainable *learning communities* with our partners.
3. **Science:**
  - a. The use of a rigorous research design *to evaluate the impact of the PTSS*;
  - b. *Validated measures of parent efficacy, and child wellbeing* (for 5-12 year-olds) derived from an engaging video game, *Rumble's Quest*<sup>3</sup>;
  - c. A tool for *measuring the quality of local coalition functioning*.
4. **Collaboration:** broadening the spectrum of child and family needs addressed by local coalitions by including:
  - a. *Primary schools* as full partners in all community coalitions;
  - b. An evaluated *school-family engagement training program*;
  - c. *State-funded NGO-delivered intensive family support services*.
5. **Scalability & sustainability:** both through *resources and processes* that help transform service delivery systems and through the development of *human capital* within organisations and local community coalitions.

### In short:

*This project is the most comprehensive science-based initiative ever proposed for improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged children across Australia.* It will help transform delivery systems for large scale, fully sustainable operation through coalitions of local services and schools in disadvantaged communities.

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<sup>1</sup> A 4-minute video on CREATE may be viewed at <http://www.creatingpathways.org.au/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.griffith.edu.au/criminology-institute/our-research/major-research-projects/creating-pathways-prevention>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.realwell.org.au/>