

# YEAR IN REVIEW

2013-14



**Parenting Research Centre**  
*raising children well*

## Introduction

In 2013-14 the Parenting Research Centre's people, projects and partnerships continued bridging the gap from science to service in the fields of parenting and parenting support.

Through a mixture of continuing projects, significant new work and ongoing recognition of the organisation's knowledge exchange and implementation capabilities we continued delivering on our five-year goals to realise the vision of skilled parenting, thriving children.

Our 2013-14 achievements in relation to these goals are outlined in the following sections:

- Achievements in supporting families in parenting their children
- Achievements in enhancing the capacity of child and family services
- Achievements in informing policy and practice
- Achievements in building scientific knowledge of parenting to drive innovation

Additionally, we have included a selection of case studies that highlight the contribution our work makes to improved childhood outcomes. The Annual Financial Report for the year ending 30 June 2014 is also available on our website: [2013-14 Financial Report](#).

We thank our passionate Board and Human Research Ethics Committee members, tireless staff and inspiring partners for their contributions to our achievements in 2013-14 and their shared commitment to helping parents raise happy, healthy children.

## Achievements in supporting families in parenting their children

The Parenting Research Centre (PRC) promotes the importance of parenting and provides practical help and support for families raising children.

Our achievements in 2013-14 included the following:

1. [Raising Children Network](#) – of which the Parenting Research Centre is a founding partner – continued to expand its reach and recognition as a trusted, reliable and non-judgemental source of information to inform parent's decision making. A 25% increase in website usage culminated in four million individual visits to the website for the year, 40% of which came from a mobile device.
2. The [MyTime](#) program supported 3869 parents and carers of children with disabilities, across approximately 250 active MyTime groups.
3. The [smalltalk](#) program improved vulnerable children's home-learning environments by supporting 17 service providers in delivering the supported playgroups program to 1600 new families. *smalltalk* outcomes throughout the year included improvements in the following areas: parental verbal responsiveness, home activities with child, parental global self-efficacy and levels of psychological distress.

## CASE STUDY

### Grow and Learn Together

Children are developing every day, every moment, everywhere.

It's the everyday interactions and relationships that children have with the important people in their lives that helps their development and shapes the way they see the world.

Parents and carers are learning all the time too, and often looking for reassurance and information about how their children are developing and what things they can do to help development.

[Grow and Learn Together](http://raisingchildren.net.au) is a free online resource available on Raising Children Network ([raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au)) to help parents and carers of children between birth and eight years understand what's happening for children as they grow and develop.

Videos and on-screen text show how to promote children's healthy development and learning by:

- providing opportunities for physical, imaginative and social play
- promoting communication and language development through talking, reading, singing and storytelling
- boosting confidence
- using attention and warmth to help children feel secure and loved.

Grow and Learn Together is accessible on mobile phone, tablet and desktop computer, making it ideal for parents needing information anywhere, anytime.

## Achievements in enhancing the capacity of child and family services

Through a genuine exchange with the users of research, the Parenting Research Centre builds the capacity of community services to improve child outcomes through effective parenting support.

In 2013-14 our work in enhancing the capacity of child and family services included the following projects across Australia:

### National

1. Healthy Start, a national strategy for children of parents with learning difficulties, set about debunking misconceptions around parents with a learning difficulty, and contributing in a range of ways to evidence-informed practice, support service and policy planning in Australia.

An animated Healthy Start video addressed a number of myths relating to parents with learning difficulties, and offered simple messages explaining that, with the right support, people with learning difficulties can and do parent well. A range of other evidence summaries and resources were published on [www.healthystart.net.au](http://www.healthystart.net.au).

The strategy also published key findings from a large scale study of the prevalence of parents with intellectual disabilities in Australia and documented their family, social and cultural circumstances. A technical report – the first of three from the study – highlighted disadvantages faced by an estimated 17,000 Australian parents with learning difficulties and their families. Challenges include those relating to employment, income and general health and wellbeing. This study was based on in-depth analysis of national data sets from partners including the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Federal Government and Centrelink.

2. Through collaboration with The Benevolent Society the PRC finalised a set of tools that incorporated evidence-based strategies to encourage a resilience-led approach to service delivery in child, family and community programs. This work resulted in the production of free and publicly available [Professional Practice Guides](#) that help practitioners work with children and families more effectively.
3. The PRC joined an initiative to improve longer-term recovery of Victorians with severe mental illness by addressing their parenting role as a core part of their treatment. The PRC, together with [Monash University](#) and through funding from the [Mental Institute Research Fund](#), is building the capacity of adult mental health professionals and other community service providers to engage and work with parents.

## Victoria

4. The PRC won a competitive tender to systematically support a whole-of-Victorian-government service reform initiative: [Streamlining Antenatal-4 Services for Vulnerable Children and Families](#). The Streamlining project aims to develop and effectively implement an integrated and coordinated service delivery model that is collaborative and family-centred and better able to prevent and intervene early in response to vulnerability in early childhood. Our work involves:
  - Examination of the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing preventative, early intervention and targeted service system for vulnerable children antenatal to four years of age and their families.
  - Development and provision of comprehensive implementation support to effectively implement an evidence-informed, outcomes-focused model for streamlined, collaborative practice that can be flexibly applied and tailored to the local areas.
  - Evaluation of the model and its implementation.

This activity involves the PRC working in partnership with Deakin University, The University of Melbourne and the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. As a result of this work, the Streamlining Antenatal-4 Services for Vulnerable Children project is being trialled in three local government areas. This important work is one part of a suite of Victorian reforms resulting from the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2012 report.

5. The Victorian Government Department of Human Services engaged the PRC to consult on and develop family service planning tools for adoption under the [Services Connect](#) initiative. This work involved PRC consulting with service providers to develop a framework leading to 'one plan' per family; consistent with the Victorian Government's new model of human services delivery that places the needs, goals and aspirations of families at the centre of the Department's work.
6. The PRC supported [Doveton College](#) to implement the Making Moments Matter program and associated parent engagement strategies that aim to make a tangible difference in this socially disadvantaged area.

## New South Wales

7. The PRC focused on promoting, developing and building the organisational and program capacity of a unit within the [Wesley Mission Brighter Futures](#) program in New South Wales (NSW). This program provides group services for parents in the western Sydney area of NSW, creating a foundation for future service development and planning. Six workshops were held over a period of 12 months with Wesley Mission's regional leadership team in order to build on field application from session to session. The workshops focused on the following areas:



- clarifying target population/s
  - codifying outcomes
  - determining indicators and targets for intervention
  - understanding and aligning service scope and other organisational contextual factors
  - designing service/intervention components based on evidence-based/evidence-informed programs/practices
  - measuring performance and outcomes indicators
  - developing a program logic model.
8. The PRC partnered with the National SafeCare Training and Research Center (NSCTRC) of Georgia State University, USA, and the NSW Government Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to support a trial of [SafeCare](#). This international parenting program has been shown to be effective in reducing rates of child abuse and neglect. SafeCare is an evidence-based program for parents with young children who are at risk of maltreatment. It teaches parents to do the following:
- have positive and effective interactions with their children
  - prevent and treat illnesses and maximise parental health-care skills
  - maintain hazard-free and safe homes for children.
- This partnership was made possible with funding from FACS and will be delivered as a pilot project in several locations in NSW. The PRC is working in an intermediary role to facilitate and direct effective implementation of the project.
9. As part of major reforms to the [NSW child protection system](#) the PRC helped the Department of Community Services consider how to implement practice improvements through better use of specialist child protection and clinical staff. The PRC consulted with nearly 80 Departmental staff and this culminated in providing the Department's senior executive group with recommendations to improve structures, reporting arrangements and resource management in the practice support area.
10. UnitingCare Burnside continued its partnership with the PRC, enabling ongoing implementation of an evidence-informed [practice framework for working with families affected by domestic violence](#). This work included:
- an intensive focus on field practice and practitioner skill development
  - development of structures and supports to facilitate effective implementation such as supervisory and systems oversight and development
  - collection and analysis of preliminary data
  - initial continuous quality assurance processes.
11. The PRC contributed to an evaluation of the NSW Government's '[Keep Them Safe](#)' child protection strategy. As part of a consortium led by the University of New South Wales Social

Policy Research Centre, our work contributed to a synthesis of evaluations informing overall recommendations.

## **Northern Territory and Western Australia**

12. The PRC continued its work as Implementation Support Partner for the Australian Government [Intensive Family Support Service](#) (IFSS) in the Northern Territory. IFSS is an intensive evidenced-informed service model that is tailored to the individual needs of families at risk of child neglect. It aims to deliver specific outcomes, including: adequate supervision of children and meeting of their basic, physical health, emotional, developmental and education needs.

In its Implementation Support Partner capacity the PRC works with IFSS provider agencies to embed key implementation components that support the effective and high quality delivery of the IFSS model. These implementation activities build practice and service system capacity to tackle child neglect, including:

- developing and implementing staff training
- providing high quality on-the-job coaching focused on worker skill development and attainment of client outcomes
- ensuring adherence to the practices and principles of the program
- designing and utilising a decision-support data system, including:
  - monitoring achievement of outcomes
  - designing and facilitating systems level processes and protocols that support effective service delivery
  - assembling and maintaining stakeholder leadership groups that monitor implementation and undertake continuous quality improvement efforts
  - Assembling and maintaining local leadership teams that monitor day to day implementation at each local site.

13. Parkerville Children and Youth Care (Western Australia) engaged the PRC to provide implementation support to enable the effective implementation of the [Child Advocacy Centre service model](#) that supports child victims of abuse and neglect, and their families. The first part of this project has examined stakeholders' views of the model and barriers and enablers to its use. This information will be used to develop and evaluate a tailored implementation strategy to support the ongoing use of this multidisciplinary service model with high fidelity.
14. The PRC continued to support the implementation of evidence-informed [practice models in the Western Australia based family services agency, Wanslea](#). An implementation team was established in 2013 and delegated with responsibility to work towards full and effective implementation of the practice framework. In 2014, this team worked on a variety of actions focused on one or more core components of implementation and strategically applying Continuous Quality Assurance processes to facilitate on-going implementation and achievement of positive client outcomes. Some highlights included:



- The PRC appointed a Perth-based Implementation Specialist during the year, with a focus on developing the clinical capacity of Wanslea's coaching and supervisory functions. PRC staff work onsite at Wanslea's service centres two days per week.
- Wanslea and the PRC continued to develop and enhance the Wanslea Practice Framework, adding evidenced informed content on addressing and planning for family safety, enhancing parental coping skills, parenting skills training, and increasing social supports.
- PRC supported efforts towards the development and utilization of data in decision support systems throughout Wanslea's Child and Family Service Unit. This included regular review of data reports for planning by the Implementation Team and also by individual workers and teams.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **Implementation and adaption in action**

Faye Parriman is a Yumatji woman from the Nhanda tribe of the wildflower country in Western Australia; she is also identified as a Noongar woman from the Ballardong tribe south west of Perth. Faye is a Practice Coach in the Parenting Research Centre Intensive Family Support Services team.

With a passion for overcoming communication barriers that can adversely impact relationships between vulnerable families and service providers, Faye has utilised her artistic skills to develop a practical resource to overcome this obstacle.

The 'Yarning Mat' is a visual resource that enables people to talk about their lives and concerns for children in a safe, non-shaming, practical and culturally sensitive way.

"As a young child raised under Western Australia's Native Welfare Laws I sometimes struggled with communication and voicing my concerns," Faye said.

"Sadly, in my professional experience working with vulnerable families and complex issues I have seen many examples of these same communication barriers jeopardising better outcomes for families.

"After joining the Intensive Family Support Services team I had the idea to use a visual resource, the Yarning Mat, to assist in meaningful conversations between workers and families," she said.

The Yarning Mat represents different components of family life in Aboriginal communities and the child rearing ways of a child within the family and community in which they live.

This practical resource is proving invaluable in facilitating improved dialogue between Intensive Family Support Services team members and the families they serve.

## Achievements in informing policy and practice

As scientific knowledge of what works in parenting and family support increases the Parenting Research Centre assists policymakers, organisational leaders and practitioners in overcoming the challenge to effectively use research in policy formulation.

In 2013-14 we achieved the following:

15. The PRC completed a significant body of work for the [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#). The Commission, one of the largest of its kind, will make a major contribution to improving child protection laws, policies and practices in Australia and the PRC was honoured to provide advice and support to the Commission's deliberations. The largest of several PRC projects for the Commission was a study of the implementation of nearly 300 recommendations from 67 previous Australian inquiries of interest to the Royal Commission. The study results will provide guidance to the Commission on the barriers and facilitators to inquiry-led reform as well as an opportunity to learn from previous inquiry processes and outcomes. The PRC also undertook scoping reviews of:

- the literature on the prevention of sexual abuse of children in out-of-home care
- evaluations of pre-employment screening practices for child-related work that aim to prevent child sexual abuse.

Additional PRC work involved reviewing the history of the Australian operations of a number of religious orders and, in collaboration with the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, developing a framework for undertaking qualitative analysis of the Royal Commission's Private Sessions. This multifaceted program of work provided the Royal Commission with a suite of material to inform important aspects of its work during the first two years of its operation.

16. Our collaboration with the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health culminated in a rapid evidence review on the evidence base for approaches to [supporting children who are exposed to trauma associated with child abuse and neglect](#). The report<sup>1</sup> explored implications for policymakers, services and professionals aiming to meet the needs of these children and recommended actions to:

- improve awareness of accepted definitions of trauma and related concepts, and of evidence and related concepts
- increase awareness, adoption and effective implementation of evidence-based approaches shown to improve outcomes associated with trauma exposure associated with abuse and neglect

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health and Parenting Research Centre (2013). *Approaches targeting outcomes for children exposed to trauma arising from abuse and neglect – Evidence, practice and implications. Report prepared for the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*. Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health and Parenting Research Centre: Authors.

- increase use of quality assurance and quality improvement processes within child and family service organisations to allow for ongoing, built-in evaluations of service delivery
- increase independent evaluations of new or emerging approaches that are being implemented within child and family service organisations that target outcomes associated with trauma exposure
- increase the development and evaluation of approaches with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

17. The PRC was commissioned by the Families Commission of New Zealand to conduct an [evidence review on intervention effectiveness for parents of vulnerable children](#)<sup>2</sup> aged up to six years who have been maltreated or who are at risk of maltreatment. Using a Rapid Evidence Assessment methodology, the PRC employed stringent criteria to identify parenting interventions evaluated internationally that could more confidently be called effective for improving maltreatment and other outcomes for this population. To provide the Families Commission with information about the characteristics and practices these interventions shared, the PRC conducted a common elements analysis, drawing together the delivery and content details common amongst the more effective interventions.
18. The Community Services Directorate of the Australian Capital Territory Government commissioned the services of the Parenting Research Centre and the University of Melbourne to undertake an [evidence review of best practice in out of home care](#)<sup>3</sup>. The review focused on national and international research in out-of-home care and highlighted current and emerging interventions in this field. The review was a key piece of work for that government's development of a five-year out-of-home care strategy.
19. A new organisation – [Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety](#) (ANROWS) – engaged the PRC to conduct a scoping review of the current state of evidence for the use of knowledge translation strategies to translate evidence into practice in this area.
20. The [Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning](#) saw the PRC publicly push for this sector to extend its influence to the early home-learning environment and engage parents more effectively.

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<sup>2</sup> Macvean, M.; Mildon, R.; Shlonsky, A.; Devine, B.; Falkiner, J.; Trajanovska, T. & D'Esposito, F. (2013). *Evidence review: An analysis of the evidence for parenting interventions for parents of vulnerable children aged up to six years*, Melbourne, Victoria, Parenting Research Centre.

<sup>3</sup> Shlonsky, A.; Kertesz, M.; Macvean, M.; Petrovic, Z.; Devine, B.; Falkiner, J.; D'Esposito, F. & Mildon, M. (2013). *Evidence review: Analysis of the evidence for Out-of-Home Care*, Melbourne, Victoria, Parenting Research Centre and The University of Melbourne

21. The PRC provided input into the Victorian Government's [Parenting Support Strategy](#). This work involved:

- overviewing what the evidence says about effective parenting support
- identifying strengths and gaps in the Victorian parenting support system
- improving the capacity of professionals working with parents in early childhood settings.

Input from the PRC was reflected in the Victorian Government's Parenting Support Strategy released in October 2014.

22. A Transport Accident Commission and VicRoads television commercial aired, reflecting evidence provided by the Parenting Research Centre on how to engage parents in supporting their young drivers. Our contribution to this '[Get through the Red together](#)' campaign exemplified the role this organisation can play across a broad range of sectors in improving outcomes for young people through better engagement with parents.

## CASE STUDY

### Informing early childhood learning policy

The Parenting Research Centre made a public submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning and contended that early childhood services could be more effective in the provision of:

- *parenting support*: activity that involves supporting the development of strong parent-child relationships and positive parent-child interaction
- *parent support*: activity that strengthens parental wellbeing, enhancing parental coping and reducing negative stress on family relationships.

Drawing on previous PRC research into improving early home-learning environments and the impact of poor quality jobs on parents' mental health and child outcomes, our organisation recommended:

- greater investment in developing worker skills in engaging parents and holding constructive conversations
- ensuring that workers in early childhood education and care can competently and reliably demonstrate behaviours known to promote child development and can coach parents in using these behaviours at home
- using early childhood services to become parenting resource providers, thereby connecting parents with timely access to reliable information relevant to their individual circumstances.

## Achievements in building scientific knowledge of parenting to drive innovation

The Parenting Research Centre ensures the relevance of its work by building knowledge of the factors that shape modern parenting and understanding of what effective parenting is.

In 2013-14 we undertook the following projects:

23. PRC expertise was called upon by the [Burnet Institute](#) and [VicHealth](#) to help investigate childhood obesity prevention in disadvantaged areas. The research focuses on community capacity building to enhance healthy lifestyles and final results will be translated into articles for the Raising Children Network.
24. The journal article 'How parents' income, time and job quality affect children's health and development'<sup>4</sup>, published in the *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, raised significant questions about how we can better support parents in the task of raising children. Drawing on the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the paper confirmed that children's healthy development is affected by family income, by parents' hours of work and by the quality of parents' jobs.
25. The VicHealth-funded research project on parental fear and [independent child mobility](#) continued. Major findings included the fact that parents are not bubble wrapping their children, and that a range of social factors influence the level of independence parents grant to children.
26. The development and piloting of the Take a Breath program continued. This joint initiative with the [Murdoch Childrens Research Institute](#) aims to develop approaches that best support parents of children with serious childhood illness/injury.

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholson, Jan M; Strazdins, Lyndall; Brown, Judith E and Bittman, Michael. How parents' income, time and job quality affect children's health and development [online]. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2012: 505-525.



## **CASE STUDY**

### **Promoting parental workforce participation isn't enough to reduce effects of social disadvantage**

Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the PRC study on how parents' income, time and job quality affect children's health and development demonstrated the transmission of socioeconomic disadvantage from parents to children in the early years of children's lives. The study also presented the following findings:

- Confirmed that income, the hours that parents work and the quality of parents' jobs impact on family life and children's healthy development.
- Demonstrated that job combinations that include long hours across both mothers and fathers and poorer quality jobs are associated with reduced time in developmentally important activities with children, elevated rates of parental mental health problems and socio-emotional difficulties for children.

These research findings highlighted the need for social and economic policies to move beyond simplistic notions of promoting parental workforce participation as a way of reducing the adverse effects of social disadvantage.

## Leadership and Governance

### Our Board

In 2013-14 the PRC Board included:

- Mr John Lawrence (Chair)
- Ms Juliette Alush
- Dr Lindsay Heywood
- Mr Craig Heiner (*July to September 2013*)
- Ms Alana Killen
- Mr Tim McEvoy
- Mr Gregory Molyneux
- Mr Tass Mousaferiadis
- Professor Ian Palmer
- Dr Alison Roberts

### Our Executive Team

In 2013-14 the PRC Executive Team included:

- Mr Warren Cann, Chief Executive Officer
- Dr Julie Green, Executive Director, Raising Children Network
- Ms Annette Michaux, Director, Social Policy and Strategy
- Dr Robyn Mildon, Director, Knowledge Exchange and Implementation
- Professor Jan Nicholson, Director, Research (*July to December 2013*)
- Mr Christian Thompson, Director, Operations



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