

‘Hubbing’ Our Way Out of Crisis

Rethinking Child Protection Through Upstream Support

Prof Sharon Goldfeld AM

Panel facilitator

CCCH, RCH · MCRI

Dr Suzy Honisett

Research & evidence base

MCRI · Hubs Network

Cassie Bishop

Practice-based insights

Child & Family Hub practitioner

Tracy Beaton

Government levers

Principal Commissioner, CCYP (Vic)

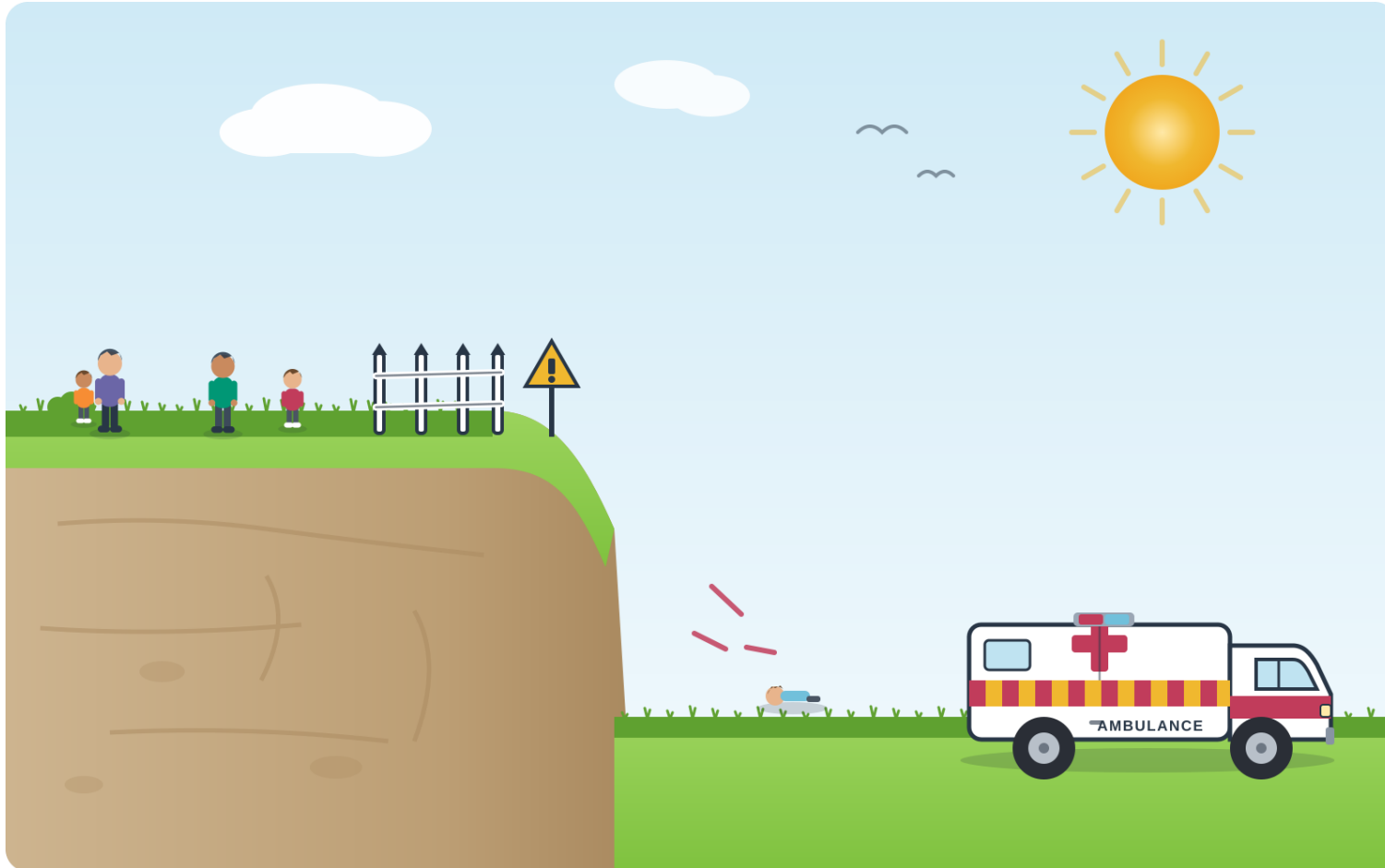
Andrew Russo

International perspectives

Family Support Networks (USA)

An ambulance at the bottom of the cliff

We too often wait until a child is in crisis before we act. Prevention means building a fence at the top.



FENCE AT THE TOP

Prevention & primary support

- Early, stigma-free, community-based help
- Reaches families before harm occurs
- Keeps children safely with family



AMBULANCE AT THE BOTTOM

Crisis & tertiary response

- Acts once a child is in crisis
- Costly, late and often too little
- Late intervention: A\$22.3 billion / year

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To support children and families early, we should invest more

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THE RESEARCH & EVIDENCE BASE

Dr Suzy Honisett

Murdoch Children's Research Institute · National Child and Family Hubs Network

What the evidence tells us...

Universal

Non-stigmatising front doors for every family

Integrated

One stop across health, education & social care

Digital

eHubs extend reach and earlier engagement



What is a Child and Family Hub?

A 'one stop' for families to support child development and improve child and family health and wellbeing.

01

Equitable access

to a range of health, education and social services, using a family-centred approach.

02

Parental capacity & connection

opportunities to build parenting capacity and for families to build social connections.



Family-centred & relational

Built around the whole family, not a single service.

Many non-stigmatising front doors:



Early childhood services



Primary schools



Primary care



Community & NGO



Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations



Virtual / eHub



Safer children, fewer paths to crisis



fewer contacts with welfare
after access to integrated 'one-
stop' centres



Child safety & protection outcomes reported across Hub studies



Reduced child-welfare encounters



Reduced physical and sexual abuse



Reduced spanking / harsh discipline



Increased neglect reporting (potential better
detection)



Increased safe sleeping



Fewer accidents & injuries

Green = risk reduced · Gold = detection improved (a protective signal, not more harm).



Why it matters: Hubs act on the drivers of maltreatment - isolation, adversity and unmet need - so fewer families reach the point of statutory child protection.



Development, behaviour & home environment



Behaviour & development

- Fewer behavioural problems
- Greater social competence & skills
- Improved externalising behaviours and oppositional defiance
- Buffering effect on abuse & emotional regulation



Home environment

- Less household chaos
- Improved warmth and stimulation
- Better parent–child interaction
- Improved parental mental health & reduced stress



Learning & education

- Improved school readiness
- Improved cognitive development
- Improved vocabulary and language
- Improved academic performance

The through-line: a calmer, warmer home and a confident parent are the strongest everyday protections a child has — and the outcomes Hubs most reliably shift.



Designed for equity - and a strong return

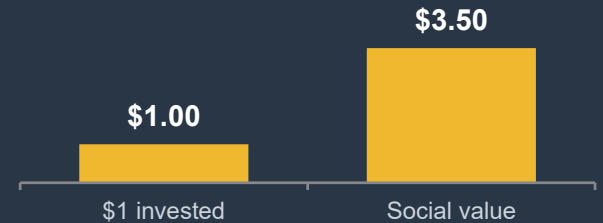
60%

of Hubs sit in areas of need (low SEIFA, high child vulnerability)

470+

Hubs across every Australian state & territory to build on

Social return on investment



The equity dividend: benefits are largest for those with the least

- Sure Start's health and attainment gains were concentrated in the most disadvantaged households.
- Head Start's impact was greatest for the highest-risk children - deep poverty, teenage mothers, special needs.

\$3.50 back for every \$1 invested and, unlike crisis response, the return compounds as children grow.

PRACTICE-BASED INSIGHTS FROM THE FRONTLINE

Cassie Bishop

Child and Family Hub practitioner, Benevolent Society

What makes a Hub feel safe, accessible and meaningful - from the people who run them and the families who use them?

- The lived, day-to-day reality of relational, family-centred practice
- How trust is built with families who don't engage elsewhere
- What frontline teams need to keep the 'front door' open

GOVERNMENT LEVERS TO SCALE UPSTREAM MODELS

Tracy Beaton

Principal Commissioner, Commission for Children and Young People (Victoria)

What will it take, in policy and funding, to move prevention from the margins to the centre of the system?

- 35+ years across child protection, mental health and clinical practice
- Examines the levers government can pull to fund and scale upstream models
- Connects system reform to safer, better outcomes for children

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FEASIBILITY & IMPACT

Andrew Russo

International Association of Family Support Networks (United States)

How do integrated family-support Hubs perform across different countries and systems - and what is similar?

- Draws on 3,000+ US Family Resource Centres serving 2M+ people a year
- Shares what makes community-based family support feasible at scale
- Brings an international evidence lens to the Australian conversation



Three questions to reimagine the system

1



The investment case

What would an official, or government decision-maker need to see, hear or believe to shift funding upstream – and who in this room has tried that argument?

2



System transformation at scale

If you redesigned your current system with a focus on prevention and the whole child, with Hubs at the centre, what would you keep, remove, and what would worry you?

3



Access & what thriving looks like

What should a non-stigmatising/non-judgemental universal entry really need to look like for a family?

Reimagine what a system designed for prevention and thriving could look like — and what it would take to make it possible.



CROSSING OUR MENTAL FENCES

It is the burden on good leadership to make the currently unthinkable thinkable, to question the obvious, to make the present systems unavailable as options for the future.

The boundaries in our minds create fear about the consequences of crossing over to the undiscovered country. But the possibilities we really need do not lie on this side of our mental fences.

Once crossed, these fences will look as foolish in retrospect as the beliefs of other times now often look to us.

Donald M. Berwick · 1998

Thank you

Let's build systems designed for prevention and thriving - and keep the front door open for every family.



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Murdoch Children's Research Institute · National Child and Family Hubs Network



More information

childandfamilyhubs.org.au

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