

Connecting the dots...

In a sustainable children's services network

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Wheatbelt is proud to have been awarded a contract to develop and begin implementation of a Regional Children's Services Plan for the Wheatbelt. This plan forms part of the state wide initiative of the Department of Local Government and Communities to develop specific plans for each of the nine regions in Western Australia (WA). Once completed these region specific plans will form the basis for an overall State-wide plan.

Funding for this project is provided by the Department of Local Government and Communities through the Regional Community Child Care Development Fund (RCCCDF).

The Regional Community Child Care Development Fund was established to support the development of sustainable models of regional community-managed education and care that meet the needs of families living in regional Western Australia. Funding of \$9.3 million has been provided by the Royalties for Regions budget over four years, which will support the transformation and longer-term sustainability of regional community-managed education and care services. The program recognises the challenges often faced by education and care providers in regional Western Australia in providing services as a result of distance, isolation, reliance on volunteers or lack of funds. The fund includes an operational grants program, a strategic grants program, support for the inclusion of children with special needs and support for children's services regional planning.

Providing education and care services for children in regional and rural areas is challenging. We have to contend with distance, smaller numbers of children, isolation, limited resources and staff training needs. The reliance on usually voluntary community based management committees to manage these services within the National Quality Framework has been an ongoing issue that impacts on the delivery and ongoing running of services, particularly in regional areas.

A summary of the main activities we will be undertaking are as follows:

- We will produce a Regional Children's Services Plan and provide input into the development of a state-wide plan. To do this we will work with Education and Care services (Childcare), any other services, initiatives and networks that support families and children in the Wheatbelt. These include Early Year's Networks, Playgroups, Parenting services and Aboriginal Early childhood.
- We will identify, work with (and develop if needed), sustainable interagency structures and networks to ensure collaboration and foster partnerships amongst organisations and agencies to ensure better outcomes for our Wheatbelt children.
- We will provide a Regional Children's Services Plan Implementation report.

The Regional Children's Services Plan will include a comprehensive implementation Plan and will be completed by 31 October 2014. During 2015 RDA Wheatbelt will focus attention on the implementation of the Plan and the project will conclude with the submission of the Regional Children's Services Plan Implementation report outlining key actions undertaken and completion and/or progress on agreed strategies, on 31 October 2015.

Broad and comprehensive consultation will be a key component of our approach to developing the Plan and we encourage anyone with an interest in assisting with this work to contact Glenice to ensure that they are included in all correspondence regarding the progress of the project. Surveys, workshops and consultations will be advertised locally well in advance through the usual channels: shires, newsletters, local centres, playgroups, CRCs etc.

Please take the opportunity to be involved if you are able and see if we can come up with some innovative solutions to help our Wheatbelt work better for all of us!

RDA Wheatbelt

