



**ACT Children's Strategy**

**Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age**

# Hearing young children's voices

Children's Services Branch  
ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services

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## Executive summary

The University of Melbourne's Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) has produced this report for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government as part of the consultations on the *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Children's Plan*. It reports on the *Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age Project* that formed part of the *ACT Children's Plan* consultations. This report describes the aims, background, methods and outcomes of this project.

The consultation project was designed to support the *ACT Children's Plan* consultation process by enhancing the ability of early childhood staff within the ACT to:

- encourage children families and early childhood staff to participate in the ACT Children's Plan consultation process
- enact the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in a practical way that other early childhood staff and families can emulate
- enhance the life of families and children in the ACT by increasing their awareness of children's roles and perspectives in their everyday lives
- enable early childhood staff to improve their capacity to relate children's ideas and perspectives to their everyday work
- build the capacity of early childhood staff to share their knowledge about young children's rights with children, families and the early childhood community in the ACT
- generate an archive of information about a practical, strengths-based approach to working with young children and their families.

The Project was enacted in several interconnected phases:

- a targeted literature review that addressed why is it important to give children a voice in planning and what it means in practice to give children a voice.
- an action learning project facilitated by the CEIEC team that was designed to build the capacity of early childhood staff who participated in the project to consult with children birth to eight on the *ACT Children's Plan*. This was conducted over a six-week period during September and October 2003. It included 3 full day training days facilitated by the CEIEC team, email briefings and support materials for participants. Day 1 introduced participants to the principles of consulting with young children ethically and to the *ACT Children's Plan*. Day 2 supported participants to plan their consultation process with children in their services. On Day 3 participants explored and shared the key themes and issues in what they had learnt from children through their consultations with them.
- evaluation of participants' learning through the project

- data analysis and report writing by the CEIEC team.

The CEIEC project team drew on current thinking within the literature reviewed on how to consult with young children in designing the detailed methodology of the Project. This current thinking emphasises the child as a competent constructor of meaning, able to report and communicate valid views on the world and able to actively participate in decision-making. In overview, the literature emphasised the importance of:

- ethical engagement with children throughout the consultation process
- best practices principles of listening carefully to children
- being closely attuned to different cues to hear the voices of children of different ages and verbal abilities
- using multi-method techniques to help children to express themselves
- documenting children's voices to share them with others.

The literature also emphasised the importance of children's right to participate in decisions that directly affect them and the responsibilities of those who plan policy for children to actively engage with them in policy development.

The action learning project's methodology and content are detailed in Chapter 3 of this report. In overview, the content of the action learning program for early childhood staff within the ACT that formed the core of the project was designed to help participating staff to focus on implementing the findings from the literature review concerning:

- ethical engagement with children, including gaining informed consent from parents and children
- best practices principles for listening to children, including the place of observation and photographic documentation for non-verbal children
- using different cues to hear the voices of children of different ages and verbal abilities
- using multi-method techniques appropriate to the verbal capacities of the children to help them to express their views and ideas through text and images
- documenting children's voices as a basis for data collection.

It also focused on the strategies and processes for designing and implementing a consultation project using the core consultation questions.

Sixteen children's services and a total of 137 children participated in the project. The majority (75 of 137) of children were between 3 and 5 years old; a small minority (8 of 137) were two years old or less. Details of the cultural background of the children were only available for forty children and of that forty; the majority (27 of 40) had an Anglo-Australian background. The children who participated in the Project attended a diversity of services; and several of the children attended more than one type of service. Types of services attended by the child participants included family day care, play group, long day care, primary school, preschool, a special education unit (school for children with additional needs) and a women's refuge.

Chapter 4 summarises and discusses the data from the consultations with the 137 children aged birth to eight years old who participated in the project. The children were asked three questions derived from the broader consultations about the ACT Children's Strategy. These questions were:

1. What do the children think that they need for their wellbeing? (The practitioners who consulted with children used several words for 'wellbeing', including good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited.)
2. What do the children value and wish for in their lives?
3. What makes the children feel valued?

Children were invited to express their ideas and feelings in response to these questions using multi-media. Data generated by the children in response to these questions included paintings, drawings, a CDROM, poems, audio-tapes and text. Adults also gathered data from children in response to these questions through field notes of discussions with and observations of children, photographs and audio-recordings. In the spirit of offering children a voice through this project children's artwork and texts have been included throughout the report to illustrate the different ways in which they represented their views and feelings in the consultation process.

Those children who participated in the project identified what they needed for their wellbeing, and what they wished for in relation to three domains of their life:

- family and home. Children in this Project highlighted the prime importance to them of safe and caring families in their lives. They wanted time with their families and it was key people within their families that made them feel safe. A home in which members of the family have time together and time apart was also important for many of the children. These needs were expressed in different ways by different groups of children. For those children in a Women's Refuge being reunited with their family and having a place that was their family home were the things that they wanted most strongly. For those children who were living with their family in their family home maintaining the status quo was important.
- the early childhood curriculum. Children valued and enjoyed the opportunity to have a say in things that affect them. They also demonstrated their capacity to express their views on those things that affect their daily lives. This has direct implications for how early childhood programs take decisions about programs for young children and the extent to which their voice is present in those programs. Children's desire for family, for friends, for play, for time with others and time by themselves, for home-like spaces in which they have choices and for sharing their ideas and having them documented link directly to questions of how best to design early childhood curriculum that values children and that supports their sense of wellbeing.
- the environs of Canberra and their local community. Children of different ages were clearly aware of the Canberra environs. The children valued space for play, meeting friends and being in nature. Having a safe environment was also important to the children.

Chapter 5 summarises adult participants' learning during the project. Two sets of data were sought from staff who participated in the project as part of the project evaluation. One set of data explores staff perspectives on the project during their participation. Kathrine Whitty (ACT Office of Child Care) gathered this data as part of her participation in the project. The other set of data consists of participants' evaluations of what they had learnt during the project. The CEIEC Project team gathered this data at the final training session. The feedback from centres and participants was incomplete, however, the combination of responses to Kathrine Whitty's mid-project survey, the evaluation forms and participants' reflections in the final training session show strongly that participants valued their participation in the Project highly and that it had increased their desire and their capacity to consult with young children. They had increased their respect for and knowledge about what young children can and do know and their capacity to express their views; and had noted how much children enjoyed expressing their ideas and views in the consultation process.

The report concludes with several suggestions that could guide a respectful and meaningful response by the ACT Government to the children and adults who participated in the project. It suggests short-term responses that include a formal thanks to all participants and the circulation of information to participants about how their work will be used by the government. It also highlights how the lessons from this project could be used to strengthen the capacity of early childhood staff to take a lead role in ongoing consultation with young children to secure their rights to participate in decision-making that affects their lives. Central to this is ongoing opportunities for professional learning and sharing of the processes and strategies developed in this project. Practical strategies have also been suggested that would enable the outcomes of the consultations to be shared with the participants, the wider early childhood community and the policy makers in the ACT. Each of these suggestions focuses on how the outcomes of this innovative project can be used to contribute to the *ACT Children's Plan* and in doing so also institutionalise processes and policies that will strengthen young children's rights within the ACT in the short and long term.

The young children who participated in this Project demonstrated their capacity to comment on a wide range of issues and policies that directly affect their lives and the lives of their families. In doing so, they powerfully, simply and often poignantly offered clear messages about what they value and wish for in their lives. Listening to children is the first step in enacting their rights. Responding respectfully and responsibly to what is offered is the second. The *ACT Children's Plan* and the consultations with young children that have formed part of it offers an important vehicle through which each of these steps has and can be realised.

## Introduction

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The University of Melbourne's Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) has produced this report for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government as part of the consultations on the *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Children's Plan*. The report was commissioned by the ACT Government's Children's Services Branch, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services to provide it with feedback on the Plan. The Children's Services Branch commissioned the CEIEC to design, deliver and report on an action learning program that would support early childhood staff within the ACT to consult with children from birth to eight years old as part of the *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Children's Plan*. This report describes the background, methods and outcomes of that action learning program process in what was called the *Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age Project*.

The *Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age Project* team consisted of Associate Professor Glenda MacNaughton, Ms Heather Lawrence and Ms Kylie Smith; and it was supported by Ms Janet Treweek, CEIEC Project Officer.

## The Project's origins and rationale

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The *Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age Project* was part of the consultation process for the *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Children's Plan*, through which the ACT Government intends to develop policies concerning children in the ACT aged between birth and 12 years old. The ACT Government outlined the vision, goals and principles of its Children's Plan in *The ACT Children's Plan: a Draft Discussion Paper*, which it launched in August 2003 (refer Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Vision and objectives of the ACT Government's Children's Plan and focus for consultation (Source: *The ACT Children's Plan: a Draft Discussion Paper*)

### **Vision**

All children in the ACT are given the best chance to achieve their full potential.

### **Objectives**

Children live in strong and supportive families and communities

Children achieve physical, cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing

Children are valued members of the community.

### **Focus of consultation (generally)**

Do you agree with the vision and objectives?

What would need to happen for the vision and objectives to be achieved?

## **Consulting with young children and the *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Children's Plan***

... to fail to consult or involve ...children and young people because of an assumed innocence is patronizing and it does not take into account their experiences or competence in making difficult decisions. (Willow, 1997, p. 12)

There is indisputable evidence that children's early experiences contribute to their later abilities and identities (see, for example, Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). This evidence compels us to reflect carefully on whether and how to enable young children to become active members a democratic society. In general, adults develop policies and practices for and on behalf of children. However, there are increasingly strong calls (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; National Youth Council of Ireland, 2001) to involve children – as a right - in developing policies that directly affect their lives. The *Australian Capital Territory Children's Plan* is the first occasion in Australia that government has formally

sought young children's views on a major government policy initiative. The Plan offers the ACT government the opportunity to include young children in the policy making process and the CEIEC project team congratulate and strongly support the ACT government's forward thinking and innovative initiative.

The principles underpinning democratic societies require that everyone – regardless of age – should be able to participate in civic life and so listening to young children is a prerequisite of a vigorous democratic society. By listening to children, adults can assist them to enact their right as citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives, giving them a stake in those decisions. Listening to young children helps them to build the skills and knowledge they need to be active citizens and gives them experience in participating in decision-making.

By listening to children, adults can align their actions with children's rights. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate in decision-making and to express their views about things that concern them. Article 12 of the Convention states that the child has the right:

... to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.

Adult individuals and institutions that enact such rights could create environments that are – in children's terms - 'child-friendly'. By listening to children, adults can understand why particular environments are more child-friendly than others and, in the process, enliven and extend their experience of the social world. Young children can tell adults a lot about what works for them in their daily lives and what would make them feel that their needs and perspectives are valued. Young children have views on subjects as diverse as playground design, early childhood curriculum and making the world a peaceful place; and they can make insightful and meaningful comments about what makes the world a better place for them to be in (see for example, MacNaughton 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Campbell et al, 2000; O'Kane, 2000, Clark, 2000).

## **The Consultation with Children Birth to Eight Project**

Part of the vision for the ACT Children's Plan was to ensure that children were actively involved in the consultation process. Through the *Consultation with Children Birth to Eight Project* (hereafter called 'the Project'), the ACT Children's Services Branch could enact this vision by enabling children between birth and eight - and those who work with them - to participate actively in the consultations about the ACT Children's Plan. The Project aimed to promote such active participation by enhancing the knowledge and skill base of ACT early childhood staff in a three-day training project as a means to:

- enable and encourage children, their families and early childhood staff in the ACT to participate in consultations about the ACT Children's Plan
- enable and encourage children, their families and early childhood staff in the ACT to enact the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in practical ways

- enhance the life of children their families and early childhood staff in the ACT by increasing their awareness of the role of children and of children’s perspectives in their everyday life
- enable and encourage early childhood staff in the ACT to improve their capacity to acknowledge children’s ideas and perspectives in their work
- enable and encourage early childhood staff in the ACT to share their understandings of young children’s rights with children, their families and the broader early childhood community in the ACT
- generate an archive of information about a practical, strengths-based approach to working with young children and their families.

In particular, the Project aimed to generate the following outcomes, each oriented to one or more aims of the Draft Discussion Paper:

- active engagement of specific children in the plan's consultation process (Vision p. 4 of the plan)
- information about what a child focussed environment feels like (p. 6). Specifically, information about what children birth to eight like about their current experiences and what they would like to happen in their early childhood environment.
- enactment at a beginning level of children's participation in matters affecting them, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (p. 8).

## **The context of Children’s Services in the ACT**

The ACT population is socio-economically and culturally diverse. Compared to the national average there are proportionately high levels of workforce participation (12% higher than the national average), educational attainment (9% higher than the national average), income and mobility and lower fertility rates for women represented in the territory (Women in the ACT, Chief Minister’s Department, 1999).

The ACT has approximately 380 children’s services including Government Preschools, Independent Preschools, Centre Based Services, Playschools, School Age Care services and Family Day Care Schemes (including Playgroups). The ages of the children in attendance at these services range from birth to 12 years of age (or the end of Primary School Attendance). All services, except the Government Preschools, are licensed under the ACT’s *Children and Young People Act, 1999*.

## Giving the competent child a voice as citizen: a review of the literature

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As part of the *Consultation with Children Birth to Eight Project*, the CEIEC team reviewed a targeted selection of the literature concerning young children's perspectives and voices. The review examined whether and how researchers have addressed two questions:

1. Why is it important to give children a voice in planning and what does it mean in practice?
2. How can we give children a voice in planning?

### **1. Why is it important to give children a voice in planning and what does it mean in practice?**

Giving children a voice means giving them a say in things that affect them (e.g. research about them, planning for them or decisions about them) *and* acknowledging that what the child says should be heard (Clark, 2000). The recent increased interest in giving children a voice in decisions about them and services for them has accompanied the emergence of new images of the young child, increased interest in enacting children's rights in the public sphere, and increased scientific knowledge about the importance of children's early experiences for their future as competent citizens.

#### ***New images of the young child***

New images of the young children as a competent maker and communicator of meanings have emerged from constructivist theories in developmental psychology and from a new sociology of childhood. In each area, researchers increasingly see children as competent constructors of meaning; as capable social actors, able to contribute valid and useful ideas to our social, cultural and political worlds and with a right to participate in it (O'Loughlin, 2001; Clarke, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000; Cannella, 1998; Wyness, 1996). As Alderson (2000) and MacNaughton (2000) each explain:

Recognising children as subjects rather than objects of research entails accepting that children can speak 'in their own right' and report valid views and experiences. (Alderson, 2000, p. 243)

The most potent source of information about young children's gender knowings are the children themselves. Accessing these knowings is the key to meaningful gender equity work with children. (MacNaughton, 2000, p.108)

These new images of the child challenge traditional ideas that young children are too innocent and/or immature to effectively comment on and contribute to decisions about

them or to our knowledge of our social world. The new images of young children emphasise three key ideas:

- young children can construct valid meanings about the world and their place in it
- young children know the world in alternative (not 'inferior') ways to adults
- young children's perspectives and insights can help adults to understand their experiences better.

Cannella (1998) illustrates this new thinking about young children when she calls for research about children that engages their voice:

The most critical voices that are silent in our constructions of early childhood education are the children with whom we work. Our constructions of research have not fostered methods that facilitate hearing their voices. (Cannella, 1998, p. 10)

Since the late 1990s, there has been an increasingly strong move to listen to young children's voices and perspectives in early childhood research and to build early childhood practices that include children's voices. For example, Australian researchers have highlighted young children's perspectives on issues as diverse as migration, (Candy & Butterworth, 1998), literacy (Martello, 1999), social networks (Corrie & Leito, 1999), 'race' and gender equity (MacNaughton, 2001a, b, c) and peace (Campbell et al, 2001).

### ***Increased interest in enacting children's rights***

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child made children's rights legally binding in the same way as other (adult) human rights, including the right to have a voice in decisions about them. The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the Convention unanimously on 20 November 1989 and on 26 January 1990, 61 countries signed it. The Convention proclaims that children have the right to enjoy leisure, recreation, and cultural activities and to enjoy and practice their own culture, religion, and language without fear of persecution or discrimination (Article 31). Each signatory to the Convention pledges that all its citizens have access to primary, secondary and higher education, together with vocational guidance and that discipline in schools respects the child's dignity (Article 28). The Convention advocates education that emphasis children's personal, intellectual and physical development; that fosters awareness and understanding of the roles of parents and of the importance of cultural identity, language and values; and that prepares children for a responsible life in society (Article 29) (See Ackroyd & Pilkingham, 1999).

The Convention's principles intersect with new images of the child and with the concern to include children's perspectives and voices in research. The effect is to emphasize the need to consider how to include and acknowledge young children's voices in the policy making process. As Christensen and James (2000) explain we need to treat children as social actors:

[We need to treat children] as social actors in their own right in contexts where, traditionally, they have been denied those rights of participation and their voices have remained unheard. (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 2)

Similarly, Dahlberg et al (1999) caution adults against imposing their knowledge on children, as such imposition can diminish children. Their concern echoes Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees the child's right to be heard and to express opinions. Dahlberg et al express their concern thus:

This is part of a wider ethical project of establishing a culture where the children are seen as human beings in their own right, as worth listening to, where we do not impose our own knowledge and categorizations before children have posed their questions and made their own hypotheses. (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p. 137)

### ***The importance of children's early experiences***

The importance of children's early experiences for their long term growth and development is well established in the international research literature and it is now being heard and in some cases being acted on by policy makers. For instance, in Australia, the late 1990s and early 2000s state and federal government departments responsible for services for families and young children rushed to respond to growing evidence (e.g. Bowman et al, 2001) that children's experience in the first years of life affects their educational success, personal development and wellbeing (Lindsey, 1998; Joseph, 1999) and is linked with criminality.

The National Academy of Sciences advises the USA federal government on a variety of scientific and technical issues and their publication *Eager to learn* (Bowman et al, 2001) is the result of a 3 year study by 17 early childhood experts appointed by the National Academy of Sciences. The authors undertook an extensive, cross-disciplinary review of the research literature on early childhood and their Preface makes their impetus plain:

The last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an outpouring of research on cognition and learning, child development, and the social and cultural context of learning. One clear message to emerge from this explosion of knowledge is the prodigious enthusiasm and competence for learning shown by young children. (p. vii)

Wise (2001) suggests that combating economic and social disadvantage in the early years requires 'supportive social environments that encourage healthy development'; 'positive social interactions'; 'positive connections between family and community'; 'community-based support for families'; and 'programs that enhance development'. For Wise:

The approach advocated here is based on a philosophical shift in child welfare thinking, beyond child rescue and family strengthening to that of community-building ... (defined as) ... creating community associations into which are all citizens are incorporated. Developing network relationships

involving work, recreation, friendship, support and the political power of citizenship are fundamental to this approach. (p. 6)

Wise cites the National Crime Prevention Report's agency-based approach to community building:

(The Report) identifies relevant community members, societal institutions and agencies that would be recruited to the process of improving the 'child-friendliness' of communities ... Childcare, media, tertiary institutions, employers, trade unions, schools, non-government organizations, child and adolescent mental health services, prenatal and perinatal services, neighbours and friends are among those specified. ... (B)uilding on the strengths and abilities of community networks would naturally endow the community with the capacity to ultimately control, through collective activity, the influences that adversely affect children and adolescents. (pp. 6 -7)

In summary: current knowledge about young children's competence, and about the impact of their early experiences on their future wellbeing strongly supports giving young children a voice in policy-making. Further, giving young children a voice in policy-making can enhance children's sense of community and it can strengthen their communities by acknowledging them as people with rights - including the right to be heard.

## **2. How can we give children a voice?**

New principles for seeking children's voices are emerging from early childhood pedagogy and policy making in response to the increasing interest in including children's voices in research. These principles centre on:

- ethical engagement with children
- listening carefully to children
- using different cues to hear the voices of children of different ages and verbal abilities
- using multi-method techniques to help children to express themselves
- documenting children's voices to share them with others.

### ***Ethical engagement - guiding principles***

The following principles of ethical engagement with young children develop the work of Kylie Smith (e.g. Smith 2003), a member of the CEIEC team. Smith argues that to protect and enhance children's rights through consultation with them adults should ensure that children have:

- safe spaces in which to share their ideas without challenge or critique
- privacy: ask children for permission to document/record what they say
- ownership of their ideas: ask children to display and/or share their ideas and understandings with others
- appropriate equipment with which adults can care for children's work in ways that shows that their voice is important and respected.

Adults should reflect critically on how and why they are consulting with children, asking:

- why they are seeking children's voices as they are?
- in whose interests are they acting?
- which power relationships (between children and between adults and children) are operating in specific contexts? Adults need to ensure that children don't feel compelled to share their ideas when they would prefer not to; and that the processes through which they can share their perspectives don't silence particular children.

### ***Listening carefully to children***

Strategies for listening carefully to young children should be based on best practice pedagogies within early childhood services. MacNaughton and Williams (1998) argue that to listen carefully to young children requires adults to:

- make specific times to seek children's views and listen to their responses. Children's lives in early childhood centres can become dominated by adult directions, expectations and thoughts, as children spend between 25 percent and 50 percent of their time listening to staff (Renck Jalongo, 1995). Clearly, adults who are seeking children's views on specific issues need to address this imbalance. They should find time to listen to the children, so that the children see that staff are interested in their perspectives and feel that they can direct the conversation.
- wait a few seconds before responding so that the children realise that their comments are taken seriously (Seefeldt, 1980)
- help children to learn to listen to others by actively listening to them. Many adults are poor listeners who are, '...preoccupied, distracted and forgetful nearly 75 percent of the time.' (Renck Jalongo, 1995) If staff want children to become thoughtful and active listeners, they should display such qualities in themselves.
- respond to children's comments with care and thought.
- act as a scribe for what children say, rather than as a commentator on it.

These techniques need to be accompanied by processes that help children to share their views and come to a position. Some tried and true examples of processes are:

- raise a question or an issue on which you would like children's comments
- offer children different ways (e.g. images, voice, text) to share their knowledge
- talk with children, listen to them and then document/record what they said
- look for similarities and differences in what children share and tell the children about them
- explore how to use what children shared (and what they didn't) to create a sense of what might happen
- explore who is advantaged, disadvantaged, silenced or marginalised in the process of seeking and sharing ideas
- engage children in discussions of what is fair and not fair about what they see, feel and believe and try to find the fair way forward.

## ***Using different cues to hear the voices of children of different ages and verbal abilities***

Each baby will communicate through a range of gurgles, chuckles, coos, grunts, giggles, babbles or cries and a range of tones within those sounds. Adults can learn about a baby's likes and dislikes by learning her or his repertoire of sounds and their meanings. A baby's repertoire of sounds will readily tell an adult who is listening with care when a baby in a specific environment is tired, hungry, unwell, excited, frustrated, fascinated or rested (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998). This can help adults to judge what a baby is trying to say about, e.g., what it feels like to be in a baby-friendly environment.

Listening to toddlers as they struggle to express themselves verbally shows that you care about them. If adults listen with care to toddlers, they learn that it is worth sharing their ideas and thoughts with adults. However, if adults pretend to hear what was 'said' or give up trying to hear, children learn that adults don't care about what they say (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998). Thus, when consulting with toddlers, it is especially important to allow them time and quiet spaces in which to share their ideas with adults and to offer children different media through which to share their ideas.

Children between three and four years old will speak an average of 15,000 words a day (Hurlock, 1978) and their language skills can increase rapidly as they use language to express their ideas and feelings to themselves and to others. Thus, adults have many opportunities to converse with children and to learn about their social, emotional and cognitive desires, perspectives, interests and needs (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998). Young children's ability to tell simple stories offers adults another way to understand and document their ideas and perspectives (Soundy & Genisio, 1994); and five year-old children start to include feelings and reasons for doing things in their stories. Adults can use this development to help develop children's vocabulary for talking about emotions and moral behaviour. Finally, young children's capacity to explore, represent and share their perspectives symbolically is also growing and painting and drawing enable them to express themselves symbolically.

## ***Using multi-method techniques and tools to help children to express themselves***

Using multi-method techniques to explore children's perspectives is strongly supported by the work of researchers attempting to develop more participatory approaches to research with young people and children in the Majority World (see Chambers, 1997; O'Kane, 2000). As Clarke (2000) explains:

Techniques include the use of mapping and modelling, diagrams, drawing and collage, child to child interviewing and drama and poetry. These participatory research methods are designed to empower those who take part by enabling people to represent their own situations, to reflect on their experiences and to influence change. ... These tools appear to have particular relevance when seeking to reveal the multiple perspectives of young children who are themselves the least powerful individuals in the institutions they are part of. (p. 3)

Other methods and tools that have been advised for seeking children's voices include: creative and expressive arts such as pottery, mosaics, ceramic, drawing, painting, drama, story-telling, puppetry and persona dolls (Campbell et al, 2001; MacNaughton, 2002). In addition, child interviews and group discussions have been used to provide children with dedicated space and time in which to express their ideas and views on diverse topics (see MacNaughton 2001a, 2001b, 2001c).

The aim of using multi-method techniques is to seek diversity in the views expressed and to honor the views of children who may differ from the majority. (O'Kane, 2000). Multi-method techniques can offer children with different languages, abilities and styles of expression more than one way to express themselves, helping them to find ways that suit them (Clarke, 2000). Multi-method techniques support ethical practices because they allow all children to actively document/record their ideas and feelings (O'Kane, 2000).

### ***Documenting children's voices respectfully***

Katz & Chard (1996, p.1) have noted that, 'Documentation, in the forms of observation of children and extensive recordkeeping, has long been encouraged and practiced in many early childhood programs.' Early childhood staff are familiar with recording their observation of children's development in writing, to help them to plan techniques and learning experiences for a particular child or group of children. Early childhood staff use many techniques to record their observations, including:

- photographing children's work
- making written observations of children's work
- audio-recording children's comments and conversations
- video-recording the processes and products of children's learning
- transcribing children's comments and observations
- collecting a portfolio of children's work.

These techniques (sometimes adapted) can be used to document children's voices. They record children's voices and they enhance children's sense of wellbeing by exciting interest in their learning and by demonstrating that their work is taken seriously (Malaguzzi, 1993). Then, as Vecchi (1993) suggests:

the written descriptions, transcriptions of children's words, photographs, and now the videotapes - becomes an indispensable source of materials that we use everyday to be able to 'read' and reflect critically (on) the project we are exploring.' (Vecchi, 1993, p.122)

### ***Implications for the project's design and methodology***

The CEIEC project team drew on current thinking within the literature on how to consult with young children in designing the action learning project's methodology and content (refer Chapter 3). Specifically, the content of the action learning program for early childhood staff within the ACT that formed the core of the project was designed to help participating staff to focus on:

- ethical engagement with children throughout the consultation process

- best practices principles of listening carefully to children
- being closely attuned to different cues to hear the voices of children of different ages and verbal abilities
- using multi-method techniques to help children to express themselves
- documenting children's voices to share them with others.

## The Project's methodology

The CEIEC team designed a strategy that would generate outcomes beyond the immediate life of the Project. The strategy centred on an action learning programme to enhance the capacity of 23 early childhood staff in the ACT to consult with young children. Table 3.1 gives an overview of the Project strategy.

Table 3.1 The Project Strategy

<i>Key steps in the project</i>	<i>Timing</i>
<b>Step 1.</b> CEIEC and ACT Children's Services Branch clarify the Project's goal and refine its methodology.	Early August
<b>Step 2.</b> ACT Children's Services Branch recruit participants from 17 early childhood centres to act as Children's Consultancy Leaders.	Aug
<b>Step 3.</b> Children's Consultancy Leaders participate in an action learning programme to enhance their capacity to consult with children.	Sept 1 – Sept 29
<b>Step 4.</b> Each Children's Consultancy Leader implements a children's consultancy project in their local service.	Sept 2 – Sept 26
<b>Step 5.</b> CEIEC Project team collate and evaluate the results of each children's consultancy project and of the Project overall.	Sept 30 – Oct 15
<b>Step 6.</b> CEIEC Project team produce the Project Report.	End of Oct

In that Project strategy, the CEIEC Project team played the following roles:

- mentoring the early childhood staff involved throughout the action learning programme
- designing and delivering an action learning programme to enable participating staff to implement a children's consultancy project in their local service
- collating, analysing and evaluating the results of each children's consultancy project
- evaluating the progress and success of the Project overall
- providing the Children's Services Branch with a Project Report.

When planning the Project, the CEIEC Project team assumed that participating services would have access to the following to support their consultation with children:

- still image cameras, digital scanners, video-recorders and/or audio-recorders, photocopiers
- computer services with which to access on-line supports provided by the CEIEC team
- the normal range of art and craft materials with which the children can express their ideas and perspectives.

## Step 1: Turning aims and objectives into consultation questions

Following discussion with the ACT Children’s Branch, the CEIEC Project team generated three questions as the basis of the consultation with the children. The Project team also generated examples of how to address each question with verbal and non-verbal children. Table 3.2 lists the three questions and shows how each reflects one or more of the objectives in the Draft Discussion Paper; Table 3.3 lists the examples of how to address each consultation question.

Table 3.2 The three consultation questions

<i>The consultation questions</i>	<i>Links with objectives in the Draft Discussion Paper</i>
How do children see what they need for their well-being?	Objective 1: Children live in strong and supportive families and communities Objective 2: Children achieve physical, cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing.
What do children value and wish for in their lives?	Objective 3: Children are valued members of the community
What makes you feel valued?	Objectives 1, 2 & 3: (as above)

Table 3.3 Examples of how to address each consultation question

<i>Consultation Question</i>	<i>With verbal children</i>	<i>With non-verbal children</i>	<i>Using art or movement</i>
<p>1. How do children see what they need for their well-being?</p> <p><i>(Synonyms of well-being: good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited, sad, angry.)</i></p>	<p>When do you feel good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited, sad, angry?</p> <p>What makes you feel good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited sad, angry?</p> <p>Where else do you feel good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited sad, angry?</p> <p>When does your body feel good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited sad, angry?</p> <p>What makes your body feel good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited sad, angry?</p> <p>When does your body feel good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited sad, angry?</p> <p>If you feel sad what can make you feel better?</p> <p>If you were feeling sick what would you do?</p>	<p>Observe &amp; document</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- body language</li> <li>- social interactions</li> <li>- reactions.</li> </ul>	<p>Show me what makes you feel good, happy, safe, okay, excited, belonging, included, sad, angry.</p> <p>Show me how you feel when you are good, happy, safe, okay, excited, belonging, included, sad, angry?</p>
<p>2. What do children value and wish for in their lives?</p>	<p>If you had your best day at preschool what would you be doing?</p> <p>Who would be there?</p> <p>Where would things be?</p> <p>What would it look like?</p> <p>What special things would you need?</p> <p>If the grown ups were there, what would they be doing?</p> <p>What do you enjoy most about your life?</p> <p>If you had one wish what would it be?</p> <p>What is good/the best thing about your life?</p>	<p>Create opportunities for the children to move around and document the results.</p> <p>Where do they go?</p> <p>Where do they enjoy being?</p> <p>Taking the inside out and the outside in.</p> <p>Where do the children go, especially in</p>	

<i>Consultation Question</i>	<i>With verbal children</i>	<i>With non-verbal children</i>	<i>Using art or movement</i>
		relation to the adult/s? Who decides where babies go - adults or babies?	
3. What makes you feel valued?	How do you know this place is for children? What do you like to do with your family in Canberra and why? What makes you feel welcome? What makes you feel special, important or needed? How do you know when someone likes what you do? What do you like about your family and about the centre/school/class? Who listens to you?	(As above.)	

## **Step 2. Inviting Children's Services to participate**

A broad range of children's services were invited to participate in the *Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age Project*, as a result of discussions between the CEIEC Project team and the Senior Policy Officer, in the Children's Services Branch. Staff in each service would be invited to develop a project through which to consult with a minimum of 5 children, thereby involving a minimum of 100 children across 17 services. Table 3.4 shows the type and number of services invited to participate and the numbers of those who accepted the invitation.

In August 2003 information on the *ACT Children's Plan* and an accompanying *Expressions of Interest* form for involvement in the *Consultation with children birth to eight years of age project* was sent widely to early childhood settings and programs across the ACT.

A diversity of settings was viewed as important in engaging both mainstream and targeted groups of young children, including Indigenous children and children with additional needs.

Settings included all ACT licensed children's services, Children's Services Early Intervention Programs, ACT Government preschools (including Indigenous Preschool), ACT Government and non-government primary schools, including special schools and a number of community agencies working directly with young children.

Table 3.4 Target staff participants and actual staff participants

<i>Service type: Birth to 5 years</i>	<i>Number targeted</i>	<i>No. of staff targeted in each service</i>	<i>Actual numbers</i>	<i>Actual numbers of staff</i>
Early Intervention Program	1	1	0	0
Independent preschool	1	1	0	0
Language Preschool	1	1	0	0
ACT Government Preschool	4	4	4	4
Koori Preschool	1	1	1	1
Three-year old preschool	1	1	0	0
Special needs playgroup	1	1	0	0
Centre based children's services	3	2 (6 in total)	5	5
Family day care (playgroup)	1	1	2	2
Playgroup	1	1	1	1
<i>Service type School age</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Number of staff</i>		
Primary Schools	2	2	1	1
School Age Care	2	2	1	1
Special schools	2	2	1	1
Women's refuge	1	1	1	1
Canberra Institute of technology	1	1	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>23 services</b>	<b>20 staff</b>	<b>18 services</b>	<b>18 staff</b>

### **Step 3. An action learning programme for Children's Consultancy Leaders**

The CEIEC has growing expertise and experience in designing and delivering research-based action learning professional development programmes in diverse settings and the

CEIEC Project team drew on this expertise and experience to develop a capacity-building action learning programme for this project. The programme aimed to enable participants to:

- use action learning to innovate in their daily work
- explore the implications for their practice of current research about the early years
- develop practical strategies to transform their practices
- learn about the different ways in which to address the issues they face
- enhance their ability to reflect critically on their work and to use their reflections to transform their practices
- learn how the World Wide Web can support their professional learning.

The programme explored how to access and present children's perspectives in ways that are age-appropriate and appropriate to the specific circumstances of the consultation process. Consequently, the sessions included the following:

- diverse interactive teaching strategies and resources to support teaching and learning during the consultations
- research-based insights into children as competent citizens
- research-based insights into the role of early childhood staff in eliciting children's views in ways that are meaningful and are developmentally and culturally appropriate
- research-based studies by practitioner- researchers who have included children's voices in their programs and daily decision-making in meaningful ways
- a learning process that is strategic, supported in practical and theoretical ways and is geared to changing their practices through critical reflection.

The program ran over 5 weeks. Specific training sessions ran all day, one day each week. Table 3.5 summarises the content of all sessions and the support offered in between the sessions.

Table 3.5 The Action Learning Programme (September 2003)

<i>Session</i>	<i>Content</i>
<b>Day 1 (W/b 1 September): 'Planning the consultation goals and strategies'</b>	<p>This session introduced the consultation aims and action learning and explored the research about how best to elicit children's perspectives. It examined how to create a Children's Consultation project and how to plan the first steps; and it examined the three consultation questions (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3 above). Finally, it introduced the role of the 'project buddy'.</p> <p>Participants left with a specific goal for their work with children and they planned how to start this work in ways that were appropriate to the age of the children they would work with and to their specific contexts. They were asked to choose a question from Table 3.2 as their starting point for consulting with children. Each participant was linked with one other, each acting as the other's project 'buddy'.</p>
<b>(W/b 8 September): 'Maintaining the momentum'</b>	<p>Before the second training day, participants had received an e-mail Project Bulletin supporting them in maintaining the momentum from their first training day and offering on-line support and a telephone help-line. The Project Bulletin revisited the goals and actions that the participants had agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contact their project buddy and help them to reflect critically on their work to date by asking them: What did you want to do? What did you try? What do you feel good about? What did you learn? What niggles or challenges you? Could your friend help?</li> <li>▪ Begin consulting with children and (e.g.) parents and colleagues.</li> <li>▪ Ask a group of 5 to 8 children their first consultation question.</li> <li>▪ Begin to document this process.</li> <li>▪ Contact the CEIEC Project team if they need help.</li> </ul>
<b>Day 2 (W/b: 15 September: 'Problem- solving and critical reflection'</b>	<p>During this training day, participants shared their progress on their consultation project. Small groups addressed problems and issues that had emerged and planned the next steps, including deciding what and how to document their local consultation projects. On this training day, participants reported on their work and explored a structured process of problem-solving and critical reflection. The process includes equity checks on their work (e.g. whose children's voices are and aren't being represented in their consultation project?). The day included practical, 'hands-on' resources through which participants could deepen their consultations with children.</p>
<b>(W/b 22 September): 'Maintaining the momentum'</b>	<p>Participants received another e-mail Project Bulletin that revisited the problem-solving strategies and supported participants in maintaining the momentum from the second training day. The Bulletin also reminded participants of the on-line support and telephone help.</p>
<b>Day 3 (W/b 29 September: 'Documenting and evaluating the learning'</b>	<p>Participants brought the data they had generated in their local consultation projects. They were assisted to organise their data via themes and categories and to identify any significant issues. They were encouraged to reflect critically on what they have learnt and on the issues that have emerged from the project - for them and for the children; and they evaluated their learning.</p>

## ***Step 4. Implementing local children's consultancy projects***

### **The participants in the project**

#### **The services**

Sixteen children's services participated in the project. Each wrote a short description of their service and its context. In what follows, pseudonyms, chosen by staff, have been used where requested to maintain the privacy of those using the services.

1. ACT Playgroup Association. No information as participant was sick on the last day and no specific information required.
2. The Dust Cloud. The centre is a 90-place centre, which is situated in a new development. It caters for children aged between four months to school age – and there are a total of 137 families. Many of the families travel to the city for work and therefore many of the children are at the centre from 7.45am until 6pm. There are many families from other countries within the centre and these include: Chinese, South African, Swedish, Italian and Indian.
3. Jarra Preschool. Jarra preschool is in the central district of the ACT. It is a part time preschool which has a maximum enrolment of 25 children.
4. Three Trees is a 47-place centre, which provides 3 facets of care, long day care, permanent part time care and occasional care. This arrangement has been in place since January 2003. We are registered to undergo accreditation and our self study report is due July 2004. We have children from birth up to 5 years of age, but are licensed to have children up to 8 years of age. We are located in the West Belconnen area of Canberra located at the Charnwood shops. This area is known as a low socio-economic background and we are certainly a part of a strong community within the shopping centre. Our families are a large diverse group ranging from families who identify as indigenous to families who practice as Muslim. Our centre community relies on us for regular support, which often means as a Director accessing the JET scheme and special childcare benefits. The majority of our families are single parent families and are from low socio-economic backgrounds
5. 'Maisie' Women's Refuge has been in existence for fifteen years in the ACT. MWR supports women and children in crisis escaping domestic violence. MWR has been on the cutting edge of working with children recognising children as clients in their own right – developing programs that support children to enter into dialogue about their experiences/reconnection with main careers after domestic violence. In recognition of the effects of domestic violence on children MWR has developed policies and procedures, which support and enable children to express themselves through activities, which recognise their strengths and encourage change, where it is needed. MWR recognises the rights of children and advocates in collaboration with them for positive ways forward. MWR houses seven

- families with up to 20 children. MWR also has an outreach service and up to 6 families access. All in all we have had in 2002 1600 at in house programs and programs conducted in other services. MWR supports children 0-17 years of age. This includes loving them.
6. Green Hills Family Day Care. This playgroup works with children birth to twelve years of age. We have up to 50 children and 20 carers at the centre with the Family Day Care 3 days a week (around 50 carers) and YWCA Family Day Care 2 days a week (around 80 carers). Our service cares for children in the home of the carer who can have up to four children under school age and up to seven children all together. A lot of the care is part-time.
  7. Blue Ponds Family Day Care. Our family day care scheme covers the Tuggeranong Valley area. We have approximately 200 carers registered with the scheme. We have two co-ordination units consisting of Co-ordinators and a manager for each. I am the Resource Co-ordinator, running playgroup and providing programs and resource material for carers. The scheme provides care for children from birth to 12 years of age (long day care, before after school care, and vacation care).
  8. Purple Preschool. A government Preschool that is co-located with a childcare centre. The preschool is for children in the year before starting school (turning 4 before May). There are up to 25 children in the group. Some children attend the childcare centre as well and some children only attend the preschool. The children who attend the 2 services are dropped off at childcare by their parents, brought to preschool by a childcare staff member, taken back to childcare by a preschool staff member and picked up from childcare by their parents. The services are in a middle class area of Canberra.
  9. Daintree is one of 6 long day centres from a larger organization 'Community@work'. It is licensed for 46 places. However, we have three rooms. Dream room birth – 18 months (10 places), 18 months – 3 years (10 places) Daintree room 3 years – school age (22 places). It has 11 staff with various qualifications including trainees, Diplomas, Certificate III and Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Teaching. It is in Tuggeranong area.
  10. Learning Together, located in the leafy inner Canberra suburb of O'Conner is the only ACT Government early childhood school (Preschool, kindergarten, Year 1 and 2) in the ACT. The school is characterised by its wonderful physical environment, which provides a safe, secure learning through play environment for children 4 to 8 years of age. A maximum of 85 children are enrolled in the school and many of the students attend onsite long day care (following preschool sessions) and before and after school programs. Teachers P – Year 2 are employed by the ACT Department of Education and Children's Services are outsourced to the YWCA. The school offers a seamless transition for children between the services. There is a high level of community involvement.

11. Moving Forward Preschool and Child Care Centre. The Preschool and Child Care Centre is made up of ninety families who use the service. It is a Long Day Care setting with 43 families who use the Preschool centre. The Preschool caters for 23 children a day, 5 days a week. We offer 2 sessions each day - morning 8-1pm, afternoon 1-5.45 pm. There are 3 Preschool Staff members - a qualified preschool Teacher (Bachelor of Education), a qualified L4. And L2. The service is located near the city centre in Braddon. It has close ties to the local primary school. Most of the families using the service are highly qualified professional. The group used in the consultation process was the older preschool children aged between 4 and 5 years. These children are very active and involved in the preschool program. They are often consulted about the direction of the daily program and what they would like to do.
12. The Party Place is a school for children aged 3-12 years with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and concurrent sensory disabilities. The area of Canberra that it services is all Canberra North of the lake. The school is divided into an early childhood unit (ECU) and a primary school. The ECU has 37 Enrolments for a total enrolment of 81. Children are offered sessional preschool starting with 3 sessions for 3 year olds and extending sessions until children are attending full time. Group sizes are usually 6 with a teacher and teacher assistant with each group.
13. Ardrossan Preschool. The children of this preschool range from 4 to 6 years of age. Twenty-four children attend and this is our full capacity. We are a part-time preschool – the group of children attending from 9 am to 12.30 pm, Wednesday to Friday for four terms. Most of the children are at home during the day with their mothers who are either not in paid employment, on maternity leave or working part-time. We have two fathers who care for their children during the day. Five children attend full time childcare and are walked to and from preschool by the carers. There are 23 families using the preschool. Ainslie is an inner northern suburb of Canberra. Apart from 3 children, all live in Ainslie. It is a middle class area with homes being well sought after due to their history. It was a working class area early in its establishment, with homes predominantly weatherboard and many heritage listed. The families mainly are young professional couples with a strong sense of community.
14. Bebes and Ninos. This centre provides care and programs for 31 children from birth to 5 years of age: 10 children from birth to 2 years and 10 children 2 years along with 11 3-5year olds in Ninos room. (Bebes is Spanish for babies and Ninos is Spanish for children) Primarily we are a work-based centre that provides places for children whose parents work on the site. However, currently approximately 50% of families are from the general public. The centre is in Belconnen, has enrolled children from 42 families primarily from middle –high socio-economic backgrounds. Majority of families are involved in sport, as athletes, coaches or

supporters! We have recently undergone Accreditation and are eagerly awaiting the results.

15. South Grammar. Age of children – kindergarten – 6-7 years. Group – 6 children. Type – Primary school. Size – 250 families. Area – middle class – high socio-economic background – mostly professional families
16. Koori Preschool. There are 4 Koori preschools across Canberra running 1 three-hour session at each preschool. Children are eligible for mainstream preschool also and attend their local preschool usually. Children are aged from 0-5 and can attend whichever preschool is close to their home and more than one of the preschool sessions if they wish – only a few families do this. The group size varies from week to week and setting to setting. Approximately 3-12 children may attend a session in any week.
17. Vine Preschool – no specific information provided.

# Note:

1. Three services withdrew from the project after the first session citing over commitment of work due to issues such as accreditation. These services included long day care and school age care
2. No data was received from three of the participants.

## **The staff**

Staff from all the aforementioned services as well as some special schools, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) and women's refuge staff were represented in this project (refer Table 3.5). The majority had formal early childhood qualifications and most had worked in early childhood services for a number of years. Several staff provided the CEIEC with specific biographical details. Where requested, pseudonyms have been used.

1. ACT Playgroup Association - Lauren with no specific information provided.
2. The Dust Cloud – Maree. I am a 25-year-old female with a Diploma in childcare and Education from Central Queensland TAFE. I moved to Canberra in February after working in Townsville Queensland for the past 6 years. I enjoy working with children and seeing them learn and develop on a daily basis. I joined the project because my director felt that with my interests and experience I would enjoy doing the project.
3. Jarra Preschool - no specific information as she did not attend the last session.
4. Three Trees – Agnes. I am a female who has had the privilege of having both parents who came to Australia at the age of 2 and 4. A strong Celtic/Slavic background has ensured that I have an extremely close relationship with my family and was brought up with a strong background in social justice. I am the eldest child. I have a Diploma in Children's Services (centre based care) and am currently studying my Bachelor of Social Science Child Care and Family Studies.

I joined the project because I am a huge fan of Glenda's practice and as a strong advocate of social justice wanted to promote this to the team at Three Trees. As a centre we need to change and commit to equitable practice. We already have a new project in mind! That of designing our new garden.

5. 'Maisie' Women's Refuge - Red dust. I have been working in women's services for the past twenty-five years. I am a double certificate nurse. My father was born in England and my mother was only young when her parents migrated from Ireland. In the last twenty years I have worked with Indigenous people, Kimberley Aboriginal law/culture – I compiled the Tindale Collection – Stolen Generation – Manchu Janta - Community Centre supported young Indigenous youth. Lowana Young Women's Service (3 years). Completed youth certificate 4 & community services certificate 4. I am an incest survivor – in the last five years I have worked with children who are in my position. I recognise how important children's experiences informs the action we could take. Since working in this position I have developed ways of working with children 0 –17 years of age that encourage confidence and belief in themselves.
6. Green Hills, Family Day Care – Jess. I have an Australian country up bringing and worked as an enrolled nurse then as a play nurse. I then trained in childcare and have worked in Family Day Care for 18 years as a playgroup leader and a carer. I have a Diploma in Child Care. I joined the project because my boss asked me to do it and I hope to learn something new about communicating with children.
7. Blue Ponds Family Day Care – Anne. I commenced working in the early childhood field approximately 17 years ago. I have a background in long day care – experience with all age groups. I spent 7 years presenting a perceptual motor program at childcare centres in the ACT. I have been playgroup leader for FDC for the past year. I run playgroups each morning for carers and children. Each session I see 20 to 40 children, aged 0-5 years. I provide carers with a book each term of weekly programmes, and resource ideas. I arrange school holiday activities. I joined the project because I am interested in being part of the development process and enjoy gaining new ideas and knowledge to implement when communicating with children.
8. Purple Preschool – Ella. I have a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and have been working in children's services for 16 years. My first twelve and a half years were in childcare and the last three and a half years have been in government preschools. I have always worked with preschoolers. I joined the project because I'm very excited by young children and the ideas that they have. I'm committed to hearing what they have to say and recognising their contributions as valid and important. Also, I like networking with other early childhood professionals who think the same way about children.

9. Daintree – Shannon. Assistant manager and room supervisor of the Eden Room (18 month – 3 years). I hold an Associate Diploma in Social Science and a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Teaching from VC. I have been working in children's services 10 years and have worked in long day care, occasional care, vacation care, and independent preschool and have taught kindergarten at an independent school. I joined the project because the staff of Daintree Early Childhood Centre believes that children are a valuable resource and have a lot to offer the community. Adults often assume young children's needs and wishes; the child's voice is disregarded if asked for at all. I as part of Daintree staff decided to take part in this project as a way of giving OUR children a voice.
  
10. Learning Together – Annie. A female Anglo-Australian verging on middle age, very experienced!! I have had considerable experience across educational sectors. She has a diploma from Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College (B.ED – Special Education Major). I have been Teacher-in-Charge of preschool and early intervention taught in primary school for the past seven years, executive teacher and my present position is as a Principle of Learning Together. I also have a certificate in leadership. The best bit is I am grandmother of two gorgeous girls. I initially expressed an interest in launching the Children's Plan at my school. Melanie then contacted me, as the project needed representation from early childhood five to eight year olds.
  
11. Moving Forward Preschool and Child Care Centre – Kleppy. I am female and 34 years old. I have been the Preschool Teacher at Moving Forward Preschool and Child Care Centre for the last two and a half years. Before this I have taught in England doing supply work in London and North East England. After finishing my degree here in Canberra at UCI I was the Preschool Teacher at a Centre in Sydney at Macquarie Uni. Before this I am also a qualified fitness Instructor and I have a passion for Health and fitness for adults and especially children. I joined the project because I believe children provide us with so much information about what their needs are and what they are interested in. There fore I have a keen interest in this consulting children process and the program I was hoping would give me more insight in ways of capturing and nurturing this.
  
12. The Party Place - Mrs Desert. I am a female, WASP, with a wide range of experience, including working with isolated, gifted, special need and NESB children in a range of countries and States of Australia. I hold a Master of Education and a B.ED, which comprised a Dip. ED. ECE. Topped up with a year of Special ED. Studies. Melanie approached our School and we were delighted with the opportunity to offer students with the special needs a voice.
  
13. Ardrossan Preschool - Jean Haworth. I am a middle-aged female teacher. I taught for ten years in Western Australia where I first graduated. I taught in early childhood K – 2 till I resigned to begin my family. I then spent approximately 10 years at home with my family living in Northern Western Australia and Kakadu

National Park as we accompanied my husband on location. I returned to teaching, in the preschool areas, as it suited part-time work more than K – 2. I also upgraded my qualifications in the early childhood area for although I had the experience in that area, I did not consider my previous training had prepared me. I joined the project because I was asked by my executive officer. I had not considered attending as (Mondays) were my day off. However, I had read the information and the ‘consulting with children’ really interested me. I really agreed to come because I thought this would be worthwhile for me (I thought I could learn from this) for the children (giving them a voice and hopefully empowering them to affect change, if only in our setting).

14. Bebes and Ninos – Winsome. I am a female, born in Canada, raised in Sydney. I completed my Bachelor of Teaching, Early childhood at Macquarie University in 1997. I have been working in this field ever since. I began teaching preschoolers in a LDC Centre, then spent 4 years directing before moving to Canberra. I am currently teaching 2-5year olds and loving it. I love drama, outdoor activities and learning much from the children I interact with each day. My director thought it would be great to be involved and encouraged me to join the project. I have been consulting with my children and developed my program throughout the year to reflect their voices and choices they make each day and we felt this project would be a great challenge as I develop my skills as I consult with young children.
15. South Grammar – Xena. Female, Anglo Australian. Early childhood teacher K-2 (5-8 years) for most of my career. 20 years experience at present Executive Officer in Preschool Services. Mother of three children. Enjoy being creative in a variety of areas. I joined the project to represent Preschool Services – the administration area for ACT.
16. Koori Preschool – No specific biographical detail.
17. Vine Preschool - Jackie – no specific information provided.

## **The children**

Table 3.3 shows the age, cultural background and type of service the children who participated in the consultations attended. Several features of these figures need noting:

- Age. The majority (75 of 137) were between 3 and 5 years old; a small minority (8 of 137) were two years old or less.
- Cultural background. This was reported for only forty children and of that forty; the majority (27 of 40) had an Anglo-Australian background.
- Service. The children attended a diversity of services; and several children attended more than one type of service (as Table 3.3 shows). Types of service are coded thus:
 

FDC	Family day care
PG	Play group
LDC	Long day care
P.school	Primary school
Preschool	Preschool
SE	Special education unit (school for children with additional needs)

Table 3.3 Children who participated in the Project

<i>Age (in years)</i>	<i>No of children</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Cultural background</i>	<i>Family background</i>	<i>Service/s</i>
0 - 1	1		1	1 Aboriginal Australian		1 WR
1 - 2	1		1	1 Anglo Australian		1 LDC
2 - 3	7	4	3	5 Anglo Australian 1 Ethiopian Australian	1 one-parent family	1 FDC 6 LDC (2)
3 - 4	14	7	7	2 Anglo Australian (3 not identified - AIS)	3 two-parent families	5 FDC (2) 1 SE unit 7 LDC (2) 1 PG
4 - 5	49	28	28	5 Anglo Australian 1 Sri Lankan (2 unidentified - AIS) 1 South African 1 Italian 1 Latvian 2 NESB (1 <sup>st</sup> language unidentified, mother translated) 7 Aboriginal Australian	1 two-parent family  3 two-parent families living apart  1 one-parent family	6 FDC (2) 2 SE unit 16 LDC (2) 15 Preschool (3 also attend LDC) (3) 2 PG 1 WR  Koori PS (7)
5 - 6	29	17	12	4 Anglo Australian (4 unidentified - AIS) 1 Vietnamese (adopted)	4 two-parent families	2 FDC (2) 2 SE unit 12 LDC (2) 12 Preschool (Also attends LDC) (3) 1 WR
6 - 7	15	8	7	11 Anglo Australian 1 Italian Australian 1 Danish Australian 1 Cambodian Australian	13 two-parent families	13 P. school (2) 2 WR
7 - 8	7	4	3	3 Anglo Australian 2 Indian Australian 1 European (no more specific details available)	5 two-parent families 1 one-parent family	6 P.school 1 WR
8 - 9	3	2	1			2 WR 1 PG
9 - 10	1	1	0			1 WR
12	3	3	0	1 Cambodian		3 WR
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>63</b>			

## Having a voice: findings from the birth to eight consultations with young children

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This chapter summarises and discusses the data from the consultations with the 137 children aged birth to eight years old who attended ACT children's services. As discussed in Chapter 3, the children were asked three questions derived from the broader consultations about the ACT Children's Strategy. These questions were:

4. What do the children think that they need for their wellbeing? (The practitioners who consulted with children used several words for 'wellbeing', including good, happy, safe, okay, belonging, included, excited.)
5. What do the children value and wish for in their lives?
6. What makes the children feel valued?

Several age-appropriate techniques were used to gather children's responses to these questions. Verbal children were interviewed individually and in groups and were also invited to express their ideas in pictures; parents and practitioners took field notes and photographs of non-verbal children reacting to specific situations. Practitioners, guided by the CEIEC team, analysed these notes and photographs to identify themes, such as children's likes and dislikes and what made them feel good, happy, safe and excited. The result was a rich diversity of data:

- 131 pieces of children's incidental dialogue - recorded by practitioners
- 1 audio-taped semi-structured group and individual conversations with children
- 19 examples of children's writing
- 135 children's drawings and paintings on paper and calico
- 20 practitioners' and parents' written observations of children
- 41 photographs of children at play
- 8 teachers' field notes
- 14 teachers' reflections
- a CDROM that was created by a child.

Table 4.1 summarises the key themes and issues in the children's responses to the three questions. The remainder of this chapter draws on the children's words and images to discuss these themes and issues.

Table 4.1: Key themes and issues in the children’s responses to the three questions

<i>Consultation question</i>	<i>Key themes</i>	<i>Issues within each theme</i>
1. <i>What do the children think that they need for their wellbeing?</i>	Family as core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the importance to children of time and space with their family</li> <li>▪ how their family makes children feel special</li> <li>▪ reconciliation with family members who are separated from children</li> <li>▪ government support services that keep their family intact.</li> </ul>
	Home as core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the importance of having somewhere to themselves</li> <li>▪ the need for a safe space at home</li> <li>▪ the desire for home-like spaces.</li> </ul>
2. <i>What do the children value and wish for in their lives?</i>	Outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ being in parks and gardens</li> <li>▪ being at and using sporting facilities (e.g. swimming pools, football grounds).</li> </ul>
	Friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ participating with friends in celebrations and outings</li> <li>▪ sleepovers with friends</li> <li>▪ going to the park and playing games with friends.</li> </ul>
	Animals and pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ spending time with pets</li> <li>▪ visiting places with animals.</li> </ul>
	Better housing and homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ better housing</li> <li>▪ housing that is constant and safe</li> <li>▪ housing where you can live with your family.</li> </ul>
	Entertainment industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ watching television, watching movies and using computers.</li> </ul>
	Public facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parliament House (as a place where politicians can work)</li> <li>▪ another fire engine for Canberra</li> <li>▪ the Aquarium</li> <li>▪ going to the movies.</li> </ul>
	Playing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Playing at kindergarten in a variety of activities, generally with friends.</li> </ul>
	Community safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ an end to war</li> <li>▪ an end to racism</li> <li>▪ an end to bullying.</li> </ul>
3. <i>What makes the children feel valued?</i>	Respecting ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ being listened to and being asked questions.</li> </ul>
	Family members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ spending time with family (as Question 1).</li> </ul>

# Consultation question 1: What do the children think that they need for their wellbeing?

## Overview

Two broad themes emerged in the responses: children need a *family* around them and involved in their daily lives; and children need a *home*.

## Theme 1: Family

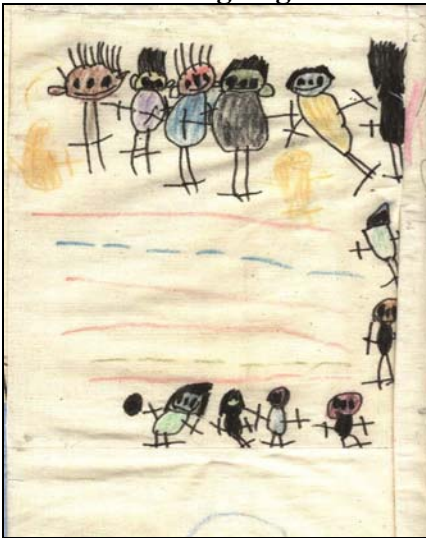
In all of the <sup>1</sup>15 services that participated in the ‘birth to eight’ consultation, the children said that their family is critical to their wellbeing. Family was the most frequent theme in children’s statements about what made them feel good, happy, safe and excited.

Of the 137 children who participated, 71 identified family as crucial to their wellbeing<sup>2</sup> in four ways:

- the importance to children of time and space with their family
- how their family makes children feel special
- reconciliation with family members who are separated from the children
- government support services that keep their family intact.

‘Family’ included parents, siblings, cousins and grandparents. Children discussed, wrote, and illustrated their families in different ways. For example, Picture 4.1 is a painting by a four year old of his family - including parents and cousins - visiting his grandmother.

Picture 4.1. Going to grandma’s



<sup>1</sup> Number of services that provided data.

<sup>2</sup> It's difficult to give precise numbers of children who saw family as important to their lives and wellbeing, because sometimes the practitioners discussed this with children in groups and recorded illustrations of the children's responses, rather than each child's responses.

## **The importance of time and space with their family**

Fifty-four children talked of times with their family that made them happy, safe and cared for. For example, some talked about spending time with their parents because parents cared for them, looked after them, made them feel safe and generally did things for them. Broadly, children under three years old expressed this differently to children of three to eight years old.

### **Children under three years old**

These children look to close family members for pleasure and security in their daily life. They expressed their views about the place of family in their sense of wellbeing by actively choosing whom to spend time with and/or by describing who they liked to spend time with; and in the ways in which they spent such time.

For instance, at the Daintree early childhood centre, staff observed six children between 23 and 26 months old, noting with what and with whom they preferred to play, to understand how these children sought to achieve 'wellbeing'. Shannon (the practitioner) analysed these observations and found that time and space with family was important to four of the six children:

Four of the six children observed had a sibling or close relative at the centre. In all four cases it seemed that the sibling or relative was the main person the child interacted with when they were given the opportunity to do this. In three out of the four cases it seemed that the interaction with their sibling or relative overrode the importance of the experience.

As a result, staff at the centre re-examined their practice of grouping children according to age and are considering grouping children according to family groups.

Similarly, John (2 years, nine months), who attended Three Trees Long Day Care Centre, said that his father is important to him because he takes John between crèche and home each day:

Yeah and my daddy go driving in the Magna you know that? And daddy takes me to the crèche and daddy takes me to my home, I have lots of toys at my home.

### **Children three to eight years old**

These older children looked to family for feelings of wellbeing and security. Feelings of happiness, excitement and safety were connected to the everyday contacts children had with the people in their immediate family. Children with disabilities often demonstrated these feelings powerfully in moments of meeting and greeting family members through their body movements and sounds.

When Anne asked her daughter Bethany (8 years old) what made her feel happy or safe at home, she talked about her mother and father:

Anne: Is there anything at home that makes you feel happy or safe?  
Bethany: Yes, mummy.  
Anne: How do I make you feel happy or safe?  
Bethany: You look after me.  
Anne: Is there anything else at home that makes you feel happy or safe?  
Bethany: Daddy ... but not Chris - he just annoys me.

After this conversation, Bethany created a CDROM to talk about what made her happy.

Further examples come from the Party Place - a school for children aged between three and twelve years old who have moderate to severe intellectual (and concurrent sensory) disabilities. Mrs Desert (teacher) and five parents asked five children what they saw as important to their wellbeing and used written observations and photographs to record the responses. All five saw their family as important. Some examples:

Yes I think he behaves differently when he is happy or excited. He will squeal when he sees his dad, and sometimes he will laugh when he is excited. (Mother of Percy, 4 years old.)

A special day for Bill would involve being outside. It would mean a lot of physical things – swimming, swings, trampoline. His Dad and I would be there, and maybe his sister. (Mother of Bill, 3 years old.)

Her big sister is very active and noisy and Rosy seems to like that. (Mother of Rosy, 4 years old.)

The best thing in Rosy's life is her family. She is a much-loved child, and any special day would have to include them. (Mrs Desert, about Rosy, 4 years old.)

Oh yeah, when she sees her Mum or me, she gets very excited, and does this sort of jump, and dances around. ... I guess that in terms of when she might be sick or a bit miserable, she goes straight to Dad – I think I am a bit of a safe harbour for her. (Father of Susie, 5 years old.)

A special day for Susie would include doing something with her family, as she has a very loving family. I think her parents and grandparents are very special for her, as she gets very excited when she sees grandpa. (Mrs Desert about Susie, 5 years old.)

Then she would come home, and Mathew would be there to play with her. I think that my mother and Mathew's Dad would be part of that day. (Mother of Jane, 5 years old, writing about what a wonderful day for Jane would be)

Her family is definitely a very supportive one for her, and her Dad in particular is a great advocate for Jane. He seems to know her incredibly well and to anticipate her needs. (Mrs Desert, writing about Jane, 5 years old.)

### **How their family makes children feel special**

The older six and seven year old children linked feeling special with being with their immediate family. Again, for these children it was the everyday contact with specific members of their immediate family that made them feel special. Specifically, thirteen six and seven year old children from a government early childhood school (4 to 8 year olds) wrote/drew about what makes them feel special in terms of people, celebrations, places and fun. Eleven of them mentioned particular people in their family who make them feel special. Some examples:

I feel special when I'm with my family. (Sally, 7 years old.)

My family is special because they are all ways there for me. (Jasmine, 7 years old.) Picture 4.2 is by Jasmine of her family.

Picture 4.2 **Jasmine's family**



### **Reconciliation with family members who are separated from the child**

Fifty-four children described how their time with their families made them feel happy, safe and cared for. A separate group of twelve of children were living in a Women's Refuge and while they said that their family is important to their wellbeing, they also said that they wanted their family to be reunited. These children aged between 8 months and 12 years of age described in simple yet powerful terms what would make them happy:

I want my dad to come to live with us.

If I could get back my little sister who lives in another place she could live with me.

## **Government support services that keep their family intact**

Three children aged seven to twelve years of age who were living in the Women's Refuge wrote movingly about their wish for family support from the government of Canberra, including affordable housing, assistance with alcohol abuse and cheaper childcare. Their comments show that they are aware that family and community support services can improve their lives and that improving these services could improve their wellbeing and their family's wellbeing.

Only a small number of older children raised these issues, but their comments indicate the diversity of issues that children of this age can and do experience and, therefore, have opinions on. Children are not ignorant of the difficulties in family and community life and they have definite views about how they should be addressed.

Some examples:

Don't take children off mums' cause of drinking problems, give them help first.

My mum and the support she gets. (Responding to, 'What makes Canberra great?')

Do something about the drug problems. (Responding to, 'What could make Canberra better?')

Cheaper play groups for babies. (Responding to, 'What things could be done to make things better for children?')

## ***Theme 2: Home***

For many children, the importance of their family to their sense of wellbeing was linked to having a safe home and home-like space to be in. The children expressed their ideals about home in three issues:

- the need for a safe space at home
- the importance of having somewhere to themselves
- the desire for home-like spaces.

### **A safe space**

This was emphasised by children between three and four years old children who responded to 'What makes you feel safe?'. For example Jamie (3 years) talked with Tom (4 years) about being safe in a house:

Jamie: Living in a house.

Tom: So the rain don't get you.

Jamie: I feel safe when I live in a house, so the rain and thunder don't get you.

## Somewhere to themselves

The six and seven year-old children talked this about. Twelve of thirteen children aged between six and seven years old described home as a place that made them feel special; and two described it as a place where they could be by themselves. Some examples:

Home is a place wer(e) I can be by myself. (Chloe, 7 years old.)

I like my bedroom because I can play by myself. (Ella, 6 years old.)

## Home-like spaces

Four-year old children who were attending a preschool and long day care service were asked, 'What do children value and wish for? The teacher asked the children to pretend that they were going to the best preschool in the whole world. She then asked the children what that would look like. Luca (four years of age) talked about being able to do what he did at home as well as having his own belongings. He said:

You can watch the Sharkies on TV at this preschool. You get to snuggle up on a great big teddy bear to watch TV. There's no sleep time at this preschool. The teacher is Sandra and sometimes it's Beth too. The teachers hug me at preschool. You can eat roo-ups and bickies at this preschool. You can stay there all day and you ride your bike there and you ride it home too...I'm happy on this day because I've got all my toys at preschool. I've got my dog there too and he can even come inside to the preschool'. (Picture 4.3 illustrates Luca happy on this day.)

Picture 4.3 I'm happy



Bronte (four years old) talked about how she was happy when she was in a quiet place at preschool and there is time to talk with adults. She said:

I'm happy in this picture at the lucky, lucky preschool because it's no noisy there. There aren't too many kids. The teachers sit down and talk to you all the time. They let you decide what to do all the time. They don't tell you what to do. (Picture 4.4 shows Bronte happy.)

Picture 4.4 **Bronte's happy**



Darius (four years old) focused on the importance of preschool being a place where he could relax with friends in comfortable spaces and make choices about what he did and what he ate. He said:

There's a lovely couch with heaps of colourful cushions for all my friends. You can sit there and watch 'Hairy Maclary' on the TV. I've got the remote for the TV so I can choose what's on next. You can eat some crackers with Vegemite. (Picture 4.5 illustrates this scene.)

Picture 4.5 **Darius's best preschool**



## Consultation question 2: What do children value and wish for in their lives?

### Overview

Seven broad themes emerged from children's responses to this question:

- Outdoor spaces (65 children)
- Friends (28 children)
- Animals and pets (22 children)
- Home and housing (12 children)
- Entertainment facilities (10 children)
- Public facilities and services (10 children)
- Playing (7 children)
- Safety (5 children).

### Theme 1: Outdoor spaces

Children's wish for time in outdoor spaces highlighted the importance to young children of public spaces and good physical community infrastructure. They talked and drew about how they valued and wished to go to:

- parks and gardens
- sporting activities and facilities.

### Parks and gardens

Thirty-eight children between three and eight years of age identified parks and gardens as outdoor spaces that they valued or wished for. They talked about the importance of the natural environment such as trees, flowers, ponds, sandpit forests and caves; and of access to equipment such as slides, swings and climbing frames. An example:

This is a park with flowers and a sandpit and big swings. There's no fence around it and the people are playing and are very happy. (Adelaide, 4 years old.) (Picture 4.6 is Adelaide's picture, 'My park with flowers'.)

Picture 4.6 My park with flowers



Some further examples:

I like flowers because they smell nice and look nice. I had my very own fuchsia and it died. I have another plant and it's growing in my pot. (Jennifer, 7 years old.)

Why do you like it? (Jennifer's teacher)

Because it's getting bigger and bigger. It's nearly my birthday and I go to Floriade every day. (Jennifer, 7 years old.)

Picture 4.7 is Jennifer's picture, 'Jennifer looking at the flowers at Floriade'.

**Picture 4.7 Jennifer looking at the flowers at Floriade**



Tom (four years old) described 'my park' as featuring nature, his family and other community members:

The policemen and the ambulance men are good people, they fight people, the ambulance has to go to the park, the park has slippery dip in it and that's a dog and a crocodile and a wolf. That's a snake. I have lots of animals in the zoo. It's a zoo park. There are no police in the park today. I go there with my brother and daddy. (Tom, 4 years old.) (Picture 4.8 is Tom's drawing 'My park'.)

**Picture 4.8 My park**



One parent of a child with a disability sought to identify what her child valued or wished for by observing her. Her observations and her past experiences with her child highlight the lack of access for children with disabilities to the public spaces and places that the other young children in this consultation project valued so highly. She wrote:

Kidzone is quite good, but some of the areas are a bit hard for her to access. A safe place is important. Cockington Green is quite nice too, and interactive, but some of the displays are a bit hard to access. We don't go to many parks with her because the swings, etc. are not designed for her. Steps and pushers are a real issue, and when you have two pushers life gets tricky. Commonwealth Park was supposed to be designed in the year of the disabled, but we found it a real disappointment – the swing was not accessible. The National Museum is quite good – it has lots of interactive displays and good access.

Four years old Rosy's teacher described what a wonderful day would include for Rosy. This included a park. She said:

Some of the things that she would like to do, and would make a special day for her are a walk in the park, a ride on a swing or a merry-go-round, and a ferris wheel, a swim, (something) nice to eat and touch, as well as her family and friends around her.

The teacher further commented on the question, 'What are places in Canberra that children with special needs can visit, and how do you know a place that is good for children?'. The teacher wrote:

I think that places that are safe, but allow maximum independence – for example Kidzone. Places that enable exploration and interaction but that are safe. I don't think that there are very many in Canberra, for example that parks are very dilapidated, and don't often have swings that a child with a disability could access safely. They also have access problems with lots of steps, etc.

Rosy's mother also answered this question. She wrote:

I find that a hard one to answer, because I sometimes think that our kids the world is passing them by. When friends come by they talk to me about Rosy but not to her. People are generally uncomfortable with disability and they don't know what to do. There are not many parks where I could take Rosy because the equipment is not suitable for her – swings etc are for ordinary kids. Kidzone she enjoys and it is safe. (Picture 4.9 shows Rosy enjoying the swing.)

#### Picture 4.9 **Rosy on the swing**



### **Sporting activities and facilities**

Twenty-six children (between three and eight years old) valued or wished for access to sporting activities or facilities, such as football fields and swimming pools (sixteen). They expressed this view to their teachers, through their drawings; and their views were reflected by adult observations of what their children enjoyed doing. For example, Jane who has a disability was observed to enjoy the following:

She (Jane) enjoys Pets as Therapy, cuddles, swims, massage and chocolate!  
(Mother of Jane, 5 years old.) (Picture 4.10 is of Jane enjoying her time in the pool.)

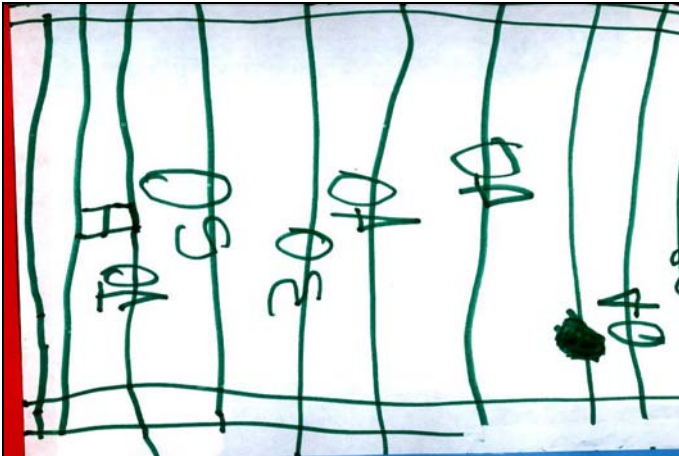
**Picture 4.10 Jane enjoying time in the pool**



Mark (five years old) talked in some detail with his teacher, Winsome, about his wishes to play in a football stadium and go to a football matches. This discussion and Mark's painting reveal his detailed views about what a playground could and should look like.

- Winsome: If you could have one wish what would it be?  
 Mark: I want a raider's T-shirt.  
 Winsome: You want a Raider's T-shirt. Why?  
 Mark: Because I go for them and I want to wear it to the game.  
 Winsome: Do you go to the game?  
 Mark: Yes, sometimes. We're going on Friday night to see them against Storm, we go on the Friday night.  
 Winsome: Is the stadium a good place for children?  
 Mark: It is good to play on, but you're not allowed to.  
 Winsome: What would a playground you could play on look like?  
 Mark: Well you'd like playing on it.  
 Winsome: And what would it look like?  
 Mark: I'd say if they had, like (pause)... a playground that had like a footy thing that had buttons to press so you could throw the ball and tackle others and I could play with my mum and they will have the rules so you know how to play the game. And I wish I got a season ticket, that's for every game in Canberra'.
- (Picture 4.11 is Mark's painting of the Canberra football stadium.)

Picture 4.11 **Canberra football stadium**



## **Theme 2: Friends**

The older children's wish to be part of a wider community and to have friends beyond their immediate family was graphically illustrated in their drawings and in their talk. Sleepovers with friends and participating in celebrations and outings such as birthday parties featured heavily in what they valued and wished to do.

Bethany (eight years old) talked about feeling happy when she was playing with her friends. Picture 4.12 is by Bethany and it shows her spending time with friends.

Picture 4.12 **Bethany and her friends**



The top three activities to engage in with friends were:

- participating in celebrations and outings (three to eight years old)
- having sleep overs (five to eight years old)
- going to the park and playing games (three to five years old).

### **Participating in celebrations and outings**

Nineteen children talked about valuing or wishing to spend time with friends during celebrations or outing such as birthday parties, movies, and the fun factory.

### **Having sleep-overs**

Seven of the older children indicated that sleepovers with friends was something that they valued doing. Six of these children were girls and one was a boy. These children were either six or seven years of age. For example, Louisa (6 years) drew a picture of a sleep over in response to the question, what is something that she sees as fun. This picture is presented as Picture 4.13.

Picture 4.13 Sleepovers



## Going to the park and playing games

Two preschool children draw or talked about going to the park or playing games with friends as something they valued or wished for. A detailed representation of this was provided by Jaimee (four years old) who drew and painted on calico a picture of playing soccer with friends (refer picture 4.14).

Picture 4.14 **Playing soccer with friends**



## Theme 3: Animals and pets

Children (three to eight years old) often included the natural world in their illustrations of what they valued and wished for. There were often images of the outside worlds in which there were birds in the sky, flowers blooming, and trees and grass growing. These children's enjoyment of animals was also apparent. A world with animals, some of which were pets, was important to the children of this age. For instance, a teacher who worked with children with disabilities mentioned pets' therapeutic value; and twenty-two children wished for or had pets (cats and dogs) and valued spending time with animals – whether at home or visiting public places that had animals such as the Aquarium, the Zoo or the circus. Some examples:

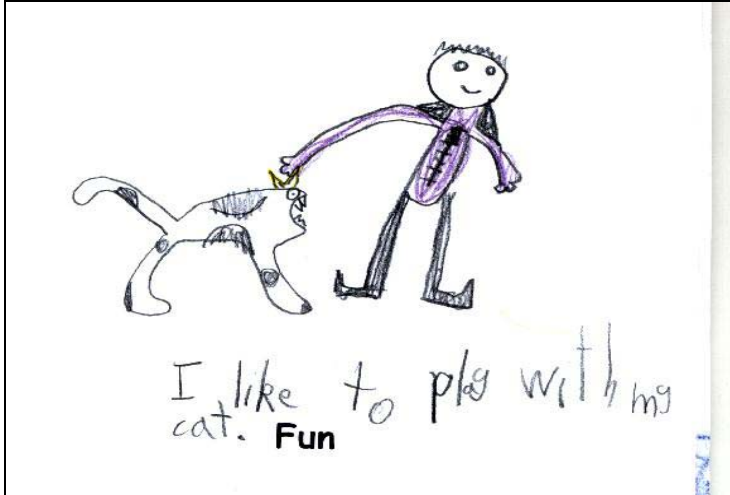
I went to the circus with my dad. I like the horses at the circus...all the people clap. There was a girl with a ribbon in her hair and she was riding a horse.  
(Lily, 4 years old. Picture 4.15 is by Lily; it's called 'The circus'.)

Picture 4.15 **The circus**



Jaida (seven years old) said that she particularly liked playing with her cat and drew a picture called 'I like to play with my cat' (Picture 4.16).

Picture 4.16 **I like to play with my cat**



#### **Theme 4: Housing**

Homes and housing surfaced again powerfully and poignantly in the responses to these questions of the older children who lived in the Women's Refuge. They wished for:

- better housing
- housing as a place to be safe
- housing as a place to live with family.

#### **Better housing**

Whilst in response to the first consultation question about children's wellbeing the children identified home as a place where they felt safe and good, some of the children that the practitioners with consulted in this project were homeless. When these children were asked, 'What could make Canberra better?' these ten children who were living in the Women's Refuge asked for housing. For instance, one child living in the women's refuge said simply:

Better houses.

This same child when asked, 'If you had a magic wand, what would you change in the world?', said: 'a new house'. She drew a picture to illustrate her ideas (picture 4.17).

Picture 4.17 **A new house**



Nemo (5 years) who attended a long day care centre and lived with her mother, father and brother wrote about and drew (Picture 4.18) the 'bestest' house. She wrote:

It's a house with windows and bricks and it's orange and it has windows and a yellow chimney and a door with a red knob in the middle and orange bricks.

Picture 4.18 **The bestest house**



### **Housing as a place to be safe**

The twelve children living in the refuge talked in detail of their wish to have safe housing and highlighted in their comments the importance to children of this age of a place that is your home. A home was housing where children's ideas and opinions were valued and in which fighting was not allowed. Red Dust their teacher wrote:

It was an overwhelming response and such an informing one. Most, if not all children wanted a 'home'...They wanted to stay home, return home, make a home and for them living in Canberra means most of the children who

accompanied their mothers/carers into the safety of a refuge escaping domestic violence, will have up to a year or more to wait.

In discussions on what the children wanted for their home they said:

Yeah! A home where I don't have to move any more and I can have a horse'.  
Yeah a house with a special room where parents have to go when they argue so we don't have to hear them.

Two children also linked good housing with having enough food and having food that you like. One said:

Yeah! I want a house with a big fridge with lots of food. That's what I want.

The second child wanted food that was culturally familiar to him (Cambodian food) and a physical environment around the house that was tropical. He said:

Yeah, lots of palms and a beach with lots of Cambodian food.

This group of twelve children living in the Women's Refuge decided to work together to build a model of their dream house. Their design of the house highlighted their capacity to think about how to design spaces in which everyone is safe and feels safe as in constructing this model safety in the house was a major issue. Red Dust the teacher explained:

All the children present wanted a high wall put around the pool to stop people from falling into the pool and drowning. There were a number of children who were scared of the dark so there were six large white lights placed in strategic places. One in each corner of the block and then anywhere else that had shadows.

The children also demonstrated detailed knowledge of what makes for respectful community living when Red Dust asked the children how they wanted people to behave in/outside of the dream house. The replies included:

- people must be respectful
- people must not shout
- everyone must be kind to animals
- that children must be listened to
- children must be included in the decisions
- children must do what they are asked to by their mums
- mums/dads not to hurt the kids
- if parents argue they must go to their own house
- parents must not fight in front of children
- parents love us and help us with our homework
- leave their shoes outside the front door
- everyone really likes each other

- they must knock on the door before coming in
- that if you want to be alone you can without people thinking your funny.

These rules generated by the children also provide a detailed picture of what they value and wish for in their own lives.

### **Housing as a place to live with family**

The twelve children living in the Women’s Refuge also talked about housing as critical in achieving their desire to reunite with their families. These children talked insightfully about the need for housing so that they could bring their family back together. For example one child said:

I want my dad to come to live with us.

While another child said:

If I could get back my little sister who lives in another place she could live with me.

### **Theme 5: Public facilities or services**

Ten children discussed public facilities or services as objects or spaces that they valued or wished for in Canberra. These facilities or services included well-known public buildings and services in Canberra such as:

- An Aquarium
- Parliament house
- Fire engines.

Whilst only a small number of children identified these public facilities as things that they wished for in their lives they have been included to highlight the diverse range of public infrastructure that young children in Canberra can come into contact with and can and do have views about. They expressed views about the importance to Canberra of the public buildings/services and showed knowledge of what each of these public facilities offer people in the ACT.

#### **An aquarium**

An aquarium was identified as valuable infrastructure in the ACT by one of the children. In what follows Nemo, five years of age, demonstrates his capacity to compare the attributes of different Aquarium and to design what he sees as the best Aquarium in the world:

Well this is a dark tunnel, which you go into like the one in Sydney and this girl catching Dory and the big one is Marlin but he got away from the jellyfish. This is the best aquarium but I haven’t been to it yet but I certainly want to. I went to the one at the zoo in Canberra and it was pretty good and I saw some penguins there. (Picture 4.19 ‘The bestest aquarium’ is by Nemo.)

Picture 4.19 **The bestest aquarium**



### **Parliament house**

Bob (five years old) identified Parliament house as a place of value. In what he said he demonstrated knowledge of the relationship between politicians and parliament house:

This is parliament house that we need because all of the politicians work there. (Picture 4.20 is Bob's painting of Parliament House.)

Picture 4.20 **Parliament House**



### **Fire truck**

Luka (5 years) was the only child who specifically said that Canberra needed a fire truck:

The fire truck goes on the road and has a loud siren. Four fire fighters can fit in the truck and it has hoses to put out the fires.

## **Theme 6: Media and entertainment industries**

Twelve children talked about valuing and/or wishing for the media and entertainment industries in their lives pointing to practices such as going to the movies, watching TV and using computers as things they liked to do. This was a relatively small number compared with the number of children who saw and wanted parks, gardens and other outdoor public facilities as a key part of their lives.

### **Going to the movies**

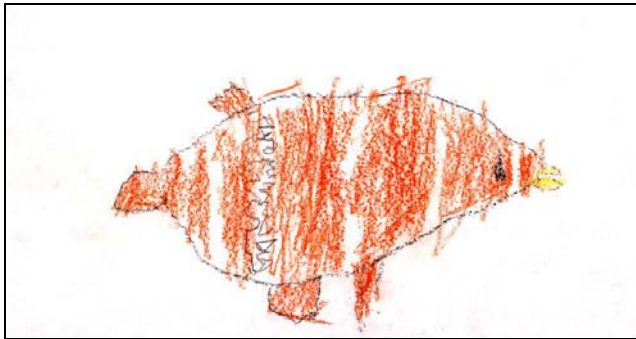
Five children valued going to the movies, because they learnt about things there. For example Jamie (3 years) said:

This is my name and this is Nemo. I saw Nemo at the movie, the best theatre has Nemo on it but he gets lost at the boat.

Bob (five years old) also talked about the movies. He said:

This is a fish. It is swimming around to get away from the shark. It lives in the coral. I saw it at the movies, which is really good. (Picture 4.21 is Bob's painting of a fish.)

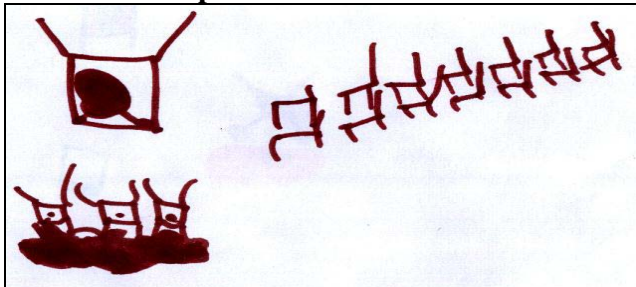
Picture 4.21 **Bob's fish**



Joe (three years old) talked about going to the movies to learn about things like Mars. Joe said:

This is a place where people sit to learn about Mars and watch the movie about Mars. (Picture 4.22 is Joe's painting of the cinema.)

Picture 4.22 **A place to watch the movie about Mars**



## Television

Five children spoke about wanting to have time and space to sit and watch television at home. Two children spoke about the enjoyment of watching videos or DVDs and two of the children talked about wanting television in their long day care service.

## Computers

Six children spoke about how they enjoyed using computers.

## Popular culture

Six children aged three to six talked about ideas or names associated with popular culture. These included:

- Nemo
- Harry Potter
- Dalmatians (101 Dalmatians)
- Action Men
- Superman.

An example of this occurred at a preschool where the teacher (Ella) asked the children (4-5 year olds) to imagine that they were magic and think of magic words to help them visit the best preschool in the whole world. The conversation follows:

Ella: What if we think up our own magic words then they'll be just for us to use.

Elyse: Well I don't know any other ones really.

Ella: Let's just make them up ourselves.

Mark: What about using a magic wand because that's what Harry Potter does and it works too. He's really magic with the wand and he can fly on the Nimbus 2000 too.

Another example of popular culture was Hamish, five years old who responded to the question, 'Tell me about your favourite day at Preschool' by saying:

Hamish: What I like the best is playing with these capes. Black cape  
*Teacher's field notes* (Hamish is wearing one of the dress up capes – a favourite with him and some other children, often worn during the session even when they're engaged in play other than dramatic or role play)

Jackie: Why do you like to play with the capes?

Hamish: Because I like to do spells with it.

Jackie: Who do you pretend you are when you wear your cape?

Hamish: I pretend I am Superman. (Refer Picture 4.23 Hamish being Superman)

Picture4.23 Hamish being Superman



### **Theme 7: Playing**

Seven preschool children from an Indigenous background were asked by their teacher: 'If you had your best day at preschool what would you be doing?'. Their main interest was in playing. They talked of playing in several areas in the kindergarten. For example:

I would play in that over there (homecorner) the dressups and beds and the drying thing for hair and the clippy clap shoes. (Bethany, four years old).

Playing hopscotch, playing houses, army men. (Bert, four years old)

I would do playing mmm racing games, playing with big skateboard thing, got a house inside, play cars...playing in the sandpit. (Ernest, four years old)

Painting, drawing, playing dress ups, dancing. (Gillian, four years old)

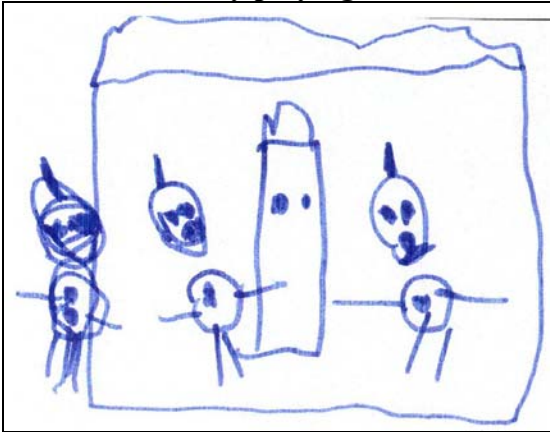
Painting, colouring in, playing with my friends when we're running. (Janet, four years old)

Ah painting, drawing, go outside. (Kane, four years old)

Seven children from an ACT government preschool were also asked by their teacher, 'Tell me about your favourite day at preschool?'. Their main interest was in playing. For example:

Casey (4 years) said: I like um playing mummies and daddies...Because I get to be the mummy sometimes and whoever is the boy can be the daddy and if I don't want him to be the daddy I let someone else be the mummy. ) Casey then drew her ideas as seen in Picture 4.24)

Picture 4.24 Casey playing mummies and daddies



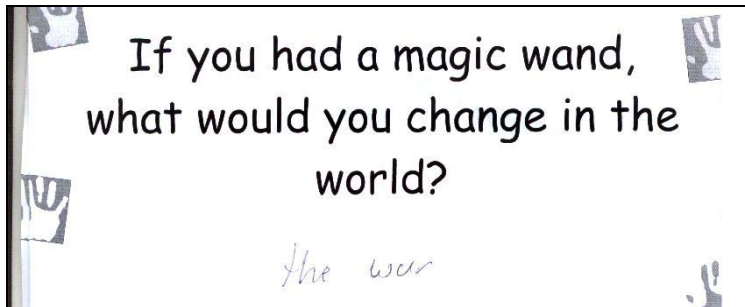
### **Theme 8: Safety and security**

Five older children talked about their wish for greater safety and security in the broader community - specifically, their wish for an end to war, to racism and to bullying. Whilst it was a small group of children who expressed these wishes they again show the diversity of issues that touch young children's lives and their capacity to have views about difficult and complex community safety issues.

#### **War**

Three children between 7 and 12 years of age who had experienced domestic violence and homelessness said that if they had a magic wand, they would have no war (see Picture 4.25).

Picture 4.25 No war



#### **Racism**

One of the older children said she wanted to end racism. (S)he wrote in a simple yet clear-cut poem:

Safe world  
No war  
No racism  
No terrorism.

#### **Bullying**

In response to 'What is not good about being a kid?', one child wrote:

Not allow(ed) to have opinion in some families. Been bullying from big kids.

### **Other issues: a teacher's comments**

A teacher in the consultation project noted other issues that emerged from her consultations with children. On a mural in which children illustrated what they wished for, she wrote:

Children want technology in their lives  
Children want to be healthy  
Children want to explore concepts of gender as they develop their understandings and awareness  
Children want public places to offer interactive activities and a range of food that children prefer  
Children want to participate in popular culture  
Children want a place that they can use their imagination to develop their 'ideal world', as they want to feel that they have control and make choices and decisions  
Children want safe places to engage in physically active play and riding bikes. They want to take risks and be challenged physically. They want facilities that allow them to be active such as parks and swimming pools  
Children want relationships with their family and friends'

These aren't the children's words, but they capture the images in the children's mural. They also echo strongly the themes and issues that emerged through the words and images of the children in other services in the consultation.

### **Consultation question 3: What makes you feel valued?**

The main theme that emerged from this question was that children feel valued when there is respect for children. Specifically, eight children aged three to twelve years of age talked about having control over their environment or having a say in what happened in their lives as being meaningful. These children were from long day care, preschool and the women's refuge.

#### ***Respect for children***

The single most notable issue emerging from this theme is that children feel valued when they are being listened to or when their opinion is asked for, that is children have a voice in deciding what happens in their lives. Eight of the children (aged three to twelve years of age from preschool, long day care and the women's refuge) commented that children should have a say in what happens in their lives. For example, one child from the women's refuge said children should be able to tell parents to go outside or to another house if they argue. Two children five years of age from a preschool and long day care setting commented on how having choices like not having to 'go to sleep for twenty minutes' made them feel valued. For example Elyse (five years old) said:

I look happy because I played with all my friends and the teachers were lovely and they didn't tell everyone to go to sleep for 20 minutes. (Picture 4.26 illustrates Elyse happy because she didn't have to sleep.)

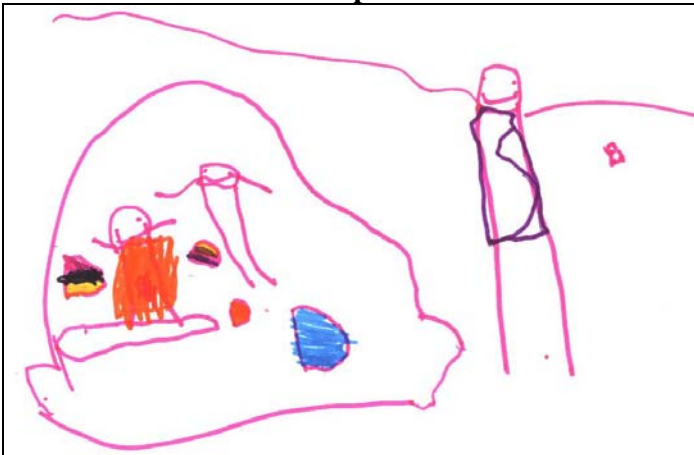
Picture 4.26 **Elyse**



Bronte (four years old) discussed having a voice in what happens in her day when describing the best preschool she could wish for. She said:

The teachers sit down and talk to you all the time. They let you decide what to do all the time. They don't tell you what to do. (Picture 4.27 illustrates what the best preschool you can wish for looks like for Bronte.)

Picture 4.27 **Bronte's best preschool**



Rosy's (four years old child with a disability) mother talked about the silent voices of children with a disability. She wrote:

When friends come by they talk to me about Rosy but not to her. People are generally uncomfortable with disability and they don't know what to do.

When one of the older children from the women's refuge was asked to write about what is not good about being a kid (s)he wrote:

Not allow(ed) to have (an) opinion in some family.

### ***Being with family***

Twenty children (aged three to five years of age from family day care, long day care and preschool) when asked what made them feel valued didn't answer the question but then went on to talk about what made them happy. All of their comments on what made them happy involved them being with family and thus reinforced the comments that were made in relation to the first two consultation questions.

## Capacity building to honor children's voices: training for participating staff

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As indicated in Chapter 1, the consultation project was designed to support the ACT Children's Strategy Consultation process by enhancing the ability of early childhood staff within the ACT to:

- encourage children families and early childhood staff to participate in the ACT Children's Plan consultation process
- enact the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in a practical way that other early childhood staff and families can emulate
- enhance the life of families and children in the ACT by increasing their awareness of children's roles and perspectives in their everyday lives
- enable early childhood staff to improve their capacity to relate children's ideas and perspectives to their everyday work
- build the capacity of early childhood staff to share their knowledge about young children's rights with children, families and the early childhood community in the ACT
- generate an archive of information about a practical, strengths-based approach to working with young children and their families.

This chapter uses two sets of data from staff who participated in the project to present the project's outcomes as they relate to these goals. One set of data explores staff perspectives on the project during their participation. Kathrine Whitty (ACT Office of Child Care) gathered this data as part of her participation in the project. The other set of data consists of participants' evaluations of what they had learnt during the project. The CEIEC Project team gathered this data at the final training session. Not every participant participated in interviews with Kathrine and/or completed an evaluation form at the final training session, so full data is not available for every participant. However, themes and issues emerged from the data sufficiently strongly to indicate whether and how staff built their capacity to consult with children through this relatively short project.

### **Staff perspectives during the project**

At the project's mid-point, Kathrine Whitty asked the staff who were participating in the project why they were participating in it and how they felt about their participation.

Specifically:

- What personal/professional values drew you to participate in this project?
- What do you hope this project will achieve?
- What has surprised, puzzled or worried you about how the project's progress?

Fourteen participants (all female) responded. Kathrine summarised their responses and the following is based on that summary.

## ***What personal/professional values drew you to participate in this project?***

Staff said that they participated in the project because they believed very strongly that what children have to say is valid and important and that children should have a voice in policy making. Some examples:

I was interested in the project because of the inherent value in listening to children's voices but also for the opportunity to network with other like-minded Early Childhood Professionals. I often see other teachers at various meetings and forums but rarely have the opportunity to discuss issues and ideas with this degree of value. There are also many teachers who would scoff at the idea of the government consulting with children – I welcome the opportunity to be one of the ones who didn't! (Ella)

My interest in children. The idea that children have a voice and that people in power need to listen to that voice. (Laura)

The desire to articulate 'best practice' in Early Childhood to the ACT community. It is also an opportunity to promote the structure of our school as a model for young children. (Sarah)

The belief that children with special needs should have a voice, and these should be acknowledged. (Mrs Desert)

I am a feminist and have worked with children escaping domestic violence and effected violence for twenty years. I have worked with children and recognise children as clients in their own right. (Red Dust)

The image of the child as having something to offer the wider community and the desire to give children a voice. I also have a particular interest in research and how it is conducted with children. (Joanne)

## ***What do you hope this project will achieve?***

Participant's hopes for the project were tied to their beliefs that children's views and voices should be acknowledged and honoured strongly in government policy making. They hoped that the project would support the development of ethical practices for consulting with and working with children; and that it would help the broader community to understand how young children can contribute to the community and why government should listen to them. Some examples:

To develop ethics/practice that enhances strengths of children and develops a respectful way of working with children. (Red Dust)

I hope it gives children a voice and makes the wider community aware that children have a contribution to make irrespective of their age. I think it is arrogant to tell children (as if we know) what they need. (Joanne)

I hope as one of my preschoolers commented that the government listen to what children's views are and action is taken to create this. The children I spoke to could hardly dare to believe that the government would actually listen to them and do something they actually want. (Xena)

### ***What has surprised, puzzled or worried you about how the project's progress?***

Four themes emerged from participants' responses to this question:

- surprise at the complexity of children's ideas and understandings
- concern at the limited time in which to do their work
- difficulty in getting people to sign the permission forms
- curiosity about how to ask children questions.

Participants' specific comments on each theme follow.

#### **Surprise at the complexity of children's ideas and understandings**

Several participants expressed surprise at the complexity of children's ideas and understandings that they had encountered during the consultations. All these participants had considerable experience of working with young children, yet the project broadened their view of young children's complex and diverse knowledge and opinions. Some examples:

I was very surprised about the directions that my questions were taken with the children. I was expecting more superficial subject matter – activities that they like at preschool and things that they don't like. I got discussions about multiple care settings and children's needs for nurturing and comfort instead. (Ella)

How much children know never ceases to amaze me. How children are community oriented, how children are wiser and can be wiser from their experience and require a safe and respectful way to communicate. (Red Dust)

Participant surprise at young children's knowledge was linked with their desire to consult more meaningfully with children in the future. As Rose said:

Some project participants asking how it will be done surprised me. A perceived lack of trust that children are well resourced to be able to appropriately talk about such things. It has challenged me to think about setting up environments through consultation with children and the project has prompted me to take the next step of actualising the process. (Rose)

Xena also talked about her surprise at children's joy about being consulted:

The reaction of the children has really surprised me. It's evident that they really value being asked what they think and want. Their whole face lights up with joy and excitement. (Xena)

Other staff talked informally during the second and third training sessions about their belief that children really valued being asked their views and that they really enjoyed having special times and places when they could talk with staff about what they enjoyed doing and what they wished for.

### **Concern at the limited time in which to do their work**

Ten of the participants wished that the project had run over a longer period of time, as this would, in their view, have enabled them to deepen their consultation with children and gain a richer range of responses. For example:

I also felt that this should have been a longer process – I felt that I didn't get as much done in a two-week period as I wished. (Maree)

The speed and time frame. The children could visit this over a longer period of time. (Kristen)

### **Difficulty in getting people to sign the permission forms**

Four staff said that it was hard to obtain families' permission for their children to participate in the project. Thus:

The lack of response and interest from parents and how difficult it has been to get the permission forms back. (Maree)

I'm concerned that few of my parents returned their permission notes and so limited the number I could submit. It appears they were concerned about photographs and the Internet. (Jean)

### **Curiosity about how to ask children questions**

Two participants expressed the wish that they could have learnt more about how to ask children questions in ways that deepened their conversations with them; and said that they wanted to reflect further on how to consult with children under two years of age.

### **Staff perspectives from the final training session**

In the final training session, the CEIEC Project team invited participants to evaluate their participation in the project in three ways:

- completing a simple evaluation form (Appendix 2)
- writing a short learning story about the most significant changes that had occurred in their centre and/or in themselves as a result of their involvement in the project
- reflecting on future consultations with young children.

## The evaluation forms

Eight of the twenty-three participants completed the evaluation forms. Some of the participants were absent from the final session, as it was (unavoidably) in the school holidays. Some participants who were present at the final session said that they would send their completed forms to the CEIEC Project team, but have yet to do so.

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 summarise the responses of those participants who did complete the evaluation. They show that the eight participants were very positive about what they had learnt in the action learning training sessions and in the project itself.

**Table 5.1: Participant evaluations of their participation in the project**

Participating in the project enabled me to:

<i>Aims</i>	<i>Disagree strongly</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Agree strongly</i>
Build my capacity to bring children's voice to the fore in my daily work				5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Familiarise myself with action learning				4 (50%)	4 (50%)
Improve my knowledge of how to bring children's voices to the fore in developmentally appropriate ways				5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Improve my capacity to reflect critically on children's voices in my daily work				5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)

**Table 5.2: Participant evaluations of the training sessions in the project**

The action learning training sessions:

Quality of sessions	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree strongly
Allowed me to participate				1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)
Introduced me to research-based case studies of practitioners who have brought children's voices into their programs				3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Enabled me to learn something new				3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Were supported by useful learning resources (e. g handouts)				3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Challenged my thinking				3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Were well presented				2 (25%)	6 (75%)
Were well organized				3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)

The evaluation form invited further comment, but only two comments were received. One participant wrote, 'I feel everyone was encouraged to openly participate and all was extremely well organised'. Another wrote, 'Time span too short', which reinforced the comments in Kathrine Whitty's survey (see above).

### ***The learning stories about significant changes***

Each participant was invited to writing a short learning story about the most significant changes that had occurred in their centre and/or in them as a result of their participation in the project. Each story about changes in a centre was written by one or more participants who worked there; and each story about changes in an individual participant was written by that individual.

### **The centres: significant changes**

Seven centres each submitted a short statement about the most significant changes that had occurred as a result of their participation in the project. In summary, these were:

- parents' increased awareness of the ACT Children's Plan (1 centre)
- staff's increased understanding of about children's knowledge and preferences (1 centre)
- staff's increased desire to consult with children on other issues and to use what had been learnt in their everyday practices (3 centres)
- the ways that they link the service and the children's home (1 centre).

What follows are specific instances of those broad changes:

Parents have a heightened awareness of the notion of the 'ACT Children's Plan'. Permission notes would be most significant data. Considerable dialogue has been taken place re the extent to which permission has been given. (Learning Together School)

I believe that the staff are more aware of what the children know and like. They are also looking forward to doing lots of different things and centring daily things around the children. (The Dust Cloud)

From sharing the voices of children from the various centres, I am keen to consult with the children from my setting on other issues to affect change, because I can see that they are capable of expressing their desires. (Ardrossan Preschool)

An understanding of a different method of practice for the team at my centre – valuing children for what they want to learn and doing that for them always. (Three Trees. Original emphasis.)

How the children's work is displayed. (Green Hills Family Day Care)

We are making more effort to blur the boundaries between home and preschool e.g. encouraging the children to bring in photos of people who are

important to them and encouraging children to bring things/toys that are important to them. (Purple Preschool)

All of the staff are becoming more comfortable with asking children what they want to do. Our program is developed around their choices. (Bebes & Ninos)

### **The centres: significant learning**

Six centres each submitted a short statement about the most significant learning that had occurred as a result of their participation in the project. In summary, these were:

- children value family and home enormously (2 centres)
- children enjoy and are excited by being consulted (2 centres)
- children know clearly what they like (1 centre)
- children with challenging behaviours don't feel free at the centre as a result of those behaviours (1 centre).

What follows are specific instances of those broad statements:

Children at a school know about and value their family and their home as being central to their lives. At age 6 to 7 they are beginning to make small (but significant to them) steps away from home i.e. developing a sense of independence. (Learning Together School)

The children were very interested and enthused about taking part in the project. They were very excited about drawing on a piece of calico and finally when they saw the finished product. (The Dust Cloud)

They (children) know what they like. (Ardrossan Preschool)

I didn't realise the children with challenging behaviours didn't feel a sense of freedom at Three Trees. I also am really excited by what we can do in the future and change so children are learning what they want to. (Three Trees)

Children need reminders of familiarity/home to help them feel comfortable. (Purple Preschool)

The book, *The best things in Canberra* showed to me the willingness of children to share with us what is important to them, it was quite individualised and reflected their ideas. (Bebes & Ninos)

### **The participants: significant changes**

Five participants each submitted a short statement about the most significant changes that had occurred as a result of their participation in the project. In summary, these were:

- an increased desire and capacity to consult with children (3 participants)
- the desire and confidence to create changes in daily practices (2 participants)
- listening to children more (2 participants).

What follows are specific instances of those broad changes:

My most significant change was becoming part of a group of early childhood professionals from a diverse range of settings. Hearing and discussing what happens in each of the settings has given me a broader perspective and my understandings particularly about childcare prior to 4 years. (Annie)

As of today I am going into a new room – this project has given me lots of ideas and made me think of lots of things that I would like to achieve in the room. (Maree)

From the other participants I have acquired some really effective strategies to consult better. (Jean)

The opportunity to work with the team from Melbourne Uni and for me to realise it is possible for me to do this and change the way the centre operates. (Agnes)

I have given more time to listening and talking with children and carers. (Jess)

I'm spending more time sitting at the drawing table and chatting with children as they draw. (Ella)

I will consult with children about our centre environment, getting them to set up areas. (Winsome)

### **The participants: significant learning**

Seven participants each submitted a short statement about the most significant learning that had occurred as a result of their participation in the project. In summary, these were:

- children liked participating in the consultation processes (1 participant)
- children value family and environment (2 participants)
- children know more than adults given them credit for (2 participants).

What follows are specific instances of those broad statements, showing an increased respect for children and what they know:

I found that the children were very interested in participating in the project – the most common theme that came out from my research was families and friends. (Maree)

Some things that have occurred to me that I have listened to today in addition to my own material is:

- children appeared to express a desire for something that is a deficient in their life due to their setting e. g. family seemed so important to children in child care
- children liked what their lives e.g. environment outdoors. (Jean)

Children know what they believe in and understand a lot more about things that adults give them credit for. I just want the children to feel like they are valued. (Agnes)

I can learn a lot about what children think by really listening to them and asking questions to ensure that I understand what they're thinking. (Ella)

### ***The reflections on future consultations with young children***

In the final training session, participants were invited to reflect on:

- how children might like to develop the consultation process
- how participants might like to develop the consultation process
- how participants could develop the consultation process and the supports they would need to do so.

Participants' responses to each question are described below. In general, they expressed a strong desire to continue consulting with children and a strong belief that what the children had communicated (verbally and otherwise) in the project should be listened to.

### **How children might like to develop the consultation process**

Participants' responses to this issue emphasized the importance of informing the children about the project's progress. Some examples:

In the very brief 'snapshot' of consultation attempted in this project we have heard some strong clear ideas of children in Canberra. I believe they want to have these explored, taken seriously and realised. (Gabriel)

The children were interested in seeing the finished product (some have since drawn pictures and brought them to staff to write the story on the bottom). (Maree)

To effect change in their preschool environment. (Jane)

Seeing what other children are saying. (Winsome)

### **How participants might like to develop the consultation process**

Participants expressed their wish that the project is extended in different ways. Some examples:

I would like to see an extension of this project (in time) and across the sector to involve everyone and become integral to service delivery in the ACT. (Gabriel)

Would like to have a night where parents can come and look at what was observed etc during the project and beyond. (Maree)

To effect change in their preschool environment. (Jean)

Continue meeting with people about future consulting. (Winsome)

### **How participants could develop the consultation process and the supports they would need to do so**

Participants identified various ways to continue consulting with children about the program of their centre and to give children a stronger voice in what was planned for them. Some examples:

Practice and a commitment to changing my expectations of children's programs and the capacity within them to consult in an ongoing way. (Gabriel)

I will continue to consult with children, especially in my new room. (Maree)

I intend to consult with my children so we can design our indoor and outdoor environments as children would like. (Jean)

Developing the program and environment with them (children) more. (Winsome)

Talking, taping. (Green Hills Family Day Care)

Further, participants described specific ways they intended to develop the consultation process:

Considering the report and how we can develop consultation work further within the children's service sector. (Gabriel)

To continue to observe children: new and interesting areas. (Maree)

To list the best questioning that others used i.e. strategies. (Jean)

Making regular time for talking and listening to the children and carers. (Green Hills Family Day Care)

Consulting about the environment with children. (Winsome)

When discussing the support that they would need to develop the consultation process, participants said that they valued the process of networking and sharing practice (initiated in the action learning sessions) and wanted to continue meeting as a group after the

project's end, so that they could gain further feedback and support on how to consult with young children. Some examples:

Feedback from similar projects internationally, relevant research updates, consideration within other states/territory. Funded ongoing project to disseminate/include in all ACT programs and links to licensing and accreditation. (Gabriel)

To come back as a group to share what we have done since (i.e. finishing). (Maree)

Talking and sharing as we have done today. (Jean)

Networking more with other professionals. (Winsome)

## **Final comments**

The feedback from centres and participants was incomplete, as already noted. However, the combination of responses to Kathrine Whitty's mid-project survey, the evaluation forms and participants' reflections in the final training session show strongly that participants valued their participation in the Project highly and that it had increased their desire and their capacity to consult with young children. They had increased their respect for and knowledge about what young children can and do know and their capacity to express their views; and had noted how much children enjoyed expressing their ideas and views in the consultation process.

## Looking forward from the Project

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Respect for children's status as social actors does not diminish adult responsibilities. It places new responsibilities on the adult community to structure children's environment, guide their behaviour and enable their social participation in ways consistent with their understanding, interests and ways of communication, especially in the issues that directly affect their lives. (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000, pp. 31-32)

Valuing children, [is] the inheritance of a 'civic covenant' which includes a moral responsibility for the generations which follow us... (Aubrey et al, 2000, p. 25)

Listening to children's voices comes with responsibilities. Whilst not all of what children want will be consistent or achievable, once their views are sought adults have a responsibility to respond to them ethically and with respect. This final chapter of this Report focuses on what has been learnt from the Project and how to look forward from the Project to ethical and respectful responses to children. It will use the findings from this small Project to:

- identify the key issues that should be considered in the development of respectful practices for consulting with young children at the level of policy development
- make suggestions on the actions needed to progress this work within the ACT.

It is hoped that the findings from the Project can be used to:

- Prompt the ACT government to reflect on how they might respond to the specific children and the views they expressed as part of this Project.
- Encourage the ACT government, under the leadership of the Children's Services Branch, to adopt an ongoing commitment to consulting with children in ways that are exploratory and based on best practices of listening to young children.
- Prompt further capacity-building research-based project work into the issues identified in this chapter.
- Aid the development of strategies by the ACT government to structurally embed young children's voices into those areas of government service provision and policy development that directly affect them.

### **Responding to the children who participated in the Project**

Through this Project 137 children in the ACT identified what they needed for their wellbeing, and what they wished for in relation to three domains of their life:

- family and home. Children in this Project highlighted the prime importance to them of safe and caring families in their lives. They wanted time with their families and it was key people within their families that made them feel safe. A home in which

members of the family have time together and time apart was also important for many of the children. These needs were expressed in different ways by different groups of children. For those children in a Women's Refuge being reunited with their family and having a place that was their family home were the things that they wanted most strongly. For those children who were living with their family in their family home maintaining the status quo was important.

- the early childhood curriculum. Children valued and enjoyed the opportunity to have a say in things that affect them. They also demonstrated their capacity to express their views on those things that affect their daily lives. This has direct implications for how early childhood programs take decisions about programs for young children and the extent to which their voice is present in those programs. Children's desire for family, for friends, for play, for time with others and time by themselves, for home-like spaces in which they have choices and for sharing their ideas and having them documented link directly to questions of how best to design early childhood curriculum that values children and that supports their sense of wellbeing.
- the environs of Canberra and their local community. Children of different ages were clearly aware of the Canberra environs. The children valued space for play, meeting friends and being in nature. Having a safe environment was also important to the children.

Chapter 4 presented a more detailed discussion of their views in each of these domains. (Refer to Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 for a summary of their views.) In this chapter we make suggestions in response to the children's issues, interests and concerns on two levels. First, we consider how the children can be responded to respectfully in the short term. Second, we offer a set of suggestions to prompt reflection at the policy level on what children said. In building these suggestions we have drawn on several sources including:

- the literature summarised in Chapter 2 on consulting with young children
- the findings of this consultation presented in Chapters 4 and 5
- guidelines for good practice in consulting with young children at the policy level that have been developed by the Children's Rights Alliance (UK), the National Youth Council of Ireland in a twelve-month research project on *Hearing Young Voices* (2001).
- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We also use the discussion to highlight some indicative *Pointers to Best Practice in Consulting with Children Birth to Eight Years of Age* from this Project that could be tested more thoroughly in an extended project.

### ***Responding to children in the short term***

Children shared their ideas in this Project because they had been invited to do so in a government-led initiative. If the children who participated are to feel that their ideas have been listened to it is crucial that the ACT government responds to them. Feedback to the children who participated in this Project should be at the foundation of any response to this Report. We strongly endorse the principle that feedback is 'a cornerstone of good

practice' when building approaches to consulting with young children (Children's Rights Alliance, 2002) (*Pointer 1 to Best Practice*).

To that end, we would suggest that the ACT government:

- formally thank the children and adults who participated in the Project for the time that they spent sharing their ideas
- inform them about what has been learnt from the children
- indicate to them how the government will be responding to their ideas in the short and long term.

There are several ways in which the ACT government could enact this suggestion. They include sending a letter to the children and families, forwarding them a copy of the Report and/or inviting them to an event at which their ideas are publicly displayed. Suggestions for how their ideas might be publicly shared (detailed later in this chapter) include: a Children's Voices Fair, a Website for Children's Voices in Policy, a Children's Voices Roadshow, an Engaging Children's Voices Book and/or CDROM, a series of exhibition panels and a Canberra for kids 2004 Calendar.

### ***Reflecting on the policy implications of children's areas of concern and interest***

Children's areas of concern and interest touch several policy areas including:

- family and children's policy
- housing policies
- family protection policies
- community safety policies
- policies on community infrastructure and public spaces.

Children told us that policies that affect their lives range well beyond those services directly aimed at them. They point to the wide range of financial and resource allocation decisions in public policy, such as housing policy and environmental policy that make a difference to young children's rights and wellbeing. The ACT government could play a key role in promoting this understanding across government as well as in the broader public arena (*Pointer 2 to Best Practice*). We suggest that the ACT government actively promote in the broader public arena the understandings that:

- a diverse range of public policies directly affect children and their wellbeing
- young children can and do express views that can positively inform these policies.

There are several ways in which the ACT government could enact this suggestion. They range from developing a Children's Voices Fair to a public media campaign. We offer the following specific strategies for consideration:

- A Children's Voices Fair at a key venue within the ACT. This could display the outcomes of the consultation work in the form of interactive exhibits that encourage visitors to 'ask a child today' what they think. It could be directed primarily at children and parents in the local community. The Fair could be publicized through the ACT children's services and be available to staff and families in those services.

- A Website for Children’s Voices in Policy. This could provide various resources to children’s centres and serve as an inspiration and support for those wishing to explore new and equitable ways of bringing children’s voices into daily work with young children and their families. It could contain a record of the Children’s Voices Fair and its development; descriptions of the consultation activities with on-line discussion forums about them; and details of resources for use in innovative and equitable ways to encourage children’s participation in daily decision-making in children’s services in the ACT.
- A ‘Children’s Voices Roadshow’. This could be a portable version of the Children’s Voices Fair that could be an ‘outreach’ resource, enabling other children’s centres in the ACT to explore new ways to bring children’s voices into their daily work. This could also ‘travel’ to conferences and to the tertiary institutions within the ACT.
- An Engaging Children’s Voices booklet. A book and/or CDROM that could summarise the aims, objectives and experiences of this Project, to encourage and enable other Centres to develop new and culturally-inclusive approaches to children’s participation in the daily life of the centre.

Each of those strategies would be enhanced by the use of local media, such as the *Canberra Times* and *Canberra Chronicle*, to increase and diversify the audience reached through the suggested dissemination strategies.

Alongside the development of strategies to increase public awareness of how children’s lives are touched by public policy, we believe that it is important for the ACT government to take a proactive role in developing an increased awareness across all areas of ACT government about how their policies touch young children’s lives. To support an increased awareness within government, we suggest that all ACT government departments, under the leadership of the Children’s Services Branch, could be invited to reflect and report on the implications of findings from this Project for their policy portfolios. They could be asked to reflect on how children’s wellbeing is directly touched by their policy portfolio and to report on how they might hear young children’s perspectives in their future policy making. This could include reporting to children, families and early childhood staff who participated in the Project.

There are several small-scale strategies that the Children’s Services Branch could use to share the ideas generated within the Project. Each of these could serve as a basis for reflection on the findings from this Project within the ACT government. These strategies could include the development of a PowerPoint presentation that provides a Project overview, outcomes and future directions, a whole of government seminar on the Project structured to inform and support reflection on the implications for specific departments, and/or presentations about the Project at key inter-department fora. It would be important in any presentation of the outcomes from the Project that the words and images of the children are used to help capture the spirit of children’s voices.

This suggestion is critical to structurally embedding hearing children’s voices into the policy making process within the ACT government. There is a danger that this Project

could be seen to be a tokenistic gesture to involve young children in the policy consultation process unless there is plans to take this work forward and structurally embed it into government policy decision-making processes over time. (*Pointer 3 to Best Practice*). As the Child Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland cautions:

Denying them [children] such opportunities risks trivialising the practice of consultation and discriminating against those most vulnerable to the impact of government decisions. A tokenistic approach would also deprive us of an opportunity to improve the policies and services that affect children and young people – the research supports the view that enabling children to be heard in connection with the development of these policies and services will enhance their effectiveness. (p 1-2)

A coordinated approach to the findings from this Project and to structurally embedding the hearing of children’s voices into the policy making process will be critical to ensuring that tokenism does not prevail. The Child Rights Alliance and the National Youth Council of Ireland emphasise that such coordination is a cornerstone of best practice through the lessons they learnt in their twelve month long Project on *Hearing Children’s Voices* in Ireland (2001). We would strongly endorse their statement that a key action to support best practice is government taking a lead responsibility in:

Promoting and facilitating a cooperative approach among agencies to advancing the effort to hear young voices and a coordinated approach to addressing the issues that arise in relation to consultation with children and young people (p. 2)

## **Early childhood professionals and capacity building for consulting with children**

Early childhood professionals are uniquely placed to take a lead role in consultation with young children. Their professional training in early childhood pedagogies and practices equips them with a sound knowledge base in seeking children’s views, listening to children and documenting children’s learning. However, they cannot do this work without appropriate resources and support. The action learning training programme and the professional networking opportunities provided in the Project were crucial to the capacity of participants to consult with young children. (*Pointer 4 to Best Practice*) Specifically, they:

- provided participants with time to plan how to engage best practice strategies for consulting with young children
- expanded participants’ repertoire of strategies that they could use to consult with young children
- increased participants’ desires and capacity to consult with children
- increased the time participants gave to listening to children
- increased understanding for participants about children’s knowledge and preferences

- enabled participants to network with other professionals and engage in critical reflection with them about how best to consult with young children.

Clearly, the knowledge and skills of early childhood professionals about young children and how to seek and hear their voices is core to the process of consulting with young children. This Project highlighted the ways in which early childhood professionals can be supported to embed consulting with young children into their daily practices and how their work with young children and their families can be used to inform wider policy initiatives. They are a powerful resource and key stakeholders for the ACT in any future efforts to consult with young children and structurally embed consulting with young children into government policy initiatives. However, this Project was by necessity short-term in nature (one month), and it involved only a small cross-section of early childhood professionals in the ACT. In addition, the timeframe and the resources available to this Project meant that it was not possible to include all children in the ACT from birth to eight years of age, nor identify a representation sample to survey. Ideally, all ACT children would be offered the opportunity to participate in future policy consultations and in consultations about what they wish and value in their daily lives in children's services and all staff working with young children would be supported to undertake this work using best practice strategies (*Pointer 5 to Best Practice*). For these reasons we would suggest that the ACT government draw on the action learning processes and best practice strategies on consulting with young children trailed in the Birth to Eight Consultation Project to extend this Project. They could then conduct a more in-depth evaluation of the extended Project as a basis for developing a strategic, long-term plan for structurally embedding consulting with young children throughout children's services in the ACT.

This Project also offers a positive basis for the ACT Children's Branch and the ACT tertiary institutions serving early childhood services to link and explore ways in the processes and outcomes from the Project could be used to build capacity within ACT early childhood students to honour children's voices as future early childhood professionals. Specifically, this Project offers the ACT Children's Services Branch the opportunity to initiate discussions with the course coordinators of the key early childhood training institutions in the ACT – both at TAFE and University level - to invite their views on how to institutionalise the principles and processes for centring children's voice in work with young children within the training programs of these institutions. Much of the best pedagogy practice discussed in Chapter 2 will already form part of these training programs but it may be possible for the outcomes from the Project to enable the use of practice-based examples of how this work can be done within the overall policy context of the ACT. For these reasons we suggest that the ACT government's Children's Services Branch consider initiating discussions with the ACT tertiary institutions serving early childhood services to explore the ways in which principles and processes of the Birth to Eight Consultation Project could be incorporated into training programs for early childhood staff.

## **The Children's Services Branch and the Children's Plan**

Core to honouring the children's voices that were shared through this project is using their voices and the learning that has been generated through the project to inform the

Children's Plan. To this end we would suggest that the Children's Services Branch consider ways to ensure that the learning generated in the Birth to Eight Consultation Project in the ACT informs the ACT Children's Plan and future policy for young children within the ACT.

The small-scale nature of this Project means that taking the work forward would usefully involve sharing the ideas generated within the Project with those children's services who could not participate in it. To support this work we suggest that the ACT government's Children's Services Branch consider identifying and implementing a set of specific strategies that will enable it to share the processes and outcomes of the Birth to Eight Consultation Project with children's services throughout the ACT.

Possibilities that the ACT Children's Services Branch could consider include:

- A presentation of the Project, its processes and outcomes at the ACT Children's Services director's meetings and meetings of ACT Government preschool staff
- An article written for the ACT Children's Branch's Division newsletter and children's services sector newsletter
- The organization of a dedicated *Engaging Children's Voices Forum* to share outcomes of Project, ongoing work.

More resource intensive strategies could be used to share the work from this Project could be used to give the Project a stronger life and influence beyond the immediate consultation period. The suggestions that follow arise from the experiences of the CEIEC team in other Projects geared to generating outcomes beyond the immediate life of the Project and include:

- *A series of exhibition panels children's perspectives*. This could be used to share the consultation results with a larger audience, to generate further discussion and to inspire additional projects by providing a practical example of what the outcomes of such consultations look like in practice. The panels could not only present children's perspectives but also offer suggestions for how adults engage in seeking children's perspectives in their own work. The exhibition could tour local shopping centres or be organised in conjunction with *ACT Children's Plan* exhibition planned for display in legislative assembly.
- *2004 Calendar 'Canberra for kids - what children said'*. This could be a possible joint project with Urban Services and offer a way in which the children's voices could be shared with a diverse audience in Canberra. Again the Calendar could also offer simple suggestions for how adults can engage children's voices in their daily lives with children.

In addition, a conference paper is in preparation for presentation to a forthcoming international early childhood conference in Melbourne. The paper will explore the consultation process and its outcomes and be co-authored with ACT Children's Services staff and CEIEC project team members. This will enable the consultation process and its outcomes to be shared with an audience beyond the ACT.

The small-scale nature of the project meant that a limited number of children were by necessity involved in the project. It will be particularly important in any extension of the project to consider how best to broaden the range of children involved and in particular how to ensure the voices of those children most at risk of being silenced are heard. (*Pointer 6 to Best Practice*). The small group of children who participated in this consultation Project were children who lived in a Women's Refuge had powerful, insightful and poignant views to offer on what was crucial to their wellbeing. They commented knowingly on family protection policies, housing policies, community safety and their own safety and wellbeing. It will be important in future consultations with young children that the services that are selected to participate in consultation processes have children attending their services that represent a diverse range of family backgrounds. The experiences in this Project indicate that it will be necessary to specifically target specific services in areas where it is known that significant numbers of 'at risk' children live. For these reasons we suggest that the ACT government's Children's Services Branch reflect on how they might devise appropriate and respectful strategies for including the voices of children from diverse backgrounds in any extension of this Project or future consultation process with young children. This would necessitate sufficient time and resources are allocated to make this possible.

## **Concluding remarks**

This small-scale consultation project with children birth to eight years of age conducted by the CEIEC project team as part of the consultation on the ACT Children's Plan cannot provide conclusive evidence of what young children in the ACT want for their wellbeing and what they value in their lives. It was not designed to be representative of all children birth to eight in the ACT as the resources were not available to undertake such a task. For this reason, the outcomes of this consultation project can be indicative only. However, for those adults involved in the project – ACT children's services staff and members of the CEIEC team the project generated powerful and memorable understandings about what the 137 children who participated in the project knew and understood about their wellbeing and what they valued. It indicated how possible it is to consult with young children and how much young children enjoy being consulted with.

Policy consultation with the very youngest of our children is still in its infancy. In initiating and supporting the *Birth to Eight Consultation* project the ACT government's Children's Services Branch took an important step in beginning the process of seriously enacting children's right to participate in decision-making, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Child, with the youngest of our children. It also took a lead in advancing knowledge about how best to do this. They did this in a spirit of exploration with and trust in the youngest of children in the ACT (*Pointer 7 to Best Practice*). The next step could and should be to extend this knowledge by extending the important and pathbreaking work begun in this project. In doing so, the ACT government can play a lead role in extending children's rights in and through its Children's Plan to all children, irrespective of age.

## Appendices

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## **Appendix 1: Definition of key terms**

Several terms in this report are being used and understood in particular ways, as follows:

**A committee of management** is responsible for decision making related to a service's day-to-day running. It is comprised of voluntary members and usually includes representatives of the Operator, coordination unit, carers and parents. When a service does not have a management committee, advisory committees provide advice on operations.

**Accreditation** is 'a system or scheme for comparing service quality with agreed upon criteria for purposes of validating areas of strength and areas for improvement, recognising quality where it exists, and providing a designation of the level of quality of the service.' (Stonehouse, 1998, p. 15)

**Childcare services** are services that cater primarily for children from 0 – 5 years of age. They are generally open at least 8 hours a day, 5 days a week for up to 48 weeks a year.

**Children's services** is term used to describe those services that provide for children outside of formal schooling and include preschools, child care services, family day care services and out of school hours care.

**Early childhood** refers to the period between 0 and 8 years of age.

**Early childhood services** is a term used to describe those services that cater for children from 0 – 8 years of age but primarily those services before the formal years of schooling begin.

**Preschools** are an educational service provided by children 3 to 5 years of age. They are generally open during school terms and children will generally attend on a sessional basis for up to 10 hours per week.

**Stakeholders** is used in this report to refer to those people within the ACT with a stake in ACT children's services including parents, early childhood staff and members of committees of management and other management bodies.

## Appendix 2: Participant evaluation form



### Your project evaluation - based on project objectives

Your name (Optional):

Pseudonym:

The action learning training sessions (Place a tick in the appropriate box)

Quality of session	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Allowed me to participate					
Introduced me to research-based case studies of practitioners who have brought children's voices in to their programs					
Enabled me to learn something new					
Was supported by useful learning resources (eg handouts)					
Challenged my thinking					
Was well presented					
Was well organised					

Participation in this project enabled me to: (Place a tick in the appropriate box)

Aims	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Build my capacity to bring children's voices to the fore in my daily work					
Familiarise myself with action learning					
Improve my knowledge of how to bring children's voices to the fore in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways					
Improve my capacity to critically reflect on children's voices in my daily work					

Other comments

*What other comments would you like to make about the project and your involvement in it?*

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