



PARENTS, FAMILIES AND CARERS

DEVELOPING A NATIONAL VOICE FOR FAMILIES

PROPOSAL FOR DISCUSSION

National Summit Wednesday 8 August 2007 Melbourne

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. Our objective is to find an appropriate method and structure for developing a national voice for parents, families and carers.
 2. This voice will incorporate three functions:
 - i. advocacy of the interests of parents, families and carers as interests which are distinct from those of governments, service providers or charities;
 - ii. development and promotion of public policy which enhances the rights, capacities, choices, and dignity of parents, families and carers;
 - iii. development and promotion of innovation in support and service delivery which empowers parents, families and carers, and builds our capacities and resources.
 3. We aim to bring together parents, families and carers from several different sectors which have previously been isolated from each other, including education and schools; child care; early intervention and early years development; disability; mental illness; learning difficulties; behavioural difficulties; youth support; chronic and acute illness; and senior years.
 4. We aim to develop a voice that is as broad and inclusive as possible which will not be aligned with any religious or cultural perspective on family structure or bio-ethical issues.
 5. We aim to develop a voice that can attract significant financial and infrastructure support from public, private, philanthropic and charitable sources.
 6. We welcome the participation in this process of
 - i. individuals who are parents, families or carers;
 - ii. organisations which are support, advocacy or self-help groups of parents families or carers;
 - iii. individual philanthropists or donors and philanthropic and private sector organisations who support our objectives.
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PROPOSAL FOR DISCUSSION

The following is a proposal for discussion. It contains nine (9) key points on which comments are invited.

Our aim is to receive comments on this proposal from parents, families and carers and their support, advocacy and self-help groups around the country throughout June 2007. From this process, a refined proposal will be developed for further discussion throughout July ahead of our national Families Summit in Melbourne on Wednesday 8th August 2007.

KEY POINT 1

Name

Proposal: National Union of Parents, Families and Carers

Rationale: The word 'union' is our preferred term ahead of 'federation', 'alliance' or 'association'. The structure we have proposed (below) is a combination of a federation of groups and an association of individuals. It is an alliance of individuals and groups. We think the word 'union' communicates this alliance concept, but with the added value of the traditional union idea of "strength in numbers" creating a powerful voice.

KEY POINT 2

Mission

Proposal: To be a national voice for parents, families and carers in Australian public life.

Rationale: There is no political voice for parents, families and carers in Australia which crosses the many whole-of-life issues we face.

We aim to develop a voice that is as prominent in Australian public life as that of ACOSS, the ACTU, and the National Farmers Federation. We want to develop parent and family voices that are recognised in the media as household names on a par with Noel Pearson on indigenous issues or Bob Brown on environment issues or Bill Shorten on trade union issues.

KEY POINT 3

Functions

- Proposal:
1. To represent and advocate for the interests of parents, families and carers as interests which are distinct from those of governments, service providers or charities;
 2. To influence the development of public policy which enhances the rights, capacities, choices, and dignity of parents, families and carers;
 3. To develop and promote innovation in support and service delivery which empowers parents, families and carers, and builds our capacities and resources;

4. To aggregate the leverage and purchasing power of parents, families and carers in bargaining with suppliers of information, goods and services.

Rationale: The potential power of parents, families and carers as a bloc of voters and consumers is untapped. The absence of an organising vehicle on a national scale has meant that the potential influence, leverage and bargaining power of parents, families and carers in influencing institutions and politicians is almost entirely undeveloped. In particular, the consumer power of parents, families and carers as the primary buyers of human services is a bargaining instrument that has never been developed and utilised in Australia as it has in other countries.

KEY POINT 4

Scope

Proposal: We will bring parents, families and carers together from several different sector areas which are usually treated as segmented fields. The following sector areas are the key ones we are interested in - this list is chosen because relational and familial issues are critically important to well-being in each of these areas, yet the voices of parents, families and carers in these fields are usually muted:

- Early intervention and early years development;
- Child care;
- Education and schools;
- Disability;
- Mental illness;
- Learning difficulties;
- Behavioural issues;
- Youth support;
- Alcohol and drug issues;
- Chronic and acute illness; and
- Senior years

Rationale: Service providers, professional interests, and research entities are well-established and well-resourced in these areas and provide the bulk of policy advice to governments. Because they tend to operate within a government silo mentality and professional discipline mindsets, they tend not to generate integrated whole-of-life perspectives. Our interest is in leading the development of integrated whole-of-life thinking which encompasses all of these sector areas and crosses the boundaries between them.

KEY POINT 5

Public Policy Principles

Proposal: 1. Person-centred and family-centred arrangements should become the norm in all forms of social support, service delivery and social investment – service systems and institutions should be tailored to meet the personalised needs of individuals and their families. The ‘one size fits all’ model should be assigned to the dustbin of history in practice as well as in rhetoric.

2. Integrated whole-of-life arrangements should be extended to encompass all forms of social support and service delivery – individualised consolidations of funding from different programs, funding streams and jurisdictions should be introduced to enable these arrangements.

3. Empowerment of parents, families and carers to exercise enhanced choice and self-determination should be established as a guiding ethic in public policy.

Rationale: The crowding out of parents, families and carers by providers, professional interests and research entities followed the emergence of provider-centred service systems. Recovery of the voices of families will require development of person-centred and family-centred systems. One can't be done without the other.

KEY POINT 6

Participation

Proposal: We want to develop innovative forms of participation by parents, families and carers in making our voice heard and exercising the maximum influence possible over our own lives. Streamlined structures, consolidated support resources, good use of online technology, and clarity of purpose are needed to make participation effective.

Rationale: The 'committee of management' model of participation (in which parents and carers sit on committees with primarily administrative functions) and the 'consultative committee' model (in which family members are solicited to act as sources of advice to service providers) have both had their day. Over the past 30 years, these models have burnt out many active parents, families and carers and left too many exhausted and embittered.

KEY POINT 7

Structure (1)

Proposal: From thirteen sector areas, we will appoint a *National Council* comprising 26 people, two from each area. These two will comprise one representative of a support, advocacy or self-help group in that sector area, and one parent, family member or carer as an individual drawn from that sector area. This *National Council* will be the key policy-making body.

The thirteen sector areas are:

- Early intervention and early years development;
- Child care;
- Education and schools;
- Disability;
- Mental illness;
- Learning difficulties;
- Behavioural issues;
- Youth support;
- Alcohol and drug issues;
- Sole and separated parents;
- Blended and step families;
- Chronic and acute illness; and
- Senior years

From the *National Council*, we will appoint four people to constitute a *National Executive* along with three appointed office-bearers, making an executive committee of seven.

We will also appoint an *Advisory Council*, comprising figures of national standing and expertise in selected fields relevant to our work.

Rationale: This structure should ensure a *National Council* that is drawn fairly from all of our key sector areas, with a balanced weighting of sector area issues.

An *Advisory Council* also allows for the appointment of outside experts to complement the work of the *National Council*.

KEY POINT 8

Structure (2)

Proposal: We will gather parents, families and carers by organising by federal electorate. In each of the 150 federal electorates around Australia, we will appoint a convenor and conduct local events and campaigns, and lobby local MPs.

Rationale: Organising by federal electorate provides a localised focus for developing the voice of parents, families and carers. It also allows for a high impact presence in local communities, and a high impact on the consciousness of MPs in their constituencies. We want to create a permanent influence on MPs which originates in their electorates, rather than ineffective one-off campaigns.

The federal electorate structure will also provide a focus for participation by parents, families and carers. Without such a focus, many advocacy groups and specific campaigns have struggled to know where to start, what to do, or how to do it.

KEY POINT 9

Corporate

Proposal: We propose an initial twelve to eighteen month period of operation from August 2007 to trial and assess the structure and functions outlined here. In this initial period, we anticipate the entity (its governance, finance, website and communications) will be hosted by an existing organisation prior to determination of an appropriate independent corporate structure.

In this initial period, we propose a no-fee membership for parents, families and carers, and a fee for membership of groups and organisations.

Rationale: The first four months of the trial period (August to November 2007) will coincide with the lead up to this year's federal election. We will use the approach of the federal poll (in which every other interest group in the country will be in the ears of politicians) to advance the case for a national voice for parents, families and carers.

COMMENTS

Please send your comments on this proposal by using the online form:

<http://www.civilsociety.org.au/FamiliesSummitProposal.htm>

or by contacting:

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