

Submission to the Inquiry into the best ways for Western Australia to make sure that children from poor families get enough food.

This submission is being submitted on behalf of the Local Area Committee for the Child and Parent Centre – Roseworth

Who we are?

The Child and Parent Centre - Roseworth is one of 22 centres funded by the Western Australian government to provide early learning and parenting services and support to families with children aged 0 -8 in low socio -economic areas in Western Australia. The CPC Roseworth provides services in the suburbs of Girrawheen and Koondoola.

The Centre is located on site and Roseworth Primary School and provides services and supports at Koondoola Primary School, Waddington Primary School, Hudson Park Primary School and two private schools, Our Lady of Mercy and Emmanuel Primary School.

We have been operational since 2014 and during this time we have seen an increase in food security needs within our community. The Centre has a local area Committee comprising principals from all local schools, representatives from service organisations, local government, and state government departments. It meets to discuss issues in the community and strategic directions.

School's responses and current efforts to address food insecurity within their schools.

Roseworth Primary School has provided a breakfast club since 2008 and the number of people accessing this service has grown from 20 to 60 children daily. Parents are welcome to attend with their children. Breakfast club operates 3 days a week and although some food is provided through foodbank, school budgets are being used to supplement this. The operation of breakfast clubs is an additional cost to schools as is the collection of bread and staff time in shopping.

The school also assists if it becomes aware of additional needs for families and provides food packages whenever it can. The school also provides a stock of sandwiches that are frozen to provide lunches for children who do not have a lunch. The schools also provides a bowl of fruit in the wet area of each classroom block. Teachers are supplementing fruit bowls and lunches for some children. When a family is in crisis, the canteen is paid to provide a large tray of lasagne. Food is always provided at community events and always runs out.

At Waddington Primary school they operate a breakfast club 5 days a week, have weekly deliveries of fruit and vegetables and bread. Being a small school this a real drain on resources. They are also very concerned about the growing demand for food.

Hudson Park similarly reports an increase in the number of children experiencing food insecurity both at home and at school. They are concerned about the impact that food insecurity has on school attendance as children are not attending as they don't have food. The school works with the families to find solutions.

Strategies being utilised by Hudson Park include breakfast club twice a week. Approximately 40 children attend each session, with some parents and older siblings also attending. The school also provides emergency lunches which are accessed on a needs basis and the number of children using

this service is steadily increasing. The school also provides fresh fruit available throughout the week. Free bread is provided at the school once a week. The school operates a community pantry available for families to use whenever needed. The school is currently liaising with Manor House on an increasing basis for the provision of emergency food parcels. The school has excellent relationships with children and families and they are becoming more aware of the many challenges being faced by families in the school.

Koondoola Primary school has a high proportion of refugee families attending and this can be a barrier for families in hardship as they may not have the English or confidence to ask for help. This school has also provided breakfast club for students since 2007. And report growing numbers attending. They provide spaghetti on toast, porridge or cereal. This school also provides lunches on a daily basis for children without food. This can be up to 20 students per day. The school receives a box of fruit each week and utilised this for crunch an sip.

In addition when they are aware of the families in hardship the chaplain organises food hampers through the Salvation Army of Foodbank. These are delivered to the home.

In our experience, some families have been reluctant to ask for help as they fear being viewed as a failure as parent. Some families also have DCP involvement, so there is a fear that seeking help might be reported to DCP and could be used against them.

The Centre, in the past, had a small stock of food that it was able to provide for additional assistance for families with requiring immediate support.

1. How are children and young people affected by not eating well and how big is the problem

All schools expressed concern about the growing need and level of food insecurity in our community. The impact is across all classes and impacts on children's ability to concentrate and can lead to poor behaviours. Given the range of options that schools have introduced (see school's responses) the problem is large and growing.

One of the major impacts will be poor nutrition will be poor health outcomes in the future. The more immediate impact will be on their ability to learn. These schools are already below the national average on measures such as NAPLAN and although all schools have introduced a range of programs and teaching strategies to close the gap, issues such as food insecurity add an additional layer of complexity to an already difficult challenge. Research shows that children on poor diets experience more difficulties in learning and with memory. Teachers report that children can become tired and irritable, which can result in behaviour problems in the classroom.

Young people who do not receive adequate nutrition are often tired at school and where sugar and carbohydrate dense meals are provide can experience mood swings. Their capacity to focus and learn is impacted. We are all aware of the health impacts of poor diet and lack of exercise and we see an increase in the number of children who are obese within the school system. Sugar rich diets also lead to an increase in dental cavities with some children in this area having all their teeth removed by the age of 5.

These areas are characterised by families who are experiencing intergenerational poverty. Adults within these families are often obese and have a variety of health problems. Where families are struggling to provide a roof over their family's heads and pay utility bills they are very often experiencing mental health issues, dealing with past traumas and often have little energy left over to consider providing a healthy diet for their children let alone have the resources to do so.

2. What makes it hard for children and young people to get hold of good food?

Children have no control over the food that is purchased and provided by families and children often have no control over foods being provided in a school canteen. Whilst canteens are following a traffic light system it still allows for sugary products to be sold. When families are experiencing other issues such as drug and alcohol, debt, homelessness and family violence, food can often be a lower priority. In my experience children do start into crime in order to obtain food or money for food.

3. Does food provided by charities reach children and young people, including at school and preschool care, and how much does it help?

In order to access food provided through charities families often require a car to travel to food pantries and services. For example the Foodbank van visits the local area in Balga a couple of times a week. However for a family in Girrawheen to access low cost parcels, who do not have a vehicle they would need to travel by bus to Mirrabooka and then catch a bus to Balga. You then have the problem of how they will get home with their food parcels. Another issue can be the number of times a family can access a service. In the past families were limited to accessing service twice in a six month period. For some families this will not be enough to get them through the crisis period.

In our experience where food resources are limited within a family setting, in the majority of families, parents would go without to ensure that their children have something to eat.

When providing emergency relief services, in the past the demand has been greater than services could provide. In current times this is even more difficult with families being turned away.

4. Do children and young people and/or their parents/carers go to lessons on how to buy and cook food, and how much do the lessons help?

At the Centre we regularly run Food Sensations, a program provided through Foodbank. This program is regularly full and feedback from families is very positive. The program is very popular with our refugee families who are keen to learn how to cook Australian foods. Due to funding and demand for the course we are only able to offer the course once a week.

At the Centre we run a program called Kids in the Kitchen. This program is aimed at children aged 5 to 8 years and provides them with the opportunity to learn some basic cooking skills and nutrition information. The recipes we use are from Cancer Council and Foodbank and we focus on recipes that could be utilised in school lunches. All recipes are inexpensive and nutritious. This program is very popular with families and is always booked out.

In our experience and was anecdotal comments, we know that families are using the recipes and ideas provided. The Centre used to host a Friday lunch along similar lines with healthy low cost meals and recipes that families were unfamiliar with, including soups. One parent commented that she had not thought of soup and now cooks soups for the family.

We were advised by Foodbank at the end of their last program that the government was now discontinuing this program and the focus would be on families with children who were obese. We believe that this will be a loss to the community. There is considerable evidence that obesity is greater in low socio-economic areas.

5. *Could providing a sit-down lunch for all children at school be a good solution?*

This could well be an option. Schools in the area are a diverse cultural mix and supporting a program that caters for diverse cultural requirements could be challenging. In discussions with schools, they are already extending and utilising every available resource and are concerned about what additional support they might be requested to provide.

Providing free school lunches has been the way the United Kingdom and USA has addressed child hunger. The question would be to whether all children received lunches or just those who are somehow identified or who self-identify. In our view it would be better to be more inclusive than create a system that could be used to stigmatise children. If lunches are to be provided then providing some cultural meals or days could be a way of including all.

6. *Are there any other good ways to keep children from going hungry?*

- One suggestion was that The Smith Family Learning for Life scholarships be added to provide monies that could be utilised in the canteen for school lunches. Only two of the four public schools in the area currently operate school canteens.
- Children could be provided with free lunches through the school canteen.
- Providing food packs to parents that include fresh food and vegetables

7. *How is Western Australia paying attention to children's rights to a healthy diet?*

The citizens and organisations of Western Australia have demonstrated concern and provide donations to charities providing food relief, however as the number of families requiring this support is greater than the amount donated, then it falls to schools to attempt to breach that shortfall by the many various ways outlined in this submission. This stretches the resources of schools already dealing with many complex problems. For families in dire circumstances, the amount of assistance offered does not even begin to address their needs. These families live below the poverty line and are simply unable to manage on government benefits.

Whilst providing children with healthy and nutritious meals will help children grow and develop now, we need a long term plan to ensure that all children are housed and have adequate food into the future.

A Child Well-Being strategy would be a welcome in order to keep track of well we are doing in relation to supporting children.