



Early Childhood Education & Care, Workplace Relations & Regulatory Compliance Specialists

Project Review: Crystal Brook Early Childhood Education and Care and Outside School Hours Care Facility Proposal

Part A

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to advise the Crystal Brook Childcare Working Group (CBCWG) and other stake holders as to the potential options for creating an Early Years Education and Care facility in the town of Crystal Brook for the young children of the town and surrounding communities. This report examines need, benefits, potential viability, and models for development, benchmarked against current sector models and costs.

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Background

Crystal Brook is small town located at the entrance to the Flinders Ranges. Sitting in the Port Pirie Council area, it is 200 kms north of Adelaide and is a quiet rural service centre at the heart of some of South Australia's most productive sheep and wheat country. The population of Crystal Brook is 1515 residents (ABS Statistics 2016) which includes 398 families with an average of 2 children. Services in the town include retail, a hospital, aged care settings and a primary school. There is a Department for Education Kindergarten attached to the school, but no other formal childcare setting in the town for children aged birth to 5.

Introduction

The Crystal Brook Childcare Working Group (CBCWG) was formed in mid 2017, in response to the considerable community interest in the provision of childcare and outside school hours care (OSHC) based in Crystal Brook to service the needs of the families in the town and surrounding areas. Formal data collection and approaches to resolving the issue began in 2017. There was a 'baby boom' in 2018/2019 and there the already limited options for childcare have become overwhelmed. Families are using a combination of rural care, long day-care and family day-care that are all located in other towns. The only other option for families is that only one parent can work or the use of family members if they are available. The growing need for childcare has been a workforce participation issue for the farming and other families for some time that primarily affects the economic participation of women in the community. Additionally, the provision of healthcare services, growth of local businesses and the attraction and retention of skilled labour to the area has been adversely affected.

The (CBCWG) has provided the authors with comprehensive raw data, the raw data includes two online surveys (using survey monkey) sent to families to establish need, the first in July 2017 and the second in April 2021.

The survey sent out to families in July 2017 demonstrated that there was need for childcare places in 2017. However, this survey was deemed as not very successful as there were only 12 responses. At that time there were 2 family day care schemes in operation (that have subsequently ceased) and the survey was only sent out to current families attending the kindergarten, so it was not widely advertised to the broader community.

The most recent survey in April 2021 had 92 respondents, of which 66 live in the Crystal Brook postcode. The results demonstrate that the need for care during school hours has grown to a total of 80 children, there is identified need for Before school care (BSC), After school care (ASC) and Vacation care (VAC). Since the working group began, an OSHC program has been established at the school, but uptake of its service does not reflect the need identified in the survey data. It appears there may be unknown barriers to the communities use of that service.

Discussions have been had with local members of Parliament, Department for Education staff and regional development representatives. Port Pirie Regional Council has been supportive of this volunteer group in a variety of ways and in more recent times has partnered the community to jointly fund the commissioning this report.

2.0 Centre Based Childcare/OHSC Proposal

2.1 Centre Based Care (CBC) and Outside School Hours (OSHC) Proposal

It is clear from the responses to the most recent survey that what working families in Crystal Brook and the surrounding communities need is a centre-based childcare (CBC) model offering full day care for children aged birth to 5. Interest has also been expressed in all types of Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) care i.e. Before school care (BSC), After school care (ASC) and Vacation Care (VAC).

2.2 Funding for Development of Building and Site

Sources of start-up capital are yet to be formally established. This report is a key step for the CBCWG because it is acknowledged that once a budget has been set the community itself is very motivated to raise funds. It is intended that formal requests for government assistance will be made now that the veracity of community need as well as the potential viability of the service can be demonstrated. Other sources of funding through community grants may also be available once the group has established itself as a formal community entity.

2.3 Proposed Land and Site Use

At present there are three potential sites for the centre to be established. The primary school may have some spaces and buildings available that are adjacent to the Department for Education (DfE) kindergarten. There is potential for the refurbishment of 'The Old Boarding house' and a parcel of land available at the Public Hospital site. Informal discussions have been had with the owner organisations of these sites as to the possibility of a leasing arrangement. The community is blessed with choices, and each has their advantages and disadvantages. Some of the sites would require a new build and others a refurbishment of existing buildings and outdoor spaces.



The Current School Site



The current DfE Kindergarten is an established and well-maintained program with an inviting natural play space and inviting and up to date teaching environment. The program is well respected in the community. One of the acknowledged issues for the kindergarten and any future centre-based care model is the current parking and traffic issues on Mais Terrace. Informal discussion has been had with council that if this development was to go ahead a renovation of this road space would be required. The overall benefit of using the school site is the 'one stop shop' aspect for parents with children attending the school and the childcare setting.



An initial investigation of the school grounds invites the consideration of one of the older prefab buildings situated nearby to the current kindergarten. However, the author deems that the refurbishment of this building would not be the optimum choice. The use of this site would require the removal of established trees and the use of a driveway on Mais Terrace; however, this could mean the linking of a play space with the current kindergarten playground.



To the western side of the kindergarten there is a driveway and garden space that could create a linked building. This site would mean a change of access for the school from Mais Terrace and the size of the space may limit the size of the centre. Another issue may be the presence of a septic tank between the kindergarten building and this space.

The Hospital Site



The hospital site would be a new build with a suitable parcel of land available to accommodate a purpose build with access from Huddleston Road. The acknowledged benefit of this site is that it creates opportunities for linking with the established aged care facility in the hospital.



View across potential site
to entrance to aged care
facilities in the hospital

In the last few years in Australia and internationally there has been considerable interest and some research into the benefits of programs that link the youngest and eldest generations in our society and the positive outcomes for both groups in terms of general health, mental health, and educational opportunities. Currently in SA the 'Childcare in Aged Care' initiative is supported by the Office for Ageing Well, SA Health. This cross sectoral partnership led by ACH Group also involves the University of South Australia and Child care Provider TAFESA City West Child Care Centre.

This option would put the centre at the forefront of innovative social change and have value add benefits for the whole community. An innovative program of this nature

may have the possibility of attracting additional investment due to the unique nature of the development.

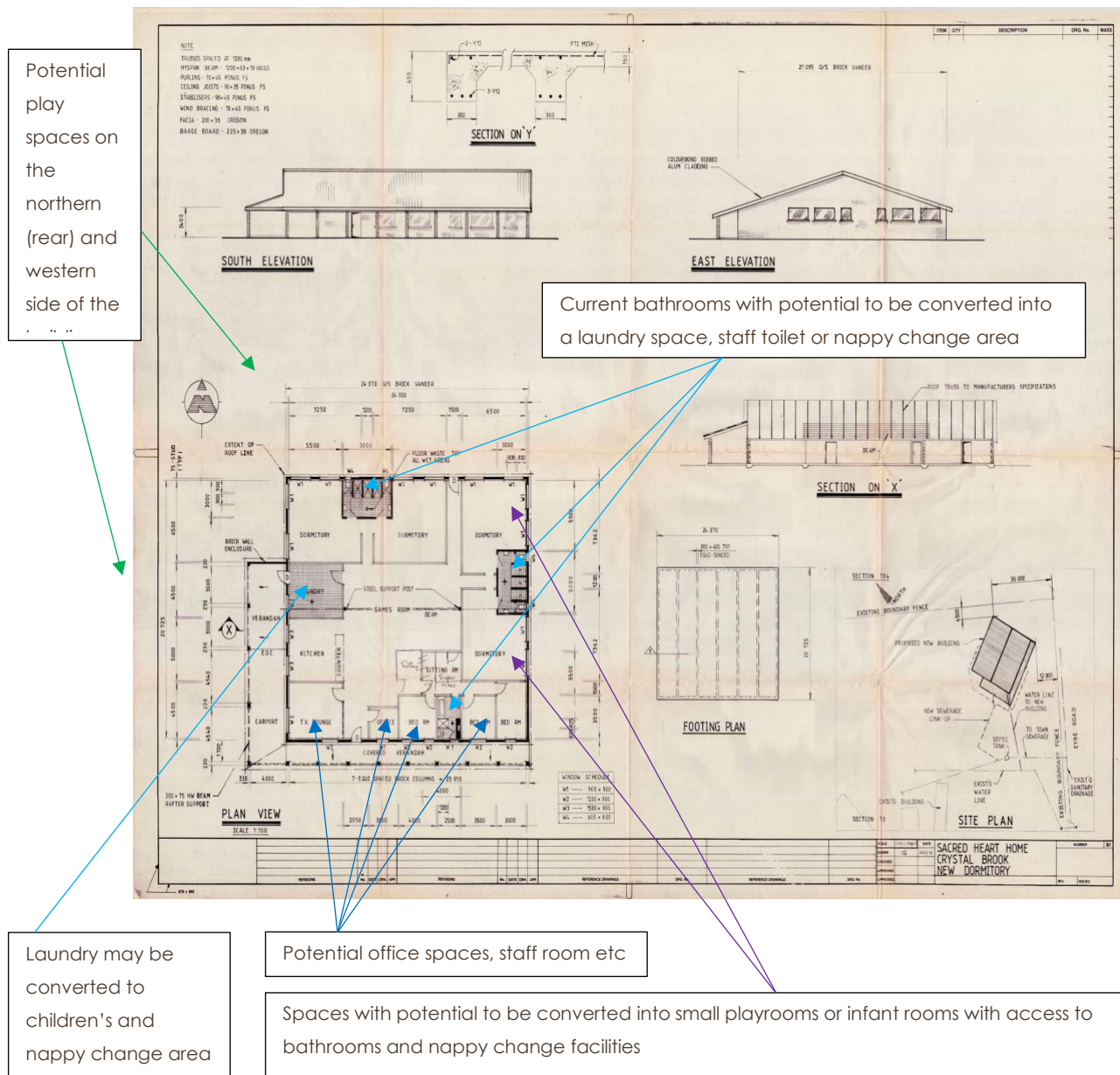
One consideration for the hospital site is access to the main road, the need to expand the carpark and the impact on the current traffic flow to the hospital. There is some concern about Huddleston Road as it is a main thoroughfare for traffic into and out of the town. This site would create the need to manage potential double drop off issues for parents with children attending the school and the childcare centre.

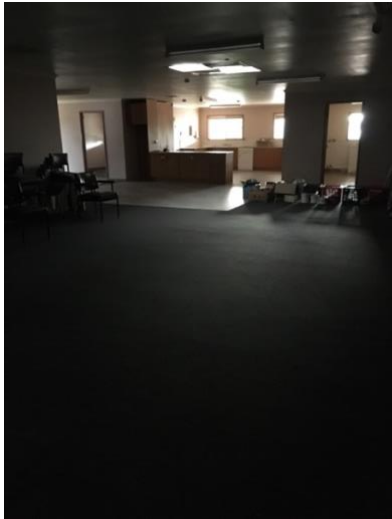
The Old Boarding House



Owned by the Arch Diocese of Port Pirie, the 'old boarding house' is the affectionate local name for the former residential facility for students attending St Marks College in Port Pirie. The site has not been used since 2007. This site has the potential for refurbishment. Parking is ample, and the internal current spaces appear to lend themselves to a re purpose concept. Initial examination suggests that many of the essential structures that would be needed are available, e.g., a large central kitchen, a large central laundry that could potentially be converted into young children's toilets and nappy change facility and additional bathrooms for conversion to laundry spaces and use as staff toilets. The large central room has the potential as a play and learning space but the addition of skylights or extra and or larger windows would be needed to minimise the need for excessive artificial lighting. The existing structure has potential office space and other rooms suitable for use as staff rooms, smaller play spaces or infant rooms, cot rooms for infants, storage space etc. The existing structure

and plumbing would need to be investigated and assessed as sound able to meet up to date building codes. Considerable fencing and landscaping will also be needed for this site. The challenge of this site is that it is a slightly longer distance from the school and would create potential double drop off issues for parents with children attending both education sites.





Left: Main internal space looking towards kitchen.

Below Left: Kitchen

Below Right: Current laundry space next to kitchen potentially suitable for conversion into young children's toilet and nappy change space.



Area to rear (north) and side (west) of property suitable for development in extensive play space. The potential to build an exceptional play space and bush kinder program on this site is a major benefit.



2.4 Building Plans

No building companies have been identified for provision of a new build or refurbishment. There are several reputable companies who can be engaged for this process that are experienced in this market and are SA based.

2.5 Demand and Survey Results

The response to the survey in April 2021 was very strong and in general terms the data shows that in 2022 there will be 55 children eligible for OHSC services with evidence of an interest to enrol in all programs. There will be 80 children aged between birth and 5 requiring childcare and a further 14 expected births in 2021. The following age data was confirmed for children requiring care in 2022.

Table 1A - Projected Occupancy and need based on survey results by age

| 4-to5-year-olds | 3-to-4-year-olds | Birth to 2 years old | Expected births in 2021 |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 16 | 29 | 35 | 14 |

Table 1B - Projected Occupancy and need based on survey results by need

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 36 | 49 | 45 | 35 | 25 |

Based on the responses there is an established need for at least 191 childcare places across the week which averaged equates to a 38-place centre.

Some of the requests include before and after school care but based on the pipeline figures of children due to be born in 2021, it would be reasonable for the community to consider developing an early learning centre for up to 50 children aged birth to 5 with a flexible space for the use of up to 20 OHSC places if needed.

2.6 Operating Hours, Days and Fees

The expected fee for LDC will be \$100 per day and optimum operating hours to support working families would be 7.00 am – 6.00 pm. A minimum 2 day per week attendance is recommended firstly as what is optimum from the child's perspective, children who attend an education and care program less than 2 days per week usually struggle to develop peer and care relationships and take a long time to settle into programs. Additionally, from an operational point of view offering one day of care becomes onerous to manage and places additional stress on staff in terms of planning for and documenting children's learning. An OSHC service would need to provide care from 7.00 – 9.00 am for BSC and 3.00 – 6.00 pm for ASC. Vacation care and pupil free days would need to be available for 7.00 am – 6.00 pm. The expected fees for OHSC are expected to be BSC \$20 per session, ASC \$26.50 per session ,VAC \$ 66.00 per session.

2.7 Staffing

It has been identified that there are a few potential staff available, however recruitment locally or from elsewhere will be necessary. There are experienced leaders in this field available to support the development of staff which offers a potential career path opportunity for people in the area. It has been identified that although the CBCWG is a group of dedicated volunteers, there is limited capacity to project manage this initiative. A suitable person needs to be recruited for this role.

3. Community Needs & Benefits

3.1 Social Needs

There are children in the community who would benefit from access to a consistent quality education and care environment. Education professionals in the community identify that there are currently children who are falling through the cracks. These are children who are not able to easily access early intervention for developmental and learning delay, which would be available as part of their participation in this centre. Additionally, many of the children who would attend the proposed service come from the many farming families

in the area and have limited opportunity for social interaction with peers and the rich learning opportunities for developing pro social skills and school readiness.

3.2 Work Needs

The most recent survey supports what the community has identified for some time. Currently women's opportunity for workforce participation and local services and businesses are impacted by the lack of childcare available. Local businesses report having to reduce hours of business due to lack of childcare options for staff. Businesses who would like to expand and offer additional employment opportunities in the community are unable to do so as both male and female candidates are affected by childcare availability. Businesses are unable to fill advertised roles that may be suitable for female candidates as they are unable to access childcare.

3.3 Respite Needs, Health Outcomes and Community Safety

It has been identified by healthcare and education professionals that there are families at present in the community struggling with general health, mental health and disability care for family members who also have the additional responsibility of caring for young children as well. These families would benefit from the availability of consistent childcare and the children of these families would benefit from the educational and social aspect of a quality education and care environment. A number of grandparents are engaged in full time childcare duties, whilst this is a labour of love many, families are concerned about the physical strain this places on the older generation. Additionally, there is a sense of parents who have worked hard all their lives not really being able to enjoy their retirement. Recruitment for Allied health staff is very difficult due to the lack of childcare thus limiting the services that can be provided. The hospital reports that nurses and midwives are unable to return to work after maternity leave. A number of families are currently traveling long distances daily to access care in Laura and other towns. This adds an additional layer of stress and cost to families lives that is detrimental to health, quality of family life and safety.

4.0 Functionality

4.1 Benefits

The benefits of the establishment of a centre based childcare setting in Crystal Brook include but are not limited to

- Workforce participation of women
- Increased Allied Health
- Regional development through business expansion and increased capacity
- Career development paths through the service
- Reduction of family stress generally and economically
- Opportunities for child and family well being
- Better developmental outcomes for children

4.2 Challenges

The establishment of the Governance and development of an initiative like this is always subject to challenges. Ongoing issues may also include

- Effective management of the service
- Ensuring ongoing financial viability
- Attraction, retention, and development of staff
- Establishing and maintaining the quality of the service

4.3 Community Support

The volunteers of the CBCWG demonstrate that there is strong community will to see this project succeed. Potential willing candidates have been identified for the management committee. There is historical demonstration of the community working together to support working bees and fundraising initiatives for the kindergarten. There is a strong sense of community spirit and action in Crystal Brook.

5.0 Conclusion

Having reviewed the data provided and the evidence of the long historical desire to establish a childcare service in Crystal Brook, it is clear that there is

genuine need for the provision of an education and care facility for the children in this community. Additionally, our financial modelling demonstrates that the proposal is financially viable. Set out in Part B of this report are the start-up and operational considerations for the establishment of a centre-based care setting for children aged birth to 5, with additional information if needed for the establishment of an OHSC service.