



New Voluntary Service for Parents

Consultation Response

September 2023



IntoWork Australia is a leading national provider of employment, skills & education, and support services that promote educational, economic, and social participation for Australians from all walks of life. IntoWork Australia supports parents who may be students, apprentices, and job seekers to achieve this.

This response paper has been prepared by multiple representatives from services across IntoWork whom engage and support parents to achieve educational or employment goals.

More information on the work IntoWork Australia provides can be found at www.intowork.com.au

Meeting Parent's Needs:

How can the new service ensure that caring for children remains a priority for parents?

IntoWork Australia believes there are fundamental program elements required to ensure caring for children remains the priority for parents.

Placing Parent and Child at the centre of service design and having a clear message that caring for children remains the priority for parents, will shift this program to demand driven and away from being seen as mandatory requirement that devalues the role of a caregiver.

Providers should complete a comprehensive assessment process that covers both the parent and child needs, resulting in individualised tailored servicing and a milestones of success agreement.

Connection and Relevance:

- Providers need to ensure the service has clear connectivity to the local community and relevance to the individual service user. Providers can do this by
 - linking in with local placed based community organisations that support parents,
 - linking with health care supports (if relevant) for both the parent and child.
 - staying up to date with relevant programs in education, training, and support
 - Providing connectivity to expertise in funding programs such as NDIS and Child Care Subsidy
 - Connecting with child friendly activities that are taking place locally e.g.: toddler time at the library, reading groups.

These organisations can also be invited to attend the site and host activities on site in conjunction with a healthy morning tea provided to promote a sense of community and a holistic support.

Key Milestones of Service Delivery:

- Providers need to have an agile model that will ensure various engagement supports are available based around timeline milestones within the context of caring requirements. Tailored options to suit newborn parents, toddler parents, pre-school and school aged parents is necessary.
- The Milestone support plan will be co-designed with the parent and drive the direction of tailored support to both the child and the parent. Milestones are based on the individual's current situation, barriers, and goals. These milestones may relate to Mental Health, Financial Support, Parenting Life Skills, Child Care Support, Vocational Training, Employment Preparation

Flexibility:

- Ensuring that the baseline of all service delivery is underpinned by flexibility to meet parent's needs. This includes, but not limited to:
 - Reality of access to childcare locally that is suitable for the parent and the child.
 - Place based and remote service delivery options to accommodate care commitments while still providing regular support and connection.

- Employment and/or training options that can work within caring responsibility and transitional arrangements from full time caring responsibilities to balancing employment and caring responsibilities.
- Working with employers to help them understand the best approach to supporting parents returning or entering the workforce that have caring responsibilities, and the benefits of this workforce. This includes practical supports, legislative requirements, training and development pathways and modifications.

How can the new service best meet the needs of parents and their children?

IntoWork Australia delivers support services to vulnerable communities through a range of funded programs and evidence-based success is seen when there is proactive co-design of servicing and feedback mechanisms to ensure the supports are meeting the needs of the service user. Some examples of practical supports that need to be considered in this service include:

- **Social Interaction:** The new service will strongly encourage activities that increase social interaction and support network development e.g.: weekly playgroup.
- **Transport Support:** Providers should have vehicles equipped with car seats to provide transportation to activities and appointments. Providers should also offer a mobile service model with 'place based' delivery which removes transportation barriers.
- **Life Skills Support:** Connecting parents with services that providing holistic support Life Skills e.g.: managing work life balance, support services for parents with children with special needs, healthy eating, wellness, and budgeting.
- **Inclusive Activities:** Promoting and creating opportunities for parents to engage in activities that incorporate their children such as parent-child fitness classes, kinder gym, creative activities (i.e., music and craft classes), life skills (parent-child cooking classes etc). This will help to build parent support groups and meet other parents to build them a support network. These activities can lead to positive parenting, building confidence and self-care.
- **Tailored Servicing:** Flexible of attendance options and compliance of the programs. Face to face delivery (this includes mobile or 'place based' consultations) and use of technology to connect to support is required.

Eligibility:

Who would benefit most from a voluntary pre-employment service? Tell us why.

The program would benefit those who are not eligible to link to another service provider such as DES, TTW or Workforce Australia.

Being voluntary and demand driven the program would have activities and supports available and relevant for all eligible parents, with a focus on:

- **Vulnerability Indicators:**
 - those that have been out of work or lack of work experience.
 - Those that have limited education.
 - All young parents in receipt of income support could benefit to build back who they were before children.

- Those with mental health issues or lack of confidence wanting to plan for when their child is of fulltime school age and what options they could explore work or study or even self-employment.
- **Soon- to -be parents:** 35-week pregnant participants to prepare them for the supports and assistance for after they have their baby.
- **New Parents:** Those parents that have just had a baby and may need the money, those that have never worked and not only are doing it for financial reasons but also for social interaction.
- **Family or Domestic Violence:** Parents that have this vulnerability indicator should be automatically eligible for servicing irrespective of age of child and income recipient status. A direct registration option is required to be a critical element of the servicing eligibility.

The voluntary nature of the program should expand on the eligibility to allow a choice and control model of support with appropriate measures of service support success against each eligibility group. Engagement is led by the parent, with the removal of mandatory obligations, however commitment agreements should be in place to ensure collaborative support in provided.

What type of support should the new service target? How should it be targeted?

The program should provide holistic support to build a solid foundation to enable sustainable employment opportunities, with key focus areas including:

- **Progression Measures:** Tailored servicing designed and delivered based off the individuals' circumstances and milestone goals. This may be measured through distance to employability readiness from commencement into program to milestone dates.
- **Further Education Participation:** Upskilling and engaging in skills in demand programs that will increase employability needs to be a considered milestone measure of success.
- **Non-Vocational Intervention Participation:** Connection and engagement into professional services, support groups and life skills programs need to be considered a milestone measure of success.
- **Employability Skills:** Engagement in pre-employment focused soft skills programs, work experience, career taster opportunities and employment readiness programs need to be considered a milestone measure of success.
- **Specialist support:** Based on circumstance it should have strong links to localised support options. The future program design has key opportunity to delivered specific Family Domestic Violence services with linkages to employment participation or training pathway access.

Apart from parents who receive Parenting Payment, who might benefit from this service?

IntoWork Australia respects that the caregiving of young children extends beyond that of the primary parent. It is proposed that a level of support services extends eligibility to:

- Grandparents who are primary caregivers
- Foster parents / Temporary caregivers
- Family Domestic Violence impacted caregivers who don't receive parenting payment.
- Recently settled parents.
- Parents where partners may earn above means test threshold but need support.
- Underemployed parents

Do you think other parents on other income support payments should also benefit?

Support services should be allocated to eligibility. Those in receipt of income support are deemed to be vulnerable cohorts within the community and should have bespoke specialist access to parenting servicing supports.

If they are ineligible for other support related to their income support payment but meet the eligibility criteria.

What support services should we consider for young parents who left school before completing high school? Do they need a more specialised service? If so, what do they need, and how should it be delivered?

Further educational participation should be a focus area for the program; however, it should not be limited to traditional study.

Participation in traditional study should be based on the individual circumstance including the support, capacity, motivation, and alignment to goals.

Other activities such as life skills programs, driving lessons, play groups etc should also be counted in terms of progression.

It should also be noted that this cohort may be isolated, disengaged, have not had positive experiences with study and learning previously and/or have had no exposure to learning in an 'adult' setting, therefore thought should be given to how formalised study can be structured to take these situations into account.

This may include reintroduction to learning through programs such as CGEA and potentially SEE programs to familiarise participants with the learning experience as well as building LLND skills, engagement of mentors or social workers to assist in addressing other barriers, and vocationally focussed taster programs that allow participants to find areas of interest and develop career pathways.

A strong and clear connection between the study and the impact it has on lives (for example opportunities to engage in work, earn money, career progression, building financial security etc) should be built.

Study options should also be flexible and hybrid to allow participants to engage while managing their caregiving responsibilities. This may include remote learning components, 'mums and bubs' style classes and learning hubs,

Timing:

When do you think the opportunity to participate in voluntary pre-employment support should be offered to parents?

The voluntary program should have the ability for entry and exit points for any eligible participant pending their circumstances. Block funding against different milestone supports for the individual will allow the phase of supports required drive entry and exit agility. The program needs to reflect the stages of parenting and milestones relevant to the individual's journey.

In your experience, what is the ideal age of the youngest child to offer voluntary pre-employment support?

This is dependent on the circumstances of the individual accessing the servicing. No two situations are the same, and with the nature of a voluntary program, with no compellability to engage – offering a demand led service with entry points for all participants who fall under the eligibility criteria will ensure those who need the support, can access the support irrespective of child age.

It is also recommended the program is structured to suit the different development stages of the child/ren (babies, pre-school, school aged)

Should parents be able to decide themselves when they want to participate in the service, regardless of the age of their child?

Structuring an eligibility framework that will engage those on income support and those not, those with potential requirements under Workforce Australia, the choice and control of engagement should form the basis for this program. Block based funding applied to certain elements of servicing may allow a direct referral for DHS for completion – this would allow assessment and future engagement planning for the individual and may be seen as a pre-program to the full engaged service delivery.

How could we tailor the new service to the differing needs and levels of support for parents? What types of needs might require assistance for a longer duration and for how long? For example, parents who need more support may need assistance for a longer duration.

The new service would take a holistic approach with key support area and education to the parent on what and how the service will engage and support them. Initial assessment would be undertaken to understand participant goals, barriers, and requirements and this would be used to map the level and length of support required. Those parents requiring longer term support would have a clear plan with agreed milestones to ensure consistent and ongoing progress and engagement. Examples of this include:

- **Support services linkages:** connection to services within local communities to assist them with overcoming their identified barriers to return to work.
- **Tailored Support:** though the offering of flexible servicing, welcoming environment, and mentoring. This provides regular check ins, a purposed designed office to come and talk, access to food and clothes and the ability to seek companionship and advice at any time. A welcome, inclusive and child friendly environment will ensure parents feel the services is tailored to them.

How long should support be available to parents for? Why do you think that time period? Should support be available for as long as parents want to receive it, or should it be available for a year, or a few years? Consider the time needed to build good relationships with a service provider, and for parents to receive a range of support if they would like to and if they need it.

Building a trusted relationship and identifying and supporting barriers faced by an individual takes significant time. In other programs we see the options of 18 months to 2 years of servicing with an extension period allowed to be requested pending circumstances. It would be proposed that the new program will align to this servicing eligibility duration.

Features of Service:

We have heard from parents that they would like a service that:

- **has better and more useful content and communications that describes the features of the service.**
- **values and respects parenting as important, as paid employment.**
- **offers features and benefits parents want and need.**

Do you agree with that the above statements? What else would you include in the new voluntary pre-employment service to assist parents to reach their education and employment goals?

Having clearer messaging around the purpose, features and delivery of the program would be beneficial to creating a successfully demand driven service.

If the program has a holistic overview, allowing parents to access the features and benefits that are relevant to them and co-create their own support plan and milestones will further strengthen the appeal and effectiveness of the program.

Clearly acknowledging the value (both monetary and societal) of parenting and incorporating that into the program will establish an environment of respect from the outset.

Features of the program should include agreed employment and/or education measures however they should be individualised and integrated into the broader support plan to ensure the parent is equipped, resourced, and supported to successfully achieve these measures.

These supports could include upskilling and job readiness, interpersonal and communication skills, and practical support including resume, job application and reverse marketing.

Employment and education goals should integrate with further areas of milestone support such as:

- **Life skills:** to support the transition to parental responsibilities. This would include financial management, meal preparation, physical and mental health fitness, and access to services. Support to access budget friendly children's activities
- **Navigation of childcare and schooling services:** support around funding eligibility, school enrolment supports, and any specialist education support needed should the child have additional needs.
- **Positive Mindset and Confidence:** Access to even something as simple as a yoga, mindfulness sessions, a haircut or gym memberships to promote health and positive mindset.
- **Relationships:** Navigating relationship dynamics with situational changes
- **Peer Support services:** Utilising lived experience advocacy to support pathways and confidence building.

Stakeholders have suggested a new service should be respectful to parents and their children and recognise and value their role in caring for children.

What types of arrangements would make parents feel respected and valued in a new service?

The parent and the child need to be at the centre of servicing, including the initial assessment whilst we drive forward the engagement and milestone plan. Understanding that their children come first and respecting that as opposed to penalising them for it. Ensuring an agile services delivery model is available that includes the options of phone and remote servicing if children are sick or have a transport, financial or other barriers making it hard to commit to face-to-face appointments from time to time.

Further suggested arrangements include:

- Rooms to have closed doors and be child friendly.
- Mobile servicing with vehicles equipped with car seats to support place-based service delivery and assistance with access services, thus reducing barriers due to transportation.
- A service delivery model that is mobile and flexible parent lead service tailored to their individual needs.
- Child friendly sites, free creche when in courses and appointments.
- Lived experience workers.

Pre-Employment Support

What support should be offered to parents as part of the new voluntary pre-employment service? For example, pre-employment support might include help with vocational needs such as career guidance, skills development, or study towards a qualification. It may also include help with any support parents, or their children may need to participate in the service. This may include non-vocational support such as help with confidence building, or with financial management, or accessing medical/mental health services or childcare services, or with child wellbeing.

The above examples are all supported as part of the new voluntary pre-employment service.

The program should take a holistic approach to supporting parents into employment. This may include life skills, confidence building, career advice and mentoring, mental health support, peer support, network building, support navigating childcare and schooling systems etc.

Access to other specialised support should also be included such as for parents experiencing or recovering from Family Domestic Violence, for newly arrived parents to connect with ESL and settlement services.

Of the following types of support what could be included in the new service?

- **Accessing affordable and quality childcare**

Support to access quality and affordable childcare would be a great benefit to parents to allow them to participate in activities and have time to focus on their own development.

This childcare could include onsite crèche facilities or servicing support being provided in or near existing facilities.

- **Finding secure housing**

Offering access to emergency accommodation services, providing support navigating local housing options, support with housing applications, rental related legal advice and other housing related services should form part of the holistic support approach to the program.

- **Managing your money, including budgeting**

It would be beneficial to offer financial counselling and finance management courses, along with goal setting. Additionally, the program could offer practical activities such as 'op shopping' and accessing programs such as feed it forward and second bite sites to reinforce the learnings.

- **Relationship support, including for those experiencing family and domestic violence.**

This should be a critical element of the program. Having education, connections, and resources available to support parents and children experiencing Family Domestic Violence or at risk. This could include access to alternative safe accommodation, legal advice and support and counselling. The new service would also have clear pathway support for this cohort to access training and employment suitable to the individuals' circumstances and delivered in a safe manner.

- **Parenting support, including support for kids' physical and mental health**

Including this in the service would be critical to its success. Having education about the range of supports available, and support to connect with and navigate things such as NDIS, Headspace, in school support would be beneficial.

Providing and promoting opportunities to engage in physical activity and providing support including subsidised physical activities (i.e., exercise and/or wellbeing classes, sports participation) and workshops to build capability in the areas of physical and mental health in the context of positive parenting could also benefit.

- **Finding work, including developing resumes, help applying for jobs, or coaching for interviews**

The program could link in with existing programs such as Jobs and Skills to help with practical elements such as resume preparation, interview skills and career counselling and planning. Connecting with organisations such as Dress for Success to help with accessing clothes and build confidence and preparedness ahead of employer engagement would be of benefit to participants.

Pre-employment workshops on workplaces rights and responsibilities and the systems and supports in place to support workers would be another valuable element.

- **Organising work experience**

The service should have established relationships and partnerships with stakeholders and volunteer organisations to offer structured, positive work experience. Workshops to develop skills and confidence in proactively seeking work experience and opportunities would also be beneficial, as would opportunities to hear from key industry employers and experts and gain insights.

- **Undertaking training and education**

Further educational participation should be a focus area for the program; however, it should not be limited to traditional study. Participation should be based on the individual circumstance including the support, capacity, motivation, and alignment to goals. As mentioned previously there may be a cohort of Early School Leavers who may need alternative structures for learning. This may include reintroduction to learning through programs such as CGEA and potentially SEE programs to familiarise participants with the learning experience as well as building LLND skills. Engagement of mentors to provide support and guidance would contribute to successful outcomes. Access to childcare or crèche facilities need to be considered in support of the training and education.

Work Related Support (i.e.vocational support)

Should this service support parents of young children who want to work to prepare for and find work? If so: What types of support should be available?

For parents with desire to work, support should be provided to achieve this goal. This support plan should be tailored to the parent's current capacity, needs, barriers and opportunities. This may include access to relevant training, support with resume and interview preparation, connection to potential employers or work experience opportunities, access to childcare options, or any other of the holistic supports that will establish a solid foundation for successful entry or re-entry into employment.

What arrangements should be in place for providers to engage with businesses?

Providers should be expected to establish relationships with local employers, industry, and other stakeholders to facilitate reverse marketing and pathways to work opportunities. Additionally, providers should deliver activities such as jobs clubs, career tasters, employer meet and greets, industry spotlights, and expos to engage businesses and connect them with potential employees.

Should the service include support for parents for the initial period of their employment, if so, what type of support?

From experience it is the first twelve weeks that is a critical period for establishing positive and sustainable employment. It is recommended that there be in-work support for this period to allow early identification and addressing of any issues.

How do we ensure that work support is provided only to parents who want to look for work?

Ongoing case management with regular check in of agreed goals will ensure work support is being provided to the correct cohort and that parents not wanting to look for work are not being forced into activities. Records should be maintained to clearly identify those parents who are wanting to look for work. However, there should be a mechanism that would allow those not looking for work to still have access to information or work development opportunities without expectation or shame.

How do we ensure that parents are supported into secure work?

Building great stakeholder engagements and relationships. Having modules and workshops to know their rights. Checking in on the parents through that 12-week placement to ensure it's a great work environment. Doing workplace visits, ensuring that it's a great place and fit with mentoring of both employer and employee. An example of how this could look may be Completing workplace assessments for the employer and assisting them through videos and face to face or on-line workshops to have a suitable, positive, engaging workplace.

For parents who are work ready there should be a strong framework of support for their entry or re-entry into employment. This could include undertaking job matching of parents to employers to identify a good 'fit', ensuring employers are engaged, informed, and prepared to support their new employee, ensuring parents have practical needs met such as PPE and work equipment and understanding their rights and responsibilities, along with a clear and holistic support plan which may include childcare, time management, emotional support, transport, etc. This would be supported by providers who would provide up to twelve weeks of 'in work' support.

Would access to work experience opportunities be beneficial, and if so, how could this be delivered bearing in mind parents' caring responsibilities for young children?

Depending on the parent stage appropriate work experience would be very beneficial. This may range from work experience with local charities and not for profit organisations through to internships with employers.

These opportunities would need to be structured to consider caring responsibilities. For example, offering shifts that coincide with school hours for those with school aged children or subsidised childcare hours for those with younger children.

Communication Strategy

How should the new service be communicated and promoted?

It should be left to the service providers to communicate and promote the services provided to ensure targeted communication and servicing in a placed based model.

The program should be promoted as one that supports parents to explore, set and achieve their work and training goals in the context of creating their own vibrant future. It should be clearly communicated this is a voluntary, holistic, supportive program that is tailored to participants and respectful of their role as parents.

Other service providers and community stakeholders should be engaged and educated about the program so they can understand the benefits and opportunities and promote it through their networks to reach the target cohort. It should be seen as supporting parents rather than 'penalising' them.

Service Delivery

Should there be different services for parents from different communities or regions?

Ensuring that the provider of services has a tailored approach to the local community and labour market will naturally see a range of services and individualisation. Sound awareness of caseload demographics would be expected to ensure appropriateness of services provided.

The program should include flexibility in what services are eligible to be part of the program to allow local providers to identify and incorporate based on local need, this may include First Nations specific programs, CALD specialists' programs or Settlement Support programs as examples.

Which vulnerable groups might need more or different help? What would that look like?

All parents have vulnerabilities, so it is important that tailored assistance and flexibility is within the service delivery model and funding envelope. For example:

- Remote communities or isolated areas might need remote servicing or offering a regular outreach program that may include Online or teams' options for learning and workshops.
- Those with mental health or trauma need to have flexibility in appointments and access.
- First Nation participants, cultural diversity.

- Refugee or CALD participants may need translators, cultural experts, or coaches from diverse backgrounds.
- Those on single incomes and lack of free services.
- Underage parents

How might this support be strengths-based, and participant led? How can this be embedded in practice?

From the outset the individual plan should be co-designed by the parent, so they have a sense of control over their future.

Goals should be set, with clear roadmaps to achieving them and agreed check ins. Milestones should be celebrated to reinforce achievement and progress.

Ensuring that staff have relevant backgrounds and experience to provide support and understand those needs of the parents, along with how to identify and draw on parent's strengths while working through areas of improvement in a respectful way.

What skills and qualifications should frontline staff have? Which of these might be mandatory requirements?

The delivery of services within a voluntary nature to ensure strong attraction, engagement and milestone outcomes should see professional comes from, or being experienced in:

- Lived experience as a parent / caregiver.
- Career development training.
- Community service backgrounds,
- Employment service backgrounds,
- Mentors need to have mental health training including mental health first aid,
- Teaching or training and accessing background, dealing with youth work or even support workers would be great candidates.

Based on your experience, what delivery mechanism would be most effective?

Face-to-face, online or a mix of the two.

Providers should have the mechanisms to be able to offer flexibility in servicing arrangements, with clear face to face servicing options at a minimum level where the participant can physically engage. Servicing face to face does not need to be in a formal office, and a placed based option that is in an environment that is comfortable and familiar for the parent should be part of the standard service delivery. Online options should also be available to support parents to be able to manage their caring responsibilities and their participation in the program.

How might communities of practice be embedded as a feature of the new service? Do you think this would be valuable?

There is a huge community of support services, and this program is no different. Establishing community of practice engagement for providers will ensure:

- Cross pollination of best practice
- Connection and engagement into specialist sub services
- Reduction in duplication of funding using already funded support services.
- Continued upskilling and trusted reputational build of workforce.

How would referrals to local services enhance the new service? Would priority access be required and if so what types and why?

Having a strong local network of service providers is a key to the success of this program. Establishing an agreed upon process for priority access from the outset is important, to ensure vulnerable cohorts are supported in an effective and timely manner.

Creating opportunities for parents to meet and get to know service providers in a safe and relaxed environment such as 'meet and greets' and information sessions would benefit those who have traditionally had a distrust for authorities and services and encourage and empower parents to reach out independently when they need help.

If a dedicated point of contact for providers was established in Services Australia, what type of support would be required?

Having this dedicated point of contact would need to have heavy engagement in with the servicing provider to ensure a clear and supportive range of advice is provided to the individual. The ability to share knowledge and informed information of vulnerable participants as they navigate the Services Australia system will reduce a lot of barriers. This support should also be there to escalate payment issues when eligibility changes or if there is a change in circumstance.

This service would operate in a hybrid model combining Services Australia and provider placed based model to support providers and participants.

How do we ensure a trauma informed approach to service delivery, and that services are culturally appropriate?

- Having highly qualified, screened delivery staff.
- Having culturally diverse employees and making sure that staff are trained to make sure everything is appropriate and respectful.
- Have a mechanism for feedback from participants to be used for continuous improvement, and a clear complaints form or procedure.
- Ongoing professional development for staff to identify and respond to trauma appropriately.
- A strong and clear referral process for coaches to access on participants behalf.
- Have subject matter experts involved in the design of services, resources, and delivery methods.

Engagement Strategies

How might we encourage parents to participate in the new voluntary pre-employment service? What strategies or assistance would make it easier for parents to participate in a voluntary service?

Providers need to have flexibility when servicing parents. This will increase engagement where parents see the benefits and outcomes of the service.

Online options, onsite creche, flexibility and being able to bring children along safely. Longer time frames, school holiday programs that involve the children and support the parents in gaining time to work on themselves and alongside their children. Food and clothing options on sight for them to access without shame and when needed.

Careful and deliberate promotion of the program as a parenting support as opposed to an additional task or obligation which offer engaging, appropriate, and fun activities as 'tasters' for the service.

What sort of incentive would encourage parents to participate in the new service? Do you think this would be necessary?

While incentives may not be necessary for all participants, they provide positive reinforcement and encouragement to continue to strive towards their own goals. They also may provide some relief or 'treats' for their children which

further reinforces the ‘why’ of their participation. A range of incentives relating to both the parent and the child/ren could be effective in encouraging participation and progress. This may include:

- Milestone credits for participation in activities or achieving goals.
- “Tools” to help parents to achieve their goals e.g., support to get a computer or equipment to help with their study,
- Free childcare support with active engagement
- Regular child friendly social events to encourage network building, celebrate success and mark milestones.
- Regular parent social events to encourage networking and peer support.
- Care packs for babies or gifts for older children (e.g., birthday) to reinforce the importance and value of the family unit.

What value of incentive would encourage parents to participate?

Rather than monetary value, the incentives should have meaning and impact for the individual and be related to their goals, aspirations, achievements, and progress. This would involve direct servicing and servicing referral pathways to support the parent i.e.: funded training, allied health support, childcare.

When would be most benefit for parents to receive an incentive? For example, would this be after starting in the new service? Or after achieving certain milestones or outcomes? Or both?

An initial, small incentive could support in the initial establishment of the relationship and be used as an acknowledgement of the achievement in taking ‘the first step’ in their journey towards their goals. Incentives could also be used at key milestones or outcomes, not as the key ‘driver’ but as an acknowledgement of the progress. These incentives do not need to be large or costly but relevant to the parent and their goal.

What other engagement strategies would be effective or required to encourage disadvantaged parents to participate in a voluntary service? For example:

- **good promotion of the service so that parents understand the support available,**

Hosting open days or events to provide education and awareness of the service.

Having mums and bubs events where the service could be promoted.

Engagement with other community service providers, training providers, and other key stakeholders to inform them about the program and the potential benefit to their clients.

- **service providers who can meet parents in the community at convenient locations or even undertake home visits.**

Mobile Service Delivery has proven effective for IntoWork in the delivery of Workforce Australia Services, and we believe this approach would lend itself to this program.

Removing barriers around transport and offering parents options to meet in a familiar and comfortable setting can lead to stronger relationships and greater engagement by participants, particularly those who are uncomfortable or unused to formal office settings.

- **initial face-to-face contact to start building rapport,**

Face to face contact is preferable to effectively build rapport however this does not need to be a traditional office-based appointment approach. Offering outreach and mobile service delivery should also form part of the program.

- **assistance with transport costs for parents to attend appointments.**

Equipping case managers/coaches with vehicles that are equipped with car seats to allow parents to be transported to and from appointments is one strategy to break down transport barriers.

For areas with good public transport networks assistance with the cost of transport could be provided.

For those areas with little or no public transport alternatives such as taxi could be utilised

- **access to the same caseworker so parents can build good and ongoing relationships.**

The ideal model would be an 'end to end' relationship where case managers/coaches are matched with the parents and remain with them throughout their journey. This allows a strong, trusting relationship to be established.

- **having discussions with the service provider by phone or face time etc.**

Exercising flexibility and offering phone or online appointments when required reinforces the respect and value for parent's primary role as caregivers.

Financial Support

Should a new service provide some financial assistance to enable parents to participate in the service or to achieve their education and employment goals? For example, to help with costs such as training, or for IT or phone access, or transport, or childcare, or work-related expenses, or medical expenses.

The listed barriers are all contributors to this cohort and are all reflective in the journey to employment for individuals. Funding principals need to allow the flexibility of allocation of funding to support these categories. Providers should be expected to utilise any other fee-free funding or services prior to just utilising program funding. A fee for service schedule could be applied based on session attendance.

Funding Structure

What should be the funding model for providers? For example, fee for service, up-front payments, graduated payments, or outcome payments or a combination of these?

Funding arrangements should be reflective of administration of contract fees, progression of milestone fees and employment outcome fees. There should be multiple categories of fees available pending the type of referral (income support recipient vs. direct registration, level of barrier management support required).

In your experience, what incentives drive providers to achieve the best outcomes? What are your thoughts on outcome payments to providers? If so, what types of outcomes, what value should they be, and how can they be measured? How do we ensure that outcome payments reward providers but do not create perverse incentives to push parents into particular activities for the purpose of securing a payment?

A quality performance framework that covers progression to job readiness, employment commencement and outcome milestones is important. Ensuring that there are clear targets per milestone for an individual based off their initial assessment and identified barriers. Milestone achievement should have funding attached to it.

Partial and full reduction of income support through employment should be incentivised to the provider but a balanced score card of milestone measures should be seen so there is no exploitation of “work first” push approach.

The Workforce Australia model which recognises the work in barrier management and progress should have reflection in the performance model for this new program.

What should be the provider funding arrangements to undertake engagement strategies? For example, should engagement strategies be funded separately such as financial incentives for participants, provider outreach, and promotional activities to ensure parents know the service is available and the support it can provide.

Investment in ensuring an educated approach to the program is essential. Voluntary based with the option of eligibility of income support recipients and eligible vulnerable participants requires the ability for local targeted servicing promotion and engagement.

How might the Participation Fund be a feature of the new service? Should credits be pooled? Or should every participant have access to funds? Or should funding for participant interventions be rolled into provider fees, for providers to purchase based on participant need.

Every participant should have capped funding and excess pooled to provide room for participants needing more support or show determination in an area that is needed. Many won't need to access all the funding so those not used can be pooled to provide bigger events or services as a group.

Those most vulnerable and having hard barriers to work through be given more flexibility others with little to no barriers can be capped but it does need to be fair and addressed case by case including factors such as how sustainable, how engaged, and how reliable is candidate.

What types of interventions should be funded for participants? For example, goods and services participants need to achieve goals or undertake activities. What should be the funding model for providers? For example, fee for service, up-front payments, graduated payments, or outcome payments or a combination of these?

Funding for support should be within the principles of the employment fund covering all items that are deemed to helping parent move through barriers to move into secure employment and study to gain the life they and their family deserve by gaining employment once their child can be looked after or at fulltime school.