

What's in the

NEST?



**Exploring Australia's Wellbeing Framework
for Children and Young People**



the nest
A wellbeing framework for
children and young people





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What is the Nest?

The Nest is Australia's wellbeing framework for children and young people aged 0 to 24 years. It's a way of thinking about the whole child in the context of their daily lives, viewing wellbeing in a way that brings together the different elements a child or young person needs to thrive. The Nest conceptualises wellbeing as six interconnected domains that support each other to help children reach their potential. To have optimal wellbeing, a child or young person needs to be adequately resourced in all six domains.

Why is it called the Nest?

At a national summit that brought together young people and Australia's leading 'thinkers and doers' to finalise the framework's creation, a young participant described all the areas of wellbeing as forming a nest, where **"if every area is supported, we're able to be happy and healthy and fly from the nest"**. Everyone liked that image so much the wellbeing framework became the Nest.



What is 'wellbeing'?

Children and young people told us that what they needed to have a 'good life' fell into six interlinked areas, which when taken together holistically support a child or young person's 'wellbeing'. Wellbeing is therefore seen as an 'umbrella' term, with domains sitting underneath it. This holistic view is central to the Nest and to wellbeing itself.

When many people talk about 'wellbeing' they are often referring to certain aspects only, such as mental health or social-emotional learning. While these are crucial elements, we need to ensure everyone working with, and for, children and young people, understands that 'wellbeing' refers to ALL six domains of the Nest, not just one or two. All areas need to be seen as a priority by all the adults in our children's community.

The six domains of the Nest are:

- Valued, loved, and safe
- Material basics
- Healthy
- Learning
- Participating
- Positive sense of identity and culture

VALUED, LOVED, AND SAFE



Being valued, loved, and safe means having loving, trusting relationships with family and friends. It involves a child or young person feeling valued by teachers and other adults in their life and knowing that they are important to others and that others are caring and supportive of them. It involves feeling safe at home, in the community and online. Safety also means feeling safe about their future, which includes the knowledge that the environment and climate are a priority and are being protected.

MATERIAL BASICS



Children and young people who have material basics have the things they need. They live in suitable, secure, stable housing, with appropriate clothing, nutritious food, clean water and clean air. They have access to transport, to required local services (e.g. plumbing) and to open spaces in nature. Their family has enough money for necessities. They have the material items needed to develop as an active member of society such as school supplies, suitable technology or sporting equipment.

HEALTHY



Healthy children and young people have their physical, mental, and emotional health needs met. All of their developmental health needs are provided for in a timely way. They receive appropriate health services, including preventative measures to address potential or emerging physical, emotional and mental health concerns.

LEARNING



Children and young people learn through a variety of experiences within the classroom, the home and the community in which they live. Their individual learning needs are addressed to allow them to realise their full learning potential. Families are engaged in their child's learning. Children and young people are supported and encouraged to learn in a wide variety of settings, including formal education. They have opportunities to participate in a breadth of experiences where their learning is valued and supported by their family and in the wider community.

PARTICIPATING



Participating is about children and young people having a voice, being listened to, and taken seriously within their family and community. It means having a say in decisions that impact them. It is being empowered to speak out and express themselves. Participating includes involvement with peers and groups through a variety of activities, including online communities. Participating means being an active member of society.

POSITIVE SENSE OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE



Having a positive sense of identity and culture is central to the wellbeing of all children and young people. This is important for all, regardless of background, but in Australia, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It encompasses having spiritual needs met, a sense of cultural connectedness, belonging and acceptance at home and in the community – and confidence that their identity, culture and community is respected and valued. It involves feeling safe and supported in expressing one's identity, regardless of gender, sexuality, culture or language.

How was the Nest developed?

The development of the Nest began in 2010 with a meeting at Parliament House in Canberra, which brought together experts and politicians from across Australia. Over a two-year process, we listened to over 4000 children, families, and professionals from a broad range of sectors, asking them what it means to have a 'good life'.

We have worked to ensure the Nest is reflective of our diverse population, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in rural and regional Australia, and children living in out of home care.

Central to the development of the Nest were the voices of children and young people of all ages. We asked them to tell us what wellbeing meant to them, through a range of activities such as creative drawing, group discussions, and a survey.

At the same time, ARACY researchers combed through hundreds of Australian and international programs, strategies and approaches related to the wellbeing of children and young people.

We wanted to learn what works to improve wellbeing, and what aspects of wellbeing are needed for children and young people to thrive. The information we gathered was used to create the Nest.

A national steering committee of experts from different sectors guided the entire development process, which was recorded in the Nest consultation report¹ and the Nest technical report².

The Nest was officially launched in 2012. Since then, we have continually updated and strengthened the Nest to reflect new evidence, terminology and our changing world. For example, a report and practice papers regarding the development and measurement of identity and culture³ was released in 2019.

Globally, the need and value of an ecological, holistic wellbeing framework for children and young people continues to rise, as described in the 2021 OECD paper Measuring what matters for child wellbeing and policies⁴.

1 [The Nest consultation report \(2012\)](#)

2 [The Nest technical report \(2014\)](#)

3 [Renshaw, L. \(2019\). A Positive Sense of Identity and Culture](#)

4 [OECD \(2021\). Measuring What Matters for Child Well-being and Policies](#)



How is the Nest being used?

As a conceptual framework for the development of a strategy or plan

Examples include The Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy⁵, *It takes a Tasmanian Village* and Maribyrnong's Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families 2030⁶.

As a guide to monitoring and evaluating children's outcomes

Examples include ARACY's 3-yearly Report Card⁷, which provides a national snapshot of Australian children's wellbeing compared to international standards. This type of reporting can also be adapted to suit local or state government data, for example the Palmerston State of the Children Report⁸ and the Story of Our Children and Young People⁹ in the Northern Territory.

Tracking student wellbeing in real time

ARACY has assisted in the development of EI Pulse¹⁰ which enables educators to rapidly track the wellbeing of students in real time, aiding in swiftly linking students with supports where needed. The app engages with students using principles of the Nest and ARACY's Common Approach¹¹, and has been adopted by a growing number of schools across Australia and internationally.

5 [The Tasmanian Government \(2021\). It Takes a Tasmanian Village; Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy](#)

6 [Maribyrnong City Council. Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families 2030](#)

7 [ARACY 2018 Report Card: The Wellbeing of Young Australians](#)

8 [Grow Well Live Well \(2016\). Palmerston State of the Children Report: A report on the wellbeing of children and young people in Palmerston](#)

9 [Story of Our Children and Young People, Northern Territory, 2019 & 2021](#)

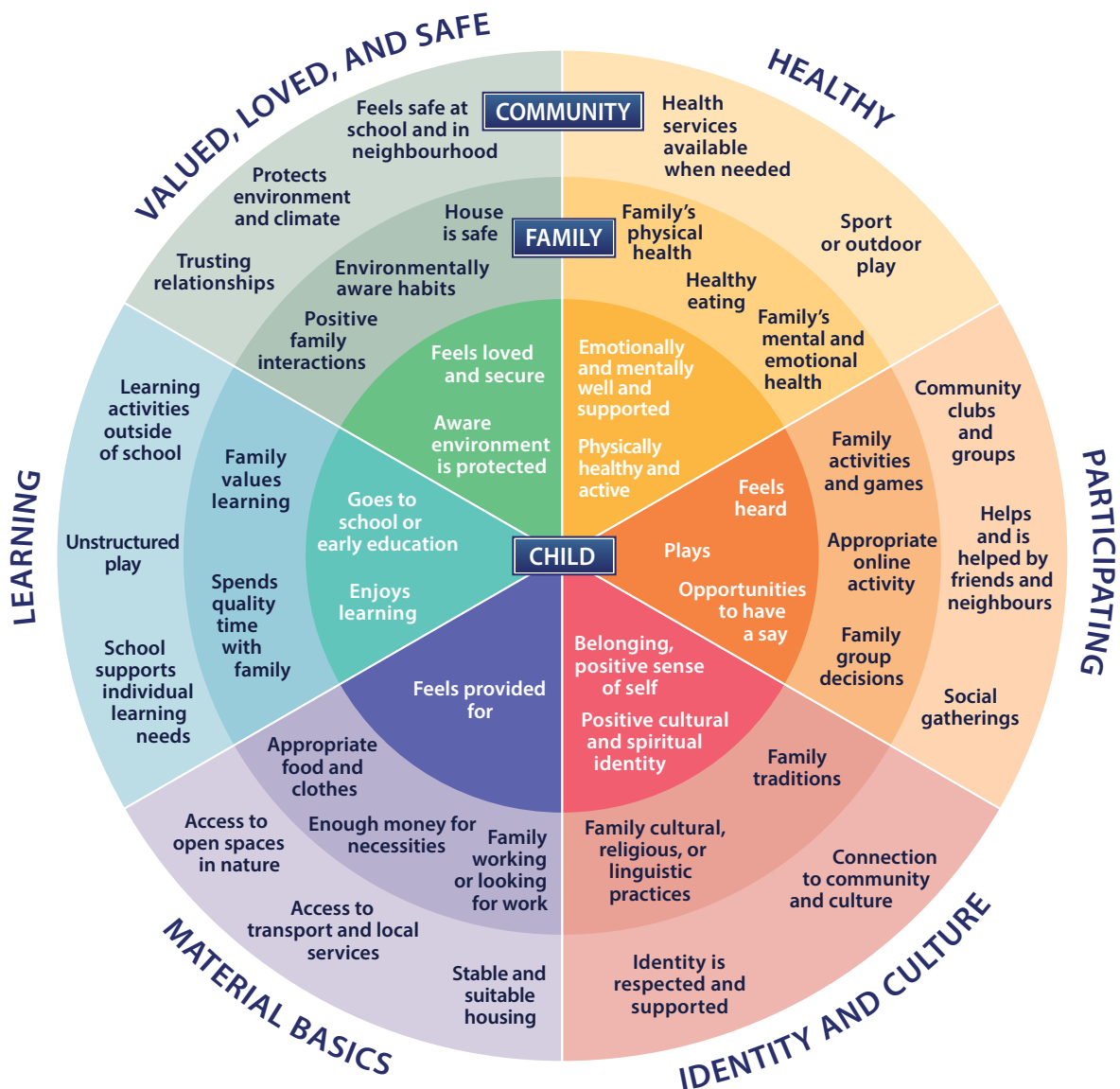
10 [Educator Impact, Student Pulse](#)

11 [ARACY'S Common Approach](#)

Through the uptake and delivery of The Common Approach®

The Common Approach® is ARACY's training program that enhances the ability of adults to engage with children and young people (and their families) through improved communication and conceptualisation of wellbeing. It is a strengths-based, holistic, child-centred, and collaborative approach to wellbeing for children and young people. The Common Approach® is an evidence-based approach suitable for anyone regularly interacting with children, young people and their families.

ARACY'S Wellbeing Wheel for Children



As a framework for community engagement

First Steps Count Child and Community Centre¹² in Taree, Mid Coast New South Wales, are using the Nest to frame conversations with children and young people about wellbeing. Large paper scrapbooks, structured around the Nest wellbeing domains, are allowing children and young people to draw or write their ideas about each wellbeing area and offer suggestions for what could be done locally to improve their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their peers.

Operational Principles

When the Nest is operationalised, there are six principles that guide the implementation of the framework. It is understood that when the Nest is used there is a commitment to:

1. **The child at the centre;** starting from the perspective of the whole child, ensuring the child or young person has agency, focusing on what is required to ensure their overall wellbeing beyond established disciplines and service boundaries.
2. **Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge;** recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies are well placed to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children and young people and such agencies require the funding, accountability and authority to do so.
3. **A long-term, evidence-informed approach;** recognising there is no quick fix for the complex issues facing children and young people, adopting long-term views, strategies, monitoring and evaluation processes.
4. **Prevention and early intervention;** although tertiary action will always be required, the maximum benefits will be achieved by shifting our efforts towards preventing problems and intervening early through a proportionate universalism approach.
5. **A life stage approach;** our work will have the strongest impact when focused on the early years, yet we need to continue to combine this with focus on the middle years and young people, particularly at transitional points in their lives.
6. **Systemic change using an outcomes approach;** agreement to work toward a shared vision, in collaboration with agencies, professions, governments and young people themselves. Collectively using shared outcomes frameworks, reforming funding arrangements and increasing the use of implementation science.

¹² [First Steps Count Child and Community Centre](#)

How the Nest operates at different levels

The Nest framework can be used to organise thinking around child wellbeing at multiple levels, from individual practice through to service planning to population level data and system analysis. **Appendix 1** shows the Nest in the context of the different levels at which it has already been used, and how these fit together to increase knowledge and understanding of child wellbeing across sectors and systems.

Other uses of the Nest include:

- As a shared framework for all service provider/delivery focused organisations who work with children and young people, and their caregivers
- As a framework for the agencies and philanthropic entities investing in child, youth, family and community wellbeing
- As a framework for the Commonwealth (similar to the approach taken by the New Zealand Government), to help drive and monitor change and align efforts
- To guide research and development, and as a framework for data assets and analysis
- As a way to increase wellbeing literacy and provide a shared language and consistent understanding of 'wellbeing' within Australia.

Further development of the Nest

In collaboration with children and young people, and our many partners, ARACY will embark on a number of projects to update the Nest to ensure it remains a valid and current wellbeing framework representative of our children and young people. We will gather the voices of children in the often forgotten middle years; increase our focus on regional communities; and work closely with First Nations communities and organisations.

About ARACY

ARACY was established in 2002 by former Australian of the year, Professor Fiona Stanley AC. Our intent is to catalyse change by bringing people and knowledge together for the benefit of all children and young people in Australia. We work to ensure that systems, policies and programs designed to benefit children and young people are based on the best available evidence, to grow capability, influence decision-making, and catalyse collective action.



Evidence based



Holistic

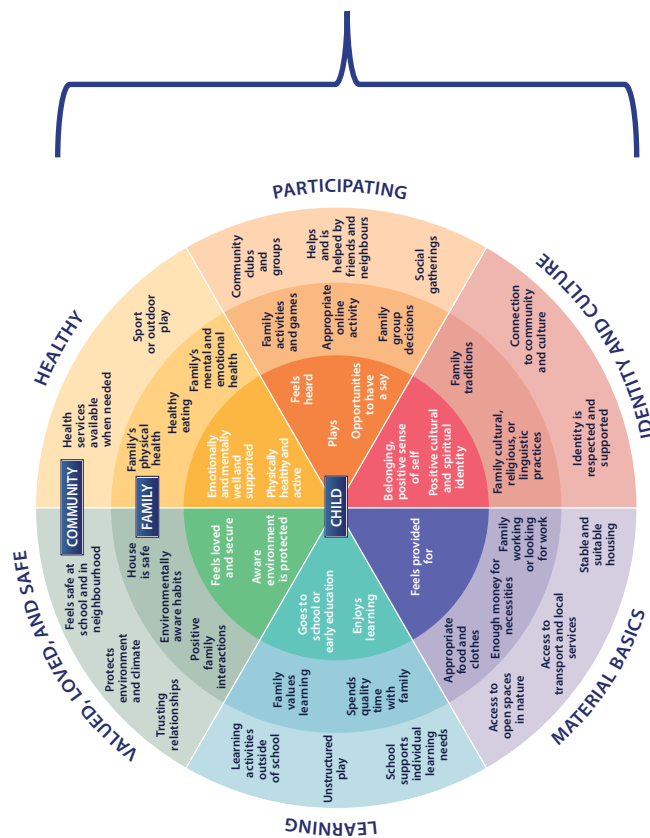


Child centred



Strengths based

A framework for understanding what children and young people need to thrive



Creates child wellbeing literacy; enables collaboration and contextual understanding of the child and family system and own role in child outcomes; focuses attention on outcomes not activity; supports outcome measures and indicator pathways

ESSENTIAL CHANGE DOMAINS

Concerted leadership

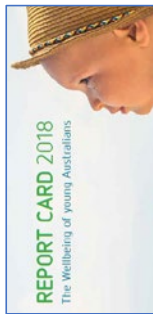
Smarter investment

Engaged public

Stronger workforces

Integrated delivery

Putting data and learning to work



National overview of Australia's progress



Indicator pathway:
builds high level /
national aggregates



common approach



Brain Builders Alliance

Sector capability building – core concepts, shared language, understanding of own role in child outcomes



Indicator pathway:
individual services
identify contribution
and impact

Work with services to develop indicators; ARACY "distance travelled" client tool captures and aggregates impact for reporting and continuous improvement



ARACY



For more information

We'd love to hear from you! Visit our website www.aracy.org.au, follow us on Twitter @ARACYAustralia, email us at enquiries@aracy.org.au, write to us at GPO Box 2807, Canberra City ACT 2601, or give us a call on +61 2 6204 1610. If you would like to support this work financially or in-kind please email enquiries@aracy.org.au.

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