



Safe Children, Strong Families, Supportive Communities

Investing in children and their families

The right support in the right place at the right time

25 June 2018

Concept Paper



Executive Summary

Early intervention and prevention services offer critical support to children and families experiencing vulnerability. They have the expertise and knowledge to positively change the trajectory of those they work with but require adequate investment to reach the demand in community.

Every year in New South Wales, 30,000 children and their families who need support, are ignored. They are children and young people who are assessed by FACS as being at risk of significant harm and their cases are closed before anyone has contacted the child or family. That's the equivalent of 423 school bus loads of children who remain at risk.

30,000 children identified as being at risk of serious harm are ignored



The purpose of this paper is to contribute knowledge gained through frontline experience to the discussion around prevention and early intervention and to advocate for an evidence-informed approach to investment in children and their families. This paper outlines a pathway for addressing the necessary policy reforms required in New South Wales to ensure that children and families do not fall through the cracks. We can and should do better. We will only achieve better outcomes for our most vulnerable in this State if we are all partners in this together.

Human services work is the hardest work that government funds. The people we work with often have complex needs and it can take a long time to achieve lasting outcomes. For years, most of the population level indicators on vulnerable children and families have been tracking in the wrong direction. We must target our effort to ensure that children can remain safely at home. Fams supports the permanency support principles and the NSW Premier's Priority to reduce the number of children re-reported at risk of significant harm.

Fams asserts significant additional investment is needed to fund true preventative action, in order to support children and families who are at risk, slow the rate at which children enter Out of Home Care, and save the NSW Government money in the long-term. It is unacceptable for the Government to fail to invest in prevention while spending increasing sums of money on dealing with Out of Home Care, a problem that is larger than it ought to be due to a failure to invest in prevention responses.

Fams proposes that what is needed in NSW is a coordinated approach to prevention and early intervention. It proposes that FACS and the sector work together to better adopt, fund,

measure, evaluate and iterate a service delivery model that satisfies best practice service delivery approaches.

Recommendations

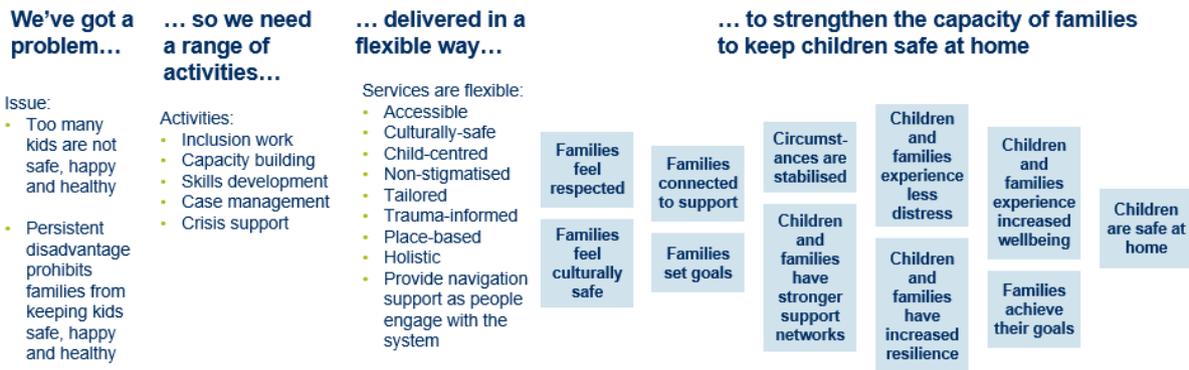
All children in New South Wales have the right to a safe, healthy and happy childhood. To ensure that children and families experiencing vulnerability receive the right support at the right time NSW requires a prevention service system model that:

- is offered to families at the point of first ROSH report, or earlier when families experiencing vulnerabilities can be identified;
- is flexible to deliver tailored responses to reflect families’ unique needs and circumstances;
- is data driven, with more transparent, regular and independent child protection information made available to the sector so that we can work with government to identify issues, trends and problems, and co-design programs that provide help earlier;
- funds service providers to work with families for as long as it takes to build resilience;
- promotes access to and coordination of social services and other community-based supports for families; and
- is outcomes-focused and evidence-informed with a view to a return on investment within five years.

An approach based on these principles would require significant additional funding from government in the short term. Existing studies suggest a targeted intervention approach could result in a net saving for government within five years.

Fams is now preparing its strategy to move from this concept paper to leading work with the sector and Government to identify an evidence informed service response that is targeted to where new investment is needed to achieve better outcomes for children and families at first ROSH report.

Theory of Change



This position paper will set out why it is imperative that Government adopt this course of action.



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Investing in children and their families	4
About Fams	4
Acknowledgements	4
The problem: the system is broken	5
Our partners	10
The work that works	11
Our pathway for change	16
Recommendations	23
Appendix 1	25
Appendix 2	28
Appendix 3	30
Appendix 4	31



Investing in children and their families

Fams is working with Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and sector stakeholders to share insights and advocate for an evidence-informed approach to investment in children and their families.

About Fams

Children are kept safe by quality services which help kids and families when and where they need it. Fams makes this possible by advocating for better public policy, advising how to achieve sustainable outcomes and acting to help vulnerable children, young people, families and communities.

At Fams we advocate, advise and act.

Established in 1981, Fams has always been driven by strong values and our aim:

- Safe Children
- Strong Families
- Supportive Communities

We contribute to population outcomes through:

- Building skills and knowledge in outcomes-based frameworks to enable organisations to collect and use data to inform practice and collaborate to provide better results for clients, practitioners and organisations; and
- Systematic policy and advocacy to inform and enable the government to implement solutions that support vulnerable children, families and communities.

Acknowledgements

Fams wishes to acknowledge and thank the time generously contributed by our partners in this work. We also thank those who may have contributed anonymously or informally.

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 Maranguka
 Mission Australia Greater West
 Parramatta Holroyd Family Support
 Rosie's Inc
 Social Futures
 Sutherland Shire Family Support
 Tamworth Family Support
 The Canopy
 WASH House Inc
 Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre



The problem: the system is broken

Fams consistently hears that the current system for protecting our children is broken – for children, for families, for service providers and for government. There is significant investment of public money but we are not seeing an improvement in sustained positive outcomes for children and families. Historical funding models, inflexible program guidelines, strict and expensive licensing restrictions, geography, and long waiting lists to access appropriate services have all conspired against success. Despite the level of reform activity currently underway, Fams remains concerned that the system will still not respond to vulnerable children early enough to change their trajectory.

Fams believes there is ample evidence that substantial investment in prevention is required now to reduce the persistent disadvantage that exists for hundreds of thousands of children and families in New South Wales. The New South Wales Government is aware of this evidence. It is irresponsible of the Government to spend ever increasing sums of public money on dealing with a growing problem that we have failed to prevent through lack of investment in early intervention.

FACS investment in the protection of children is not sufficiently evidence-based. The evidence says that what is currently being done is not working. FACS' support of children and families reported to be at risk results in positive outcomes in fewer than five per cent of cases, and the long-term outcomes for children involved in the Out of Home Care system are overwhelmingly negative. The investment in prevention is too little, too late and not based on evidence. The lack of sufficient investment in true prevention work means there is insufficient evidence of the value of prevention work when it is done comprehensively. The sector holds knowledge of what works but is not funded to deliver programs that take advantage of that knowledge, or to generate shareable evidence to prove the value of prevention. The sector finds it difficult to take an evidence-based approach because providers are frequently hamstrung and unable to work with families using the required approach, or for long enough to see sustainable change, due to funding constraints.

Fams believes the New South Wales Government must inject significant funding into true prevention in order to stem the flow of children into the Out of Home Care system. If it does not, FACS will spend additional sums of money in the long-term because the numbers of children entering Out of Home Care will continue to increase. Not only will FACS expenditure continue to increase, but health, education, justice and welfare will also bear the increasing cost of failing to build resilience in families.

The Government has a responsibility to protect the 30,000 children per year in New South Wales who are at risk of significant harm and who currently receive no support. If the Government fails to invest in true prevention, it will have failed those children.

Vulnerable children, young people and families in New South Wales deserve better. Together, Fams and SVA are proposing in this paper an alternative evidence-based model building on Fams' principles of practice.

Fams recognises and endorses the important role AbSec has as the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family services. As recommended in the Family Matters Roadmap, genuine participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in decision-making requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their



representatives, are able to participate in policy development, service design, and oversight of the systems and services that impact on the safety and wellbeing of children¹.

Children remain unsafe

Too many children are not safe, happy and healthy. 20,000 children and young people are in Out of Home Care, and every year there are hundreds of thousands of reports made to the FACS child protection helpline. Despite significant investment across numerous policies over many years, the trajectory has not improved. The rate of children entering Out of Home Care continues to increase.

In 2015-16, there were 140,063 reports made to the FACS child protection helpline, and 79,487 of those reports met the threshold of the child or children being at risk of serious harm (ROSH). Only 31 per cent of those children deemed to be at risk of serious harm (24,490 children) received a face to face interview. Around 40% of children deemed to be at risk of serious harm (31,794 children), received no support².

The 2013-14 data shows that current FACS programs are helping very few children to be safe and stay safe. Only 1.8 per cent of children who received support from FACS had their ROSH status reduced as a consequence and were not re-reported to the FACS child protection helpline within 12 months³.

Lack of investment in early intervention and prevention

Every year approximately 30,000 reports about children being deemed to be at risk of serious harm are closed without any services being provided and without even providing a referral or visiting the child or family. This is a consequence of a lack of funding for prevention and early intervention.

A 2017 Parliamentary enquiry into child protection (2017 Parliamentary Inquiry)⁴ highlighted the proportion of children and families at risk of significant harm who receive no support. FACS reported as part of the inquiry, that around 40% of reports deemed to be at risk of serious harm receive no support and the cases are 'closed due to competing priorities'⁵.

Part of this problem is due to funding for prevention and early intervention coming from the same pool of funding as for Out of Home Care. New South Wales continues to see an increase in the number of children entering out-of-home care, meaning the expense associated with Out of Home Care continues to increase, causing there to be less money available to spend on prevention and early intervention. Over the past 10 years, the cost of Out of Home Care in NSW has increased by \$671,500,000⁶. This trend is unlikely to see significant and sustainable change without investment in true prevention.

¹ <http://www.familymatters.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Family-Matters-Report-2017.pdf>

² Department of Family and Community Services, FACS Caseworker Dashboard - September 2016 quarter <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/about-us/community-services-caseworker-dashboard>

³ FACS (Corporate Governance and Performance) data 2013/14

⁴ NSW Legislative Council 2017 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 Report 46 – March 2017

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>

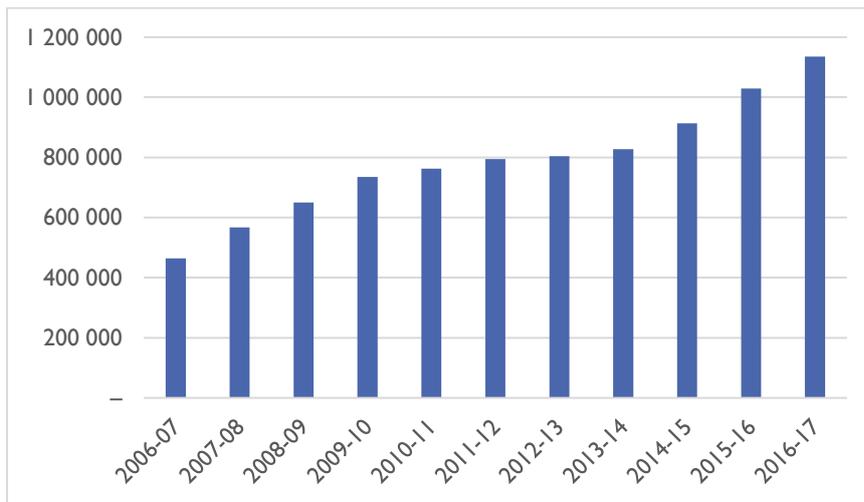
⁵ NSW Legislative Council 2017 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 Report 46 – March 2017

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>

⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2017 Volume F Chapter 16. Time series financial data are adjusted to 2015-16 dollars using the General Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GGFCE) chain price deflator (2015-16 = 100).



NSW expenditure on Out of Home Care 2006 – 2017 (\$'000)⁷



We have even seen this focus on the crisis end of the spectrum result in a redefining of language. Successive policy shifts have led to the terms “prevention” and “early intervention” now being used to describe supports much further along the crisis continuum than our traditional idea of prevention. This has diminished the importance of work with families who have not yet had contact with FACS, or, alarmingly, with families who have only been notified to FACS once. For the purposes of this report we are using the term “true prevention” to describe preventative work with children and families to avoid children experiencing abuse or neglect, including working with families to keep children safe at home.

The 2017 NSW parliamentary inquiry into the role of FACS in relation to child protection⁸, found consecutive state governments have failed to properly invest in the sector. Of the \$1.85 billion FACS was allocated in the 2016-2017 budget for the provision of child protection related services, the only expenditure that comes close to constituting prevention or early intervention expenditure is the \$117,429,000 (6.3 per cent) spent on family support services:

- \$117,429,000 for family support services (6.3 per cent);
- \$181,948,000 for intensive family support services (9.8 per cent);
- \$418,447,000 for child protection services (22.6 per cent); and
- \$1,135,516,000 for Out of Home Care services (61.3 per cent).

⁷ ibid

⁸ NSW Legislative Council 2017 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 Report 46 – March 2017
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>





Lack of evidence from the sector to inform decisions

There are a lot of reports saying the same thing, but the recommendations in those reports are not leading to sufficient investment in prevention. In 2015, ARACY canvassed the strong evidence that investment in prevention leads to better outcomes for children and families⁹. Other recent and relevant reports include Their Futures Matter, an independent review of Out of Home Care in NSW, the 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry¹⁰ and Family Matters¹¹. Fams agrees that an evidence-based approach is needed and supports action based on these reports. Fams questions why the initiatives in Their Future Matters still constitute late intervention rather than true prevention.

Data is not currently setting Government up to make good decisions, or enabling the sector to provide help early enough. As with funding, the data that is currently available is skewed towards the crisis end of the spectrum. We know how many children are in Out of Home Care, but we do not know what proportion of all children in New South Wales have been the subject of at least one notification to FACS. We do not know the full extent of the problem and we do not know enough about the broader context that shapes parenting and the challenges faced by many parents. Without this data, we cannot learn how best to support parents to keep children safe.

Without transparent, shared data, there is a risk that government decision-making will be influenced by unconscious bias regarding the capacity of certain marginalised cohorts to parent, which might disincentivise decision-makers to invest in prevention. There is a lack of data that demonstrates that parents can be supported to be good parents regardless of the challenges they are or are not facing.

On the other hand, without access to regular and accurate (de-identified) data, the sector's efforts cannot be targeted to those in need. While the sector has valuable knowledge of what it believes works, the sector has limited funding to deliver evidence-based programs as thoroughly as that evidence recommends, and the sector has insufficient funding to

⁹ Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D. and Smith, C. (2015). Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).

¹⁰ NSW Legislative Council 2017 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 Report 46 – March 2017 <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>

¹¹ Family Matters <http://www.familymatters.org.au/family-matters-state-2017/>

comprehensively measure and evaluate the programs that it does deliver. Sixty seven per cent of programs for vulnerable children and families have not been evaluated¹².

We need greater clarity around the lifecycle of a family, the impact of triggers and challenges faced by families, the extent to which different services work collaboratively to support families, and the services that are needed across the full child protection spectrum.

We need better evidence on the number of children and families having contact with different kinds of supports, and the outcomes those children and families experience as a consequence. This data will help us to learn what works, and to invest accordingly.

Losing capacity to do prevention well

Prevention and early intervention has suffered from funding shortages for many years. As the need for these services has increased, the funding problem has compounded. Although service providers may be delivering evidence based strategies, funding constraints may mean those strategies cannot be implemented with the necessary intensity or duration to deliver their full potential in terms of outcomes for children and families. A 2007 report from NSW Health argued that smarter choices need to be made about investment in health and other services: “prevention strategies in Australia appear likely to suffer from ‘investment failure’ rather than ‘program failure’¹³.

“Good staff leave when they are uncertain that (sic) fixed term projects will be extended. We want to do real prevention work that starts at grassroots to change intergenerational trauma, welfare dependency and cycles of violence. But we aren't funded to do it and outcomes will take years to be seen.”

- NSW Service provider with 300-500 clients, and four funding sources

Despite it being important work, it is difficult to ensure the financial viability of some services, and to attract skilled staff to low-paying jobs. These circumstances make it difficult for service providers to learn, iterate and collect evidence on what works best.

¹² Tune D. (2018) Their Futures Matter: Reform directions from the Independent Review of Out of Home Care in New South Wales. NSW Government

¹³ 5 Fox S. et al. (2015). Better systems, better chances: A review of research and practice for prevention and early intervention, The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. Ref. NSW Health, 2007, p. 6



Our partners

Children and their families

The ABS estimates that in 2015 there were 1,896,167 children and young people in NSW (aged 0-19).¹⁴ Data collected in the 2011 Census showed that in NSW there were 676,386 couple families with children under the age of 15, and 193,719 one parent families with children under the age of 15.¹⁵

In 2016-7, 66,689 children in NSW received child protection services – making up 40% of the children in Australia who received child protection services.¹⁶ Children in NSW are interacting with the child protection system at a higher rate than the national average, with 38.5 children per 1000 in NSW compared with 30.8 nationally. In 2016-17 there were 17,879 children in Out of Home Care in NSW, making up 37% of the children in Out of Home Care nationally.¹⁷ In comparison only 17,875 children in NSW engaged with an intensive family support service in 2017.¹⁸

As in other parts of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in NSW are over-represented in both engagement with the child protection services and in Out of Home Care. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 10.4 times more likely to be in Out of Home Care in NSW than non-Indigenous children.¹⁹

Government

In Australia, child protection is the jurisdiction of state and territory governments. In NSW there is a shared responsibility between state government agencies for protecting children and young people, with oversight and coordination from the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS).²⁰ FACS services for children experiencing vulnerability can be broken into three key streams:

1. targeted earlier intervention services
2. statutory child protection services
3. Out of Home Care services (run predominantly on contract by the non-government sector)

¹⁴

http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary®ion=1&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&geoconcept=REGION&measure=MEASURE&datasetASGS=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&datasetLGA=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA®ionLGA=REGION®ionASGS=REGION

¹⁵ ABS,

http://stat.abs.gov.au/itt/r.jsp?RegionSummary®ion=1&dataset=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&geoconcept=REGION&measure=MEASURE&datasetASGS=ABS_REGIONAL_ASGS&datasetLGA=ABS_REGIONAL_LGA®ionLGA=REGION®ionASGS=REGION

¹⁶ 66,689 of 168,352. 'Children receiving child protection services' is defined as 1 or more of the following occurring within the reporting period: an investigation of a notification, a child being on a care and protection order, or a child being in out-of-home care. It is not a total count of these 3 areas, but a count of unique children across the 3 areas. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Child protection Australia 2016–17. Child welfare series no. 68. Cat. no. CWS 63. Canberra: AIHW, p.10,

¹⁷ AIHW, p. 45.

¹⁸ Data supplied by the NSW government, as published in Family Matters, <http://www.familymatters.org.au/family-matters-state-2017/> p.30.

¹⁹ Family Matters <http://www.familymatters.org.au/family-matters-state-2017/>.

²⁰ NSW Legislative Council 2017 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 Report 46 – March 2017 <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf> p1.

The key legislation authorising the operation of the child protection system in NSW is the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW), with a series of related laws authorising broader aspects of the system.²¹

A more comprehensive review of the policy context is included in Appendix 1.

Service providers

FACS estimates that in 2015-16 targeted earlier intervention services were delivered by more than 600 organisations who assisted over 130,000 children, young people and families.²² Many of these organisations are non-government entities that are also delivering a broad range of services to children and families.

Prevention and early intervention services can include: case management, home visiting, parenting groups, playgroups, evidence based parenting programs, children’s groups, counselling, and engagement activities.

A more comprehensive review of service providers is included in Appendix 2.

Funders

Organisations delivering prevention and early intervention services rely on unstable and fragmented funding. The quantum of funding invested into early intervention in NSW in 2016-17 was \$117,429,000 – only 6.3% of the total investment in the child protection system. Most of that early intervention spend was focused at crisis stage and does not constitute true prevention work.

A more comprehensive review of funders is included in Appendix 3.

The work that works

Family services deliver powerful outcomes. Fams members have observed that “how” a service is delivered is more important than “what” the specific program is. A flexible response achieves positive outcomes for families.

Fams represents around 600 organisations that work directly with families. Those organisations see what works with NSW families. Fams is well placed to aggregate and share observations about what its members have observed works.

In February 2018 Fams convened a working group with stakeholders who have worked across the sector for many years. Stakeholders were invited because of their experience working with vulnerable children, young people, families and communities across the continuum from universal to tertiary responses. The working group discussed the role of existing prevention and early intervention work in helping children to stay safe at home.

²¹ AIFS: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation>
Adoption Act 2000 (NSW); Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014(NSW); Child Protection (International Measures) Act 2006(NSW); Child Protection (Offenders Prohibition Orders) Act 2004 (NSW) Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 (NSW); Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012(NSW); Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007(NSW); Industrial Relations (Child Employment) Act 2006 (NSW); Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW); Young Offenders Act 1997 (NSW)

²² https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/419277/FACS-Statistical-Report-2015-16-V10.pdf

From those contributions, we developed an initial Theory of Change that articulates how existing services deliver outcomes.

A key insight from this group’s extensive experience was that the strategic response, or the “how” a service is delivered is perhaps more important than “what” the specific program is. In particular, it was agreed that what they see work is taking a flexible response in order to achieve positive outcomes for families. Effective flexible responses involve services being accessible, non-stigmatised, child-centred, trauma informed, culturally safe, tailored, place based and holistic. These flexible responses are appropriate given the significant diversity between families, the wide-ranging needs of families and the multiple potential support points.

We have worked hard to develop parenting programs that are flexible, responsive to the identified needs of the particular group, and deliver the outcomes that have been identified by the group. They are built on the particular skills of the group leader and require considerable practice wisdom. We resist (not always successfully) a 'market place' approach to providing our programs. We believe that there is ample evidence that it is not the particular program that is effective but rather other factors that are common to all good parenting programs: relationship that is created, confidence of the practitioner, optimism factor, and other external factors for example.

NSW Service Provider, 655 clients

Another important part of effective service delivery is the provision of a navigation service. Services connect people to other social services, community-based supports and social support networks. Services increase the likelihood of the person experiencing positive outcomes from that other service in a number of ways, such as providing warm referrals, supporting people to attend appointments and checking-in on progress afterwards. Services build the capacity of people to navigate the system themselves by modelling, increasing health and system literacy and building confidence. The services act as the glue that connects people to service providers and increases the effectiveness of those other providers.

Despite such diversity amongst families and their needs, the group was able to identify a theory of the journey of change many children and families experience as a consequence of working with service providers who deliver these flexible responses. The journey begins with the family being connected to supports and able to set goals. Families circumstances are then stabilised, with the children and families having stronger support networks and increased resilience. Ultimately the families achieve their goals and children are safe at home. The Theory of Change supported the importance of taking an outcomes-focused approach based on core principles of practice and responding to the unique needs of each family. Fams Principles of Practice is included in Appendix 4.

Participants in the working group shared frustrations around being unable to work with families in the way that they know works because of resourcing or policy constraints. In particular, providers discussed often having insufficient opportunity to work with families beyond crisis stabilisation. If service providers are unable to continue working with families beyond stabilisation, there is a missed opportunity to build the family’s resilience so that the family will be better able to deal with distress in the future.

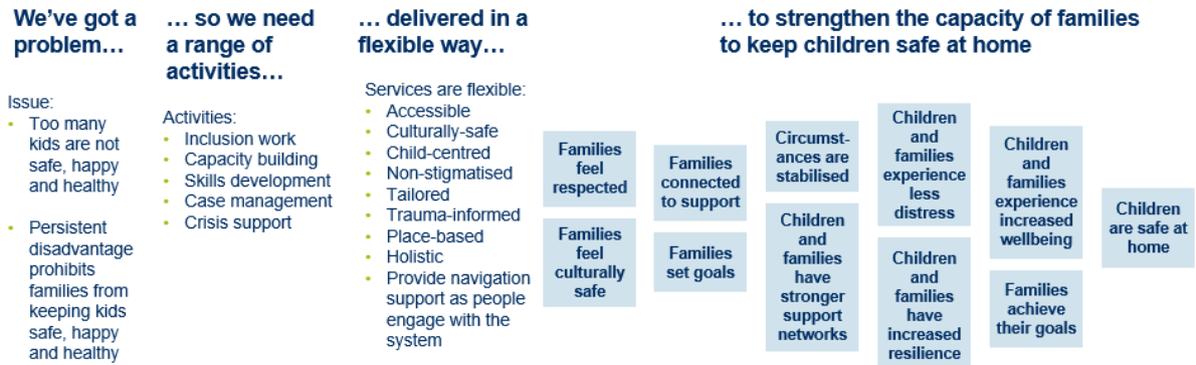
“The work we do that is truly flexible and innovative is often with small and one-off grants and donations. We try new things that work but then don’t have the resources to continue them.”

– Urban NSW service provider with 300-500 clients



Theory of change

The sector representatives articulated the theory of how they see change happen for children and their families in the following Theory of Change:



Case study of how Family Services work:

From a young mum with no model of how to be a parent, no consistent schooling and no model of how to function appropriately in society ... to a young mum who is connected, aware, has her children achieving in school, advocates for supports, and wants to continue to improve her skills. Her children are loved and cared for and have avoided ending up in Out of Home Care.

Kelly's childhood

Kelly was removed from the care of her parents when she was eight due to significant physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Kelly had several short-term placements in Out of Home Care and was then housed in refuges, hostels and short-term accommodation. Kelly frequently abused alcohol and had a criminal history (primarily stealing and fighting). At 14 she became pregnant with her first child who was subsequently placed in Out of Home Care. Kelly had a relationship and had her second child when she was 17 and her third child when she was 18. There was significant violence perpetrated on both Kelly and the children during the relationship and Child Protection in WA were involved with the family. When Kelly was 19 she fled the domestic violence with her two younger children and moved to Melbourne for a short time before being relocated in Sydney.

Accessible, non-stigmatised activities needed to engage Kelly

Once in Sydney, Kelly secured housing through Start Safely. Kelly was then referred by FACS to Family Service for support accessing childcare, organising her finances and reducing social isolation because FACS did not have capacity to allocate the case to a more intensive service.

It took time for Family Service to engage Kelly due to her immense distrust of services. Kelly initially attended a Young Parents Group and Family Fun Days where Family Service worked with Kelly's strengths. Family Service works from unmarked premises and all staff are skilled at welcoming clients and allowing them to feel comfortable even when they do not directly work with them. Kelly often commented that before her connection with Family Service, she



had felt “judged” as a young single mum with children from a CALD background. The consistency and variety of her initial interactions with Family Service helped Kelly to break down the negative beliefs she had about herself and how people perceived her and to see that not “EVERYONE” judged her.

After gaining Kelly’s trust, Family Service learned that Kelly also needed support with court attendances, budgeting, ante-natal programs, binge drinking, domestic violence counselling, parenting skills and housing. Family Service was able to extend the time it had to work with Kelly in order to support her on these additional issues through case management, group activities and advocacy.

A flexible response to working with Kelly and her children

Family Service worked with Kelly in a flexible way. It provided home visits and arranged appointments at parks and shopping centres to allow Kelly to complete chores or “get the children out of the house”. The work was tailored to Kelly’s age and skill set. As a young parent with limited literacy, language, resources and interactions were tailored to give Kelly the best chance of understanding and succeeding. Given Kelly’s trauma history, Family Service constantly worked from a trauma informed place. The service was welcoming, calm, predictable and non-judgemental. Client safety and comfort was a priority. When the children and Kelly arrived like a tornado, staff consistently provided ways to assist them to learn to regulate (sensory toys, playground, music etc). In casework the trauma was acknowledged and responded to, triggers were identified, and strategies introduced.

Outcomes for Kelly and her children

Family Service worked with Kelly to improve her parenting skills, gain budgeting skills, manage her emotions, become more confident with her literacy levels, manage addiction, access services and advocate for herself and her children. Family Service took a client centred approach rather than one that strictly adhered to funding program guidelines. This flexibility allowed them to work with Kelly for two years given the number of issues that came up once she was truly engaged and open about her problems. The need for crisis support reduced significantly after about six months of working with Kelly.

Family Service supported Kelly to access services and advocated for her in the court system and with Housing and other providers. Despite Kelly having a history of transience, Family Service supported Kelly to relocate when the house she was living in was not maintained by the landlord. Family Service supported Kelly to access Fair Trading and once she understood the process, Kelly was then able to advocate for herself in a future property issue without support. She then secured a private rental in Sydney for two years before moving back to WA where she has been in private rental since January 2017.

Family Service spent time helping Kelly with budgeting. Although she had limited literacy she became proficient at planning and working out how to prioritise and allocate her money. By the time Kelly left Family Service she was managing her finances and renting privately. However, she was also aware of services that could support her on occasions when she needed financial assistance and was proficient at accessing them independently.



When Kelly came to Family Service her ongoing and consistent fear was “losing her children”. Working with Kelly to increase her confidence and skills as a parent through groups, home visits and modelling helped shift her focus from being “fear based” to beginning to notice what her children needed. Kelly was assisted to enrol the children in childcare and to constantly be thinking about the safety of the children. Concerns were raised honestly and quickly and strategies to address them implemented and followed up consistently.

Throughout the time Kelly worked with Family Service she was consistently introduced to other services for support. This was done intentionally and, in a manner, that skilled Kelly up to be able to then access these supports independently once Family Service had closed her case. Initially Family Service had to work quite intensively to support Kelly to navigate Centrelink, Housing, Health and Childcare Supports. However, as Kelly became more confident and aware of how the systems worked she became proficient at accessing the supports she needed independently and then contacting Family Service to share her achievements. Kelly has since returned to WA. She has independently accessed private rental, enrolled her children in childcare and school, accessed medical and educational supports for her second child, accessed counselling for herself and her second child and begun attending parenting classes.

By supporting a mum in a way that responded to her needs and the needs of her children, skilling her up, reducing fear of services and helping her see the benefits of accessing supports, Kelly is more aware of what her children need and more confident in her capacity to meet those needs. Kelly is now renting privately, advocates fiercely for the wellbeing of her children, is connected with services, manages her finances and is planning to study. Kelly still emails or phones every now and then to let Family Services know what she has achieved or to seek advice or confirmation. In her most recent email she reported that her children are doing well at school and kindy and are loving it. She said: “I’m just so proud of my babies and how hard they are trying”.

Our pathway for change

Work towards having clarity on the outcomes you want to achieve, and better evidence on what works to achieve outcomes for children and their families

The sector would like to work with Government to share its insights and data on outcomes. Service providers have unique, trusted relationships with thousands of families including those in hard-to-reach cohorts so they are in a position to share valuable data.

Fams proposes a two-year iterative approach to designing and refining a shared outcomes measurement framework. This work would align with NSW Commissioning and Contestability Policy and Practice Guide, plus support the transition of funding agreements to the new Human Services Agreement. The sector is willing to work collaboratively with Government to determine the most appropriate data to collect, and the most efficient way to communicate that data and learn from it. The sector requires funding to undertake this work.

“We want to measure change over time, but we are given at best 3 year funding cycles.

– NSW service provider with 300-500 clients and four funding sources

Fams proposes that this be done alongside a Government campaign to collate useful data from various government departments as well as service providers in the existing Data Analytics Centre (DAC). The DAC could then use the collated data to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex situation families are dealing with, and how best to support them.

The Government could draw insights from the Stats NZ Sydney-based data lab which opened at the premises of Ernst & Young on 16 August 2017²³. The data lab enables analysts to remotely access Stats NZ’s Integrated Data Infrastructure for a project with the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry for Vulnerable Children (Oranga Tamariki).

The project examines the costs and benefits of efforts to support vulnerable children and their families. It takes a lifetime view of children’s well-being and focuses on early intervention to prevent poor outcomes for children. The project will develop a framework to allow the Ministry of Social Development and Oranga Tamariki to better target help and services to vulnerable children and their families, to ensure that taxpayers’ money is being used in the best way possible.

Establish a mechanism for more transparent, regular and independent publication of (de-identified) child protection data.

If you can measure it and report it, you can fix it, and Fams is of the strong view that a new approach to data analysis and collection in the child protection space is urgently needed. In order to be evidence-informed, and recognising the current deficiencies in the data, Fams believes that the New South Wales Government should consider approaches that would increase the transparency, frequency and independence of published child protection data.

As a comparison only, in New South Wales we recognised that crime prevention can be supported by proper resourcing of front line services (i.e. Police) combined with resourcing at the back end (transparent, independent provision of crime statistics to the police, sector, academics and the community). A similar statutory authority responsible for publication of

²³ http://archive.stats.govt.nz/tools_and_services/media-centre/media-releases-2017/stats-opens-int-data-lab.aspx



de-identified child protection data, could serve to both address the data vacuum that currently exists, as well as the current over-emphasis on children who have already reached crisis. An alternative proposal could be to expand the remit of the NSW Data Analytics Centre to include child protection data collection and reporting. Either would serve as a valuable tool for the sector, assisting us to better focus our resources and efforts in areas of emerging crisis (as distinct from crisis that are already here). It would also assist with cross-agency cooperation amongst government agencies, when identifying and rolling out programs. Data should guide us to evidence-informed solutions, not continue to be merely an act of compliance for contract management.

Utilise the NGO's capacity to achieve outcomes

The NGO sector has been developing outcomes management capacity over the past 10 years. Fams has supported thousands of service practitioners to adopt an outcomes focused approach through coaching, workshops, and training materials. In terms of the data capture component of an outcomes focused approach, most service providers collect performance measures. Many have been supported to shift to collecting that data both before and after a service, so that the data can show them what change their program resulted in. The extent to which service providers have adopted an outcomes focused approach varies, but there are a great deal of providers who are currently well-placed to participate in a commissioning for outcomes process.

“With funding uncertainty, we are unable to provide future planning and therefore this restricts longer term outcomes.”

– Urban NSW service provider with 300-500 clients

Leverage NGO's to support other service providers to achieve positive outcomes – the glue

Despite minimal and fragmented funding, the NGO sector has significant reach throughout many hard-to-reach communities. Services work hard to be accessible to families. Services are also well-connected to other service providers in those communities and often work to support collaboration between providers.

Parenting stress has persistent correlations with poverty, with poor housing, with community factors, and with access to health services for adults, particularly mental health services. NGOs are well-connected to the network of service providers working to support families experiencing those challenging conditions. NGOs can support families to achieve positive outcomes when engaging with other service providers by providing warm referrals and ongoing case management support. As a consequence, the other service providers are more likely to have clients experience positive outcomes, and the investment Government makes in those other service providers is more effective.

NGOs are also well placed to collect data to help Government better understand the complex needs of many families, which could help inform the Government as it works to force change in those broader factors that shape the context of parenting.

Learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers

Fams endorses the Government's commitment to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can receive services from providers who have accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Fams remains committed to its belief that



all service providers have a duty to become culturally safe providers. This will mean service providers are better placed to deliver appropriate services to people from a range of cultures, and it could mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have more options, should they choose them.

Further, Fams suggests that many of the policies being developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers might also be valuable in a non-Indigenous context and there are opportunities to learn from the evidence generated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers.

Achieve positive outcomes for more children and families - an investment approach

We need to invest in children. We cannot continue as we have been, and in deciding how to do things differently, we need to invest where the evidence says we will have most impact.

Why take an investment approach?

There is overwhelming evidence in other jurisdictions that expenditure on prevention and early intervention will result in better outcomes for children and families²⁴.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has canvassed the international and emerging national evidence on the value of prevention and early intervention. ARACY highlighted the following studies:

One of the many studies referenced in the report was a meta-analytic review conducted by researchers at Griffith University²⁵. It reviewed a range of early years prevention programs (including structured preschool programs, centre-based developmental day care, home visitation, family support services and parental education) delivered to at-risk populations with children aged 0-5. The review focused on outcomes that were maintained into adolescence, and found a range of significant effect sizes on key outcomes: educational success, cognitive development, social– emotional development, deviance, social participation, involvement in criminal justice, and family well-being. They found an overall effect size of 0.313, which was equivalent to a 61 per cent difference between intervention and control groups.

As well as evidence of prevention leading to better outcomes, there is strong evidence that prevention is more cost effective. Victorian Government modelling illustrates the comparative costs of universal services, such as maternal child health, versus remedial interventions, such as out-of-home care. Early services, provided across a broad population, are often more cost-effective per individual than later remediation²⁶.

Fams is recommending Government work with the sector to collect better local evidence at a program level of what is working to achieve sustainable outcomes.

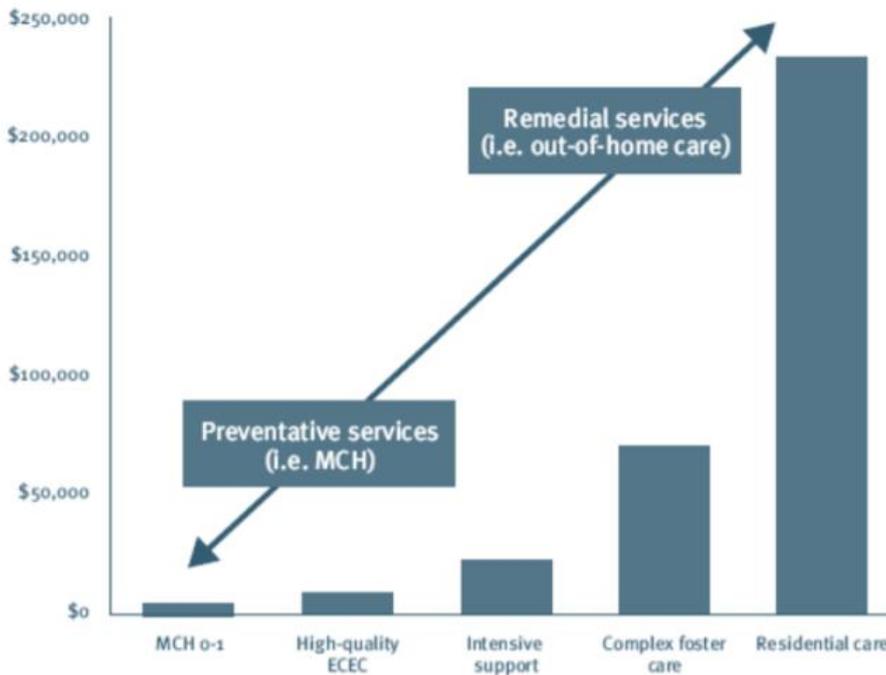
²⁴ Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D. and Smith, C. (2015). Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

²⁵ Manning, M., Homel, R., & Smith, C. (2011). An economic method for formulating better policies for positive child development. Australian Review of Public Affairs, 10(1), 61-77 p512

²⁶ DEECD (2014c). Early years strategic plan, improving outcomes for all Victorian children 2014-2020. Melbourne p 7-8.



Maximum annual unit cost of Victorian children's services



An investment approach can help us to attract additional funding to the areas that are most likely to help children and their families avoid experiencing negative outcomes. If we think of a spectrum of child well-being, from having healthy, safe, happy children at one end, through to families experiencing instability, children living in Out of Home Care, and finally children being restored to their families, we can think about where investment would have the most impact. We assume the following:

- Funding will not permit us to work with every family. If we invest funds with the entire population of children, we may build up the capacity of all families to respond to stressors, thereby avoiding the need to provide more intensive support after the family is already in a state of crisis. However, the cohort is so large that the finite financial resource would mean the level of support available to each family would be minimal.
- We could invest in reducing the drivers of vulnerability or the levers for change. Vulnerabilities that may lead to families experiencing risk of serious harm can include housing instability, violent neighborhoods, employment insecurity, low levels of education or poor integration of social services. These challenges are largely outside the remit of FACS. Until Government departments are able to break silos, FACS is somewhat constrained in its capacity to reduce the drivers of vulnerability.
- Working with at-risk families will deliver the greatest return on the investment. If we invest funds in providing an appropriate response to a family the first time a child is identified to be at risk, such as those who have been the subject of a notification of a risk of harm, the cohort is much smaller and there is still an opportunity for a relatively small investment that can change the course for a family and avoid children and their families from experiencing negative outcomes.



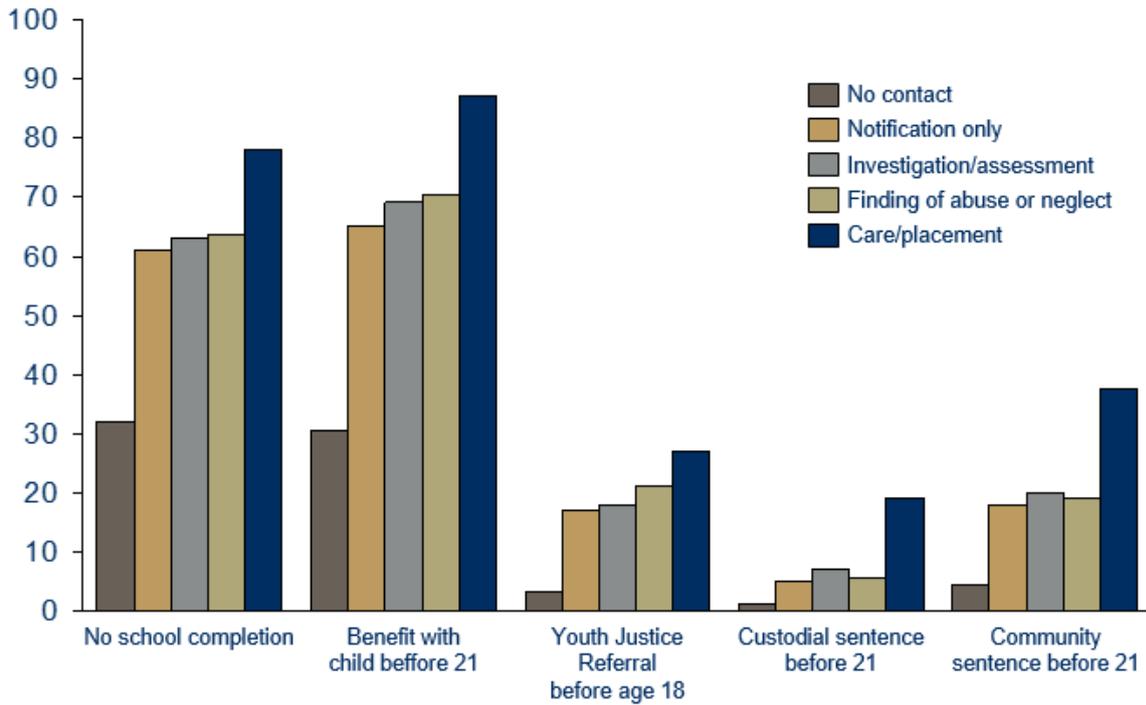
- There will never be enough funding if we allow more and more families to end up in crisis where they require intensive support. If we invest funds with families who are in crisis, those families require more intensive support. There is a risk that the finite financial resources might only get the family out of crisis temporarily and not ensure the ongoing stability of the family.
- We must continue to fund children who are in Out of Home Care and draw on evidence to find ways to restore children to their families safely. Children in Out of Home Care, and families working towards restoration, require intensive support. This investment is expensive and must be maintained to ensure appropriate care is delivered to these children. The need for expenditure on Out of Home Care should not distract from the need to support the 30,000 children identified as being at risk of serious harm who currently receive no response. In the longer-term, a reduction in expenditure on Out of Home Care can come from reducing the number of children entering Out of Home Care.

Evidence can help us to identify the key points at which support can help to adjust the path for a family. It is well known that children and young people experience negative outcomes as a consequence of living in an unstable home, living in Out of Home Care or being a victim of abuse or neglect. The negative outcomes can include not completing school, long-term unemployment and custodial sentences.

New Zealand data represented in the graph below demonstrates that the likelihood of a child or young person experiencing those negative outcomes increases significantly if the child has been the subject of a notification. The likelihood then increases again if the child enters Out of Home Care. This data suggests that our investment should focus on avoiding the need for a notification about a child or young person, as well as avoiding a child or young person entering Out of Home Care.



New Zealand findings on selected life course outcomes to age 21 by type of contact with Child, Youth and Family



Source: Crichton, S., Templeton, R., Tumen, S., Otta, R., Small, D., Wilson, M., & Rea, D. (2015) New findings on outcomes for children and young people who have contact with Child, Youth and Family, Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Social Development

Our assumption is that appropriate investment to avoid children being notified, and avoid children being placed in Out of Home Care, means more investment earlier:

Aspirational future spend across the spectrum of child wellbeing



Recommendations

We need a drastic change

Fams proposes that what is needed in NSW is a coordinated approach to prevention. We propose that FACS and the sector work together to adopt, fund, measure, evaluate and iterate a service delivery model that satisfies best practice service delivery approaches.

To be effective, Fams believes the service delivery model should:

- be offered to families at the point of first ROSH referral, or earlier when families experiencing vulnerabilities can be identified;
- be flexible to deliver tailored responses to reflect families' unique needs and circumstances;
- be data driven, with more transparent, regular and independent child protection information made available to the sector so that we can work with Government to identify issues, trends and problems, and co-design programs that provide help earlier;
- fund service providers to work with families for as long as it takes to build resilience;
- promote access to and coordination of social services and other community-based supports for families; and
- be outcomes-focused and evidence-informed with a view to a return on investment within five years.

An approach based on the principles above would require significant additional funding from government in the short-term. Existing studies suggest that a targeted intervention approach could result in a net savings for government within five years.

Fams proposes that the NSW Government make an additional funding investment to respond so that all children can receive a targeted response on their first ROSH report. As a starting point, to inform the level of investment and response required Fams recommends a strategy that:

1. allocates Fams access to FACS data for the purposes of analyzing and gaining an understanding of the children at their first ROSH report, including but not limited to:
 - a. the age of children reported
 - b. the geographical location of the children reported
 - c. the presenting issues on report (for example, neglect, abuse, domestic and family violence)
 - d. who is making the report: mandatory reporters, family, service providers, bystanders
 - e. the blockages and barriers to an effective and timely response
2. authorises Fams to lead work with the sector and Government to identify an evidence informed service response that is targeted to where new investment is needed to achieve better outcomes for children and families at first ROSH report.



The project cost for leading the systemic response would be dependent on what the data dive reveals.

Fams strongly believes that New South Wales is at a critical juncture that will determine the success, or not, of targeted earlier intervention responses. We are committed to working with Government and the sector to ensure that we build a flexible system that is delivering better outcomes for children and families.



Appendix 1

Government

In Australia child protection is the jurisdiction of state and territory governments. In NSW there is a shared responsibility between state government agencies for protecting children and young people, with oversight and coordination from the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS).³⁰ FACS services for children experiencing vulnerability can be broken into three key streams:

1. targeted earlier intervention services
2. statutory child protection services
3. Out of Home Care services (run predominantly on contract by the non-government sector)

The key legislation authorising the operation of the child protection system in NSW is the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW), with a series of related laws authorising broader aspects of the system.³¹ The Commonwealth has limited jurisdiction over child protection matters, although the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) and the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth) provide some guidance.³² Additionally Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (CRC) which sets out principles for ensuring that the human rights of children are upheld. Reporting to the UN on Australia's compliance with the CRC has regularly identified that the current structure and operation of the child protection system, most notably the skewed investment in crisis response versus early intervention, does not reflect best practice compliance with the human rights of children as outlined in the CRC.³³

In response to the acute awareness of governments and non-government organisations involved in delivery services to children and families experiencing vulnerability that a child protection system established to respond to crisis was no longer an appropriate or sustainable model, the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* (NFPAC) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2009.³⁴ NFPAC promotes a public health approach to addressing the needs of children and families, with an emphasis on the need for early intervention and prevention services.³⁵ The establishment of the NFPAC represented a cultural shift in how governments respond to the needs of children experiencing neglect or abuse, and was also an "acknowledgement of the inadequacy of existing state and territory frameworks".³⁶ Despite the promise of NFPAC to bring a transformation to the system, change has been slow.

³⁰ Child Protection Inquiry report, p.1

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>

³¹ AIFS: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation>

Adoption Act 2000 (NSW); Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014(NSW); Child Protection (International Measures) Act 2006(NSW); Child Protection (Offenders Prohibition Orders) Act 2004 (NSW) Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 (NSW); Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012(NSW); Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007(NSW); Industrial Relations (Child Employment) Act 2006 (NSW); Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW); Young Offenders Act 1997 (NSW)

³² AIFS, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation>

³³ Child rights taskforce, <https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Documents/CRC25-Australian-Progress-Report.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business>

³⁵ <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation>

³⁶ <https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Documents/ListenToChildren2011report.pdf>

approach to service design and delivery; improving the collection and use of data to better inform service delivery; child and family-centred approaches; the establishment of authorising mechanism for FACS to lead reform; and the alignment of fragmented funding arrangements between different government departments and agencies.⁴⁶

In 2016 an inquiry into NSW child protection system commenced. Unsurprisingly the parliamentary committee tasked with conducting this inquiry noted that:

“The sector is fatigued from reform, tired of ad hoc trials, poorly served by underfunded and incomplete programs, losing talent and experience due to short term contracts and delivered a disservice by constant political scapegoating. This committee, indeed all of Parliament, needs to not only make recommendations but see that they are implemented, properly funded and given time to work. In the modern political cycle, and especially given the highly emotive subject matter of child protection, this is a challenge that most governments and parliaments have failed in the past. We need to do better.”⁴⁷

The NSW reform response *Their Futures Matters*, specifically responding to the recommendations of the Tune Review, was announced in 2017. *Their Futures Matters* outlines an ambitious agenda of reform that clearly identifies the need to shift expenditure from crisis response to early intervention and prevention.⁴⁸ A key response is the introduction of tailored support packages for children and families experiencing vulnerability that aim to link families with complex needs to a broad range of support services covering the following areas: health and mental health; education and skills development; employment; positive parenting and relationships; housing; permanency and stability for children; empowerment and agency; and connection to culture. Four critical enablers are identified to achieving this reform:

- apply an investment approach to service delivery
- shift investment to evidence based services and interventions
- develop an outcomes framework for vulnerable children and families in NSW
- identify current funding for vulnerable children and families across government agencies.⁴⁹

While the reforms outlined in *Their Futures Matter* represent a significant shift in the approach of the NSW government responding to the needs of children and families experiencing vulnerability, Fams remain deeply concerned that there will be inadequate investment made in this new approach and that the investment will continue to be focussed too late.

⁴⁶ <http://www.theirfuturesmatter.nsw.gov.au/independent-review-of-out-of-home-care-in-nsw>

⁴⁷ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.theirfuturesmatter.nsw.gov.au/reform-publications-and-presentations/their-futures-matter-a-new-approach>

⁴⁹ <http://www.theirfuturesmatter.nsw.gov.au/reform-publications-and-presentations/their-futures-matter-a-new-approach>



Appendix 2

Service providers

- FACS currently runs and/or funds non-government organisations to deliver a number of early intervention programs, notably: Community Builders: offers services focused on strengthening communities and build their capacity, including: community and neighbourhood centres; men’s groups, women’s groups and cultural groups; mentoring schemes and management training.⁵⁰
- Child, Youth and Family Support (CYFS): offers services to families who fall below the threshold for statutory child protection intervention. Services include: advice and referral; assessment, case planning and case management; parenting programs and parent support groups; skills focused groups for young people; counselling; and home visiting.⁵¹
- Families NSW: offers services targeted in the early years of a child’s life, including: supported playgroups; parenting programs; family workers; community capacity building; partnership and network projects.⁵²
- Triple P
- Getting It Together (GIT): offers drug and alcohol services to young people aged 12 to 25 years.⁵³
- Intensive Family Preservation (IFP): offers services to families where children are at imminent risk of removal and placement in OOHC.⁵⁴ IFP draws from Homebuilders®, an international evidence-based family preservation model.⁵⁵

FACS also runs specific programs to meet the unique needs of Aboriginal children in NSW, including the NSW Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFCs).

Other programs are to support to children and families once they interface with the child protection system include:

- Brighter Futures: offers services to families with children aged 9 and under who are experiencing vulnerability due to: domestic violence; parental drug and alcohol misuse; parental mental health problems; lack of extended family or social support; parents with learning difficulties or intellectual disability; child behaviour management problems; or a lack of parenting skills or adequate supervision of children.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/community-builders>

⁵¹ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/child-youth-and-family-support>

⁵² <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/families-nsw>

⁵³ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/getting-it-together>

⁵⁴ http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/320799/tab_7a_ifp_program_guidelines_may_2014.pdf

⁵⁵ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/intensive-family-preservation>

⁵⁶ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/parents,-carers-and-families/support-for-your-family>



- Integrated domestic & family violence service: offers coordinated and multidisciplinary services to victims and perpetrators of family and domestic violence.⁵⁷
- Social Benefit Bonds: including the Newpin SIB and the Benevolent Society SIB which prioritise family reunification and preservation.⁵⁸

In 2017 FACS engaged in reform of the early intervention sector and initiated the *Targeted Earlier Intervention Program Reform July 2017 – June 2010*. The current FACS programs being considered as part of this reform are: Community Builders; Families NSW; Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy; Triple P; Child Youth and Family Support; and Getting It Together.⁵⁹

There are a diverse range of providers operating in the early intervention and prevention space in NSW.

FACS estimates that in 2015-16 targeted earlier intervention services were delivered by more than 600 organisations who assisted over 130,000 children, young people and families.⁶⁰ The current system is characterised by:

- significant barriers to access for children and families experiencing vulnerability driven chiefly by the limited availability of services, as well as fears from parents of engagement in a service leading to child removal
- severe funding and resource constraints, with short-term funding contracts between government and non-government service providers amplifying capacity stresses for service providers
- fragmentation with services being program centred, rather than child and family centred
- inflexibility to respond adequately to children and families needs, in large part due to capacity and resource constraints
- minimal support for families with lower needs as families with higher needs have priority access
- siloed programs and organisations that restrict the ability of planning and coordination in service delivery
- variation in the type and quality of services available in different geographical regions, with a notable lack of adequate services in rural, regional and remote areas.⁶¹

The 2016 child protection inquiry identified that services vary greatly between regions within NSW, with regional and remote areas suffering from a chronic lack of quality and accessible early intervention services.⁶²

⁵⁷ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/integrated-domestic-and-family-violence-service>

⁵⁸ <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/for-agencies-that-work-with-us/our-funding-programs/social-benefit-bonds>

⁵⁹ <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/reforms/children,-young-people-and-families/targeted-earlier-intervention-reform>

⁶⁰ https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/419277/FACS-Statistical-Report-2015-16-V10.pdf

⁶¹ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>

⁶² <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/DBAssets/InquiryReport/ReportAcrobat/6106/Final%20report%20-%20Child%20protection.pdf>



Appendix 3

Funders

The investment of the NSW government in various aspects of the child protection system is outlined in Table 1:

Table 1: Real recurrent expenditure for child protection services, out-of-home care, intensive family support services and family support, 2016-17⁶³

	Child protection services		Out-of-home care		IFSS		Family Support services		Total
	Unit \$'000	%	Unit \$'000	%	Unit \$'000	%	Unit \$'000	%	
NSW	418 447	22.6	1,135 516	61.3	181,948	9.8	117,429	6.3	1,853 340

In 2017-18 the NSW government will be investing \$1.9 billion into the child protection system, including:

- \$25 million for new evidence-based models improving family preservation (services for 900 children a year in 15 priority locations)
- \$63 million over 4 years of new funding for additional caseworkers and casework support workers
- \$95 million for targeted early intervention services, including parenting, youth and family support programs
- \$60 million for the Brighter Futures program to deliver services to families for children who are at high risk of entering or escalating within the statutory child protection system.⁶⁴

⁶³ <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2018/community-services/child-protection/rogs-2018-partf-chapter16.pdf>

⁶⁴ https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0005/417695/2017-18-NSW-Budget-Child-Protection.pdf



Appendix 4

What is a Family Service?

A family service is a non-government organisation (NGO) that works with vulnerable children and families. These NGOs reflect the diversity of their community and can be small, medium or large in size. They are usually located in the most disadvantaged communities within their district or they outreach into those areas.

Family services work with vulnerable children and families to deliver a wide range of services including:

- case management;
- home visiting;
- parenting groups;
- playgroups;
- evidence based parenting programs;
- children's groups;
- counselling; and
- engagement activities such as family fun days.

Workers use evidence based approaches including strengths-based, trauma-informed and child-centred practice. The nature of the work is holistic and underpinned by an ecological approach whereby communities, families and children are inter-connected and require multi-faceted solutions.

Principles in Practice

Children and family's safety, health and well being is at the heart of all our work. Families have multiple forms, not necessarily biologically based. These principles are modelled in all aspects of planning, service delivery, management and administration.

- Children and families should be safe.
- Children and families receive services that are flexible and responsive to their needs.
- Children and families can access services embedded in their community.
- Children and family's growth and development is enhanced by research supported practice.
- Children and family's social, cultural, racial and linguistic identities are affirmed and strengthened.
- Children and families work together with services in relationships based on trust and respect.

