

Appendix 4: Western Australia— Department of Family and Children’s Services

The information provided during the discussions is outlined below, under the following topic areas:

- approach to family support services
- services provided or funded
- service delivery mechanisms
- data currently being collected or planned to be collected
- developments or initiatives which are planned in relation to family support

Approach to family support services

Approach to planning

The vision of the department is that it will ‘be an innovative, effective and responsive leader in contributing to the quality of family life in Western Australia’. It aims to promote caring, responsible families and communities and to contribute to the protection and care of children and young people.

The department does not provide health or disability services, unlike several other jurisdictions.

The department has moved towards early assessment and ‘filtering’ of people out of the child protection system if there is not clear evidence of child abuse. These people are referred to family support services, and this is a growth area. In particular, a number of Parent Link services have been funded under the Parenting program to provide casework services and other activities to parents.

Under the department’s Strategic Plan 2005, three outcomes are identified, which cover all departmental activities:

- Outcome 1—Families and individuals achieve self-reliance and are skilled to care for their children.
- Outcome 2—Individuals and children are protected from abuse in families, supported through crisis and, where possible, children remain with their families.
- Outcome 3—Children whose placement has been approved by the department or are under the guardianship of the Director-General or are in child care, receive quality care.

Outcome 1 is the area of particular interest for the Family Support Services Scoping Study. This outcome has been developed in the context that early intervention and prevention are significant parts of the department’s work. Services cover a wide range, aimed at skilling

families to care for their members, meet their needs and prevent intrusive involvement in their lives. Services assist families to become empowered through providing information and linkages to supports in the community. Services delivered as part of this outcome are universal and accessible to all families. Some services target vulnerable groups and communities. Services are promoted to attract the broadest customer base and include support to those who may not achieve self-reliance. Target groups are parents, families, young people, individual adults and communities.

Two major strategies are pursued in relation to this outcome:

- improving the provision of prevention and early intervention services—with emphasis in the next 2 years on further developing and implementing universal and targeted services for families of children aged under 3 years, and on developing such services for those with children aged 2–4 years; and
- examining new ways of bringing services to targeted groups—with emphasis in the next 2 years on assessing parenting approaches and developing models of parenting services for Aboriginal communities and families; identifying, developing and implementing approaches to working with men as parents; reviewing, redeveloping and implementing services for young people; and reviewing family support and parenting services.

Family support and parenting services are targeted for review in 2001–2002, with redevelopment and implementation of new service models in the following year. The next review will then be undertaken in 2004–2005, under the 3-year rolling review program.

Outcome 1 has a series of outputs which relate to family and individual support. Services assist community members, including disadvantaged and socially isolated families and individuals to achieve self-reliance and to develop knowledge and skills about parenting. A key focus of measuring the outcomes which result from the service outputs relates to the client's perception of the effectiveness of the service by measuring factors such as increased knowledge, skills, confidence to manage well in the future and increased links to community resources and support. Effectiveness measures vary according to the nature of the service.

Developing self-reliance and skills is a key aim of the family support services. The department seeks to foster strong partnerships with other government agencies and the non-government sector to achieve the desired outcomes. Development of culturally appropriate services and responses to issues is another key driver of departmental policy in the area of family support.

Outcome 2 primarily addresses services focussing on crisis intervention, family violence or other specific issues such as homelessness, drug use, children who are carers, financial problems or gambling addictions. Services responding to disasters are also covered by this outcome. The majority of services under this outcome are out of scope of the Family Support Services Scoping study.

Outcome 3 is at the tertiary end of the continuum of care, with a focus on child protection, with the primary aim being the best quality care for children and young people who are not able to live with their families. Also included under this outcome is child care, with the aim to provide quality choices in child care. These services are also out of scope of the study.

Approach to funding

Services are funded under a tender process. Service specifications are developed, and public advertisements are placed inviting proposals from organisations to provide services. Briefings are held, and proposals are reviewed by a selection panel which provides recommendations to the minister. Contracts are for three years and funds are guaranteed if agencies meet the requirements. A data collection each 6 months is loosely tied to the contract. Agencies funded for less than \$20,000 are not required to provide 6-monthly data, but there is still a need for some information on their activities and outcomes. This is being examined. The community development officer in each zone manages contracts, with accountability ultimately to the minister for the funds expended.

Outcomes are specified in the contracts, and strategies are specified by agencies, with some suggested strategies outlined. There is an opportunity for agencies to input to the development of new service specifications, although this has not yet occurred in practice.

Internal funding is based on a budget allocation process, which is not yet using data collected on activities or outcomes to allocate funds. Zone managers are responsible for their budgets.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

The department provides a number of family support services through zone offices. These services aim to help families and individuals to develop skills and self-reliance to enable them to live independently.

Parenting

Parenting Information centres are located in a number of areas. These centres provide information and referral services. Parent Link services provide home visiting. A number of these services are now being contracted out to the non-government sector.

The Parent Help Centre runs parenting skills courses, provides information on a wide range of parenting topics to parents and runs the Parenting Line, a telephone counselling, information and referral service. The centre provides an outreach service and conducts seminars on parenting. The Positive Parenting Program is used in seminars and courses. Some of these are delivered in conjunction with the Department of Health. Groupwork activities for parents of children up to 2 years old are also conducted, aimed at providing parents with an increase in skills, knowledge and confidence in parenting.

The Parent Help Centre distributes the *Living with ...* series of magazines, which are written by departmental staff. These have recently been updated following a formal evaluation. A *Living with Teenagers Training Manual* has also been produced to assist parents struggling with the dilemmas they face with adolescent children.

Early Education Service works with parents and carers in their homes and community groups. The service assists parents and carers to improve their skills and knowledge on child development. Parents and carers are also encouraged to develop linkages to other services in their local area.

Best Start focuses on Aboriginal parents and children, and provides extensive services throughout Perth, regional towns and remote areas of the State. It is targeted at parents or other carers with children aged from birth to 5 years, and provides a range of parenting skills and modelling services for parents and carers. Workshops, activities and playgroups are run by local coordinators to help improve the life opportunities for young children. Culturally appropriate materials and coordinator training conferences support the service delivery arm of the program. The program is a cross-departmental one, with involvement of the health and education departments.

The Lifeskills Teams located in zone offices provide generic services to families, involving short-term work in relation to parenting skills, homemaker skills and the like.

The Intake and Assessment Teams will provide initial advice, information and referral services for families contacting the department, or about whom a 'child concern report' has been received. Some referrals are to the child protection staff where more intensive work will be undertaken with families at risk.

The department undertakes regular universal corporate communications activities—these 'media blitzes' on parenting issues are an integral part of family support. Campaigns provide tips for good parenting, and publicise the parenting programs available for families to access.

Other family and individual support services

The department runs a Family Help Line, which provides telephone counselling, support and information and referral services on a broader range of issues than the Parent Help Line. The Family Help Line will assist with relationship issues between family members, and seeks to link families with other services as required.

The department's Under 10s program undertakes work with families to assist them to care for children with persistent behavioural problems. Zone offices can run programs as Family Camp venues, where families participate in a range of activities designed to enhance parenting skills and family relationships.

Services funded

Under Outcome 1, the department funds eight generic counselling services, approximately 56 family support and community and neighbourhood houses services, six home visiting services and approximately ten parenting services. Funds vary, but average approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000 annually. The services cover a wide range of areas, and offer a number of service delivery options. Service specifications include:

- a target group description
- core outcome objectives
- additional outcome objectives, including agency-specific outcome objectives
- service strategies which are tailored for individual agencies
- core output measures
- additional output measures
- core outcome measures
- additional outcome measures—often narrative descriptions

- a generic quality measure based around satisfaction with services as reported by consumers

Counselling services

Counselling services are funded to help individuals and families to assess their circumstances and relationships, to make choices, decisions and plans and to develop skills and confidence to enable them to put their plans into effect. Counselling may be in group or individual sessions, at face-to-face meetings or by telephone.

Services funded under this program include parent–adolescent conflict counselling, parent–teen link, and general child, youth and family counselling. Services specific to young people are funded separately.

Family Support and Neighbourhood Houses

These services offer support to families, individuals and community groups in the form of practical assistance, informal counselling or advice, arranging group activities and linking to other community resources and support networks. The Community Link and Network (CLAN) services funded under this program recruit, train, supervise and support volunteers who go into homes to offer friendship, support and advice regarding daily living matters especially with regard to raising and caring for children. Neighbourhood Houses are moving away from their traditional role of offering a venue for recreation-based activities, and towards providing social networking, knowledge and skills programs. Neighbourhood Houses do not simply offer a venue for provision of services, but the actual services themselves.

Services funded under this program include generic family support services, as well as services for lone fathers, lone parents, women’s groups, a migrant resource centre and Aboriginal services. An alcohol and substance abuse service is also funded to provide family support services.

Home visiting services

These services are similar in nature to the Family Support and Neighbourhood Houses services described above, but generally provide a more intensive level of casework within the service delivery.

Parenting services

These services complement, and in some cases developed from, the parenting services offered by the department. They are preventive services aimed primarily at parents who require individual support to increase their parenting skills. The services are a positive approach to strengthening the parent–child relationship to reduce difficulties experienced by families. They are available to parents who seek to improve their ability to deal with difficulties they are experiencing in parenting their children. Parents may also access the services to improve their effectiveness as parents, and services focus on the needs and strengths of parents. Parents identify their own goals, develop strategies to achieve these goals and assist in evaluation of outcomes. Services develop knowledge of local and other appropriate services relevant to parents in order to inform, support and link parents with the community.

Services may be either centre-based or community-based. One centre for new mothers provides intensive residential support.

Services ‘on the borderline’

The department funds a number of services which have strong elements of family support. These include the Family Tracing and Reunion services, which provide people with links to their birth families. Services are provided to Aboriginal people who have been removed from their family or community, to former children in care, to United Kingdom child migrants and to adopted people. These services, however, tend to be ‘issue-based’ and so would largely fall out of scope of the current study.

Family Court counselling, funded by the Commonwealth, is also provided by departmental staff. This involves mandatory counselling prior to progressing further with Family Court matters. Once again, these services tend to be issue-based.

Intensive psychiatric services may fall into the study scope. Although primarily for clients with a domestic violence or child protection issue, there is some relationship counselling involved. Departmental officers provide some services, and others are purchased from non-government agencies.

As with other jurisdictions, youth services involve an element of family support, but tend to focus on the young person, rather than the family.

Service delivery mechanisms

Department services and funded agencies provide a range of services, using a variety of strategies:

- research and development of parenting resources, education and training
- individual, family and group counselling (formal and informal)
- community development
- coordination of community services
- parenting skills development through group education, practical skills courses, etc.
- relationship skills development
- referrals and links to other services
- practical assistance
- development of personal networks
- volunteer home visiting
- information about community resources, parenting and other topics
- case planning and intervention
- in-home skill building activities
- play and social activities in areas with few community facilities
- recruitment, selection, training, supervision, and matching of volunteers with families requiring support

Data collection

The Department of Family and Children's Services has a number of integrated data collections which cover both departmental and funded services.

Departmental services

The departmental system, which is completed by individual workers in zones, produces the same statistical outputs as the collections for funded agencies in relation to family support services. This allows a seamless integration of information about these services, regardless of which sector provides the service. Other services, such as Parenting Services, have their own data systems which collect similar information to that for the non-government parenting services, although integration is more difficult. Some specialist departmental services use paper forms rather than the main system.

The department's Client and Community Services System (CCSS) is primarily a casework system. For family support services, the combination of appropriate 'service' and 'reasons' fields provides the information in relation to the services within family support which are provided by departmental staff. Basically the system records a number of generic services such as mediation or counselling or advocacy, and, to find if they would fall within the domain of family support or another area such as crisis support, the service type is placed in a matrix with the reasons for contacting the department. Hence people who receive advocacy services when contacting for reasons such as a family problem or psychiatric issues would be counted as family support. If the reason for contact is financial problems, the service would be counted in another output area.

The department surveys its own customers on a regular basis, and has done so for several years. The survey is a large-scale 'market research' telephone collection which is out-sourced to external consultants. It endeavours to contact each client with whom the department has had contact over the previous 3 months (excluding child protection and domestic violence clients where it is not safe to contact). Questions include recall of the most recent contact, whether the consumer has noticed any difference in their circumstances, whether they learned anything from the contact, and whether the contact helped. Results are aggregated into the major output groups.

Similar surveys are undertaken of visitors to the department's parenting information centres. In addition, the department commissioned a wide range of research projects into particular family support services issues, which have been used as input to service development, planning and enhancement. Examples of projects include a review of the department's 'new directions' approach which showed that it is in tune with international trends; a Family Week awareness survey; market research into parenting styles and attitudes; and a stocktake of Aboriginal parenting information materials.

Non-government services

The non-government data collection includes specific data items depending on the program—separate data collection forms exist for counselling, family support and neighbourhood houses, home visiting services and parenting services. A number of data items are common across all these data collection forms, which are obtained in paper format each 6 months. Data are entered into the Service Provision Management Information System (SPMS). Some common items are:

Service availability

- hours of operation each week
- number of weeks operating

Service workload

- number of contacts
- number of cases
- number of sessions

Individual consumers

- sex
- ethnicity
- family composition
- number of children by age

Referrals

- sources of referrals

Service provision

- number of people involved in activities (consumer reports)
- number of activities and hours involved in group activities (service reports)

Outcome measures

- number of consumer feedback forms distributed and returned
- consumer feedback on outcome measures specified for program

Quality indicator

- consumer satisfaction with service

Data items are tailored to the particular service type and the data collection forms are accompanied by detailed instructions and definitions.

In addition to these regular data collections, the department undertakes a survey of consumers. Bulk supplies are provided to agencies each 6 months, and clients are requested to complete these forms at the completion of a case, or for a period of 2 weeks each 6 months. All forms are sent to the department for processing, and an *Agency Report* is provided to the agency via the zone manager. Information from the Agency Report is transcribed to the data collection forms for input to the SPMS system.

A feature of the data collections is the concept of 'case equivalents'. This in effect converts activities of different types, such as group sessions and telephone counselling sessions to a single, comparable output measure, which allows for calculation of unit costs, etc. This helps to remove some of the difficulties inherent in comparing the costs and performance of different service delivery models.

Developments and initiatives

The program of rolling evaluations of services provides regular input to service planning and development. Evaluations occur on 3–4-yearly cycles and include both government and non-government services.

Other initiatives include development work in the service system area, to assess service delivery models; and a joint initiative with the Department of Health called 'Building Blocks' which will involve intensive home visiting of new mothers. This universal screening process will then provide targeted intervention if any risk factors are identified.

Initiatives for men, both to increase men's access to and participation in services, and to increase the number of male volunteers, are being undertaken.

There are major plans to overhaul both the departmental and non-government information systems. This will involve capturing all departmental data electronically, and 'fitting' it into the three outcome groups, while still maintaining relevance to staff in zone offices. The separate data collections for parenting services, child protection, etc., will be integrated into a cohesive system.

The SPMS system for non-government agencies is being rewritten with provision for interlinking of service specifications, contract management, financial reporting, data collection, and reporting by the outcome groups. Electronic transmission of data from agencies to the department is under consideration, with provision for Internet transfer at a later stage. The system is being rewritten around existing service specifications and data collections.

Information from both systems will be put in a data warehouse, along with departmental financial and staff resources information to provide a complete picture of inputs, outputs and outcomes.