

Appendix 1: New South Wales— Department of Community Services (DoCS)

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 department's approach to planning for family support services is affected by a number of current initiatives. Firstly, a new Act—the *Children's and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*—came into effect November 2000. Under the Act, the department is required to make due efforts to provide alternative forms of support prior to taking children into care. This will influence the referral of families where child protection concerns exist to services.

Secondly, Family Support Services are funded through the department's Community Services Grants Program (CSGP). The department is presently undertaking a re-focussing of CSGP to better align it with DoCS' legislative obligations and with the New South Wales Government's views on strengthening communities. A Roundtable Group comprising government and community sector representatives is preparing a draft program framework and will shortly develop draft sub-program descriptions (i.e. logical groupings of similar service types). Ultimately service specifications will be prepared for all funded services. Under the refocus process, service providers will not be required to change the nature of their service delivery unless they agree to do so.

Lastly, the New South Wales Government has introduced Families First in NSW, a \$54.2m whole-of-government strategy, to support parents/carers raising children aged 0–8 through the provision of an integrated network of prevention/early intervention services.

The initiative is coordinated by the Cabinet Office but the Department of Community Services is responsible for the allocation of \$39.8m in community funding over 4 years. In 1999–20000, 34 new services were funded—18 of which are to be auspiced by existing family support services.

Planning of the Families First service network emphasises the critical importance of a coordinated, interagency approach to service planning and delivery. Links between early intervention and prevention services and community development programs will form a comprehensive service network capable of providing wide-ranging support to families raising children. This will be achieved by:

- building on and broadening existing service structures so that a wider range of needs may be met
- changing the practices of some services
- coordinated service planning and the establishment of new services where gaps have been identified and which have been proven to work for families

The strategy is grounded in research which shows that early intervention services can produce a sustained improvement in children's health, education and welfare, and that early intervention programs which are designed to reduce the risk of child neglect have an important role to play in long-term crime prevention. Services have the greatest impact when they are capable of addressing a broad range of issues and are provided as part of a coordinated network.

Outcomes for the strategy are:

- healthier children and parents
- better functioning families who are able to enjoy and learn from one another
- children who are better prepared to learn and develop when they start school
- reduction in the conditions that lead to mental health problems in children (such as conduct disorder)
- improved recognition and early intervention for post-natal depression and other mental health problems in parents and new babies
- greater parental participation in education and training
- communities whose members interact more positively and which are friendly places to bring up children
- reduction in the conditions that lead to child abuse and neglect
- reduction in juvenile and adult crime

The strategy will be rolled out progressively. In 2000–2001 it covers the North Coast, Hunter, Inner Western Sydney, Orana Far West and South West Sydney. It will cover the whole State by 2003–2004. Local planning and implementation is the responsibility of Regional Officers Groups consisting of senior representatives from the participating government agencies, with input from families, community forums, non-government services, local government and other stakeholders.

Approach to funding

Funding for most services funded under the CSGP is on the basis of an agreed work plan submitted by agencies each year. This plan is negotiated with the department. In 2000–2001 3-year funding and performance agreements have been introduced for family support services. Performance is measured against each agency's work plan. This system is relatively recent, with previous funding being a historical submission-based process.

Families First is an administrative component of the CSGP. However, service specifications have already been developed for all Families First-funded services. Families First Funding and Performance Agreements therefore include the relevant service specifications and relevant performance targets which are negotiated between the DoCS Area Director and individual agencies.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

The Department of Community Services does not provide any direct services which are in scope of the study. District officers working throughout the State will refer people to other family support services which are funded by the department.

The department produces a range of parenting magazines, which are widely distributed through departmental offices, non-government agencies and the Internet. Public education campaigns on parenting are run frequently, often in conjunction with other agencies such as the health and police departments.

Services funded

Community Services Grants Program

Family support services are funded under the CSGP which has been in operation for approximately 25 years. Services funded under this program cover a wide range of community services, including family support. Funded agencies providing family support could be isolated from other services on a reasonably accurate basis.

There are approximately 135 family support services operating in New South Wales. These services have an active Family Support Services Association, which provides a focal point for individual services. Many of the referrals to these services are for families where the department has had some contact with the family in relation to child protection concerns—up to 50% of all referrals are in this category,

Many services operate only in the area of family support, while others provide additional services such as financial counselling, emergency relief and child care. The Family Support Services Association provides training, support and resources for family support workers.

In addition to these services Parent Line provides advice and information for parents with children aged 0–18 years. Many other services provide telephone information, advice or counselling as part of their family support work.

Families First in NSW

Under the Families First initiative, these service types will be strengthened, and a range of new universal service types will be funded. These include:

- Family Centres—these are ‘one stop shops’ for families and will provide information and a focal point for other family support services. They will negotiate with service providers

to conduct parenting information or other sessions, such as parent skills workshops, networking or other identified service needs.

- Supported Playgroups—qualified workers will provide playgroup activities for children and parenting skills, networking and referral for parents.
- Family Worker Services—this predominantly home-based service model will provide workers to model parenting behaviour/skills in client’s homes to maximise support to parents/carers at stressful times such as during the early evening.
- Volunteer Home Visiting Services—professional workers are responsible for recruiting, training and supervising home volunteers who in turn will provide practical parenting advice and support and social contact for families with young children. These services will receive referrals from, and make them to, support agencies. They will match volunteers to families needing home visiting, and develop other ways to support families, including development of parenting groups. They will participate in networks and provide links with other service providers to meet the families needs.

Services ‘on the borderline’

Some neighbourhood centres undertake counselling activities, but the majority are involved in community development activities.

Service delivery mechanisms

Family support services undertake a wide range of activities, including:

- counselling for individuals and families
- group activities designed to provide support and networking for families in their local area
- groups for children
- parenting groups
- personal development groups
- education groups, focussing on family skills development
- playgroups for children
- centre-based family support worker services for individual support and assistance
- home visiting for families by family support workers and volunteers
- information and referral services
- centre-based information, referral, groupwork and networking
- mobile services

Many services are integrated with community development or targeted services for people with domestic violence issues, problem gambling or financial counselling needs.

Data collection

Family Support Services Association (FSSA) data collection

The department funds the FSSA data collection, and receives aggregated information in relation to their clients and activities. This data collection, which is undertaken by a private consultancy firm, covers a 2-week census period each year:

Service overview (completed by service)

- staffing
- paid staff hours
- unpaid staff hours
- number of volunteers
- number of volunteer hours
- proportion of resources devoted to each service type
- information on waiting lists
- number of additional worker hours needed to meet demand
- client numbers by category
- client characteristics, including ethnicity, Indigenous status, children at risk (notified to DoCS); special learning needs
- types of specific services provided (e.g. parenting groups for men)
- training of staff
- group activities—type, number of sessions, number of adult and child participants
- approach to service provision—use of theoretical frameworks or therapeutic models
- priorities for additional resources
- evaluation of the work of the FSSA

Completed family worker client details (completed by worker)

- client code
- living arrangements
- age of adult male and adult female in client family
- special learning needs of parents
- number and age ranges of children
- special learning needs of children
- support networks for the family
- demographic and social indicators —language, Indigenous status, income source, housing arrangements, etc.
- child/ren's and parent/s interaction with the statutory child protection system
- frequency of contact
- hours per contact
- travel time per contact

- group work attendance
- clients seen at contacts
- length of time in contact with the service
- other issues, e.g. gambling, domestic violence
- goals set (3), who identified and achievement level
- linkage of goals to economic and social factors
- how services were completed
- change in family since initial referral/intake interview
- contribution of agency to the level of change
- total direct service hours
- total travel hours
- other services provided—group sessions and child care
- worker needs to work more effectively with this client

Group participants and clients receiving family worker services (completed by client)

- a range of questions relating to the person's participation in groupwork, and service support are asked, along with demographic and social questions
- assessment of the particular services provided to the participant/client
- overall assessment of the centre or service
- series of questions about how the person sees things—13 topics
- series of questions relating to the social fabric of the person and their local community—31 topics

Staff profile (completed by service staff)

- position
- specialisation
- basis of employment
- contracted hours
- paid hours spent in direct service delivery, management and administration and travel
- unpaid hours spent as above
- demographic and social characteristics
- qualifications
- experience of abuse/threats
- years worked in family support
- length of tenure of current position
- training days
- supervision and frequency of supervision

Volunteer profile

- principal role
- other roles

- hours volunteered each week
- demographic and social characteristics
- qualifications
- experience of abuse/threats
- years worked in family support
- length of time spent as a volunteer
- training days
- supervision and frequency of supervision

No formal data dictionary exists—codes and explanations are incorporated in the data collection forms. DoCS has recently provided additional funding to the FSSA for the development of a client database—an enhancement of their FAMDAT collection—and an outcome tool.

Families First in NSW

As part of the Families First strategy, funding and performance agreements specify that funded agencies will collect data items to provide information on activities and performance to the department. There will be a range of items relating to the service (e.g. number of families by length of involvement, number of groups provided by type, etc.) and demographic and social characteristics of parents using the service (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age group, employment, family structure, etc.). In addition, items relate to social supports which the parent has, reasons for referral, child health issues, measure of parental and family functioning at start of program and after 6 months, and benefits for children and parents. Information on the volunteers providing home visiting services is also included (demographic and social indicators, numbers visited, reasons for termination of service, benefits for volunteer, supervision).

At present, the data items are the subject of a consultation project with funded services to develop draft minimum data sets for each service type.

Community Partners system

The Community Partners system will replace the department's current Grants Administration System, and will provide information on funding for services, and some information about services provided under the service agreement. It is not a client-based system. This system will also provide some links with a new Client Information System for child protection.

Neighbourhood centres

Neighbourhood centres participate in data collections run every 2 years by the Local Community Services Association. The collection covers all activities of neighbourhood centres, including family support. The classification of service types, service users, user characteristics and activity codes are based on DoCS, AIHW, ABS and the Board of Adult and Community Education classifications. Family support services are identified as a single service type. The codes list and definitions form an attachment to the data collection forms.

Developments and initiatives

The main developments in New South Wales relate to the Families First initiative. Developing service agreements with a wide range of service providers, and working with other government agencies which are partners in the initiative will constitute a major effort in the family support area. Coupled with this is the review of the CSGP, which will seek to more clearly identify the services provided by funded agencies. Both initiatives will involve the development of new information systems, for both administration of service agreements and provision of performance information.

An important part of the Families First strategy is a 15-year research consortium which will undertake a number of research projects, including full evaluation of the various aspects of the strategy. A longitudinal study of families receiving services will provide a rich picture of the effectiveness of the services, as well as an assessment of the way in which integration of services has improved outcomes for families.