

Appendix 5: South Australia— Department of Human 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

Family support services in South Australia are provided and funded through the Family and Community Development Program of the department.

The Department's Together with Families for Children—Family Development Services Policy is based on a set of principles relating to children, families and society. The major objective for Family and Community Development services funding is to enable families to provide a caring environment for their children which protects them from neglect, harm, abuse and exploitation, ensures they are not disadvantaged and allows them to reach their full potential.

Services are directed to families where children are at risk of being harmed or disadvantaged to enable them to provide the care their children need. Services are targeted to families where:

- harm, abuse or neglect has occurred or where the risk exists
- children are suffering from emotional, material and physical hardship as a result of poverty or social factors or discrimination
- children are not provided with adequate care, a healthy and safe environment, reasonable standards of food, clothing, shelter, health and education
- children are subject to problems such as family violence, poverty, poor health or nutrition, inadequate housing or violent communities
- the family cannot meet children's needs because of health or disability
- the family lacks knowledge, skills or motivation to care for children or to cope with child behaviour problems
- families in short- or long-term crisis which may result in long-term deprivation, disadvantage or developmental delays for children.

Services give priority to families where the risk of harm or disadvantage for the children is greatest. Services are provided locally to take account of the special needs of each family in the context of the family's social and cultural backgrounds. The department allocates funds to services located or provided in the most disadvantaged communities as demonstrated by social and economic indicators to ensure that services are available to those who most need them.

Community support is a key element of the Family Development Services Policy. In common with other jurisdictions, the South Australian Department of Human Services encourages agencies to see families within the context of their community. Agencies develop formal services which complement the role of the extended family and encourage and assist families to develop and maintain links with friends and neighbours, and facilitate access to local community, cultural and tribal networks and social supports as a strategy for ongoing support.

Services which help families to recognise their strengths and which provide opportunities to learn new skills are important in meeting the department's policy objectives. Capacity building of families is seen as an effective means of addressing existing issues and enabling families to provide the care they need.

Services funded under the Family Development Program are part of a matrix of services and supports in the local community, working cooperatively and in a coordinated way to meet the needs of the local community.

The Family Development Services Policy provides a range of guidelines in areas relating to consumer rights, access and equity, concept of care, intervention strategies, management, staff supervision and administration and evaluation of services. These guidelines provide agencies with a sound platform for service provision.

The policy outlines a range of outcomes expected from funded agencies, with specific outcomes for parents and caregivers, children and the community.

Approach to funding

The department undertook a major review of funding and now funds family support services on a recurrent basis for periods of 3 years, with some one-off rounds for infrastructure or specific projects. Funding primarily covers workers' salaries. Service agreements have been implemented in the last 3 years, and contain:

- family development services description
- service types which may be funded
- services to be provided by the agency
- target groups, including priorities within each target group
- geographic coverage of the services provided
- outcomes expected from the agency in relation to the funding
- data reporting requirements, including service delivery and client data at 6-monthly intervals

New services are subject to open tender processes.

Services provided or funded

Services provided

Parenting SA

Services provided by the department are primarily Parenting South Australia services and parenting support through the Child and Youth Health Service. This service is universal and provides a wide range of information relating to parenting.

Parenting SA produces a series of Parent Easy Guides, which are practical easy-to-read tips which cover a wide range of topics faced by parents through early childhood and adolescence. The following list represents a very small sample of the types of topics addressed: 'Being a Parent'; 'Single Parenting'; 'Feeding Toddlers'; 'Being a Dad'; 'Family Squabbles'; 'Teenage Parents'; 'Children and the Internet'; 'Adolescent Depression'; 'Families that Work Well'.

In addition, 12 Aboriginal Parent Easy Guides have been developed, covering topics such as 'Our Children, Our Families, Our Way'; 'Role Models'; 'Grandparents'; 'Storytelling' and 'Kids Grieve Too'.

Parent Easy Guides are continually developed, with new topics being added progressively. They receive wide dissemination through community agencies, schools, direct mail-outs to families contacting the Parent Help Line, and through the Internet.

Some family support work is undertaken by departmental staff, particularly in remote regions where other non-government services do not exist. Some intake information available in the child protection system indicates that workers in local departmental offices deal with parent-adolescent conflict and other issues.

Child and Youth Health

Child and Youth Health is the largest community-based health service for children and young people in South Australia. The objectives are to:

- enhance the health status of children and young people in South Australia, focussing on the promotion of health and the prevention of ill health, and
- to support those parents and families who are the primary carers of children and young people.

Child and Youth Health serves the needs of children and young people aged 0–25 years through its two divisions Child and Family Health Service and the Second Story Youth Health Service, and also the Parent Helpline. The Child and Youth Health Parent Helpline is a 24-hour, 7-day a week telephone service providing information and support to parents on any child or youth health, parenting, development or behaviour concern.

Services funded

Family Development Services

Family support services are funded by the Department under the Family and Community Development Program. There are 60 agencies funded on a recurrent basis for \$1.2 million.

These services are designed to provide a range of support services to families who need assistance in raising their children and managing problems. Funded services are designed to complement the informal networks which families have to provide support in times of need. The services are funded in recognition that families may have difficulty in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities and providing effective and appropriate care for children. This may result from many factors, some of which are beyond the family's control. Agencies are funded for a range of activities to meet the needs of families, regardless of their particular circumstances, location or background.

Strengthening families

This program, mainly funded by the Commonwealth, has been operated through Parenting SA. The program bordered on the child protection system, and involved coordinators and volunteers who undertook home visiting to assist families at risk. There has been a change in this program, with less emphasis on child protection, and acceptance of referrals relating to other issues. The funding of this project in the future is not certain.

Services 'on the borderline'

Maternal and Child Health Services

These services are primarily health-related, but mothers may be referred to family support services if there are other issues or concerns.

Neighbourhood houses and community centres

In South Australia, neighbourhood houses and community centres provide elements of family support. Funding is provided for coordinators and services include linking families with family support services in their area. Skills development is also provided.

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 and family counselling
- home visiting
- group work
- information and referral

- mobile crèche
- advocacy
- family education and parenting skills
- identification of supportive networks
- practical support

Some funds are set aside for training of management, staff and volunteers and for industry development, such as the provision made to the Family Support Workers Association for the networking conference . In addition, peak agencies such as the South Australian Council of Social Service (SA COSS), volunteer centres and peak organisations receive funding, some of which is directed to providing support, resources and training for family support workers.

Data collection

Agencies funded under the Family Development Program are required to provide data at 6-monthly intervals, as part of the service agreement with the department.

Information collected includes:

Counselling and family support

- total number of clients receiving a case-managed counselling and support service
- total number of direct contact hours spent in counselling and support of clients
- total number of hours spent in indirect work associated with the support of clients, e.g. advocacy, administration, supervision, travelling, etc.

Groups/workshops

- total number of workshops/group work sessions conducted
- total number of individuals attending workshops/groups
- total number of hours spent in direct contact in workshops/groups
- total number of hours in indirect work in supporting workshops and groups

Information/referrals

- total number of hours spent in providing a support service to clients who are not case managed
- total number of clients (not case managed) who receive this type of service

Volunteers

- total number of hours spent in recruiting, training and supporting volunteers
- total number of volunteers supporting the program in the data record period

Issues/presenting problems during the reporting period which have impacted on service delivery and/or other relevant information

- text description of issues, etc.

Individual clients receiving case-managed service

- aggregated counts of sex by 11 age groups
- aggregated counts of client addresses by 11 departmental regions

- aggregated counts of clients' major presenting problem by 12 categories
- aggregated counts of referral sources by 9 categories

Information is collected on paper forms and aggregated to regional and State level by the department. Consultation was undertaken with agencies in relation to the data collection. Treasury requirements, including the need to account for funds, were major drivers of the collection. A simple way for agencies to report was discussed, and counts of clients/individuals receiving services and direct and indirect hours were considered to be the best measures of activities, and also practical for agencies to collect. Activities are compared against the output levels negotiated under the service agreement.

In addition to the 6-monthly activities data collection, quarterly financial information is provided to the department.

Data items are relatively straightforward, and no 'formal' data dictionary exists.

Developments and initiatives

The department is working with the Commonwealth in relation to the national Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. It is anticipated that new Commonwealth-funded services will enhance, and complement, existing family development program-funded services, and the work of Parenting SA.

The Commonwealth Good Beginnings program is commencing in the southern region of the State, and the department will be working in conjunction with the Commonwealth and local agencies in relation to this program.

In relation to data collections, the department is looking at reviewing the data set currently collected to ensure it is flexible enough for both large and small agencies, particularly in the area of measuring outcomes. A package of tools for measuring outcomes is considered necessary for agencies to implement performance measurement strategies in relation to this program.

The department commissioned Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management to report on performance measurement in Family Development Services. The report considers the results of a pilot project to test the practicality and usefulness of a range of performance measures in the areas of efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness. Five agencies were involved in collecting data over a period of 3 months. Key recommendations include:

- a uniform but flexible system of performance measurement be further tested with agencies funded by the Family Development Services Program
- the system include identification of client and worker goals using a generic goal framework based on the target outcomes of the program
- success in achievement of goals be identified by both clients and workers at termination of involvement of the program
- satisfaction with agency involvement be determined using a common client satisfaction questionnaire
- staff workload in organisations be measured with a breakdown of direct and indirect client contact and travelling time
- this methodology be used both for individual/family work and clients taking part in group parenting education programs

- the system be further reviewed, evaluated and modified either on an annual basis or after a period consistent with contract periods

This report is currently with the department, but recommendations have not yet been implemented or integrated into existing service agreements or data collections.