

# Appendix 7: Australian Capital Territory—Department of Education and Community 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 Australian Capital Territory has a comprehensive and coordinated approach to family support services. The key policy document is the *Family Support Plan 2000–2002*. This plan outlines the five key goals of family support:

- to provide a coordinated family support service system for families with children
- to respond to family needs through the provision of a range of accessible and appropriate services
- to promote the importance and availability of family support services
- to develop the skills and knowledge of people delivering family support
- to engage in productive partnerships that promote community building

The plan was developed over a number of years in consultation with schools, program areas of the department, service providers and key agencies and has been used to give guidance to purchasing decisions by government. Organisations are encouraged to see themselves within the context of the plan, and to position services to meet the goals and outcomes which have been identified.

The plan provides a range of outcomes expected for each goal, together with actions and activity indicators to measure achievement of the outcomes.

A key focus of the *Family Support Plan 2000–2002* is to provide interlinked services, resources and activities for families with children. Links with services provided by Australian Capital Territory schools are a particular focus, and this plan and the *ACT Government Schools Plan 1998–2000* interrelate to provide beneficial social and educational outcomes for families, children, young people and the communities in which they live.

The coordination and interlinking of services is seen as a key goal, and funding decisions seek to build on existing services.

## **Approach to funding**

The department has moved from a submission-based grants model over the past 2 years, with organisations now primarily on 2-year contracts. Most funding is recurrent. Some 'one-off' services or subsidies are funded on a 1-year contract. A review of the funding model is planned, with the extension of contracting to a 3-yearly cycle the likely outcome.

New program monies are subject to tender processes, but the main focus is on building on the existing infrastructure to extend and enhance the range of services available to meet needs.

## **Services provided or funded**

### **Services provided**

The Australian Capital Territory Government does not deliver any services which are within the scope of the study. Direct service provision falls within the broader definition of family support, with a focus on statutory intervention and other child protection focussed services.

### **Services funded**

Organisations funded under the department's Children's Services Program include playgroups and occasional care, which are within the broad scope of the study.

The Family, Individual and Community Support program funds a range of organisations to provide family support, home visiting services, parent support services and volunteer support. The Counselling, Information and Referral program funds organisations to provide counselling for families and individuals and information and referral to other services. A number of organisations provide services which do not focus on individuals or families, but are related to promoting the availability of services and to resourcing and training family support workers.

There are over 40 organisations funded under these programs, for a total of \$5.78 million. A number of the funded organisations provide services which are partly or wholly outside the scope of the study, including domestic violence crisis services, financial counselling services, sexual assault services, counselling for gamblers emergency welfare, court assistance, and victim support services.

The Australian Capital Territory Government is working with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services in relation to the Good Beginnings home visiting service, where volunteers visit new mothers to provide support, parenting skills modelling and other assistance as required.

A unique feature of the Australian Capital Territory is the department's link with the school system. Education services are part of the department, and close links have been developed by organisations funded under the Family, Individual and Community Support program and local schools. The approach taken centres around looking at the student's issues in the

context of their family—the student is not seen as the sole client of the service being offered. Examples of these programs include the Woden School SASH (Schools Agencies Student Home) Program, which was developed to strengthen the links between the school, students and their families and the service providers involved with students at the school. Similarly, the Tuggeranong SupportLink community referral system which allows teachers and school counsellors to refer people for assistance to a central information and referral coordination centre has delivered anger management sessions in high schools in the local area as part of normal coursework.

The new ParentLink service commenced in March 2000, and is designed to connect parents with the services which are available in the Australian Capital Territory. A key element is ParentLine, a specialised telephone help service, which operates every day and is staffed by specialist staff, social workers and registered nurses. A range of written materials has been prepared to assist parents with particular issues.

### **Services ‘on the borderline’**

There are no organisations specifically funded to provide support for families to deal with a member’s disability or addiction, or for parents with an addiction or disability to care for children. Some organisations will provide this assistance within their overall family support service.

Family support is an element of other funded services, such as the Child Health and Development Service, which focuses on children with attention deficit disorder and other developmental difficulties, but is not exclusive to children with these problems.

## **Service delivery mechanisms**

There are seven regional community services covering the entire Australian Capital Territory which act as a focus for family support. Although these organisations may provide Territory-wide services, their main focus is on their local area. The regional services are key identifiers of trends in family support and in the identification of needs. Other organisations operate independently, although coordination of services is important. Achieving the objective of ‘seamless’ service delivery for families is a key driver for the regional services.

The interrelationship with Australian Capital Territory schools is an important service delivery mechanism. There is a strong policy imperative for schools to see the student in the context of their family and community, rather than as their sole client. A number of innovative and successful services are run in conjunction with schools.

The services provided cover a wide range of activities for individuals and families, including:

- counselling
- skills development
- home visiting
- behaviour management services
- advocacy
- support planning

- anger management
- referrals
- information provision, including a Parentline service

Community-focussed services include:

- media activities
- community development
- coordination of service delivery
- community centre subsidies

In addition, the department funds organisations which provide services aimed at supporting workers through training and information. Staff and volunteer programs are funded, with participation encouraged for all workers. The department also funds a family support and parenting network to facilitate service linkages and sharing of resources.

## Data collection

There is currently no data collection in place. The department is working on developing a data collection system, and is engaged in identifying data items and outputs which are required for managing the funding program.

The data collection will be generic, covering all services funded under the department's programs, rather than specific to family support services.

The process being followed is to discuss data collection issues with service providers, including what data they currently collect, how it is collected and the impact of new collections on the agency. To date, responses from the sector have been supportive of the approach.

The data collection plans centre on quantitative performance and qualitative performance indicators. The quantitative indicators are in the nature of non-negotiable targets, covering hours of operation, service capacity, service activity data and client profile data. A further set of negotiable indicators, including intensive support clients, volunteers hours, support hours and more detailed information relating to activities and clients is included. The qualitative indicators cover the non-negotiable areas of quality, including client feedback, client outcomes, access, appropriateness and service system development. A further set of negotiable indicators, covering client, staff and referring agency satisfaction, unmet needs, and efficiency, are included.

The department's main focus in the early stages of the data collection project are to get some idea of the numbers of clients seen by agencies, and to obtain some performance and budgetary information. A range of data items was discussed with funded agencies and further refined at a workshop at the end of August 2000.

It is planned to implement the basic client profile and service activity data by May 2001. These timeframes will be subject to review depending on the development process.

Some issues in relation to the data collection include:

- existing collections which agencies may have
- information technology infrastructure and administrative systems in place within agencies

- nature of the collection—a system is the aim, but a paper forms collection may be more feasible
- possibility of linked client records with an online system, especially for referrals
- sensitivity of certain data items such as turnover, volunteer information
- policy issues—the department is keen to resist the notion that data collection will in any sense drive policy or service delivery decisions
- change management, and the need for collaborative processes so that all stakeholders are involved and aware of the proposed collection

## **Developments and initiatives**

The main developments in the Australian Capital Territory relate to a number of key areas:

- the new data collection
- the continued integration of the Family Support and Schools Plans
- the generic quality standards which are being implemented throughout the funded agencies
- 3-year funding contracts
- a costing and needs analysis project

In common with many community services departments, the ACT Department of Education and Community Services is committed to working with the non-government sector to enhance services to families. The collaborative approach to the introduction of changes in policy, program, funding and data collection is actively pursued, with shared understanding about these changes being critical to their success.