Community Services Sector – Intensive Family Support Services and Family Support Networks

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the current services that are funded in the community services sector to provide intensive family support services; as well as providing information about secondary support service; Family Support Networks (FSNs). Further to this, consider the current issues identified about intensive family support services by the services and the Department. Then contemplate ways to reduce the amount of Aboriginal children entering out of home care and providing timely responses for the most at risk families.

Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) priorities

| Core Goals | • Reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and families in the child protection system.  
| Core Objectives | • Embed timely decision-making for children and families (permanency planning policy) in the child protection system. | • Where safe, prevent children entering out-of-home care. This is to be achieved by focusing work on the children and families most at-risk.  
| | | • Where safe, reunify children with parents in a timely manner. This is to be achieved by clear, flexible responsive and transparent work with children and families.  
| | | • When it is not safe to reunify, assertively pursue stable, quality and permanent out-of-home care arrangements that effectively meets the needs of children.  
| Strategic Directions underpinning these objectives | • An out-of-home care system that is driven by the needs of the child.  
| | | • An out-of-home care system that values and promotes stability and certainty for children.  
| | | • A responsive and sustainable out-of-home care system with capacity.  
| | | • An out-of-home care sector that is accountable  
| | | • An out-of-home care system that is consistent.  

Children coming into out of home care over the past year

Over the past year the total number of children in care has increased from 4,237 to 4,503 (6.3 per cent).

- The number of Aboriginal children has increased from 2,144 to 2,338 – 9 per cent growth.
- The number of non-Aboriginal children has increased from 2,093 to 2,165 – 3.4 per cent growth.

Aboriginal children in care comprise of 51.9 per cent of all children of all children in out of home care – compared to 50.6 per cent a year ago.

In the past year, the number of Aboriginal children in out of home care has increased by:
  - Metropolitan – 63
  - Country - 131

Community Sector Services provides services for prevention and reunification

The Department recurrently funds the community services sector to provide a range of tertiary services to support the prevention of children entering out-of-home care, and reunification of children with their families of children who are in out-of-home care. There is also funding that provide secondary services like FSNs who work with individuals and families at risk or in crisis in a targeted and preventive way.

Intensive Family Support Services

This area works with the most at risk families, working on an average of 100 hours over an average of 4 months. For families to be engaged in these services they must be an open case with the Department and the referral must come from the Department. There are two specific areas; Tertiary Family Preservation and Reunification.

- Tertiary Family Preservation services are for families whose children are at imminent risk of being taken into care as a result of child protection concerns or severe neglect.
• Reunification services are for families where children are in out of home care, to facilitate the transition from out of home care to the full time care of their family.

These services provide;
• Risk Assessment, monitoring and review,
• Practical in home support (home management/budgeting),
• Individual and family generalist solution focused counselling,
• Practical parenting education, and modelling (nutrition, hygiene, nurturing self-esteem, child focused routines),
• Child management education (ages and stages of development/positive behaviour management strategies),
• Teaching and modelling of protective behaviours,
• Teaching and modelling of personal and social skills,
• Rigorous Safety Planning,
• ‘Words and Pictures’ work with children,
• Life Story work with families,
• Advocacy,
• Provision of assessment, recommendations, review and closure reports to the Department as required,
• Linking and referral to other services, and
• Assistance in identifying and establishing support networks.

Intensive Family Support Services – Family Enhancement and Indigenous Family Program

These services are a component of Intensive Family Support, however are considered a secondary support service to prevent children and young people from being in need of care and protection. For families to be engaged in these services referrals can be received from the Department, other agencies or self-referrals.

These services provide;
• Practical in home support (home management/budgeting,
• Practical parenting education and modelling (nutrition, hygiene, nurturing self-esteem, child focused routines,
• Child management education (ages and stages of development/positive behaviour management strategies,
• Teaching and modelling of protective behaviours,
• Teaching and modelling of personal and social skills,
• Linking and referral to other services, and
• Assistance in identifying and establishing support networks.

Intensive Family Support Services that were funded for 2013 -14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Services Provided</th>
<th>Number of Agencies providing this service</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Annual Funding Level 2013-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Tertiary Family Preservation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$943,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Reunification Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$188,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Family Enhancement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$134,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Enhancement Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>$1,213,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Family Program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>$662,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Family Preservation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>$3,868,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunification Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>$2,170,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>615</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$9,181,633</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clients accessing Intensive Family Support Services for 2013 -14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Funded Cases</th>
<th>Actual Cases</th>
<th>Number of Clients</th>
<th>Number of ATSI clients</th>
<th>% ATSI Clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Family Preservation</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>366 adults</td>
<td>63 adults</td>
<td>17.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>606 children</td>
<td>118 children</td>
<td>19.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reunification</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>187 adults</td>
<td>51 adults</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>300 children</td>
<td>118 children</td>
<td>39.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Enhancement</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>347 adults</td>
<td>44 adults</td>
<td>12.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>583 children</td>
<td>92 children</td>
<td>15.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Family Program</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>757 clients</td>
<td>739 clients</td>
<td>97.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>862</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Family Support Networks**

The purpose of considering FSNs alongside intensive family support services is to look at what services are currently provided and consider whether it is targeting the most appropriate families or whether there are opportunities for FSNs to work more closely in alliance with the intensive family support services.

Western Australian (WA) FSNs are a partnership of community sector services and the Department that provide a common entry point to services and deliver earlier more targeted support to families. Services provided through the FSNs are targeted services that work with vulnerable and at risk families. Secondary or ‘targeted’ family support services have a child protection focus that aim to prevent child abuse, neglect, prevent family problems from worsening, and prevent placements of children in out-of-home care wherever possible.

The community sector lead agency partners with other secondary family support services form the local FSN alliance. The lead agency manages the common entry point, providing easier and more streamlined access to support for families. The FSN assessment process incorporates direct input from each family about their problems and goals and the services they wish to access, providing greater choice and control for families. The assessment and support officers undertake initial screening and assessment to determine which agency or agencies are the most appropriate to respond to the specific needs of the family, thus reducing the need for families to repeat their stories as they connect with different services.

If a service is not immediately available following assessment for a family, the FSN will implement an active holding strategy so that the family is actively supported while they are waiting to receive a service, rather than being waitlisted.

A senior child protection worker is co-located at the common entry point and provides information, consultation and advice to FSN agencies when there are safety and wellbeing concerns for a child. The leader child protection undertakes assessments, makes decisions and engages timely and integrated involvement of child protection services where required.

**Current FSNs**

Armadale FSN commenced as the innovations site in December 2011, with the current contract of 5 years due to expire in 2016. Parkerville Children and Youth Care is the lead agency.
Mid-West FSN was officially launched in February 2014 and is funded through corporate sponsorship. They are required to abide by the Family Support Network operating framework. Parkerville Children and Youth Care is the lead agency.

Mirrabooka FSN commenced in January 2015, with the current 3 year contract due to expire in 2017, with the option of two 1 year extensions. MercyCare is the lead agency.

Fremantle FSN is in the establishment phase and commenced at the start of August 2015, with the current 3 year contract due to expire in 2018, with the option of two 1 year extensions. St Patricks Community Support Centre is the lead agency.

Activities provided by FSNs for 2014-15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FSNs</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Brief Interventions</th>
<th>Stage One Assessments</th>
<th>Stage Two Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Common Entry Point</td>
<td>Partner Agencies</td>
<td>Common Entry Point</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner Agencies</td>
<td>Partner Agencies</td>
<td>Partner Agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armadale</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>211</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirrabooka</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>346</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current issues with prevention and reunification services as identified by the Department and the Community Services Sector

- Lack of capacity – only small number of families are accepted into services,
- Long wait lists,
- 52% of children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal, however a small proportion of services (5-10%) are provided to Aboriginal children and families,
- The recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff in the community services sector,
- Some families have the perception that the community services sector is an extension of the Department,
- The Department having unrealistic expectations around achievable outcomes,
- There can be a breakdown in communication between the Department and the community services sector,
- Increased complexity in family issues,
- The quality of the referrals received and not receiving all necessary and important information,
- The families referred to the community services sector can be entrenched in their own crises and the complexity of their lives, that it can be difficult to focus the work with them,
- Difficulty to meet timeframes (whether these are from the Court or the Department already setting deadlines for reunification),
- Families needing to be referred ASAP due to Court involvement, when these Community Services Sector are not considered a crisis intervention,
The Department referring a family to more than one Tertiary Family Preservation service at a time,
Ensuring the right families are referred - many of the referrals received for Tertiary Family Preservation are for families who have had a long history of involvement with the Department and other agencies. Some of these families have received a similar service on more than one occasion. These families can be resistant to change,
Parents not meeting the threshold for intervention from the Department for a child to enter out of home care, however not making sustainable changes for the Tertiary Family Preservation service to be able to cease involvement or move to family enhancement services,
The community services sector can be unaware of reunification planning to transition to child from out of home care, and
The Department lacking in resources, especially around transport has made some cases particularly challenging.

Consultation questions
Taking into account the Department’s current core priorities:

1. What outcomes are Tertiary Family Preservation services currently achieving and what are some of the barriers to improving effectiveness of this program?
2. What outcomes are Reunification Services currently achieving and what are some of the barriers to improve the effectiveness of this program?
3. Within the current resources, how can we be more responsive, available and effective for children and families?
4. What outcomes are FSNs currently achieving and what are some of the barriers? How can FSNs work more closely with and in alliance for preventing children from coming into out of home care and/or transitioning children from out of home care?
5. With particular reference to funded services, what should be done to make these services more available and effective for Aboriginal children and families?