Stronger Families and Communities Strategy Evaluation

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Improving the lives of Australians
OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

• Why evaluate the SFCS 2004-09?
• What is being measured and how?
• What outcomes do we expect?
• What are our findings to date?
Why Evaluate the SFCS 2004-09?

- Significant Aust Govt investment in early childhood
  - SFCS 2004-09 invests $490m over 4-5 years
Why Evaluate the SFCS 2004-09 (Cont)?

• Compelling evidence supporting early childhood intervention
  
  • Appropriate intervention in 1st 5 years significantly assists child to reach full potential
  
  • Assistance at critical points improves health, education and employment outcomes
    • eg. increases likelihood of high school completion & being employed as adults
  
  • Reduces likelihood of later problems – eg. substance misuse, mental illness and suicide, domestic violence, child abuse and crime
What is the SFCS 2004-09?

**MAJOR ELEMENTS**

- **Outcomes for 0-5 year olds** - children, their families and communities
- **National Agenda for Early Childhood (NAEC)** - key priority areas:
  - Healthy young families
  - Early learning and Care
  - Supporting families and parents
  - Child friendly communities
  - Services working effectively together (CfC only)
- **Community partnership**
  - Working closely with NGOs, communities, social coalition
  - Community place-based intervention model
What is the SFCS 2004-09 (cont)?

**MAJOR ELEMENTS**

- Evaluation covers 3 SFCS initiatives
  - Communities for Children (CfC) - $142m over 5 years
  - Invest to Grow (ItG) - $70m over 4 years
  - Local Answers (LA) - $137m over 5 years
What is the Evaluation Measuring & How?

Key Evaluation Questions for SFCS:

- Have outcomes for children and families in relation to the four priority areas of the National Agenda for Early Childhood improved as a result of the initiative?
- Which lessons have been learnt on how to achieve and sustain better outcomes for children 0-5 and their families and communities?
- Is early investment effective in terms of cost and outcomes for children; for which children, families and communities?
- What aspects of the model are effective?
What are we Measuring (cont)?

• Key Evaluation Questions for Communities for Children (CfC):
  • Have outcomes for children and families in CfC sites improved as a result of the initiative?
  • Do services in CfC sites work more effectively as a system?
  • Are CfC communities more child-friendly?
  • How successful has the Facilitating Partner model been in bringing about these changes?
How are we Evaluating?

- **Outcomes Evaluation**
  - Stronger Families in Australia Study (SFIA)
  - Outcome Indicators Framework
  - Service Users – Before and After - Study

- **Process Evaluation**
  - Demographic Profiles
  - Service Mapping
  - Promising Practice Profiles
  - Partnership Model Study
  - Service Coordination Study - Strategic and Operational Snapshots
  - Progress Report Analysis
What outcomes do we expect?

SFCS PROGRAM LOGIC

• Sustainable change takes time
  • Impact of SFCS will be felt over time – not immediate
  • Community level changes take longer but are more lasting
  • Outcomes to be achieved through staggered, continuous and overlapping process

• Changes expected in NAEC key priority areas
  • Healthy young families
  • Early learning and care
  • Supporting families and parents
  • Child friendly communities
  • Family and children’s services working together as a system (CfC only)
What outcomes do we expect (CfC)?

• **Short term** (1-2 years):

  *Service outcomes start to emerge*

  • Services working together more effectively
  • Community needs and services more closely matched
  • Better pathways between services and other activities – more seamless
  • Families know where to find support services
What outcomes do we expect (CfC)?

- **Medium Term** (2-3 years):
  
  *Child and family outcomes start to emerge*

  - 1st signs of improved outcomes for those accessing services
  - Improved outcomes include: *better parenting skills, improved diet in pregnancy and early childhood, improved physical health, more appropriate support services – especially pre and post natal, and access to good quality learning experiences*
What outcomes do we expect (CfC)?

- **Long Term (3-5 years+):**

  *Community outcomes start to emerge*
  
  - Engaging hardest to reach in community
  - Outcomes improving in whole community
  - Service delivery changes mainstreamed
What outcomes do we expect (cont)?

**Communities for Children**

**Figure 2**: Level 2 outcomes and criteria for CIC

- **Stream 1**: Communities for Children
- **Stream 2**: Invest to Grow
- **Stream 3**: Local Answers
- **Stream 4**: Choice and Flexibility in Childcare

**Family and Children's Services System**

- **Healthy Young Families**
  - Parents supported before and after birth and in the early years
  - Improved pre- and postnatal health
  - Improved child physical health and development

- **Early Learning and Care**
  - Access to early learning experiences
  - Early identification and support for at-risk children
  - Improved school readiness
  - Improved social and emotional functioning

- **Supporting Families and Parents**
  - Parents supported to provide quality environments to children
  - Strong-parent-child relationships
  - Improved parenting competence and style
  - Improved family capacity and resources
  - Improved family functioning

**Community Outcomes**

- Communities understand the importance of the early years
- Communities are inclusive of all families and cultures
- Improved community interest and capacity to own and respond to early childhood issues
- Community members, its facilities and institutions, work together to improve early childhood, development and well being issues
What are our findings to date?

COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

• A lot of activity happening in the sites
  • Positive stories emerging of changes happening on the ground
  • SFCS and Evaluation busy and on track
  • Evaluation showing us details on activities across sites
FINDINGS - Jul-Dec 2006

CfC ACTIVITIES BY PRIORITY AREAS
FINDINGS - Jul-Dec 2006
CfC ACTIVITY TYPES

No of Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Types</th>
<th>No of Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Care related</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child cognitive</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child social emotion</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/Family friendly</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children physical health</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community building</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Mappin</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education or Aware</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grass Roots Projects</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated service</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Care Support</td>
<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnancy and transition to School</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce development</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tbody>
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| Series1                  | 14               |
FINDINGS - Jul-Dec 2006
CfC PARTICIPATION LEVELS

* Currently being reviewed with the relevant Site.
# Findings - Jul-Dec 2006

## CfC Communication Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Material</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Newsletter</td>
<td>205932 copies printed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>15332 copies printed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures, Flyers, Leaflets etc</td>
<td>257632 copies printed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video/DVD</td>
<td>1946 copies produced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web Based content</td>
<td>2619 website hits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>17571 calls handled</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Newspaper, magazine, article or advertising</td>
<td>1906179 total audience reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio advertising</td>
<td>638756 total audience reach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are our findings to date?

COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

• Still early days but some findings emerging
  • Cannot expect significant findings at the community level yet
  • However, early findings are emerging though:
    • Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA)
    • Intensive Field Study
    • Operational and Strategic Snapshots
FINDINGS FROM STRONGER FAMILIES IN AUST STUDY (SFIA)

Demographics

- 74% of the children were living in 2 parent families
- 80% of the children were living with siblings
- Average age of mothers (female guardians) - 32, of fathers (male guardians) – 35
- 97% of the children born in Australia – 33% living with parent/guardian born overseas
- 8% of the children were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin
FINDINGS FROM STRONGER FAMILIES IN AUST STUDY (SFIA)

Service Use and Satisfaction

- Almost 40% of children in the study used playgroups - 53% very satisfied
- 87% of families used GP services – over 50% more than once
- Only 7% of parents undertook parenting education – 88% satisfied or very satisfied
Changes in work and attitudes as SFCS evolves

3 distinct stages: set up, roll out, and sustainability

- **Set up** – 1-2 yrs needed to build networks – time-consuming and labour intensive, requires skill and effort from staff – can be tiring and draining on staff and lead to burn out
- **Roll out / implementation** – More energising and satisfying stage, engaging and directly impacting families and children, functions may need adjusting to maintain flexibility to match community needs
- **Sustainability** – of services and partnerships is the main focus – some CfC services may continue operating after funding ceases, although likely that some continued funding will be required at this point in time
FINDINGS (Cont) FROM
SERVICE CO-ORD (Strategic & Operational Snapshots) &
INTENSIVE FIELD STUDIES

Barriers to better service coordination, delivery and quality

• Need time to:
  • create cultural change,
  • engage the hardest to reach
  • reduce entrenched distrust of services and
  • set up sustainable networks and services.

• Other barriers include:
  • Lack of resources in local agencies – ie. time and skills of staff
  • Boundaries of CfC site – if artificial grouping of suburbs
What are our findings to date (cont)?

CASE STUDIES

• Good news stories emerging – show CfC changing lives
  • Stories of tangible changes felt by participants
  • Outcomes generally in line with expected outcomes - SFCS program logic
  • Innovation and flexibility enabling change

• Case studies demonstrate CfC model producing results
  • Provide examples of:
    • Services working better together
    • Outcomes for children and families accessing services
    • Outcomes beginning to emerge at the community level
What does this mean for the future?

- Early findings are encouraging but not scientific yet
- Sustainable outcomes take time
- Work on the evaluation is continuing
QUESTIONS