



DSS Financial Wellbeing and Capability Activity Discussion Paper

Response from CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes (CWF)

1. Strategies to improve the targeting of services

1.1 What impacts do you expect restricting eligibility criteria in the manner proposed above will have on your service?

Impacts:

- Most of clients attending our service are not able to pay their debts. 'At imminent risk' describes those that are at risk as opposed to those that are past the risk and well into a crisis. This may mean that our service may not be able to work with those that fall outside of the 'at risk' category. Defining 'imminent risk' would need to be clarified to include those who are in crisis;
- We also have clients that are not on welfare payments that have high debt and low financial literacy. Limiting Financial Capability services to those receiving allowances defeats the purpose of early intervention and prevention in all communities;
- There is an increased risk of escalation of issues if people wait until unable to make payments, for example this could lead to increases in bankruptcy, legal action, repossessions, homelessness and an increase in the waiting list;
- Early intervention by a Financial Counsellor (FC) would be limited. FC would become a reactive service only;
- FC role focusses on more than just not being able to pay debts:
 - o Predatory and unconscionable lending practices and the impact these have on a client, especially in Indigenous communities
 - o Debt collection tactics/methods
 - o Lobbying for changes/ improvements to regulations and legislation
- Emergency Relief (ER) services provide aid in a wider range of circumstances than not being able to pay debts e.g. ER hardship may be caused by an illness and the costs associated, therefore affecting the ability to maintain living expenses.

1.2 What strategies can be employed to ensure that services are accessible for those who need them the most?

Strategies:

- The need for a holistic wraparound approach by services and a client networking process;
- More time in community for outreach e.g. one day is not appropriate for some rural and remote communities as they may not necessarily know who is coming on what day. Communities such as Wilcannia are left confused as some services provide outreach via a 'fly in fly out' approach. This approach is too fast and inappropriate for the people who need to access them;
- CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes best practice approach has been to employ local community members to benefit from existing relationships within the community and to build trust;
- Workshops that can be run within the community e.g. parks, halls, family homes as sometimes offices may not be appropriate;
- Utilising facilitating partners to bring their expertise to our workshop groups to offer a continuity of service as a one stop service;
- Increase in funding to provide more Financial Counsellors on the ground throughout rural and remote areas reducing outreach and allowing more face to face contact/service;
- Support for agencies to provide more self-help information to clients if they are not classed as at 'imminent risk';
- Afterhours access to services.

2. Strategies to increase service integration

2.1 What would help you to strengthen cooperation with other services (e.g. family support services and job active/job network providers) in your community? What additional support would you need to achieve this?

- Services regularly attending interagency meetings;
- One service to coordinate the interagency meetings;
- Services willing to share clients and be open to have case network meetings and using their expertise to commit to outcomes for clients. The key to this approach is to focus on the client rather than what is best for the service provider;
- Funding for a hub coordinator to put in place formal partnerships – MOUs and service level agreements;
- A more formalised partnership with services and a clearer referral pathway process that can be documented;

- Also, an understanding that service integration can also mean that a wraparound hub approach within the one organisation is often seamless and appreciated by clients when they have established a relationship with that organisation. For example, in Bourke, CentaCare can support a client with financial capability support, Financial counselling support, housing support, DV support, mental health support, parenting education and focused support for men.

2.2 What effect will the requirement to formalise relationships with other organisations have on your service?

- A more cohesive, proactive and accountable approach by services. Where services would be required to network and therefore be accountable for their identified outcomes for case service;
- Formalising partnerships – CWF Financial Counselling already work cohesively with several other organisations and services within our communities. These services already include FWC funded programs. Sometimes this is affected when the working relationship is predominately dependent on the worker in the role rather than the commitment of the organisation to the partnership;
- This may result in a focus on compliance outcomes rather than client centred FWC services and issues maintaining client confidentiality and the integrity of the Financial Counselling service if a formal partnership with a Job Network Provider (JNP) was required. Financial Counselling service currently is free, independent and confidential, with clients making their own decisions as to options taken. If a formal partnership required a client to complete a task compulsorily this may change the face of our service delivery to suit JNP compliance.

How do you see these relationships working to maximise their effectiveness?

- Regular case management meetings;
- Agreed practices between organisations;
- A clear understanding about what other organisations offer and how to access services;
- It is important however that the relationships between organisations and the development of these does not take excessive time away from the core work which is to support the client.

2.3 Where is integration / collaboration of FWC microfinance services with other FWC services occurring across the country? Is there a way these relationships could be better supported?

CWF is already formally partnering with Riverside NILS service to ensure greater access by clients and using this to further educate clients on alternatives to payday lending and whitegoods rental contracts and consumer leases. Currently our Financial Counsellors and Capability workers assist clients to submit their NILS application including collecting relevant paperwork and ensuring a more realistic money plan/budget to ensure capacity to repay.

This process is quite lengthy and can also identify clients' needs for Financial Counselling services. The final assessment sits with the NILs provider.

2.4 What elements would need to be present to ensure a hub model is successful in your community? What additional support would you need to establish a hub in your community?

- CWF already has a HUB approach – our organisational structure supports this and the FWC service works to deliver an integrated service in all our CWF offices. Working and linking with Housing - Specialist Homelessness Service and Tenant Participation Resource Service, Financial Capability, Families NSW and Mental Health programs, etc;
- Externally CWF FWC service links with ER, Nils, family and mental health support services and local JNP;
- That services are in the same venue as we tend to lose clients in transitioning from one service to the other when referring;
- A requirement that services need to work together and to ensure that there is limited service replication;
- Hub meetings between services to identify case networking possibilities;
- Having community as part of the network meetings or hub services attending interagency meetings;
- Media coverage for hub activities.

2.5 What elements and innovative practices would be particularly key in establishing a hub model in a rural and/or remote service delivery context?

- Ensure community participation by having regular community consultations at all stages of establishing the hubs;
- Having one admin team to work within the hub but all services contribute to the costs of admin;
- Ensuring that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander workers are situated in the very heart of the hubs;
- It is essential that new hubs are not established when existing hubs could be expanded. In rural and remote community family hubs have been purpose-built and failed because existing and well established services already existed and community were not consulted about their needs.

2.6 How could Australian Government funding be used differently to better support integration of FWC services?

- Setting up hubs where services do not already exist and are located together and possibly have shared funding for admin costs;
- Lead agencies and ensuring no duplication of services.

3. Strategies to support client outcomes

3.1 What strategies can you utilise to support a client to improve their financial and/or employment outcomes?

- Partnerships with Employment Services for either group or individual financial literacy sessions;
- Identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers where possible to limit the time needed to build cultural relationships;
- The “refer in” rather than referring out to other services to ensure that we do not lose clients in transition from one service to the next;
- Warm referrals for those clients that do not have the capacity to attend an appointment. This may include transport;
- Use a modelling technique for how to interact with services, creditors, financial services, banks etc;
- Achieving employment outcomes is primarily a life skill activity and best suits with Financial Capability services. FC service is client driven without advice only options provided – emphasising employment as a key goal would undermine this approach;
- Working with whole of families for household budgeting;
- CWF is already linking with JNP and ER on a cross referral basis – this is working well with each service providing the targeted service they have expertise in whilst working cohesively to support the client’s needs.

Challenges to working with JNP:

- Adding tasks such as ‘exploring pathways with clients to increase employment’ would change the focus of our role and interactions with clients. CWF feels this is better suited to sit solely with the JNP. FC are not trained to provide this service and don’t have the time to incorporate this into their service;
- Increasing income and furthering employment are always given to clients whose circumstances are suitable to this option. This is a difficult option to promote in rural and remote areas where unemployment is high.

3.2 How does your service currently deal with clients who present to your service on multiple occasions? At what point should additional support and requirements apply to repeat ER clients? What form should this take? What barriers do you see in implementing these requirements with your clients? What support would you need to implement such a proposal?

- CWF Financial Counsellors have been working closely with ER providers to better support multiple presentations for ER, predominately working with St Vincent de Paul. When clients present for ER support they are initially assisted and referred to the Financial Counselling service when their issues relate to debts and arrears ie electricity/utilities/rent/loans. The ER provider supports clients with

ongoing support whilst working with the Financial Counselling to establish their financial position and client options;

- There are many reasons people present multiple times to ER, not just limited to financial hardship;
- Some clients will not want to see a financial counsellor on a regular basis due to capacity (no transport, other issues such as mental wellbeing);
- This is where the wraparound service would be beneficial.

3.3 How can DSS better support early intervention and prevention opportunities?

- Financial literacy needs to be a core subject starting at primary school. Schools are not utilising the Money Smart Teaching Resources for schools;
- Drivers licence programs should also be a core subject at school as this will ensure that students have a licence when they leave school (as many families now cannot assist their child in obtaining a licence). It will also ensure that all appropriate ID documents are obtained and kept, as some people in Aboriginal communities lack identification documents such as birth certificates.

4 Strategies to build a strong workforce

4.1 Do ER and CFC/FC workers need to build capacity? If so, how might this be done?

- FC as an industry has been building professional capacity for many years and working towards recognised professional standards. Diploma level qualifications are required. These qualifications need to be more readily available and subsidised;
- More opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access the ICAN Financial Counselling Mentorship Program;
- Complexity of cases is demanding beyond financial knowledge. FC need to explore further skill building focusing on counselling and mental health;
- ER/NILS/Financial Capability workers need to maintain minimum qualification – Certificate III.

4.2 What 'tools' do you see as integral to the further development of the FWC services in Australia?

- A training package specifically for Financial Capability workers would be beneficial with simple sessions, for example, on how to coordinate and facilitate a successful workshop and how to assist participants to complete a money plan;
- Program Logics for both financial counsellors and financial capability workers which could be adopted by all services;
- Better by services access and promotion of self-help information for people experiencing financial hardship.

5 Strategies to strengthen evidence, improve practice and measure outcomes

5.1 What do you see as the key issues involved in evaluating the FWC Activity?

- Need for significant change stories from clients and participants, and a tool for documenting the stories;
- A clearly articulated Program Logic Model that maps prevention/early intervention through to crisis. A model or continuum of need and intervention including strategies for support;
- An understanding that a client may engage and disengage and reengage often, and evaluating success or not, needs to be clear.

5.2 What would you like to see as the main focus of the evaluation?

- Collating service delivery models and their long-term effects;
- Approaches/strategies and impacts;
- Specific feedback about specific client groups including rural and remote, Aboriginal, single parent etc.