

## Supporting Improvements to the Families and Children Activity – Submission

The following submission is made by Communities for Children Bankstown FP Committee

### Recent and emerging impacts on service delivery

**Question 1: How have you adapted service delivery in response to recent crises such as bushfires, drought, floods and Coronavirus pandemic? When has it worked and when hasn't it worked? How will this affect how you deliver services in the future? Have your service adaptations included better integration with other initiatives?**

- The CfCFP appreciated the support and flexibility provided by the DSS in responses to the crisis's of the past 12 – 18 months.

### Service adaption

- The most common form of adaption has been the transition of face-to-face service delivery to online delivery, additional direct participant support through regular telephone and various messaging apps and the provision of activity packs for children and families during COVID Lockdown. This adaptation has had mixed results:
  - CPs delivering supported playgroups have struggled to maintain participation and engagement of children and families through online delivery. While we have seen, significant work done to ensure online delivery is engaging and innovative, participation has decreased across all CPs delivering these activities. Feedback from families indicates they; are concerned about the amount of screen time for children; face challenges in accessing devices and internet bandwidth; face challenges of managing home schooling and the additional social and economic stressors; want to get out of the house with children rather than engaging in online activities once lock down ended.
  - Direct family support through messaging app's and regular phone calls has enabled CPs to provide more support to families. Specifically this has enabled families to disclose DV and for workers to be more aware of other issues facing families. The direct family support has enable workers to provide emotional support, referral to support services for issues such as DFV, food insecurity, financial security and so forth. This has been widely acknowledged as a valuable adaptation.
  - Provision of activity packs to families and children have been welcomed as a temporary response to support families during the initial lockdown. However, these are of less value in supporting children's development and wellbeing over the longer term.
  - Since the easing of the COVID crisis in term 4 of 2020 playgroups have returned to face-to-face delivery. Services have had to limit the number of participants returning face-to-face due to social distancing rules meaning that not all families are able to access services. In addition, we have observed a shortage of appropriate venues across the community in which to safely deliver these activities.
  - For other community partners the transition to online service delivery have resulted in increased levels of participation and reach: This has been the case for services Engaging of parents in literacy programs for their children, as well as in some parenting programs.
  - Some schools have requested programs continue to be delivered in an adapted form to respond to community need during the pandemic.

### Implications for future service delivery

- Many CPs are actively exploring and some continuing the informal direct family engagement such as Whatsapp groups and phone calls as a value add to deepen engagement to provide additional support for vulnerable families.
- A number of CPs are exploring how they can continue to deliver their programs online or with a mix of both face-to-face and online as this has enabled them to increase the number of families they have engaged with.

### Outcomes and Evidence

**Question 2: Are the proposed key outcomes for the families and children programs the right ones? Are there any major outcomes missing? How can we include strengths-based outcomes that focus on family or child safety?**

- The outcomes included the contextual factors could be improved through including an outcome related to the provision of services that are responsive to need and ensure safety and dignity.
- The outcomes and domains could be strengthened through a acknowledgement of domestic and family violence. DFV continues to be an ongoing challenge for women and children in Bankstown as it is across the country. (1 in 6 women & 1 in 16 men experience physical or sexual violence, 1 in 4 women experience emotional abuse in Australia according to AIHW data)

Recommendation:

- Include a new outcome in the contextual factors – ‘Services are culturally safe and uphold the safety and dignity of children and families.’

### Family Relationship Domain

- The family relationship domain when looked at in a context where Domestic and Family violence is being perpetrated are written in a way that implies that both the victim and perpetrator are 'responsible' for a family relationship not flourishing i.e.
  - it's a conflict management issue instead of a misuse of power by 1 person over the other;
  - it's a communication issue instead of verbal abuse;
  - It is a lack of cooperative parenting instead of manipulation, wilful neglect of responsibility or undermining behaviour.
- *Couple relationship satisfaction*: This outcome implies a narrow definition of a family with two parents which excludes a range of family types such as single parent families and families where grandparents, extended family members and/or other carers play an active role in raising children.

Recommendation:

- Incorporate an outcome that speaks directly to the harm caused by DFV on family relationships e.g. all family members (particularly women and children) can participate in family decision making with safety, dignity and without the threat violence or coercive control.
- Expand the definition of parent's or couples to be inclusive of single parents and other diverse family types to ensure all care givers are recognised and included (Mothers, fathers, father figures, grandparents, Aunt's, Uncle's etc.)

### Empowered Individuals Domain

- These outcomes are dependent on a person's actual or perceived safety from racism, discrimination, violence etc. If a person is not safe this will harm their self-efficacy and

confidence, physical and mental wellbeing, connections to community and culture, ability to access services and parenting support and participation in society. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities and Diverse communities.

- *Linked to services*: this implies that people only need to be 'linked' to a service. Many people in the community are aware of services but do not access them because they are not culturally safe or appropriate.

Recommendation:

- Incorporate 'safety' into each of the outcomes or into the broad domain e.g. change 'empowered individuals' to 'empowered and safe individuals'
- Change 'linked to services' to 'People feel safe to access services with dignity'.

### **Children and Young People Thrive Domain**

- It would be important to have an outcome that speaks specifically to the participation of children and young people.

Recommendation:

- new outcome 'children and young people have a voice in decision making'

### **Question 3: What tools or training would support you to effectively measure and report outcomes through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach?**

- It is recommended that the new outcomes identified in the discussion paper be integrated into DEX and Score reporting to enable CfC initiatives to track the progress against domains that are specifically relevant to the work being delivered.
- Include functionality within DEX that enables the gathering of qualitative data that provides more insight into the contribution of funded activities to change for children, families and communities.
- SCORE- provision to take into account qualitative data that captures professional judgement from the Family Workers, rather than just using data from pre and post activities/ or acknowledging that a negative Score is also a possible good outcome (some families don't know what they don't know, so can change their self-assessment after attending parenting programs).
- Explore how DEX could record how CfC early intervention programs act as soft entry points that enable people to receive referrals to more targeted support services.
- It would be helpful if DEX were able to capture unexpected outcomes and tell a story through the gathering of qualitative data.
- An improvement to DEX would include CfC FP's being able to view and generate SCORE reports for Community Partners similar to how we can access standard reports.
- Another improvement would involve CfC FP being able to track an individual/families access to services across our suite of activities and measure change against the overall goals of FP.
- SCORE could be better utilised if we could get a snapshot of an amalgamation of Community Partner Activities at a particular site available through DEX.

### **Question 4: Do you already have a program logic or theory of change outlined for your program? Did you find the process useful? If you do not have one, what has stopped you from developing one? What capacity building support would assist service providers to develop program logics and theories of change?**

- Bankstown CfC FP fund 12 community partners to deliver a breadth of programs across a range of different contexts. We use a program agreement that includes a project plan that is in the form of a program logic for all of our community Partners.
- The program Logics provide a useful format from which to support community Partners to think about how their program activities and outputs contribute to the short, medium and long-term outcomes they seek to affect.
- If not understood correctly, program logics can be linear and viewed with rigidity. This can then limit the development of innovative initiatives that require agility, adaptability and ‘new’ thinking to create change. Approaches that require more trial and error need flexibility to adapt activities and outputs.
- CfC FP, as a program, does not have an overarching program logic/theory of change that guides the entire body of work of all the FP funded initiatives. We see the development of a program logic or theory of change as being a useful means through which to articulate the strategy for CfC work over time and to enable greater collaboration across implementing community partners and the CCC. Given the 5-year funding period, it will be important that program logics/theories of change are reviewed and adapted over time to changes in context.

Recommendation:

- Support the development and implementation of Theories of change/program logics.
- Better understanding of context and purpose of program logics and theory of change to encourage the development of innovative initiatives that do not yet have an evidence base.

### Certainty and Accountability

**Question 5: As longer-term agreements are implemented, how can the department work with you to develop criteria to measure and demonstrate performance? How can the Data Exchange better support this?**

- The commitment to a multiple year funding agreement for the CfCFP initiative is welcomed as it provides ongoing certainty for the FP and funded partners in our work towards achieving outcomes for children and families.
- It would be useful for the department to ensure that periodic review points are included in the multi-year agreements to enable new initiatives and shifts in strategy over time.
- Dedicated funding allocation to undertake periodic evaluation of funded programs would enable better insight and adaptation of programs to better achieve desired outcomes for children, families and communities.

**Question 6: What does success look like for your service, and how do you assess the overall success of your service?**

For CfC Bankstown, we will know when we have succeeded in our work when:

- We have an active CfC Committee with diverse membership from across the Community. CCC members are connected with community and are active in voicing their insights about the challenges and strengths of community that informs our work.
- We fund a diverse suite of community partners delivering services for children and families that actively collaborate with children and family service systems to respond to need.
- All levels of government will actively seek the input and advice from us as FP, from our Community Partners and our CCC in order to understand and respond to emerging

community need based on our reputation for delivering quality services and the strength and trust of our relationships with community.

- Children and families across the community access a breadth of services and initiatives that support their wellbeing.

### Targeting and Accessibility

**Question 7: Do you currently service cohorts experiencing vulnerability, including those at risk of engaging with the child protection system? If not, how does service delivery need to adapt to provide support to these cohorts?**

- Bankstown CfC supports a breadth of early intervention initiatives that target both the broader community and specifically vulnerable communities including those at risk of engaging with the child protection system.
- This approach of needs to continue to focus on supporting vulnerable communities to access universal and targeted services (as needed), through building relationships with these communities that enable them to trust services and feel safe in seeking support. In addition, this will support services in their efforts to continue to reflect on and improve their service delivery in ways that ensure vulnerable communities feel safe to access support.
- Key to this will be our efforts to engage with leaders within these communities and to ensure their insights and experiences inform who and where these communities are, how we can engage with them and to ensure our service are delivered in ways that make them feel safe and are relevant to their needs.
- Bankstown has a large culturally and linguistically diverse community, many of whom are particularly marginalised and face multiple vulnerabilities. These communities should be prioritised (alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities) to ensure they are able to access culturally appropriate services to reduce stigma. There is a particular increasing need for culturally sensitive mental health, trauma and grief support amongst these families. It will be important to ensure that any policy reform in this area is informed by the needs of these communities to ensure that implemented services achieve desired outcomes.

### Collaboration and Coordination

**Question 8: If you are a Children and Parenting Support or Budget Based Funded service provider, do you currently link with a Communities for Children Facilitating Partner or other regional planning mechanism to understand what other services are provided in the community and what the community identifies as their needs? How does this work in practice? Would you value the increased support of being attached to a local Facilitating Partner?**

- N/A to CfC programs.

**Question 9: For all providers, are there other ways to improve collaboration and coordination across services and systems?**

- The following recommendations could support improved collaboration and coordination across services and systems in ways that enable our service delivery to be safe and supportive:
- Active involvement of DSS FAM's in promoting collaboration and coordination across DSS funded services and systems in a particular location. A FAM should have the ability and

permission to share a list of other DSS funded services in a location with CfC FP's and assist in making connections.

- Active involvement of key service system stakeholders (Local Health Districts, Department of Education, Department of Communities and Justice and Local Council) in the development of the CfCFP Community Strategic Plan with and alongside community leaders from across the community.

Continued flexibility of funding (including for non-evidence based activities) that enable the CfCFP to fund initiatives that are innovative and that are focused on fostering collaboration across services, systems and communities.

### Capability and Innovation

**Question 10: The capability building support offered under Families and Children Activity programs has gone through several iterations. What works well? What do you think should change?**

- Alongside Evidence Based Programs, there needs to space and focus on evidence 'informed' service delivery which would foster innovation. With rigorous outcomes measurement frameworks being implemented across programs, the imperative for 'approved' EBP's reduces.

**Question 11: Aside from additional funding, how can the department best work with you to support innovation in your services while maintaining a commitment to existing service delivery?**

- Specifically for CfC FP it is important to get the timing right for a community strategic plan phase as too long will hinder progress and not be responsive enough to emerging issues related to COVID-19 and the current economic and health crisis, however too short a timeframe will mean that CfC FP's will not have enough time to be thorough.

**Question 12: Is there anything else you would like to share about the ideas and proposals in the Discussion Paper?**

- Since the development of the Community Strategic Plan for Bankstown Communities for Children in 2015 the community of Bankstown has experienced significant change both in demographic and socio economic terms. This has included significant increases in populations of recently arrived migrants whom have settled across the former Bankstown LGA as well as changes in the levels of disadvantage in different geographic locations. In response to these changes CfC funded services have identified several service delivery hotspots that fall on, across and just outside existing service delivery boundaries.
- It is recommended that as part of the development of the new Bankstown CfC Community Strategic Plan that research is undertaken to explore possible boundary changes that will guide service delivery to meet the needs of marginalised communities for the term of the new funding period.