

# Supporting Improvements to the Families and Children Activity

## Public consultation

Make a submission

### Part A – About you

**Do you agree to have your submission published on this website? (required)**

Tick one (1)

Yes

No

**If yes, do you wish to have your name and/or organisation published with your submission? If no, your submission will be published anonymously (required)**

Tick one (1)

Yes

No

Your name (required)

(If you wish to remain anonymous, please write Anon)

Natasha Reece on behalf of Communities for Children Committee Raymond Terrace and Karuah

Email

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**Are you responding as an individual or as a representative of an organisation?**

If you are responding as an organisation your responses may be published and attributed to your organisation in public reporting.



I'm responding as an individual.



I'm representing an organisation.

Please provide the name of your organisation.

Communities for Children Committee Raymond Terrace and Karuah (The Smith Family)

**In which state or territory do you currently live?**

Select one (1)

Australian Capital Territory

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**In which state or territory do you currently live?**

Select one (1)

New South Wales

Northern Territory

Queensland

South Australia

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Victoria

Western Australia

I do not live in Australia

Prefer not to say

**Which type of geographic location do you live in?**

Tick one (1)

A capital city

A regional city or town

A remote town or area

Prefer not to say

## Make a submission

### Part B – Supporting Improvements to the Families and Children Activity

These questions build on feedback received from the 2018 consultation, insights from other consultations and ongoing discussions with the sector, as well as recent experiences of service delivery during the 2019-2020 bushfires and the Coronavirus pandemic. All questions are optional.

## 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?**

For example, you might like to comment on any specific issues in meeting service delivery needs, or what extra support you need to continue to support families and children during this time?

Please provide your response to Question 1 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

In Communities for Children Raymond Terrace and Karuah (CfC RTK) we felt the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic deeply. Community Partners swiftly pivoted service delivery to ensure continued connection with families where possible and agreed upon by families. Adapted service delivery included using modes such as posting activity packs, whatsapp chats, closed Facebook groups, video chat/conferencing, text messages, phone calls, emails etc. Service providers had to learn to work using a new set of skills that was not relevant before the pandemic, in some cases it shifted power dynamics between service user and practitioner as it allowed service users to be patient and supportive of practitioners while they learnt to use new technology and gained new skills.

Communities for Children Committee Raymond Terrace and Karuah (CCC RTK) feels that poverty is an ongoing crisis in our community for example unaffordable/unstable/inadequate housing, food security and access to other material basics are conditions that many families are experiencing. These are conditions that preceded the pandemic and will continue to be exacerbated as a result of the pandemic with concerns about new cohorts of families falling into vulnerable and at risk categories.

A success of adjusted service delivery was that digital service delivery allowed more flexibility and choice for service users and also allowed some community partners the ability to reach members of groups that may not be the usual cohort of service users for example dads and male caregivers. Flexibility also allowed some families to engage fully with evidence informed professional support and work around the competing demands experienced in daily family 'lock-down' life.

A limitation was that there is still an evident digital divide across our footprint in Raymond Terrace, Karuah and surrounds which includes inequality in access, ability and confidence in using digital service delivery. Another limitation was that with time service users experienced 'zoom fatigue' and there was a desire for Face-to-Face service delivery. A further limitation was that engagement directly with children was often not as rich as Face-to-Face service delivery as parents often had to facilitate engagement and children have limited attention spans for digital service delivery thus impacting and measuring child development was difficult.

Providing warm referrals was also a challenge during the height of COVID-19 adjusted service deliveries as many organisations shifted to working from home models they were difficult to contact and at times were not taking new referrals.

CCC RTK would like the department to consider mixed model service delivery ongoing in the future to allow choice and flexibility for service users. However, consideration needs to be given to DEX, which as a platform has been designed with Face to Face service delivery in mind.

CCC RTK notes that locally there has been an increase in domestic and family violence, mental health issues, resilience fatigue and poorer access to material basics. These are areas which we will monitor closely over the coming months/years.

## 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?**

Previous consultations have told us that it is important to clearly define and measure outcomes but that they need to be aspirational and strengths-based. The draft outcomes framework attempts to capture key outcomes for in-scope FaC Activity programs. You might like to comment on other outcomes you think should be included.

Please provide your response to Question 2 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

The CCC RTK feels that the department has taken on feedback regarding aspirational and strength-based targets.

Analysis of the framework has allowed us to identify that there are a number of assumptions that sit behind the outcomes framework that may create problems in measurement for service users and service providers. These have been identified as:

- The framework assumes that all basic needs of a family/service user are being met. For example affordable and stable housing, food security, financial security, safe environment etc. We note that they have been included by the Department as 'contextual factors' that inform the overall Framework, but believe strongly that this does not adequately reflect how vital these basic needs are as pre-conditions to any improvement in child and family wellbeing or consistent engagement with services.
- Particularly the 'Family relationships flourish' domain assumes that service users are part of conventional couple families. In our footprint 40% of households are single parent households. A
- Additionally, at our site we are very aware that Domestic and Family Violence has been increasing so in this domain we would suggest that an indicator may include "household members are confident in their personal safety".

We feel that the framework is sound but could be enhanced by including more emphasis on child rights, child participation and child voice by putting children and family's wellbeing at the centre of the framework through consulting with families. We suggest looking at [ARACY's 'The Nest'](#) for inspiration, which is an existing wellbeing framework that involved consultation with a diverse group of Australian families. It could also be enhanced by

defining a more embedded approach to improving outcomes for culturally diverse communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and may include indicators such as 'enhanced cultural pride'.

In the Community Cohesion domain we also suggest the inclusion of an indicator that encourages and measures the coordination and collaboration between services in the community. An existing tool which has been developed to measure such indicators includes the CREATE collaboration wellbeing tool.

### Question 3:

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

Reporting outcomes through the DSS Data Exchange Partnership Approach is currently optional. Increased reporting through the Data Exchange Partnership Approach would help us better understand the outcomes being achieved and where further capability building support is required. You might like to comment on your view of this idea.

Please provide your response to Question 3 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

Existing Community Partners in Cfc RTK note that continued support with understanding the measurement framework is important, including online support to map your own outcome indicators to the Families and Childrens Activity framework being paramount to the success of its implementation and ongoing usefulness.

CCC RTK notes that in outcomes measurement there is inherent participant biases such as participants answering positively to 'please' the practitioner and scoring themselves higher in pre-tests than post-tests as a result of having gained new knowledge and skills that they didn't know they didn't have. These inherent biases can skew the outcomes in SCORE which doesn't have a mechanism to account for these biases. Another limitation of SCORE is that it cannot track the change of an individual over a period longer than 6months. Many programs that are run long term, for example playgroup type activities, work with families for longer than one DEX reporting period so to be able to track their change accurately across DEX reporting periods would improve the ability of partners to demonstrate performance.

We know that many families who access Cfc Community Partner Activities, attend multiple services through their pathways of service. Our Committee feels that if DEX had the function that service providers in a particular network could track an individual's change over time through a pathway of service it would allow us to better track change against long term outcomes and place-based site priorities.

### 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?**

Agreeing on outcomes helps us think more clearly about what evidence works to achieve support these outcomes. Many service providers already use evidence-based approaches, but this may not always be the case in your service. You may like to comment on your experience of developing programs logics and theories of change in your organisation here.

Please provide your response to Question 4 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

In Cfc RTK all Community Partner activities have a current program logic and theory of change outlined. The process is useful at the initial implementation stage. We also took the time as a site to review Community Partners theory of change and program logic through a series of capacity building workshops. This process was valuable to reflect and review with practitioners who had been delivering the programs and allowed us to make slight adjustments in following iterations of the projects based on what had been learnt.

A limitation is that it is difficult to track the long term outcomes that are expressed in program logics due to the short term nature of community programs.

## 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?**

Previous consultations and reviews have told us that certainty of grant funding is critical for service providers to engage and build trust with clients and maintain workforce continuity. Greater certainty needs to be balanced with accountability. Performance criteria, including Data Exchange reporting, and review points in the life of grants can help to provide greater accountability.

Please provide your response to Question 5 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

### Question 6:

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

Success can be measured by different people in different ways. We are interested to know more about the ways your organisation measures success and what measures or tools you use to help demonstrate success.

Please provide your response to Question 6 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

CCC RTK talked about success of services as:

- Meeting short, medium and long term goals, as well as population level goals. In programs with contracts 1-2 years the focus is on short – medium term goals but ultimately we would like to see the longer term and population level change for service users and populations.
- Having a service system that works and is easy to navigate for both community members and professionals. An example of this is that an activity delivered to school students through schools is inherently valued by the Department of Education and integrated in schools so that children can access easily and lines of communication with parents are clear and well established.
- Consulting with and integrating community members with lived experience into governance and decision-making of the initiative. An indicator of success is that the CfC initiative is informed at every step of the way by community members with lived experience.

## 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?**

Previous consultation told us that service providers value Facilitating services for families and children where more targeted and intensive support is required, including providing 'wrap around' support. You may like to comment on how your service or program reaches those families and children who most need support.

Please provide your response to Question 7 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

Communities for Children has an important role in the service system as a universal and early intervention service provider. However, we do work with families who are experiencing multiple immediate crises and vulnerability particularly where poverty exists or basic needs including safety are not being met. FaC activities roles in this space should involve supporting families to first and foremost meet those basic needs through warm referrals. This will allow service providers to build trusting relationships that will then lead the way for improving outcomes that are the direct goals of CfC sub-contracted services and the CfC initiative. Importance should be placed on the role of social (or peer-to-peer) learning when having a group of families at different stages of their lives and with different backgrounds noting that learning from other parents/children can be successful change tools, especially when paired with guidance from skilled practitioners.

Child protection is everyone's business and there should be an explicit focus on building capacity and capability of FaC funded services to identify and respond appropriately to child safety concerns, including making reports to the relevant authorities. CCC RTK had concerns that if the department were to increase the focus of CfC towards families engaging with child protection that this may create an overabundance of services focusing on this particular cohort to the detriment of children/families that fall outside of the child protection focus. Having a service system that is coordinated and works well together is important for child protection. For example state government/state funded services and federal government/federally funded services should engage in regular communication and mutual support to improve outcomes and pathways of service for families.

In Australia a particularly disadvantaged cohort is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 15.3% of the population across our footprint area (Raymond Terrace, Karuah, Tanilba Bay, Lemon Tree Passage and Tea Gardens/Hawks Nest) aged 0-12 years old identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. We suggest that the Families and Children Activity would benefit from embedding a culturally informed perspective to the policy.

## 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?**

Previous consultation identified strong support for place-based approaches. Communities for Children Facilitating Partners is a FaC Activity program that builds on local strengths to meet the needs of individual communities, using strong evidence of what works in early intervention and prevention. Facilitating Partner organisations collaborate with other organisations to provide a holistic service system for children and families. Further information on the [Communities for Children Facilitating Partner](#) is available via the link.

Please provide your response to Question 8 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

N/A

### Question 9:

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

Please provide your response to Question 9 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

The purpose of collaboration and coordination is to support the ability of community and service providers to navigate the system around children and families and to improve outcomes for community.

This can be achieved through identifying other groups/individuals in the community which are working towards shared goals and ideally they are goals that are expressed by community. This can support effective referrals to build pathways of service for disadvantaged and vulnerable families and can improve outcomes for community. For universal, soft-entry services such as Communities for Children activities an important role we play in the system is being able to link families in with other supports that they may need. We have found that a large portion of service users of CfC activities are not engaged with any other community or social services and for these families CfC activities are the entry-point into the service system. FAM's and representatives from other funding bodies have a role to play in providing guidance to the sector about what services are available and what is in scope for those services. This would involve different government departments and levels of government working better together through effective communication.

Another way which improvement in coordination and collaboration can occur is through support from service networks that 'go beyond infoshare'. This means that place-based service networks should be using their platforms to focus on community needs, strengths and goals and aligning the efforts of network participants to effect meaningful change for community. This could include working on shared projects such as the one described in the following paragraph.

A local example where collaboration and coordination has worked well is in Karuah Aboriginal community. The Smith Family CfC FP leads a service network for practitioners in Karuah to improve coordination and collaboration. This network allowed us to gain insights of what people in the community were experiencing during COVID-19 lockdowns, including being unable to access online schooling. As a response to this we formed a working group of approximately 7 organisations with the goal of improving digital inclusion for Karuah Aboriginal Community. This involved leveraging Port Stephens Council to approve Telstra NBN infrastructure works as a priority, conducting community consultations about prospective internet use and securing a free wifi hotspot from Telstra for use in a communal location, at the community hall. The success of this project was due to the coming together of multiple organisations, all participating fully in a project with a common goal that was articulated by community.

## 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?**

For example, you may wish to consider the priority capability building needs identified in this Discussion Paper and comment on other capability building needs that have not been included. We are also interested to how capability building skills are supported in your organisation.

Please provide your response to Question 10 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

### 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?**

This question recognises the importance of ensuring service providers have flexibility to build their own capability and develop innovative approaches appropriate to the unique contexts in which you work. We want to ensure our grant arrangements under the Families and Children Activity support capability development, adaptability and service innovation.

Please provide your response to Question 11 in the space provided below (500 word limit).

## What else should we know?

### Question 12:

#### Is there anything else you would like to share about the ideas and proposals in the Discussion Paper?

Please provide your response to Question 12 in space provided below (500 word limit).

We thank you for the continued support and appreciate the opportunity to provide open and honest feedback to the discussion paper.

CCC RTK believes that all the ideas and proposals would be enhanced by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the policy and initiatives. This would involve consulting specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, experts and community members to ensure that the Families and Children Activity is informed by a strong cultural voice. We feel that in this aspect it is desirable and essential for the Department to lead by example and for place-based initiatives to also embed strong cultural voice into their upcoming strategic planning.

In our isolated communities of Tanilba Bay/Lemon Tree Passage and Karuah the pandemic created an opportunity for community to ask service providers and leaders for a better coordinated service system with clear entry points. General Practitioners, parents, teenagers, elderly people and service providers find navigation of the community/social service system difficult. Stronger explicit direction to the Facilitating Partner role in place-based initiatives to provide network leadership for the purpose of coordination and collaboration in our local service sectors would be well received by FP's and community.

Thank you for completing our questionnaire. We appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts and ideas. We will use this information, along with discussion through advisory groups and the online forums to inform the outcomes from this consultation.

If you have any questions or feedback about this survey, please contact the Department of Social Services via [families@dss.gov.au](mailto:families@dss.gov.au).