



Western Australian Family Support Networks

An integrated, collaborative service delivery model

Introduction

Western Australian (WA) Family Support Networks (FSNs) are a partnership of community sector services and the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department), providing a common entry point to services, delivering earlier more targeted support to families.

FSNs are currently operating in Armadale and the Midwest with Parkerville Children and Youth Care as the lead agency, and in Mirrabooka where MercyCare is the lead agency.

Aim

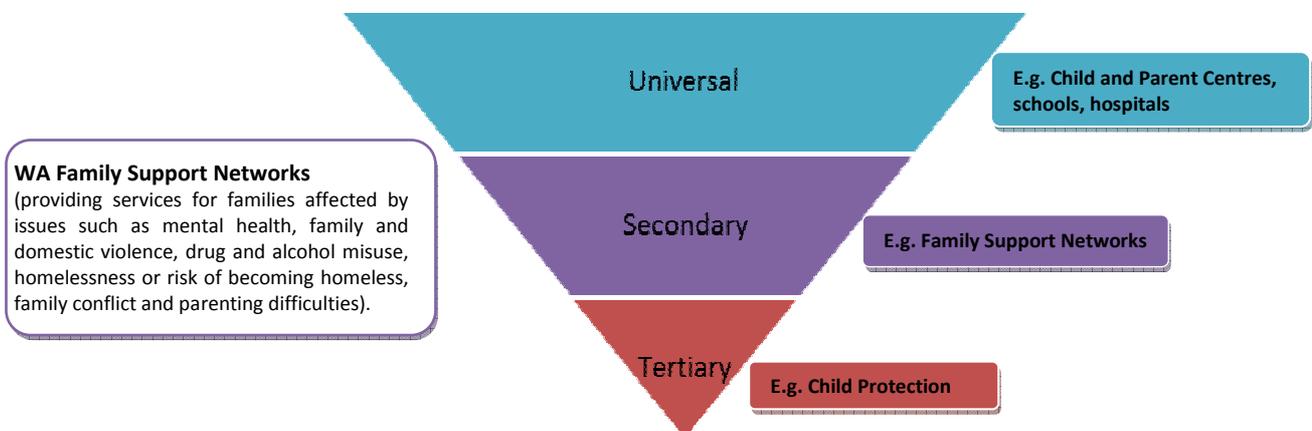
FSNs provide integrated and coordinated secondary family support services to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families and prevent the need for tertiary child protection intervention.

While universal early intervention programs such as the WA Government’s Child and Parent Centres support parents to look after their children, some families require more intensive intervention. FSNs work with families who are experiencing multiple and complex issues and where the support of a number of services is often required. Universal services such as schools and hospitals are key referrers to the FSNs. It is anticipated that Child and Parent Centres will become key referrers into the future, with a growing number of referrals being made to the Armadale FSN.

Services provided through the FSNs are targeted secondary services that work with very vulnerable and at risk families to avoid the need for them to enter the tertiary child protection system. Screening and assessment is undertaken to determine whether a brief intervention or single service response is needed or if there are more complex issues requiring an integrated multi-agency response.

Families who require intensive support services can often find it difficult to navigate the service system or are reluctant to engage. When required, the FSN will actively reach out to connect with these families and support them to access the services they need.

Diagram 1. Service Continuum



Funding

The Department provides funding to a community sector organisation to undertake the lead agency role to manage development of partner agency integration and deliver a common entry point to services. The common entry point team includes an alliance manager, two assessment and support officers, an administration officer and a co-located child protection worker.

Family Support Network: Partnership

The community sector lead agency partners with other secondary family support services to form the local FSN alliance. The lead agency manages the common entry point, providing easier and more streamlined access to support 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. Following a joint case allocation process, FSN agencies work together to support the family.

No wrong door

A Common Assessment Framework that incorporates Signs of Safety enables the FSN to operate a no wrong door philosophy so that families are connected to the services they require regardless of which agency they initially present to, reducing the need for families to repeat their stories as they connect with different services.

Collaboration

Allocations meetings are held regularly, bringing together representatives from each of the FSN agencies to facilitate an integrated service response to families. This is particularly important for complex cases where multiple services are involved, so that agencies are aware of which other services are working with the family and to identify who will be responsible for undertaking case management.

Self directed service design

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.

Families also provide direct feedback that is used to measure the outcome of the service response they receive from the FSN, through the completion of matrices on entry and exit. This self assessment is also being used to inform the overall evaluation of the FSN model.

Additionally, 'brokerage' funds are provided to support families as part of an individually tailored and flexible service response. These are one-off or time limited case support funds that help families access specific services to address immediate issues.

Active Hold

If a service is not immediately available following assessment, 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. This enables the FSN to monitor the family and take action if required to prevent the situation from escalating.

Leader child protection

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.

Information sharing

The *Secondary Services Working Together* protocol sets out the framework for information sharing. Joint allocation, case planning and case review processes underpin effective information sharing and coordinated service responses to families.

In addition, the development of a shared cross agency IT system (FuSioN) allows client information to be recorded and shared by all agencies working with the family, including the Department. FuSioN is a joint data

collection and case management IT system that enables workers to access relevant case information including assessment, case notes, case planning and review information, to assist them in their work with a family.

Workers are able to view which agencies are involved with the family, what work is being undertaken and when the work has been finalised. This reduces duplication in service provision and prevents the family from having to provide the same information to multiple agencies.

Governance

An integrated governance framework provides for strategic and operational level steering committees and provides further information sharing opportunities, leading to more effective referral pathways and integrated local service planning.

Strategic planning and reporting

The FSN funding model allows for flexibility, innovation and community responsiveness in line with the *Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy*.

FSN steering committees enable the identification of unmet need and demand for services in each district. Through working together and coordinating service delivery, service capacity is better understood and resources can be allocated or re-allocated in direct response to changes in community need across the district. FuSioN provides further evidence of capacity issues and is used to inform decision making about resource allocation.

Links with other key coordination groups such as regional managers forums provides opportunities for further strategic planning, redefining the way in which Government and community service providers work together.

FuSioN also provides the capacity for the Department and Lead Agencies to extract progress and operational reports. These are used for reporting to FSN steering and operational group meetings and helps reduce the administrative burden on the lead agency by providing a streamlined mechanism for 6 monthly progress reporting to the Department.

Site selection criteria for expansion

The selection of sites for the expansion of FSNs throughout WA will be determined through consideration of a range of criteria.

Key selection criteria include:

- the number of child protection notifications and safety and wellbeing assessments;
- the number of children in the care of the Department;
- Australian Early Development Census (formerly known as AEDI) data; and
- the number of existing secondary family support services – both state and commonwealth funded.

Other system considerations include:

- defined geographical location;
- existing links to Child and Parent Centres and other universal services as key referrers;
- leadership and willingness from existing services to work more collaboratively; and
- availability of other supportive governance structures such as well functioning regional manager forums.

Future FSN sites will also typically have a range of demographic, environmental and community characteristics including high rates of unemployment, crime, family and domestic violence, educational disengagement and truancy, alcohol and drug use, homelessness and mental health issues.

Outcomes

While FSNs are a relatively new initiative, an independent evaluation has shown early evidence of positive outcomes for families through improved coordination and integration of services and reduced demand on district offices of the Department. A second evaluation is to be completed in November 2014.