



Family Support Network (FSN) Evaluation Report Summary

Background

The Family Support Network (FSN) is a partnership of community sector services and the Department of Communities (Communities). The FSN’s intention is to provide a common entry point to services and deliver earlier, targeted support to families with complex problems and those most vulnerable to involvement with the child protection system.

Core aims of the FSN is to help families:

- Receive an integrated and coordinated service response to divert them from the child protection system;
- Develop and strengthen culturally safe support networks; and
- Improve parenting skills to safely care for their children at home;

The FSN is made up of two streams: Assessment & Coordination (A&C) and Intensive Case Management (ICM). FSNs operate across the metropolitan area in four service corridors. Each corridor is managed by a lead agency from the community services sector in partnership with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO).

Service Location	Lead Agency	ACCO Partner
Mirrabooka/Joondalup	Mercy Community Services Incorporated	Yorgum
Perth/Midland	Centrecare Inc.	Wungening
Cannington/Armadale	Centrecare Inc.	Wungening
Fremantle/Rockingham	Communicare Inc.	Yorgum

Table1: FSN locations, lead agencies and ACCO Partners

Social Ventures Australia in partnership with Dorinda Cox from Inspire Change Consulting Group were commissioned by Communities to conduct an independent the evaluation of the FSN. **This is a process evaluation (not an outcome or impact evaluation) and only considers early indicators of outcomes at a high level.**

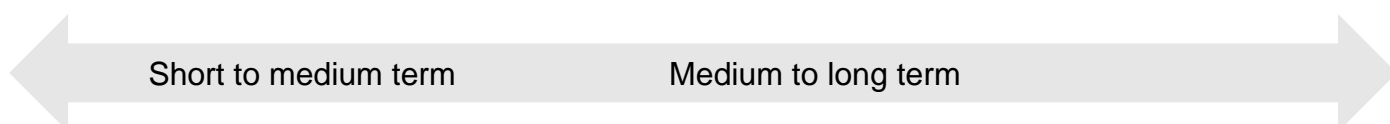
Just over a year into a five-year delivery term, the evaluation sought to answer **four key questions** drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data:

- What early indicators of outcomes for families have occurred?
- Has the program been designed optimally?
- Has the implementation been effective and efficient?
- What can be learnt and improved?

Social Ventures Australia finalised the process evaluation report in September 2020 and developed ten key recommendations.

Recommendations to improve the FSN’s effectiveness in the future

Design recommendations



<p>Recommendation 1: Develop a theory of change and corresponding evaluation framework.</p>	<p>Recommendation 3: Co-design cultural competency framework with Aboriginal stakeholders.</p>
<p>FSN currently lacks a well-articulated theory of change that clearly defines how its activities lead to short, medium, and long-term outcomes. Without this clarity, it is hard for the multiple stakeholders involved in FSN to grasp how activities in each stream achieve the overall purpose. Furthermore, not having a theory of change also creates issues for data collection as there are no well-defined and evidence-based outcomes to be measured with appropriate metrics or data collection methodologies.</p>	<p>This framework will ensure a more consistent, evidence-driven approach to cultural competency across the FSNs with accountability back to Communities. Importantly, it will help the FSN address the weaker core values of a trauma-informed approach most notable core values to be addressed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding a stronger understanding of trauma and its impact through policies and training. • Promoting safer physical and emotional spaces with a focus on referral pathways for Aboriginal families. • Sharing power and governance with Aboriginal community, including ACCOs. Practically, this may be achieved through initiatives such as Recommendation 9, co-designing formal partnership agreements between ACCOs and lead agencies.

<p>Recommendation 2: Develop incentives for partner agencies to be more accountable.</p>	<p>Recommendation 4 - Analyse service system gaps and consider how to fill them. In particular, review the gap in in-home support and consider expanding ICM to fill that gap.</p>
<p>To improve FSN, Communities should consider appropriate incentives for partner agencies to ensure full participation and accountability for critical FSN activities. These initiatives will need to be carefully designed in consultation with partner and lead agencies to define what is appropriate.</p>	<p>Communities should undertake an analysis of the size of the service system gap in in-home support and consider options for filling this gap, including exploring the possibility of increasing ICM’s budget to include the option of taking on more A&C direct referrals. It is, however, important to ensure that expanding ICM will not reduce the availability of ICM positions for those families who are at high risk and in need of those services. Detailed cost modelling and program design will be required.</p>
	<p>Recommendation 5 – Undertake a cost modelling exercise to ensure the FSN is sustainable.</p> <p>The evaluation highlighted that the capacity of FSN is under some strain and there are concerns about the ongoing sustainability of the service and the maintenance of a high-quality service. Furthermore, there have been opportunities highlighted such as a possible expansion of the ICM service or the inclusion of a step-up in-home support service that needs to be considered going forward. Communities should work with lead agencies to understand the parameters of the service and straining points on capacity to develop an agreed cost model to secure FSN’s future sustainability and effectiveness.</p>

Implementation recommendations



<p>Recommendation 6: Improve the quality of family referrals and level of family engagement.</p>	
<p>As both A&C and ICM streams are voluntary, successful referrals and engagement from families are heavily reliant on the quality of the handover process, the nature of the rapport between the referrer and the family, and the way families are informed about the services. While lead agencies have reported a gradual improvement as agencies become more familiar with</p>	

FSN, further work should be done to strengthen the quality of the referrals by:

- Continuing to improve the education and information for both the agencies who refer into FSN and for the families who receive the referral.
- Recognising that taking a broader family view can lead to better outcomes for families.
- Co-designing engagement techniques with community representatives.

Recommendation 7: Review the format and design of allocation meetings.

Frequency, format and location, tools to support meetings and family involvement. FSN should consider the potential role of families in these meetings to increase opportunities for them to engage in and lead their own support. The appropriate forum and approach to any family engagement will need to be co-designed with agencies and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. Particularly relevant to Aboriginal families, FSNs should consider referring to the Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making approach.

Recommendation 8: Introduce technology to streamline allocation for lower risk families.

Aiming to streamline and increase the efficiency of allocation processes and ensure that technology or social innovation tools are easy to use to incentivise uptake. This will increase the time available to focus on managing more complex cases and an effective platform to collect data to identify service gaps.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen governance and accountability structures.

ACCO partners, lead agencies and Communities are encouraged to refer to the recommendations in the co-design of the partnership agreement. For the purposes of this report, several critical recommendations to highlight include:

- A crucial focus of any partnership between ACCOs and CSOs is to build the capacity of ACCOs so that ultimately any child protection and out-of-home care services for Aboriginal families can transition entirely to ACCOs. Most (not all) ACCOs currently lack the size, scale or experience to provide out-of-home care services. Therefore, successful transition of placements to suitable ACCOs may take time and will require ACCOs, CSOs and government to be committed to work in partnership.
- Where CSOs need to remain actively in partnership with ACCOs for the longer term, CSOs must demonstrate commitment and accountability for a high level of cultural competence, employing Aboriginal people to deliver services to Aboriginal people and build capacity of local Aboriginal staff.
- Partnership practices should underpin the design of the partnership agreement.

Recommendation 10 – Undertake a thorough review of FuSioN to fully understand all benefits and challenges and build a set of options for improvement.

- Improved and efficient FuSioN training
- User interface problems
- Improve data collection processes for exit surveys
- Alignment with existing data collection systems
- Data privacy concerns
- More appropriate indicators

This work should flow on from and be guided by the theory of change and evaluation framework developed in Recommendation 1.

Communities will examine Social Venture Australia’s report and recommendations to develop an action plan. The action plan will drive the progression of viable actions and ensure the FSN, as a key community service, is realised to its full potential. Key actions will be published on the FSN and Communities websites.

More information

Read the Family Support Networks Process Evaluation Report on the [FSN website](#).