

INQUIRY INTO SERVICE COORDINATION IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGH SOCIAL NEEDS

Organisation: Barnardos South Coast Centre & Hunter/Central Coast
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The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issue
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

To the Director

Re: Inquiry into Service Co ordination in Communities with High Social Needs

NSW Family Referral Services Senior Officers Group

The Family Referral Services (FRS) Senior Officers Group, which comprises CEOs and executive managers of the broad range of non government agencies which host 11 FRS across NSW, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into service co ordination in communities with high social needs.

Background to Family Referral Services:

Family Referral Services (FRS) are NSW Government funded, non-government operated, regional child protection and wellbeing services linking vulnerable children, young people and their families with appropriate support services in their local area. Priority is given to clients with multiple and complex needs. FRS aim to prevent the escalation of children and young people in the statutory child protection system. Clients may self-refer or be referred by government or non-government Mandatory Reporters, including the Child Protection Helpline and Child Wellbeing Units, other government providers and a broad range of community sector service providers.

NSW Kids and Families, a statutory health corporation, is lead agency for the Family Referral Services (FRS) on behalf of the whole of government. FRS are part of the shared system of responsibility for child protection and wellbeing in this State across government, non-government and community sectors. Since the initial establishment of 3 trial FRS in 2010 a total of eleven FRS now operate to provide coverage across the whole of NSW. A Family Referral Service has been established in the following regions:

- Far North Coast: Delivery agency -a consortium between Northern Rivers Social Development Council and Interrelate
- New England North West: Delivery agency – Pathfinders
- Mid North Coast: Delivery agency – Pathfinders
- Hunter Central Coast: Delivery agency – The Benevolent Society
- South East and Northern Sydney: Delivery agency – a consortium between Barnardos Australia and Catholic Care Broken Bay
- Western Sydney: Delivery agency – Relationships Australia
- South West Sydney: Delivery agency – UnitingCare Burnside

- Illawarra: Delivery agency – Barnardos Australia
- Southern NSW: Delivery agency – a consortium between McKillop Family Services and Marymead
- Riverina Murray: Delivery agency – Relationships Australia
- Western NSW: Delivery agency – UnitingCare Burnside

The establishment of Family Referral Services (FRS) was a key NSW Government initiative in response to the findings of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW (2008). The child protection reforms recommended by the Special Commission and adopted in NSW in January 2010 included:

- raising the statutory reporting threshold from ‘risk of harm’ to ‘risk of significant harm’ with the intention that only child protection reports warranting statutory intervention should be made to the Child Protection Helpline; and
- creating new pathways into services for vulnerable children, young people and families involving Child Wellbeing Units and FRS.

The FRS as one of the key new pathways noted above provide various levels of service, ranging from information and referral support through to supported case coordination. It offers support to clients via the telephone as well as delivering face-to-face services through shop front facilities, home visiting and outreach programs. The FRS have two core functions:

- Client intake and referral: To engage with clients, assess their needs and nature of support/s required, provide information, referral and other assistance with accessing appropriate services and other supports in their local community
- Service system support/ systemic advocacy: To improve local service provider knowledge of other support services in their catchment area, and strengthening coordination and collaboration in service delivery to promote child safety, welfare and wellbeing.

All 11 FRS deliver services in communities with high social needs within their catchments. These communities are commonly suburbs or townships with high concentrations of public housing, higher numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, and remote communities in rural NSW where there are few services. The FRS concentrate much of their service delivery in the communities identified in the recent ‘Dropping off the Edge 2015’ report.¹

- *The extent to which government and non government service providers are identifying the needs of clients and providing a co ordinated response which ensures access to services both within and outside of their particular area of responsibility.*

¹ Vinson Tony & Rawthorne Margot – ‘Dropping off the Edge 2015- persistent communal disadvantage in Australia’.

The 'Keep Them Safe' five year reform strategy which was implemented by the then NSW Department of Community Services in 2009 following the release of the Wood Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection report, was intended as a shared approach to child wellbeing designed to re-shape the way family and community services are delivered in NSW to improve the safety, welfare, and wellbeing of children and young people. A critical component of the 'Keep Them Safe' reforms was the strengthening of partnerships between statutory and non-government organisations in the delivery of community services.

Service co ordination and partnership are fundamental to the FRS service model. As a centralised referral point for the child and family service system and the community in each of its funded regions it is critical to effective FRS functioning that their staff have a comprehensive knowledge of government and non government service availability and capacity. In this way, following careful assessment of client need at intake, referrals to the most useful services are then conducted for vulnerable children and young people, and their families.

The FRS are funded to drive co ordinated service delivery in each of their regions. They have the government remit to be sector leaders in this important activity. The Keep Them Safe Outcome Evaluation² stated that although 'the FRSs have been successful in engaging with families and referring them to appropriate services' (2014,p 11) their role of driving improved links between services has not yet been sufficiently realised in the service system as the FRSs had only been recently implemented and awareness of their role was still growing. As the FRS network matures and becomes more embedded in the targeted early intervention and child protection sectors in NSW this key role will become increasingly strengthened and recognised by the sector.

The KTS Outcomes Evaluation also highlighted that 'interagency collaboration does not operate within a strategic framework, and this leaves the local initiatives very vulnerable' (p68). However recently there have been a plethora of local FaCS district service co ordination initiatives co designed to improve early intervention and child protection service delivery in areas of high social disadvantage. The FRS play a pivotal role in the vast majority of these because of their leading role in service co ordination and as a central referral point. Examples of some of these local innovations are joint child protection allocation meetings between FaCS (Community Services) and the FRS in some FaCS districts, the OneFacs service co ordination hub in Wollongong, education neglect service co ordination pilots in Cessnock and Shellharbour, a school based service co ordination pilot in Wagga, statutory child protection co located workers in several FRS across the state, and the co located FRS within the Police Child Wellbeing Unit located on the Central Coast.

² Keep Them Safe Outcomes Evaluation, June 2014, NSW Dept of Premier & Cabinet.

- *Barriers to the effective co ordination of services, including lack of client awareness of services and any legislative provisions such as privacy law.*

Despite the assertive role of the FRS in co ordinating service delivery to vulnerable clients the lack of appropriate services to meet their needs is a persistent barrier in many regions of NSW. This is most evident in rural and remote communities. Service co ordination is only as useful as the capacity of the service system to deliver the right service to a child or young person in need.

Another barrier to effective service co ordination includes the continued gate keeping role that the Department of Family & Community Services (FaCS) plays for many of its funded services. Restrictive service criteria determined by FaCS, for example in family support services, does discourage interagency collaboration. Clients don't understand the range of service options that may be available. Linking services such as the FRS and Ability Links can facilitate access for vulnerable people, however not all services in a community will take referrals from these specific linking referrers because funders 'gatekeep'.

The Children and Young Person's (Care & Protection) Act 1998 Chapter 16 A information exchange reform which was implemented as part of 'Keep Them Safe' has facilitated exchange of important information about a child's safety and wellbeing between statutory authorities and non government providers. This has been a particularly useful reform and has improved service co ordination . It is used frequently by FRS to seek additional information particularly from FaCS about a child or young person's child protection history.

- *Consideration of best practice models*
The FRS is a best practice model for service co ordination in communities of high social disadvantage in NSW. This is its funding remit. As the FRS service system matures this role will take on increasing importance and effectiveness particularly in the critical areas of targeted early intervention and child protection.

The following case scenario provides a useful example of the Family Referral Service model effectiveness:

BACKGROUND (names have been changed):

The family comprised two grandchildren, Melanie 9 years and Corey 19 years. Corey is the carer for Mavis, who is the grandmother of Melanie and Corey. Corey has been Mavis's carer since her husband passed away 12 months ago. Mavis (64years) has cared for the two grandchildren for nine years due the mother's ongoing drug use. Mavis has diabetes, chronic obstruction disease, asthma, depression, anxiety and PTSD.

PRESENTING ISSUES:

Both grandchildren have been sexually abused and the most recent incident occurred at Melanie's current school. Mavis also has a history of child sexual abuse. Mavis's husband was the carer of her and the children until he passed away. Mavis's daughter relinquished care of the two children 9 years ago due to ongoing drug use. There is no family support in the area. A high level of squalor and hoarding is evident in the home.

REFERRALS MADE AND CO ORDINATED BY FRS:

The local FRS sourced the most useful services for Mavis and her grandchildren, provided supported referrals, continued to support the family during the referral take up period, and co ordinated the service delivery until Mavis was fully engaged.

- ACAT (Aged Care and Assessment Team) referral was made, and worker advocated for them to consider the referral despite the age. Mavis was approved for low level respite home care which includes transport , companionship, medication
- Partners in Recovery (PIR) – Mental Health support
- Sexual assault counselling service – sexual assault counselling for Melanie
- Anglicare – Removalist assistance
- Brokerage provided by FRS– Part payment of removalist
- Throughout the move and transition to the new home, FRS staff provided support to the family. The grand children's behaviour escalated and frequently became unmanageable for Mavis.
- FRS staff worked alongside Housing NSW to facilitate home relocation
- The family relocated to a new home
- Christmas hamper and presents for the children

The Family Referral Service Senior Officers Group thanks the members of the Social Issues Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. If you require any further information please contact Kerry Moore, Senior Manager of Barnardos south Coast/Hunter Central Coast,

Yours sincerely

Kerry Moore
on behalf of the NSW Family Referral Services Senior Officers Group