



Safe Children, Strong Families, Supportive Communities

Annual Performance Report 2019-2020



About Fams

Children are kept safe by quality services which help kids and families when and where they need it. Fams makes this possible by advocating for better public policy, advising how to achieve sustainable outcomes and acting to help vulnerable children, young people, families and communities.

At Fams we advocate, advise and act.

Established in 1981, Fams has always been driven by strong values and our aim:

- Safe Children
- Strong Families
- Supportive Communities

We contribute to population outcomes through:

- Building skills and knowledge in outcomes-based frameworks to enable organisations to collect and use data to inform practice and collaborate to provide better results for clients, practitioners and organisations; and
- Systematic policy and advocacy to inform and enable the government to implement solutions that support vulnerable children, families and communities.

Fams' Board

Lee-Anne Holmes, Chairperson, *The Canopy* (retired June 2020)

Ashleigh Daines, Vice Chairperson, *Sutherland Shire Family Services*

Liz Reimer, Secretary and Public Officer, *The Family Centre & Southern Cross University*

Melanie Andrews, Treasurer, *Barnardos*

Rosa Ciravolo, Board member, *Barnardos*

Belinda Kotris, Board member, *Tamworth Family Support Service*

Kate Melhopt, Board member, *South Eastern Community Connect*

Louise Statz, Board member, *Co-opted*

Fams' team

Jodie Abbey *Strategy & Relationships*

Julie Hourigan Ruse *Chief Executive Officer*

Kim Stace *Sector Engagement Manager*

Gina Vizza *Policy & Projects Manager (resigned May 2020)*

Catherine White *Consultant*

Fams' members

Fams' members regularly provide invaluable support to the work we do. We welcome every opportunity to continue to advocate, advise and act to support the work that they do.

Government partners

Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, the Hon. Gareth Ward MP, for his keen interest to learn about and understand our work. We look forward to continuing to work with Minister Ward and his staff during this term of Government.

Department of Family and Community Services¹ who support us with funding

Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, Andrew Johnson (outgoing Advocate), Zoe Robinson (Acting Advocate) & the ACYP team for bringing the voice of children and young people to every conversation, and additionally for doing the heavy lifting during NSW Children's Week

Other partners

Adopt Change for partnering with us to remind NSW that *It takes a village* to ensure every child has a safe and permanent home

Australian Public Affairs for strategic advice and recommendations to bring our work to the broader community

Clear Impact USA, particularly **Adam Luecking**, for the global leadership to measure only what's important and to use data to its full potential not just compliance

Community Industry Group for inviting us to partner with them to support the sector in Illawarra Shoalhaven and Southern NSW Districts

John Ferguson Accounting for financial management, audit preparation and advice

Mark Friedman, and the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, RBA™ remains an invaluable tool to guide continuous improvement

Gateway Family Support Services for inviting us to partner with them in the *Walk With* project

GKM2 for IT provision and maintenance

LCSA for persevering with the challenges of office co-location

Dr Michael McAfee who holds us accountable; if we are not contributing to equitable outcomes for children, young people, and families then we are wasting our time

NCOSS for partnering in our outcomes measurement workshops

Sydney Policy Lab for their unique way of working to strengthen our ability to collaboratively generate new ideas, transform the way we work and effect change

Youth Action for persevering with the challenges of office co-location

¹ Now called Department of Communities and Justice

Chairperson's report

Ashleigh Daines – Vice Chairperson

It is with great pleasure that I present the Annual Report 2019/2020 for Fams on behalf of our former Chairperson, Lee-Anne Holmes.

This year has presented significant challenges for our sector. From drought, flood, bushfires and then the COVID-19 pandemic - which continues to impact on the way we are able to provide service to the most vulnerable. One of these events on their own would have been enough to challenge our workforce, however with all four, we have been pushed as a sector to examine all our existing practice and look at solutions for our clients. We have tried new processes, embraced a new way of communicating while also having to prepare for new contracts and reporting systems. Through all of these changes I have been reminded of the resilience of our sector and that above all, we all do this work to find a way to ensure that those in our community who are experiencing the most vulnerability are heard and supported.

During this time Fams continued to have an active media presence. There was a real concern during lockdown that the children who connected with support through school and extra-curricular activities were becoming largely unseen. Our CEO, Julie Hourigan Ruse, gave numerous media interviews to shine the light on the increased risk to these children. The Fams team instigated various opportunities for services to connect from all across NSW via video conferencing; introducing the CEO and Worker Conversations each week to encourage services to share their experiences and challenges and provide a platform for increased collaboration with one other. (These would later become the *In conversation with* series and Practice Conversation.)

At the time of lockdown, Fams was on the road delivering our *Getting ready for DEX, Getting ready for reporting* workshop. It was so encouraging to see so many services engaging with us over Zoom video conferencing so that we could continue to deliver the session. We were thrilled to achieve the same level of attendance as we would have had were we delivering these sessions face to face.

As Vice Chairperson, I have been delighted by the contribution of the current Board who have been outstanding in their knowledge, skills and expertise. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of our former Chairperson, Lee-Anne Holmes and thank her for the leadership and the support that she provided to Fams. I would also especially like to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of departing Board Member, Liz Reimer for her tireless efforts on the Fams Board over many years. Liz has not only been an integral member of our Board but she has regularly provided an individual perspective that has enabled us to examine the work that we do through a different lens. I cannot thank Liz enough for her contribution that has enabled Fams to ensure that we can continue to strive for a sector that delivers on Safe Children, Strong Families and Supportive Communities.

On behalf of the Board I would also like to thank the staff for their wonderful and outstanding contribution to the work and outcomes for Fams. A very special thank you to Fams' CEO Julie Hourigan Ruse for her leadership and tenacity through a busy and unpredictable year.

Treasurer's report

Melanie Andrews

Income for the year was \$934,873. A total expenditure of \$847,992 gave a surplus of \$86,883. Of this surplus \$85,484 is a direct result of the Federal Government COVID-19 Cash Boost program. The organisation goes into the next financial year with reserves of \$409,703.

It is particularly encouraging, when taking into account the challenges for Fams to respond to the varied needs of a diverse sector while exceeding against our strategic and operational plans.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Julie Hourigan Ruse and the staff of Fams for the generosity and commitment that they brought to the consideration of our financial processes and management over the year. As well I thank John Ferguson Accounting for their support with the day to day management of the financial records and reports.

I am pleased to advise that our annual audit for the 2019-20 financial year produced a satisfactory and unqualified result and our organisation remains in a sound financial position.

I would also like to acknowledge the Department of Family and Community Services for the ongoing provision of our core funding.

I wish Fams every future success to continue to attract funding that fits with its objectives and improves the ability of services to meet the support needs of vulnerable children and families.

Financial health of Fams

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Reserves to Expenditure (* percentage greater than 18% is considered good)	22	23	42	20	38	30	36	49	44	48
Working Capital Ratio (* ratio of more than 2 is good)	1.4	2.0	2.1	2.5	3.33	2.86	4.61	5.7	3.55	4.65
Cash Reserves (weeks) (* greater than 10 weeks is considered healthy)	15.4	20.7	17.9	9.5	30.67	24.2	22	31.1	29.1	32.1

What we contribute to

Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform

Fams continued to deliver the Sector Assistance Strategy workshops, *Measuring Outcomes and the Logic Model that supports it*, in July. These workshops were designed to support NGOs with the development of program logics and a deeper understanding of how their organisation contributes to the TEI Program outcomes and Human Services Outcomes Framework. These workshops were delivered face-to-face in every District: Ballina, Newcastle, Tamworth, Narrabri, Western Sydney, Liverpool, Wagga Wagga, Bega, Queanbeyan, Shellharbour, Western Sydney, Liverpool, Albury, Crows Nest, Liverpool and Katoomba.

The workshops created opportunities for Fams to connect with all participants to assist organisations to ready themselves for re-contracting. In some cases resources were provided to assist organisations continue with the work, whilst in others more time was spent via face-to-face, zoom or phone meetings to support services that requested additional help.

Fams continued to support participants who had attended workshops and were faced with challenges or were looking for feedback on work they had completed post the workshop. In some cases requests for this work came directly from service providers, and in other cases, Fams was contacted directly by DCJ district offices to assist services who they felt would benefit extra assistance.

The feedback received from these sessions was then able to inform our next series of workshops – *Getting ready for DEX, Getting ready for reporting*. After trialing this in Cowra and Belmore (Sydney) the workshop was designed to focus on developing tools to record and report performance measures including those relevant to DEX SCORES. The workshop was then rolled out across the State.

The workshop was further developed based on need identified while supporting organisations during the early transition period. Components of the workshops included:

- What we know so far
- What you should know
- Documents to have on hand
- DCJ 'How to' documents (TEI resources);
- What happens next – a new language
- Preparing for access to DEX
- Dashboard, Outlets, Cases and Sessions
- Setting up in DEX
- SCORE/TEI Outcomes – Client and Community
- Minimum data sets
- Information needed to report on clients
- Mandatory Partnership Approach
- DEX SCORE Outcome Types and Domains
- Where to from here (websites/helplines)

The workshops provided an opportunity to hear directly from services about their needs as well as their concerns – and indeed what was working well. It also confirmed that many service users were faced with structural disadvantage that was compounding the challenge of measuring outcomes against a backdrop of inherent societal issues.

Following the delivery of workshops, Fams was approached by several organisations as well as the Department for further assistance. These requests covered New England, Western, Illawarra Shoalhaven, and Sydney Districts. The requests themselves ranged from:

- i) assistance with Activity Mapping and understanding the relevant documentation
- ii) thinking specifically about the priority needs of the District and how to address these both practically and sustainably

- iii) direction around relevant research/evidence for these purposes
- iv) specific guidance on measuring outcomes (not just the tools – but actually doing the work)
- v) collection as opposed to reporting outcomes
- vi) design and implementation of the program logic
- vii) engaging multiple levels of an organisation – management, staff and board and at times, DCJ, as well and facilitating this engagement by attending meetings and workshops.
- viii) engaging ‘like’ services in a discussion about measuring outcomes that were meaningful to their field of work and client base.

However, Fams offered more than the specifics named above. Fams was offering a direct connection to services – and a ‘hands on’ connection at that – which made services feel heard, valued and more confident to deal with the changes ahead. As the Peak leading the transition to outcomes measurement across all TEI funded services, we were ‘capacity building’ in the truest sense and facilitating dialogue and constructive feedback loops between the Sector and Department Central and District Offices.

The Human Services Agreement negotiation timing and process was disrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic. Following initial weekly online conversations, it became clear to Fams that participants were keen to use the platform to connect with District teams. The need for connection and clarity around negotiation arrangements was paramount, in particular, how lockdown and forced changes to service delivery may impact the re-issuing of contracts. Fams, in consultation with the Department, coordinated video conference sessions with each District Executive Director and local DCJ staff.

These conversations provided an opportunity for service providers to connect directly with Central Office and District teams at the same time to be briefed on the status of negotiations, any program and/or government policy changes, whether there was flexibility in previously agreed milestones based on the impact of COVID-19, and what the process was to escalate discussion should there be any unresolved concerns.

Fams sincerely thanks the Department’s teams around the State for their engagement, robust exchange of ideas, support, guidance, patience and good humour through Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform. We will continue working alongside you and funded organisations to keep doing the real work.


Our projects

The broad project work of Fams continued this year.

We delivered the third in a series of the *Ready to Respond* workshops (in partnership with Office of Emergency Management) where participants undertook training in disaster recovery. This was primarily targeted at the Hawkesbury Nepean Flood Plain.

We were engaged by the Northern Territory Government to support work underway in Tennant Creek to develop an outcomes framework to measure success for children, young people, families, and the community.

Fams took the lead in a joint project with our peak colleagues The Centre for Volunteering, Churches Housing, Domestic Violence NSW, Homelessness NSW, Local Community Services Association (LCSA), NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS), Shelter NSW, Yfoundations and Youth Action to engage Sydney Policy Lab (University of Sydney) to explore commissioning in New South Wales. The report, *All Together: a new future for commissioning human services in New South Wales*, investigates what commissioning can be, what it currently is and how we might seek radically to improve it for the future.



Our CEO continues to proudly hold the role of Chairperson for NSW Children’s Week Council Incorporated. This year, that extended to Secretary of Children’s Week Council of Australia.

Children’s Week was celebrated 20-26 October 2019. The theme was taken from Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: The right of the child to good quality health care – the best health care possible – to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment and information to help them stay health. Rich countries should help poor countries.

New South Wales kicked off Children’s Week with a Children’s Picnic in the Sydney Botanic Gardens. Other activities made possible with the support of Children’s Week Ambassador, Andrew Johnson, (former) Advocate for Children and Young People and the Office ACYP were NSW Children’s Parliament, Children’s Week Awards, Storytelling competition, and Biggest Recess.

Coronavirus pandemic


This year has seen a time of unprecedented challenges for our sector. The bushfire crisis was closely followed by the Coronavirus pandemic and demanded that Fams reassess the way we work and how we might position ourselves to continue to support the sector. Consequently, Fams changed the mode of workshop delivery to video conferencing. The workshops were well attended via this format and continued to provide an opportunity for services to share their challenges with DEX and reporting. In most of the workshops we were fortunate to have District DCJ staff attend so that they could contribute and take on board any issues that were occurring within the district. Fams delivered 30 workshops during the series and was pleased to receive a financial contribution from the Department to help cover costs associated with the early face-to-face workshops.

In late March, Fams commenced weekly video conferencing sessions to support the TEI sector with information and resources to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. These conversations were held on a Tuesday and a Thursday. Initially the Tuesday conversation was directed at CEOs and the Thursday conversations for workers. The sessions provided an opportunity for Fams to connect and enable services to share information around what was working, what wasn’t and how they were able to deliver services to their clients during these times. 12 weeks (24 conversations) were held from April – June with 150-200 participant joining us each week. Fams was pleased that DCJ senior executives were able to join us every week to provide updates and take questions. These conversations directly contributed to the TEI FAQ webpage so systemic updates were available to the TEI sector generally, not just those able to participate live. The conversations continue but in slightly different format from July.

We were able to learn from the “chats” during the video conferencing sessions that while workers are open to online and phone modes of delivery once a working relationship is established, face-to-face practice is a preferred approach to family work with adults, children and young people. However, details for this preference were limited.

There were some concerns, requiring a more in-depth exploration, that online delivery has an overall negative impact on worker/client engagement, especially when there is no previously established working relationship. Other issues which were reported, which also required further exploration, relate to differences inherent in the mode of delivery between working with people in an online/phone context compared to face-to-face, and how these influence the primary purpose of family work, which is to help families change.

Very few details were provided to explain or explore why these themes are an issue, and how they might impact worker practice, and client change. Therefore, further in-depth exploration of these engagement issues is required. Furthermore, additional data is required of the experiences of workers who have successfully engaged and built productive working relationships with new clients.



Through 2020/2021 Fams will partner with Southern Cross University to undertake research exploring these issues in greater depth, including a more comprehensive gap analysis of the available evidence. At the time of writing this report, ethics approval has been granted to commence focus groups for this research project.

It quickly became apparent to Fams that where children had previously connected with face-to-face systems of support, such as school, sport, and other extra-curricular activities, they were now largely invisible during lockdown. This concern was shared by others and Fams partnered with the Advocate for Children and Young People, Adopt Change and Back Track to launch the campaign *It takes a village*.

The social media public awareness campaign focused on highlighting that everyone has a role to play when it comes to keeping children safe. From Fams' early intervention and prevention perspective, we were highlighting the need to ensure that families experiencing vulnerability were aware of the local safety net systems in their community and encourage them to reach out and get the support they need. It commenced in June and continued into July. The call to action for early intervention and prevention was for people to log on to HSNNet to search/find their local specialist services.

Summary

At Fams we Advocate, Advise and Act

Over the last 12 months the Fams team has continued to ensure that the priority at the heart of all work remains the safety, health and wellbeing of children and families.

This necessarily means a continued commitment to self-evaluation. As a sector, working with people with complex needs, we do not need to (and should not) wait for government to tell us whether we are doing a good job or not. We need to want to know ourselves. We need to want to know this for those we work with.

Fams remains committed to building capacity within the sector to self-evaluate and respond to the changing needs of its service users. We want to support a sector which is flexible, partnership focused and using evidence and research to drive its work.

We will continue to work with you to ensure that the children who need us the most have a voice. "Children's views and opinions are respected. They have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child and the right to be heard" – UNCRC Article 12.

We must defend the service system as it was intended, not as it is or what it has become.

Our key performance measures

<p>How much did we do?</p> <p>172 learning opportunities were held related to outcomes measurement in the context of Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform</p> <p>766 participants attended our Sector Assistance Workshops</p> <p>293 opportunities provided to supplement implementation and using data for continuous improvement</p> <p>Fams was invited to participate on 12 government or sector committees</p> <p>195 Fams distributed publications including newsletters and policy papers</p> <p>101 policy/advocacy activities were undertaken</p>	<p>How well did we do it?</p> <p>95% of stakeholders who participated in Fams workshops report they have increased knowledge in learning objectives</p> <p>93% of participants reported that Fams has supported them to develop increased confidence in measuring client outcomes</p>
<p>Is anyone better off?</p> <p>Much of the work that Fams did in the last quarter of the financial year focussed on connecting service providers with Targeted Earlier Intervention Reform information and resources to assist them identify future contract milestones and adjust to the significant change that was required in implementing, evaluating, reporting and reflecting on their service delivery. Many of this work will be reflected in medium and long-term outcomes, however we are able to say with confidence that this work contributed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an increase in access to knowledge, resources and support in transitioning to TEI • an increase in confidence to develop and implement new evaluating methods and processes • an increase in the number of services setting up and reporting on DEX • an increase in the quality of data entered into DEX • an increase in the number of services completing a Program Logic • a positive shift in attitudes and behaviour when developing outcomes based tools and reflecting on data 	



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