
8 Local Answers

The overall aims of the Local Answers (LA) projects include the following:

- To build effective parenting and relationship skills;
- To build opportunities and skills for economic self-reliance in families and communities;
- To strengthen support to families and communities by delivering better services and addressing unmet needs through the building of partnerships between local services;
- To assist young parents in particular to further their education or access to training and other services where they are seeking to make the transition to employment; and
- To assist members of the community to get involved in community life through local volunteering or mentoring of young people or training to build community leadership and initiative.

The LA evaluation questions will examine:

- To what extent did funded projects address the LA aims?
- To what extent did funded projects achieve the LA Outcomes?
- Of the projects that appeared to be most successful, what were the success factors?
- What were the unintended project outcomes (positive and negative)?
- How were these consequences addressed?
- Was the LA initiative well managed – both by the Department and the project holders?

The emphasis of the National Evaluation of LA will be on the reporting of project level data, supplied to and managed by FaCS, against the Outcomes Framework. In addition, good practice will be identified through the Promising Practice Profile conducted by the National Evaluation (see below). In addition the National Evaluation will continue to disseminate good practice according to the model established in the first SFCS Strategy and provide web-based resources and an e-list. Key findings from this component of the evaluation will be included in the Synthesis Report that will identify general principles and themes arising from the implementation of the whole Strategy. LA will also be part of the Themed Studies. Where appropriate, LA projects will be able to use the Service Users Questionnaire and the various process evaluation instruments.

Table 8.1 Local Answers – Summary of National Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions	Methodology	
	Promising Practice Profile	LA Outcomes Framework Quarterly Reporting
To what extent did funded projects achieve the LA Outcomes?		✓
To what extent did funded projects address the LA aims?		✓
Of the projects that appeared to be most successful, what were the success factors?	✓	✓
What were the unintended project outcomes (positive and negative)?	✓	✓
How were these consequences addressed?		
Was the LA initiative well managed – both by the Department and project holders?		✓

Key findings from this component of the evaluation will be included in the Synthesis Report, which will identify general principles and themes arising from the implementation of the whole Strategy.

The following table (Table 8.2) outlines the contribution of Local Answers to the overall National Evaluation of SCFS.

Table 8.2 Local Answers – Contribution to the Overall SFCS Evaluation

Task	National Evaluation	Contribution to Overall SFCS Evaluation
Service Users Study - Before and After	- designs questionnaires and modules - conducts national analysis	*- where appropriate organises and monitors administration of questionnaires by LA service providers
Themed Studies	* - mutual agreement on division of tasks for each study	
Promising Practice Profile	- develops list of criteria - assists in documenting cases - makes cases available for dissemination	*- works with LAs to help identify cases *- supply documentation for submissions
Synthesis Report	- produces report	

*Tasks marked with an asterisk are voluntary

8.1 Local Answers: Cross Strategy Evaluation

Some of the strands will cross the whole of SFCS to ensure that lessons learned are not confined to those working within particular strands. The core activities of the cross Strategy evaluation are:

- Themed Studies

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- Promising Practice Profiles
 - Progress Report analysis
 - Synthesis Report

Themed Studies

Over the course of the evaluation a number of Themed Studies will be conducted on various aspects of the SFC Strategy, including LA. It is intended that the Themed Studies will be undertaken in partnership with the LA projects (together with CfC and ItG local evaluators) and that the themes will be chosen in negotiation with the SFCS Partnership and the Evaluation Steering Committee. Further details are discussed in Section 9.

Promising Practice Profiles

One of the key objectives of this Evaluation is to identify ‘what works’ in early intervention, in order to be able to disseminate such practices to communities across Australia. National Evaluators will lead this aspect of the evaluation to identify, validate and disseminate promising practice arising from the Strategy.

Promising Practice will be identified through a call for submissions from sites and projects and from Local Evaluators. These will be shortlisted for external validation. After external validation a selection of practices found to be promising against the established criteria are to be incorporated as Promising Practice Profiles (refer to Section 9.2).

Progress Reports Analysis

Information to be analysed in this component will include output data collected by services in the quarterly reports. Because there are larger numbers of LA projects only the larger projects will be selected for Progress Report Analysis. It will include information about the types of services provided, the intensity (how often a service was provided per day/week/month) and duration (over what period of time a service was provided) of service provision, staffing, levels of funding, a profile of participants (children and families). Additional information to be analysed in this component, such as satisfaction outcomes and perceptions of change, could be collected by the project where appropriate. The National Evaluators will provide templates for the information to be provided.

Synthesis Report

The Synthesis Report will combine information from the each of the initiatives of the Strategy and will draw out common themes relating to effective early intervention. This will focus not only on ‘what works’ in terms of outcomes, but also effective implementation issues at the strategic and operational levels.

This report will seek to synthesise all the data collected from various sources including the National Evaluation, local researchers and project data to identify general principles and themes arising from the implementation of the Strategy. These principles and themes will be identified from the data and in discussion with FaCS.

Table 8.3 below outlines the division of tasks between the National Evaluation and LA projects in relation to the cross evaluation strands.

Table 8.3 Cross Strategy Evaluation – Division of Tasks Between National Evaluations and LA projects

Task	LA project	LA project contributions to National Evaluation¹
Themed Studies	* - mutual agreement on division of tasks for each study	
Promising Practice Profile	- develops list of criteria - assists in documenting cases - makes cases available for dissemination	*-identify cases
Synthesis Report	- produces report	
Other tasks (e.g. satisfaction surveys, short-term outcome studies for service users)	- designs questionnaires - designs templates for reporting back	*-administers questionnaires or monitors administration

*Tasks marked with an asterisk are voluntary