

The Evaluators' National Newsletter

December 2007

Welcome to the December 2007 edition of *The Evaluators' National Newsletter*. This newsletter provides information about the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) National Evaluation. This newsletter and the National Evaluation are funded under the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004 - 2009.

NATIONAL EVALUATORS' NEWS

The National Evaluation project is due for completion in June 2008. Until then, our work will continue with vigour and we would like to again express our gratitude to SFCS project staff, service providers, Facilitating Partners and Local Evaluators for your energetic and valuable contribution to this project. This newsletter provides a summary of the main activities undertaken by the National Evaluators over the past six months.

Themed Studies - The National Evaluators are working on three in-depth 'Themed Studies', exploring particular areas relevant to all strategies of the SFCS. These studies will enhance our knowledge of 'what works' in these areas and attempt to answer 'why' and 'how' they work.

Study 1 is about achieving outcomes for Indigenous children and families.

The first themed study, being undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales, focuses on the effectiveness of the SFCS in providing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The main focus of the research will be outcomes for children and families. A secondary focus will be impacts on service coordination. As well as a literature review about the coordination, provision and impact of early childhood services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the study involves case studies, telephone interviews and site visits which will be completed in early 2008.

Study 2 is about engaging clients including those who are hardest to reach.

The SPRC is undertaking a study on how SFCS funded services have engaged (and sought to engage) children and families, particularly those with high indicators of disadvantage who are not accessing services. It will identify the extent to which Local Answers (LA), Invest to Grow (ItG) and Communities for Children (CfC) services have sought to adapt their services to meet the needs of these children and families, and the factors service providers perceive to inhibit and facilitate client engagement. The findings will contribute evidence about the engagement strategies being employed under SFCS, to help identify innovative approaches that can be considered in future interventions. Material for the study has already been collected in 10 CfC sites and National Evaluators will contact several ItG and LA projects in early February 2008 to conduct a short telephone interview.

Study 3 is about engaging fathers.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is undertaking a 'Fathers' study that will explore male participation in SFCS services and projects that target families with children. The aim of the study is to gain insight into men's experiences with different types of services aimed at facilitating child wellbeing and building family resilience. The study will also explore the experiences of men from different groups targeted by SFCS projects, such as young fathers, fathers from a cultural and linguistically diverse background (CALD), refugee fathers and fathers in remote and rural communities. Engaging both service users and providers, the study will be able to assess fathers' participation in SFCS projects and gain a better understanding of what is working well to engage men, where there are barriers to access, fathers' perceptions of services, and what they feel they gain from participation.

Service mapping - The National Evaluators recently asked CfC Facilitating Partners to check the baseline service mapping for their site. This was to highlight any change in the range and type of services that may have taken place between December 2005 and November 2007. Thank you to all who have returned the revised information. A small number of spreadsheets are still outstanding so please return them to strongerfamilies@unsw.edu.au as soon as possible.

Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA) is the core component of the outcome evaluation for Communities for Children sites and is referred to as the 'Family Study' in the SFCS Evaluation Framework. In March 2007, interviewers from our fieldwork agency I-view approached 2197 families to complete the interview for wave 2. Many of the families were visited by the same interviewers from wave 1, contributing to the very high retention rate of families in this wave. Analysis of the data is underway and wave 3 fieldwork is planned for February through April 2008.

The information website for SFIA participants is available at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/sfia>.

Promising Practice Profiles (PPP) - Successful *Promising Practice Profiles* from round one are soon to be published on the CAFCA website at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html>. The call for proposals in round two of the *Promising Practice Profiles* commenced on 15 June and closed 31 October. This round was supported by a highly successful series of workshops and teleconferences throughout September-October and an impressive number of proposals were submitted from CfC, ItG and LA projects in all states. The validation process is underway and successful profiles will be published on the CAFCA website in early 2008. The call for proposals for round three will be made soon via *e-evaluate* and *CAFCA-chat*.

Further information is available on the PPP webpage at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html>.

LOCAL EVALUATORS' NEWS

The **SFCS Local Evaluators Extranet** continues to grow with new contributions from Colleen Turner and the local evaluation team at Broadmeadows CfC; and Sarah Bar-Zeev and team at Katherine CfC. Thank you for continuing the spirit of peer learning and we hope that other projects will also be able to share their knowledge and successes soon.

The extranet page is password protected and restricted for use by Local Evaluators and Project Managers as a specific forum to share evaluation ideas, experiences and documentation with others. If you are involved in a local evaluation we encourage you to register for password access and to participate by providing resources that you think would be useful for the SFCS.

Contributions so far include evaluation tools and reports from CfC sites across four states and territories: Broadmeadows, Vic; Katherine, NT; Lismore and Murwillumbah, NSW; Dubbo, Narromine, Wellington, NSW; Launceston/East Tamar, Tas; and East Gippsland, Vic..

To register or to access the page, go to <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/lee/lee.html>.

EVENTS AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

PPP - Round three teleconferences - the third and final submission round for proposals to the SFCS PPP will be supported by a series of intensive teleconferences. Feedback received from round two teleconferences was very positive and will help to cater specifically to this last round of support. Teleconferences provide an excellent forum for discussion of criteria, evidence, literature and other issues relevant to each stream. Dates will be announced shortly via *e-evaluate* and *CAFCA-chat* and on the PPP web pages.

Please contact ppp@aifs.gov.au or call a CAFCA Research Officer on 1800 352 275 to express your interest in taking part in a teleconference.

RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS

National Evaluation website: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/evaluation/sfcsevaluation.html>

SFCS website: http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-sfcs_evaluation_update.htm

Resources available at the CAFCA website include:

- => The National Evaluation Framework (PDF 611K): <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/evaluation/pubs/framework.pdf>
- => National Evaluation Questions and Answers: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/evaluation/faqs.html>
- => Stronger Families in Australia participant site: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/sfia>
- => Promising Practice Profiles (PPP) web pages: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/ppp.html>
- => Resources for PPP: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/pppresources.html>
- => SFCS Local Evaluators Extranet: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/lee/lee.html>
- => Questionnaires (evaluation tools): <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/evaluation/questionnaires.html>
- => NGO Forum presentations: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/evaluation/networkresources.html>

CONTACT

If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, please email Ren Adams on cafca@aifs.gov.au.



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