

The Evaluators' National Newsletter

June 2006

Welcome to the second edition of The Evaluators' National Newsletter! This series of regular newsletters 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

It's been a busy time for those of us working on the SFCS National Evaluation and we would like to thank all SFCS local evaluators, facilitating partners, project staff, service providers and associated people for your time and dedication in assisting and facilitating this large project – well done! Please find below a summary of the main activities undertaken by the National Evaluators during the last six months.

Service mapping - Thanks to all the Communities for Children (CfC) facilitating partners and local evaluators who submitted information about services for children and families in their community. This information highlights the great diversity amongst services and service networks in CfC sites and will provide an excellent baseline and context for other elements of the evaluation.

Demographic profiles - The National Evaluation team is preparing demographic profiles on Communities for Children sites and is sharing these with facilitating partners. The profiles will be gradually distributed and include customised tables from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including information that is not publicly available. The National Evaluation will use this data as part of the baseline for assessing the impact of Communities for Children initiatives in each area. Facilitating partners and local evaluators may also wish to use the information to help plan and target early intervention and prevention initiatives.

Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA) is the core component of the outcome evaluation for Communities for Children sites. SFIA is referred to as the 'Family Study' in the SFCS Evaluation Framework. Recruitment of participants began in April with a letter sent to families randomly selected from a Centrelink database. An enquiry line, operated by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, was established so that families could ask questions or choose to opt-out of the study. There were many calls and we were especially encouraged to find that a large number of these calls were from families wishing to opt-in to the study! The first wave of data collection for *Stronger Families in Australia* is taking place in June through to July 2006.

Please feel free to view the information website for SFIA participants, available at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/sfia>.

A **Promising Practice Profile** database will be established as part of the National Evaluation and will be located on the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) website. The purpose of the database is to share information within the SFCS network and with the wider community about what works in early childhood and early intervention. The selection criteria for the Promising Practice Profiles have been developed in consultation with stakeholders. These criteria are flexible enough to allow for a range of practices across the three strands within SFCS: Communities for Children, Invest to Grow and Local Answers. More information about the database, including a call for submissions, will be available on the CAFCA website in July 2006.

Snapshot questionnaires – Facilitating partners and local evaluators have helped distribute these questionnaires throughout their service networks. This assistance has been valuable, and has helped us follow appropriate research protocols in each area. If services haven't sent their questionnaires back yet... it's not too late! In response to feedback we have changed the study instrument so that instead of two questionnaires (one for operational and one for strategic level managers) there is a single questionnaire. The new questionnaire has been designed to ensure compatibility with the data collected from the earlier version so it doesn't matter whether services in your area have completed the two questionnaires or the single questionnaire format - all the information will be analysed.

Facilitating partners who distributed the two (strategic and operational) questionnaires may wish to continue to do so to avoid confusion amongst agencies. Follow up or encouragement of agencies from facilitating partners and local evaluators will be invaluable over the next month or so to ensure we get thorough information about how services in each area work – please do your best! If you have any questions about the snapshot questionnaires please contact strongerfamilies@unsw.edu.au or Freecall 1800 332 173.

LOCAL EVALUATORS' NEWS

The e-discussion list, ***E-evaluate***, has been active recently as a result of submissions from a couple of dedicated local evaluators (thanks to them and all that responded!). *E-evaluate* was established to assist SFCS local evaluators share information and discuss issues related to the evaluation of early childhood programs and initiatives. As a result of recent discussion, a secure area on the SFCS Evaluation section of the CAFCA website will be established. The area will enable local evaluators to share evaluation tools, research interests and documents. We will continue to listen to your suggestions and do what we can to assist the sharing of information and exchange of ideas within the SFCS network.

We encourage you to participate by joining the discussion, and if you have resources you would like to share with others please send your contribution to: e-evaluate@aifs.gov.au.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Two series of **Workshops** are planned for members of the SFCS network. The first series is to assist people who are preparing Promising Practice Profile submissions (as discussed above). Later in the year, there will be another series to help SFCS Network members utilise the resources available as part of the SFCS. Dates and locations will be communicated through *e-evaluate* and *CAFCA-chat*. If you would like to be involved, or have any suggestions, please contact us on cafca@aifs.gov.au.

Study of the Communities for Children partnership model - In September and October the National Evaluators will be inviting Communities for Children Committee members to take part in a study of how the partnership model is working in each area. Also, towards the end of the year we will be visiting a selection of sites to talk with key stakeholders about how the model is working. The National Evaluators will be in contact about this closer to the time.

COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN EVENTS

- ⇒ The Communities for Children Non Government Organisation (NGO) Forum will be held in Melbourne on the 20th and 21st of September 2006; and
- ⇒ An Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Conference will be held in Melbourne on the 22nd of September 2006.

Both these events are for Communities for Children facilitating partners and project managers. Further information regarding times and venues will follow soon via *CAFCA-chat*.

RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS

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

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

Resources available at the CAFCA website:

- * Questionnaires: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/evaluation/questionnaires.html>
- * 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>
- * 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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