

# Developing Stepfamily Inclusive Practice: Results from National Training Program Evaluation

Daniela Zimmermann, National Training Manager, Stepfamilies Australia  
Steve Martin, Executive Officer, Stepfamilies Australia

## Introduction

The National Stepfamily Practitioner Training Program was funded by Dept of FaHSCIA in 2009-2010.

14 one-day "Repartnering with Children" workshops were presented to the family relationships sector in all states and territories, with the aims of

- Improving understanding and responsiveness to stepfamilies' needs
- Promoting understanding of Stepfamily Inclusive Practice.

The training program utilised Stepfamilies Australia's model for Stepfamily Inclusive Practice.

## Method

External evaluation by Dr Anita Pryor, Centre for Family Research and Evaluation

Focus: Validation of effectiveness of Stepfamily Practitioner Training, including

- Follow up evaluation with participants
- Evaluation impact of consolidation training on practitioner effectiveness.

The evaluation examined the experiences, effects and effectiveness of workshops,

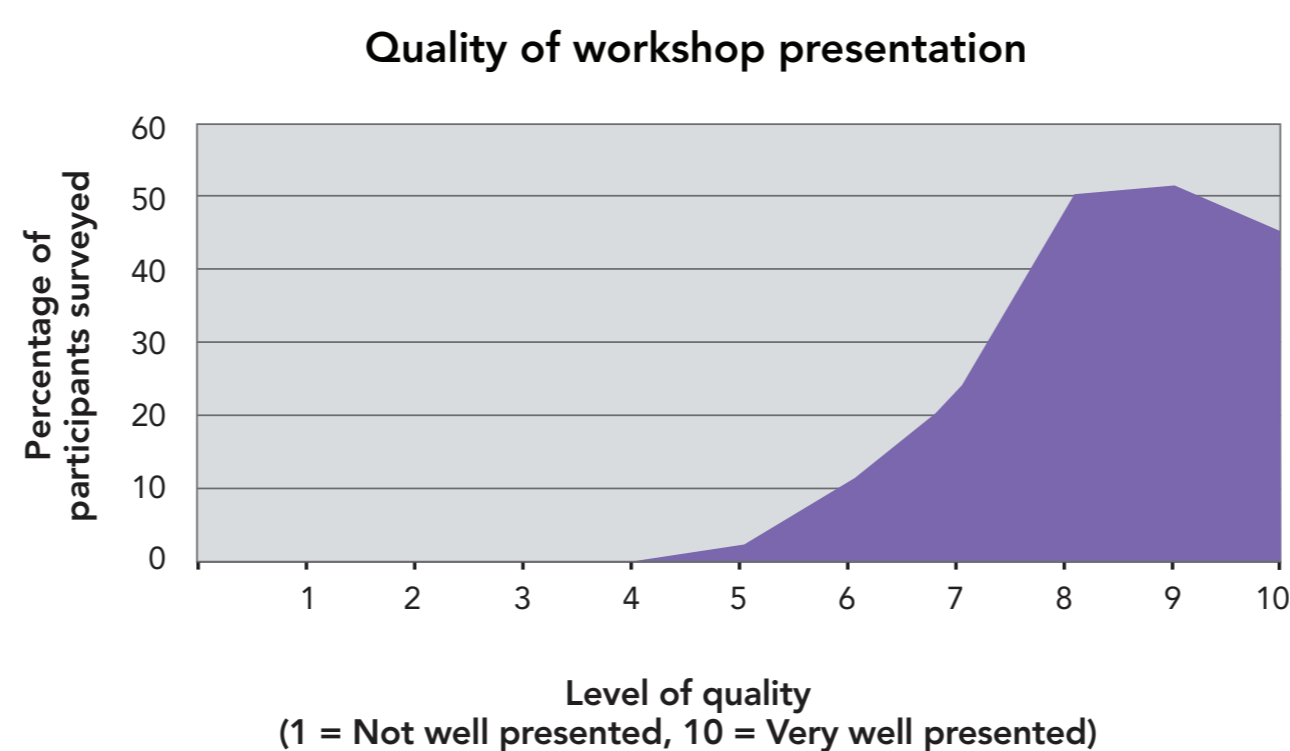
- with a focus on impacts for practitioners across three key areas of practice to work with stepfamilies effectively:
  - Knowledge (level of understanding)
  - Skills (counselling and other skills)
  - Confidence (a sense of competence).
- via both process and outcome evaluations of participants' experience of training and its impact on their practice, involving a range of research methods and data sources.

## Results

### Practitioner knowledge, skills and confidence prior to Workshop



**Process evaluation** – workshops enjoyable, relevant, high quality and offered new information; majority rated quality of delivery as outstanding



### Outcome evaluation

- Strong evidence that workshops produced significant immediate and longer term impacts in participants knowledge, skills and confidence were gained.



New Knowledge – New concepts, new information, new strategies, new awareness

New Skills – Tools and tips for working with stepfamilies, Counselling strategies

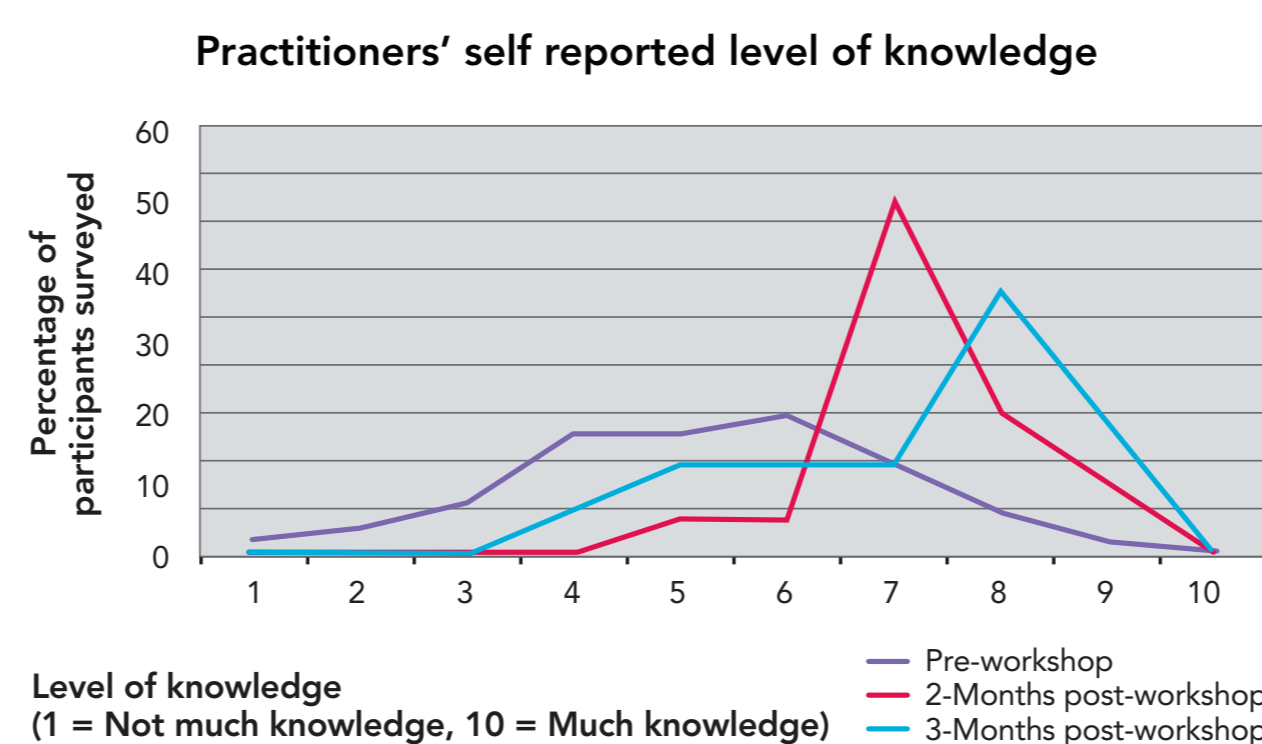
New confidence – Confirmation of existing skills, greater comfort

- Strong support for use of 1:1 supervision as a form of 'consolidation training'

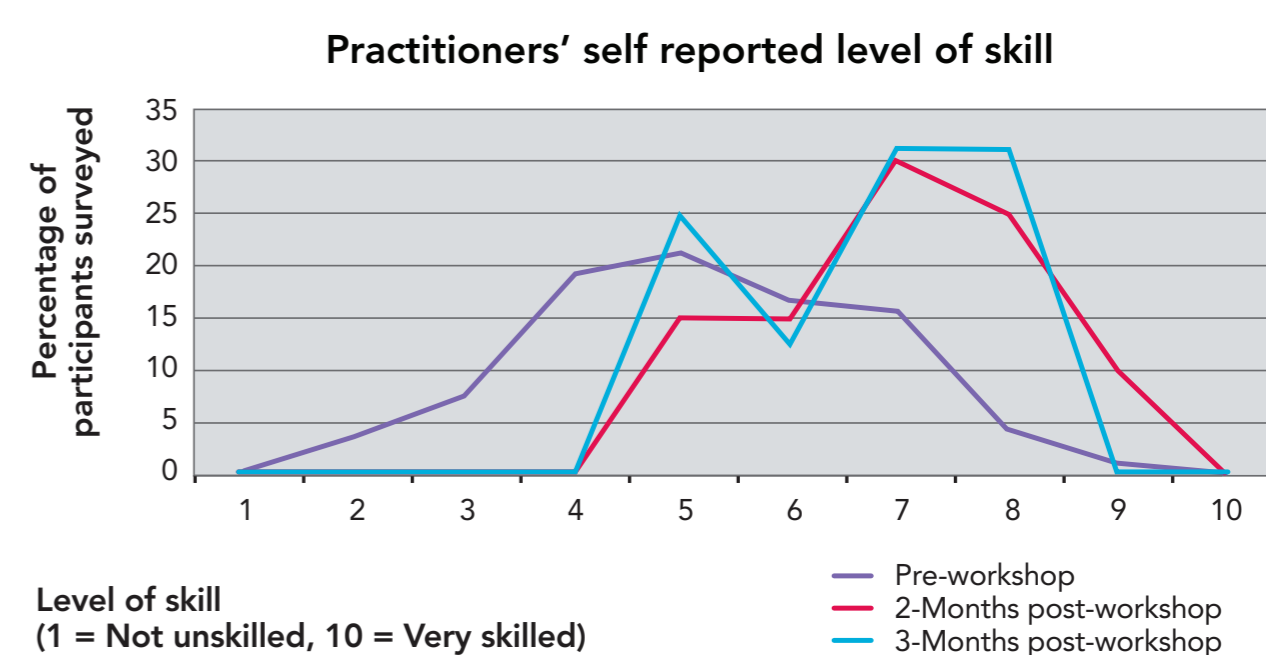
**Wider Impacts** – 98% of participants noted that other practitioners and families will also benefit from their training

**Longer-term impacts** – positive shifts in practitioner levels of knowledge, skills and confidence 2-3 months after workshops –

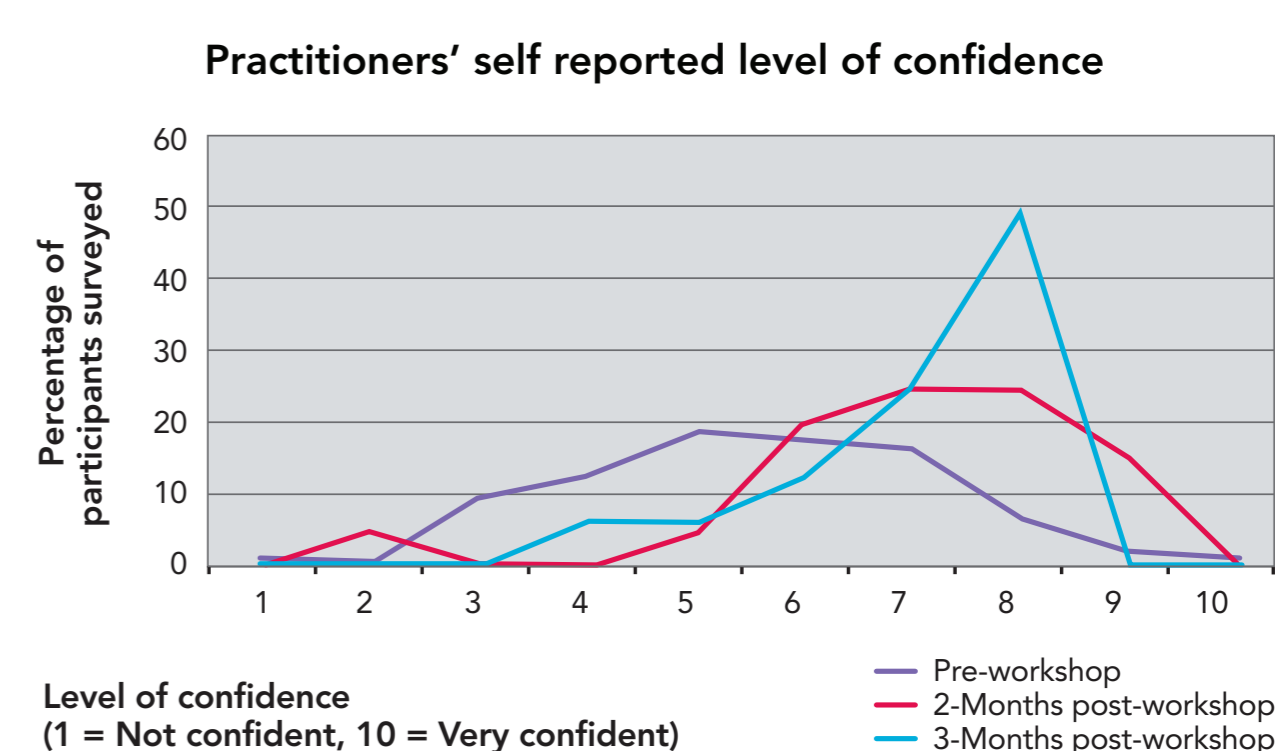
Knowledge – significantly higher, increasing over time



### Skills – significant increases



### Confidence – clear positive impacts



## Discussion

Findings indicate

- Continued demand for stepfamily training
- Little specialist stepfamily practitioner training on offer
- Pre-workshop surveys indicate Practitioners require development in professional knowledge, skills and confidence re working with stepfamilies
- Current one day workshop is effective
- 1:1 Supervision sessions are effective to consolidate workshop training
- Strong interest in continuing connections with other practitioners

## Conclusion & recommendations

- Stepfamilies Australia delivers an effective training workshop, assisting practitioners to work with stepfamilies in the Australian context
- Training delivery and consolidation may be effective by electronic media
- Establish ongoing research agenda using baseline data to investigate 6-month and 1-year outcomes and alternative forms of consolidation training
- Future service delivery could include expansion of training options
- Investigate alternative forms of training and consolidation through electronic media