THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES

FAMILIES FIRST AREA REVIEW ILLAWARRA

FINAL REPORT

FOR THE CABINET OFFICE OF NSW

UNSW Evaluation Consortium

Social Policy Research Centre

Peter Saunders, Michael Bittman, Judy Cashmore, Karen Fisher, Cathy Thomson, kylie valentine, Sonia Hoffmann, Nicole Aggett

Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation

Elizabeth Harris, Lynn Kemp

Centre for General Practice Integration Studies

Gawaine Powell Davies

School of Women's and Children's Health

Richard Henry

Early Childhood Education Program, University of New England

Cynthia àBeckett

Authors

Cathy Thomson, kylie valentine, Karen Fisher and Nicole Aggett

Contacts for Follow up to this Report

Cathy Thomson 02 9385 7800, fax 02 9385 7838, email CM.Thomson@unsw.edu.au

Karen Fisher ph 02 9385 7800, fax 02 9385 7838, email karen.fisher@unsw.edu.au

Acknowledgements

Contents

List of Tables

Abbreviations

ATSI   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CALD   Culturally and linguistically diverse
DADHC   Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care
DET   Department of Education and Training
DoCS   Department of Community Services
FOA   Fields of activity
IAMG   Illawarra Area Managers Group
LGA   Local Government Area
NGO   Non-government organisation
TCO   The Cabinet Office
UNSW   The University of New South Wales

UNSW Consortium Families First Evaluation Activities

This report is one in a series of seven undertaken by the UNSW Evaluation Consortium for The Cabinet Office as part of the evaluation of Families First.

The Cabinet Office's evaluation strategy considers whether Families First has been effective in supporting families and communities in NSW to care for children using an early intervention approach and in developing a coordinated, interagency approach to service planning and delivery (TCO, 2002).

The UNSW reports cover the Outcomes Evaluation Framework and Area Review components of the evaluation strategy. Other activities include local area evaluations, as determined by the Regional Officers Group, and program evaluation of the Families First funded projects.

Families First Report	Key focus
Outcomes Evaluation Framework	Population outcomes measures at State and Families First Area levels using medium to long-term indicators designed to measure the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities in NSW.
Area Review Methodology	A detailed outline of the methodology of the Area Reviews that focus on the statewide development and implementation of Families First.
Area Review South West Sydney	Description and lessons learnt from the experiences of the first metropolitan Area where Families First was implemented.[1]
Area Review Orana Far West	Lessons learnt from the experiences of a rural and remote Area with a high level of need in the middle stages of implementation.
Area Review Illawarra	Lessons learnt from the experiences of a regional Families First Area in moderate need for which the rollout was most recent.
State Level Review	Lessons learnt from the state level strategic policy implementation of Families First.
Area Reviews Final Summary Report	Summary of the lessons learnt from the three Area Reviews and the State Level Review.

Summaries of each of these reports and discussion papers will be available online at www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

---

[1] See Thomson et al (2002) for details on the characteristics of the areas and the rationale regarding selection.

Executive Summary

Background to Families First

Families First was introduced in New South Wales in 1998. It is a State Government strategy that aims to increase the effectiveness of early intervention services to support families and communities to care for their children. The broad aim of Families First is to develop a coordinated network of services for all families and to identify children and families who require further assistance, to link them to appropriate support early, before problems become entrenched. The strategy combines universal service elements and screening to targeted services, with operational emphases on: service integration and networking; community outreach, especially via services such as home visiting by early childhood nurses and volunteers; and community development (TCO, 2002).

Area Reviews

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) Evaluation Consortium was commissioned by The Cabinet Office (TCO) in NSW to conduct the Area Reviews of Families First. The Consortium consists of academics and representatives of a number of research centres and universities. The Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW manages the Consortium. This report is the third in a series and presents the findings of the Area Review in Illawarra as a regional locality in the early stages of Families First rollout. The Area Reviews form part of the overall evaluation strategy for Families First.

A triangulated methodology is employed to explore the process of development and implementation and the experience of key people in Families First including families, service providers from a wide range of government and non-government organisations and management representatives in Families First. The Area Review methodology involved multiple data collection techniques including document reviews, surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Families First in Illawarra

At the time Families First was introduced into Illawarra a number of other statewide government strategies were also being implemented. This necessitated the development of an integrated governance structure to coordinate the planning and implementation of these strategies. Representatives from all the human services agencies are involved in the Human Service Management Group, which directs this process. Located under this group in the governance model is the Area Management Group. They are responsible for the operational implementation of Families First. Senior managers and staff from government deparrtments and representatives from non-government comprise this group.

Three Network convenors from the local Child, Youth and Family Network are also involved in the Area Management Group. The local network groups provide a link to local planning activities across government and non-government agencies, coordinate the planning at the local level and contribute to the development of services proposals.

In the first 12 months, Families First in Illawarra focused on building structures to support the development and implementation of new service models and a

coordinated early intervention and prevention service networks. Local Families First Network groups have been established and considerable efforts have been made to link to and engage with local Aboriginal groups and networks. Over this year the implementation focused on services for families with children aged between 0-5 years, particularly the links between preschools and schools and the needs of children with challenging behaviours. It is envisaged that in the next plan services will expand to incorporate families with children up to eight years.

Additional resources within Illawarra Health Services have been used to begin the development of the systems necessary to expand universal home visiting to all parents of new babies to address Field of Activity 1. Families First funding held by DoCS is earmarked for the development of new and complementary services to provide long-term community supports for families with young children relating to Fields of Activities 2 and 4. Service proposals have been developed for the Volunteer Home Visiting Services, Supported Playgroups, Aboriginal Mobile Supported Playgroups and Aboriginal Early Support Family Worker position. Working parties addressing specific issues including transition to school and children with challenging behaviours have been established. Overall Families First in Illawarra has made significant progress and achieved many of the key objectives outlined in the Area Plan.

Although the response rate to the survey of service managers was low it showed that a high proportion of the clients accessing services were from low income families. Respondents had participated in a number of network activities such as attending interagency meetings, working on joint projects, joint planning and community development that assisted the service network to work effectively to meet the needs of children and families.

Key Findings from the Area Review

The implementation of Families First is complex and multi-layered, and requires changes both within organisations and between organisations. It is affected by the pre-existing service network and the system capacity, by individual organisations and relationships and the geographical characteristics of the Area.

The key findings from the Area Review concern management, planning, implementation, Aboriginal participation and access and system capacity.

Management

The introduction of Families First to Illawarra has seen considerable time invested in establishing and sustaining management groups. While some tensions are evident around this, we nonetheless found that these management structures are, in general, responsive to local needs and particularities and beneficial for the communication of Families First to the service network.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

• Participation in the management of Families First should involve organisations from across the network of services providing support to families. Differences in organisational size, power and capacity to participate in these networks should be acted on and addressed.

- Management of Families First should include the participation of those who will be involved in tendering for Families First funding for services, and strategies to accommodate any conflicts of interest that arise from this involvement put into place.

- Effective and sustained communication strategies are necessary to ensure the participation of key agencies in the planning, coordination and implementation of Families First, and to maintain engagement from agencies that do not receive funds from Families First to deliver services.

Planning

The planning processes for Families First in Illawarra have generated some tensions, most of which are recognised by members of the Area Managers Group and network groups. At the time of the research, options for addressing these tensions were being considered, and implementation processes for the second and third year of Families First should be more inclusive and transparent. Nonetheless, because the first months of a strategy's presence in an Area are so important to its subsequent visibility and recognition, planning around the introduction and first year of Families First has had a considerable impact.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Initial consultation and subsequent planning processes should be transparent and engage all agencies that provide support for children and families. Planning processes should take account of local knowledge and be flexible to ensure broad representation and to achieve the ongoing engagement and re-engagement of agencies.

- The management and planning of Families First funded services should be based on local knowledge and needs, and the management processes around these services communicated within and across all relevant agencies.

- Education strategies to increase knowledge of the research basis and philosophical framework of Families First are necessary to sustain engagement in its implementation. Increasing this knowledge should be a specific implementation priority.

Implementation

Families First in Illawarra has achieved many of the key objectives outlined in the Area Plan for 2003. The management structure that has been established, the strong commitment of key personnel, the recognition of and linking into pre-existing networks and dedicated resources to support further network development have facilitated the implementation process.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Building on and strengthening the pre-existing service networks and the commitment of dedicated resources to engage them is a necessary component of a successful implementation strategy.

- Clearly defining the role of network groups and other interagency groups in the planning and implementation of Families First will increase the level of engagement of a broader range of services.

- The development and resourcing of strategies to promote and facilitate the active involvement of all relevant agencies is required in acknowledgement of their unequal capacity to consistently participate in the implementation and tendering processes.

- To ensure the sustainability of Families First, early intervention and prevention principles and service coordination must become incorporated into the core business and management practices of agencies at all levels by including these principles in job descriptions, performance indicators, orientation packages and training courses.

- Providing information and feedback about the implementation processes and achievements in other Families First Areas is an effective way of increasing the understanding and commitment of agencies to the strategy.

Aboriginal Participation and Access

Aboriginal engagement in planning, management and implementation is acknowledged as crucial to the success of Families First throughout Illawarra. As in other Areas, improved service delivery to Aboriginal communities is identified as a priority for Families First. We found greater success in achieving this engagement in Illawarra than in other Areas, and recommend that the strategies adopted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and individuals be adopted elsewhere. We found that many of the forces acting as facilitators and inhibitors to the overall implementation of Families First have specific relevance to Aboriginal communities. Local management structures and processes foster increasing recognition of Families First throughout organisations and communities, and smaller as well as larger organisations should be supported towards sustained participation in these structures. We also found facilitators and inhibitors particular to Aboriginal communities' experience of Families First.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- The implementation of Families First is enhanced by the continued involvement of key individuals such as local elders in the management of the strategy

- Aboriginal engagement in Families First is achieved when time, energy and resources are invested in building and maintaining relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and organisations.

- Aboriginal elders and other community representatives hold knowledge about the needs of Aboriginal communities and the best ways to address these needs, and this knowledge should be respected and acted on. This may require a different approach to service provision than is usually taken.

System Capacity

Families First in Illawarra operates within a broad system which it cannot directly control. The geography of the Area and available resources affect the implementation of the imitative. We found that factors such as the current and past political context

and expectations acted as barriers to the implementation process. Concerns about the capacity of the service network to meet current demands and services' ability to introduce changes also affected the implementation process.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Clear and repeated communication of the parameters of Families First and what makes it unique is necessary if Families First is to gain broad acceptance.

- Families First infrastructure should act as an advocate for State allocation of funding to meet shortages in all core human service agencies and transport.

Conclusion

Overall the Area Review found that the strategies employed and the structures developed in the first year of the implementation in Illawarra resulted in Families First making considerable progress towards achieving core objectives and addressing priority issues. Families First has been supported by strong regional and local management structures. Considerable time and resources have been invested in forming and maintaining these structures, linking into and supporting existing service networks and engaging Aboriginal communities, although some criticism and confusion around these processes was evident. Addressing these tensions and issues raised concerning the planning process should be a priority for Families First management groups. Future Area Plans should incorporate strategies to increase the level of knowledge of Families First and facilitate active involvement across all agencies and organisations.

1 Background to Families First

Families First was introduced in New South Wales in 1998. It is a government strategy that aims to increase the effectiveness of early intervention services to support families and communities to care for their children. The broad aim of Families First is to develop a coordinated network of services for all families and to identify children and families who require further assistance, to link them to appropriate support early, before problems become entrenched. Details about the strategy and its implementation were described in a document from The Cabinet Office, 2002.

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) Evaluation Consortium was commissioned by The Cabinet Office (TCO) in NSW to conduct the Area Reviews of Families First. The Consortium consists of academics and representatives of a number of research centres and universities. The Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW manages the Consortium.

This report is the third in a series and presents the findings of the Area Review in Illawarra as a regional locality in the early stages of Families First rollout. These are the findings of the final of three Area Reviews undertaken by the UNSW evaluation consortium as part of the overall evaluation strategy for Families First. A detailed account of the background to Families First, the management structure and the Area Review methodology is contained in the first report on the Area Review of South West Sydney (Thomson, Hoffmann and Fisher, 2003). Details of the other Area Reviews and of the Outcomes Evaluation Framework are available through other reports produced by the consortium (see the table at the beginning of this report). A brief description is included in Appendix A, with the full Area Review Methodology in Thomson et al, 2002.

1.1 Description of Families First

Families First is concerned with the welfare of young children and the implications of early childhood experiences for long-term outcomes in health, education and social development in childhood and adult life. The policy framework is based on developing regional linkages between health, community welfare, educational and other services to ensure a coordinated approach to initial intervention, follow-up visits and other forms of support.

Since many future problems stem from influences in the child's environment, Families First is concerned with the factors affecting the biological and social development of children. The strategy combines universal service elements and screening to targeted services, with operational emphases on: service integration and networking; community outreach, especially via services such as home visiting by early childhood nurses and volunteers; and community development.

Families First seeks to improve the health and welfare of children aged from birth to eight years, by supporting parents and carers, so that they may grow to their full potential. There is a special focus on children aged between birth and three years, when development is rapid. Supporting families at different stages will be achieved through the strategic development of a service network that plans and delivers services using a coordinated, interagency approach.

1.2 Area Reviews

This report is the third in a series and presents the findings of the Area Review in Illawarra as a regional locality in the early stages of Families First rollout. Two sectors were involved in the Area Review, Wollongong and Shoalhaven. The Area Reviews form part of the overall evaluation strategy for Families First.

A triangulated methodology was employed to explore the process of development and implementation and the experience of key people in Families First including families, service providers from a wide range of government and non-government organisations and management representatives in Families First. The Area Review methodology involved multiple data collection techniques including document reviews, surveys, interviews and focus groups.

1.3 Outline of the Report

This first section of the report has provided a brief overview of Families First and the methodology used in the Area Review. Section 2 reviews the development and implementation of Families First in Illawarra and the current operation of the service networks. Section 3 outlines the key implementation issues and their implications. The final section of the report summarises the main findings of the Area Review, which are presented as a number of key lessons from the experiences of Illawarra in developing and implementing Families First. The Area Review Methodology and conceptual approach are presented in Appendix A.

2   Families First in Illawarra

Before outlining Illawarra Area Plan and the priority implementation issues, this section begins with an overview of the context of Families First in Illawarra and the regional and local structures supporting the development and implementation of the strategy. This is followed by an examination of the current operation of the service network.

Families First began in Illawarra in September 2002. Illawarra consists of four Local Government Areas (Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven) from Helensburgh South to Ulladulla with three Families First Planning Areas including Wollongong, Shellharbour/Kiama and Shoalhaven/Milton/Ulladulla. The Area Review focused on two sectors, Wollongong and Shoalhaven. For the most part these are de-identified in the Report, and referred to as Sectors.

The implementation process of a broad, systems-based strategy such as Families First and its ensuing success is inevitably affected by the historical and political context, the geographic location and demographic characteristics. The population of Illawarra is 357 247 (Census 2001). The majority of people live in urban areas. Sixteen per cent of the population speak a language other than English at home. Around four per cent of the population is Aboriginal with a large proportion living in the Shoalhaven Just under 20 per cent of families are single parent and the unemployment level is among the highest in the state.

Table 2.1: Selected Demographics of Illawarra

	Illawarra Area	Wollongong	Shoalhaven
Total population [1]	357 247	189 776	87 650
Proportion of children 0-8 years [1]	12.3%	11.9%	11.9%
Number of babies born in 2001 [2]	4 144	2 324	820
- Indigenous	203	83	70
- CALD	572	406	52
Proportion of people whose main language spoken at home is not English [3]	11.9%	17.0%	3.9%
Proportion of people who speak English 'not well' or 'not at all' [3]	17.3%		
Proportion of Indigenous persons in population [4]	2.2%	1.6%	3.9%
Unemployment rate [3]		9.1%	10.9%
% Low income (% of families with children 0-8 with a family income of less than $400 per week) [3]	13.0%	12.5%	15.6%
Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage [5]		98	45

Source: (1) ERP, June 2001, ABS; (2) Registered births, 2001, ABS; (3) 2001 Census of Population and Housing, ABS; (4) Preliminary estimates, June 2001, ABS; (5) SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage for NSW SLAs 2001, ABS. A ranking of 196 indicates the highest SEIFA value; a ranking of 1 indicates the lowest SEIFA value and therefore the highest relative disadvantage in NSW.

2.1 Regional Management Structure of Families First

At present seven State government strategies are operating in Illawarra. These include Families First, the Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy (TCO), Better Futures (Office of Children and Young People), Priority Regional Communities, Drugs and Community Action Strategy, Community Solutions (Premiers Department), and Violence Against Women and Crime Prevention. A Human Services Governance structure is being developed to facilitate a cross-government approach to implementing these strategies. The following information is from the Indicative Model for Human Services Integrated Governance: Illawarra and South East Regions (November 2002) and Illawarra and South East NSW Integrated Human Service Planning and Delivery Terms of Reference (November 2002). The structure consists of the following components:

- Illawarra/South East Regional Coordination Management group

- Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group

- Illawarra Area Management Group

- Child, Youth and Family networks (Wollongong, Shoalhaven/Ulladulla, Shellharbour/Kiama).

Illawarra/South East Regional Coordination Management group

The Regional Coordination Management Group comprises Senior Managers of State Government Agencies responsible for the implementation of the state-wide strategies in Illawarra and South East NSW. It is responsible for the integrated planning and implementation of these strategies.

Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group

The Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group is a sub group of the Regional Coordination Management Group. It is responsible for the integrated planning of human services for families with children aged 0-18 and the implementation of the strategies outlined above across Illawarra and South East NSW. Members of the Group include Senior Managers of State Government Agencies responsible for the implementation of these strategies. These members include the Department of Housing, DoCS, Area Health Services, Department of Education and Training, DADHC, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of the Attorney General, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, NSW Police and Department of Sport and Recreation. A number of regional partners are also involved including, for example, the Aboriginal Medical Service.

The role of the Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group includes determining the broad priorities and approaches for effective implementation of the statewide strategies, ensuring integrated planning and management of these strategies and determining the Area Plans and budget for the implementation of the strategies, including Families First.

The Cabinet Office coordinates the approval of the Area Plans for Families First, Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy and Better Futures. DoCS manages the administration of the funds for all three strategies. The Minister for Families and

Young People gives approval to providers selected through the tender process. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs approves proposals related to the Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy.

The Area Health Services hold some Families First funds to enhance their systems in response to the Families First Framework. The Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group has given approval for the allocation of funds held by Health.

Illawarra Area Management Group

The Illawarra Area Management Group (IAMG) is responsible for the operational implementation of the Families First Area Plans. Its role includes coordinating integrated planning across human service agencies; developing recommendations to the Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group to strengthen the early intervention and prevention service network; monitoring performance of all relevant agencies against the Area Plans; ensuring that outcomes under the statewide strategies are included in internal planning processes; providing support to, and working in partnership with, local Child, Youth and Family Networks.

Membership of the IAMG is comprised of: senior personnel in the State Government Agencies responsible for the implementation of the strategies; Peak Groups; Local governments; the Division of General Practice; the Convenor of each Child and Family Service Network and NGO representatives. The Illawarra-South East Area Managers Group is chaired by the Area Director of DoCS, who is also a member of the Illawarra-South East Human Services Management Group.

Child, Youth and Family Networks

There are three local Child, Youth and Family Networks in Illawarra - Wollongong, Shellharbour/Kiama and Shoalhaven. They were established to link local planning activities across government and non-government agencies; to coordinate the planning for human services at the local level; monitor the performance of local agencies against the Area Plan; and contribute to the development of services proposals.

The local network groups include: representatives from the State Government Agencies; NGOs supporting families with children 0-18 in Illawarra; local Aboriginal Agencies and Networks; and Local Councils. Engagement of Aboriginal representatives and the development of strategies to ensure access to services for Aboriginal families were identified as a priority for the local network groups (see Section 3.4).

Each network has a convenor who liaises with the Families First Project Leaders about the network and IAMG business. The convenor also liaises with the project managers of the other strategies. Network convenors participate in the IAMG and report to their Network on IAMG decisions and recommendations. Network Convenors receive and distribute minutes of the IAMG. Network minutes remain at network level.

2.2 Illawarra Area Plan

The Illawarra Area Plan 2003-2004 covers a 12-month period and outlines the key activities developed to implement Families First in the Illawarra Area. It will be

reviewed in 2004. In 2004/5, a three-year Plan will be developed that incorporates the State-wide Performance Indicators.

The members of the Human Services Mangers Group and a wide range of key stakeholders contributed to the development of the Area Plan. The plan was based on consultations with services and the IAMG at planning days in February 2003.

The identified priorities for Illawarra include:

- Building on the existing service network;

- Establishing Universal Home Visiting;

- Determine the definition of "universal" over the broad service system;

- Equity of access for families to support services over time;

- A minimum of 25 per cent of resources will be dedicated to Aboriginal specific services;

- Developing services for families with children between 0-5 years, focusing on the links between preschools and schools and the needs of children with challenging behaviours;

- Developing specific support services developed for the following target groups: first time parents; sole parents; teenage parents; public housing estates; Aboriginal communities;

- Finding a balance between consolidation of existing funded services, reconfiguration of existing services and development of new services; and

- Creation of outreach models for service delivery, including: developing effective communication networks, transport services and creative use of technology.

Priority outcomes for Illawarra are:

- Early identification of and preventative approach to vulnerable children;

- All children to have a good start at school - transition to school;

- Building resilience in all children;

- A clear focus by all agencies on the key transition points in children's lives;

- Children as valued members of the community.

In the first 12 months, Families First in Illawarra focused on building structures to support the development and implementation of new service models and a coordinated early intervention and prevention service networks. Local Families First Network groups have been established and considerable efforts have been made to link to and engage with local Aboriginal groups and networks. Over this year the implementation focused on services for families with children between 0-5 years, particularly the links between preschools and schools and the needs of children with challenging behaviours. It is envisaged that in the next plan services will expand to incorporate families with children up to 8 years.

Additional resources within Illawarra Health Services have been used to begin the development of the systems necessary to expand universal home visiting to all parents

of new babies to address Field of Activity 1. Families First funding held by DoCS is earmarked for the development of new and complementary services to provide long-term community supports for families with young children relating to Fields of Activities 2 and 4. Service proposals have been developed for the Volunteer Home Visiting Services, Supported Playgroups, Aboriginal Mobile Supported Playgroups and Aboriginal Early Support Family Worker position. Working parties addressing specific issues including transition to school and children with challenging behaviours have been established. Overall Families First in Illawarra has made significant progress and achieved many of the key objectives outlined in the Area Plan.

2.3   Current Operation of the Service Network

Following is an overview of the current operation of the service networks in Wollongong and the Shoalhaven using information collected in the survey of service managers. It describes the network in terms of the number and types of clients accessing services, the number of referrals made and received by agencies, and services' involvement in network activities.

Services and Clients

In total 88 services were surveyed in Nowra and Wollongong including children's services, family support, community health, child protection, housing and accommodation, hospitals and associated health, both from government and non-government agencies. Of these 51 agencies were asked to collect information on the number of referrals for families with children 0-8 over the week period. The overall response rate for the survey was 43 per cent as of November 2003.

The agencies participating in the survey operated between 5 and 7 days per week. An obvious gap in the data is from services operating part-time. The median number of days of operation was 5 days per week. During the week beginning Monday 20 October 2003, service providers had contact, including phone or face-to-face, with 413 ongoing clients and 195 new clients. Table 2.2 shows the types of clients who accessed services over this period. It can be seen that 23 per cent of clients accessing services were from low income families, reflecting the demographic characteristics of the Area, and 7.2 per cent were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families compared with 2.2 per cent of the population in Illawarra.

Service managers were asked if the data collection week represented a typical week. The majority (54 per cent) indicated that it was a typical week. A number of respondents reported that this week as slower than usual, with more clients failing to attend appointments. Some managers attended seminars and some service staff were acting in management positions, which took time away from direct service provision.

Table 2.2: Number of New Clients in Family Service Agencies in One Week by Selected Characteristics

Selected groups	Number (n=195)	Per cent*
Low income	44	22.6
Culturally diverse backgrounds	35	17.9
Sole parent	32	16.4
A child with a disability (medical, intellectual, physical)	31	15.9
Parents affected by drug and alcohol issues	24	12.3
Social isolation	22	11.3
Parents affected by a mental health issue	21	10.8
Families affected by domestic violence	16	8.2
Parents aged less than 20 years old	16	8.2
Parents with a disability (medical, intellectual, physical)	15	7.7
Aboriginal and torres strait islander	14	7.2
Other family members are primary caregivers	8	4.1
Mothers with post natal depression	7	3.6
Geographical isolation	2	1.0

Note: * Respondent agencies (n=14) could choose more than one option for each new client, so totals do not equal 100 per cent

As outlined earlier, service coordinators and managers collected data on the number of referrals made and received and informal consultation about clients over the week beginning Monday 20 October 2003. A density matrix was developed from this data to visually depict the connections and network activities between agencies. Only 11 services out of 31 (35 per cent) in Sector 1 and 3 services out of 20 services (15 per cent) in Sector 2 responded to this question. A separate table has been developed for each sector representing their distinct networks (Table 2.3 and Table 2.4). This is a low response rate and reflects the considerable time pressure agencies are under and the difficulties associated with responding to multiple requests for data from evaluators, particularly smaller organisations.

Table 2.3: Referral and Informal Consultation Activity in Sector 1, Week Beginning 20 October 2003

Main service provided by respondent agency	N=11	Referrals made and received and informal consultation														
		Self referrals	Hospitals and associated health	Education	Child protection	Community health	Counselling	Family support	Child care and preschools	Other service within sector	Local information/ resources	Mental health	Housing and accommodation	Centrelink	Crisis services	Drug and alcohol
Hospitals and associated health	6	■	■	■	■	■	▓	▓	░	░	░	░				
Family support	3	▓	░	░				░			░	░	░	░	░	░
Volunteer home visiting	1		░			░										
Local Councils	1				■											

Note: Week beginning Monday 20 October 2003

Table key

	Number of reported referrals or consultation
(white)	1-5 referrals or informal consultations
(light grey)	6-10 referrals or informal consultations
(dark grey)	11 or more referrals or informal consultations

Table 2.4: Referral and Informal Consultation Activity in Sector 2, Week Beginning 20 October 2003

Main service provided by respondent agency	N=3	Referrals made and received and informal consultation				
		Child care and preschools	Hospitals and associated health	Family support	Crisis services	Counselling
Hospitals and associated health	1		███	███		▒▒
Child care and preschools	1	██				
Counselling	1				███	▒▒

Note: Week beginning Monday 20 October 2003

Table key

	Number of reported referrals or consultation
▒▒	1-5 referrals or informal consultations
███	6-10 referrals or informal consultations
██	11 or more referrals or informal consultations

To assess the density of the referral activity and links, the service data in each sector was collapsed according to the main service that their agency or team provided (for detailed explanation see Appendix A). For the purposes of analysis referrals and informal consultation activity was combined in the matrix, as they represent network linkages in each sector.

In Sector 1 (Table 2.3) there was a strong connection between hospital and associated health services and a range of agencies, including other health services, education services, child protection, family support services, counselling services and children's services. The family support services are also linked to a broad range of services including health services, education, accommodation and crisis services. It is interesting to note that in this sector there are a high number of self-referrals to hospitals and associated services and family support services. The volunteer home visiting service is linked to hospital and community health services.

Due to a low response rate in Sector 2 (Table 2.4), it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this data except to point out that hospital and associated health services are again strongly connected with other health services and family support, while the counselling service is linked to the crisis services. The data could also be seen to indicate places where linkages are lacking, however the low response rate makes it impossible to draw conclusions. Further application of this methodology at a later stage could be used to indicate changes in referral and informal consultation activity in the area over time. The number of referrals made and received and informal consultation for each of the responding services are shown in Table 2.5. In Sector 1, hospital and associated health services received and made a significant number of referrals over the data collection week. These services also consulted other agencies informally with about their clients over 100 times.

Table 2.5: Number of Referrals for New Clients Received and Made and Informal Consultation

Type of service	No.	Sector 1 (n=11) Referrals received	made	Informal consultation	Total	No.	Sector 2 (n=3) Referrals received	made	Informal consultation	Total
Hospitals, other health services	6	113	67	114	294	1	9	0	8	17
Family support	3	26	0	10	36	0	0	0	0	0
Volunteer home visiting	1	1	0	7	8	0	0	0	0	0
Children's services and preschool	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	11	5	21
Counselling	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	11	0	11
Local Councils	1	0	15	10	25	0	0	0	0	0

Service managers were asked about their involvement in different types of network activities as a way of assessing the current operation of the service network. Table 2.6 shows that services had been involved in a number of activities including interagency meetings, joint assessments, joint projects and some community development activities. Over 80 per cent of services had been involved in attending between 1-10 interagency meetings. Community participation activities were high among these services and over half had been involved in joint projects in the last 3 months. Approximately 60 per cent had taken part in joint planning and the development of joint information directories or brochures in the last 12 months.

Table 2.6: Service Managers' Participation in Network Activities, per cent

Network activities in the last 3 Months (n=38)	0	1-10	11-20	>21
Attended interagency meeting	5.3	84.2	7.9	2.6
Community development activities	34.2	55.3	7.9	2.6
Joint projects	42.1	52.7	2.6	2.6
Joint assessment/intake	71.1	20.9	0	0
Network activities in the last 12 Months				
Joint planning	26.3	63.2	10.5	0
Joint information directories/brochures	39.5	57.9	2.6	0
Joint training in child and families issues	55.3	42.1	2.6	0
Joint protocols for information sharing	63.2	34.2	2.6	0
Local government social planning	65.8	34.2	0	0

To further investigate the impact of increasing interaction between agencies service managers were asked to rate the effectiveness of their network activities. Overall the majority of service managers indicated that network activities such as attending interagency meetings, working on joint projects, joint planning and community development activities were effective.

Table 2.7: Service Managers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Network Activities, per cent

Network activities (n=38)	Not Effective	Neither	Effective	N/A
Attended interagency meeting	8.8	2.9	82.3	5.9
Joint planning	3.2	9.7	71.0	16.1
Joint projects	3.2	3.2	67.7	25.8
Community development activities	0	8.8	67.6	23.5
Joint information directories/brochures	3.1	6.3	56.2	34.4
Attending joint training in child and families issues	0	6.3	53.1	40.6
Joint protocols for information sharing	0	10.3	48.2	41.4
Joint assessment/intake	0	3.1	40.6	56.3
Local government social planning	0	16.7	36.7	46.7

2.4   Summary

At the time Families First was introduced into Illawarra a number of other statewide government strategies were also being implemented. This necessitated the development of an integrated governance structure to coordinate the planning and implementation of these strategies. Representatives from all the human services agencies are involved in the Human Service Management Group, which directs this process. Located under this group in the governance model is the IAMG. This group is responsible for the operational implementation of Families First. Senior managers and staff from government agencies and representatives from non-government comprise this group.

Three Network convenors from the local Child, Youth and Family Network are also involved in the IAMG. The local network groups provide a link to local planning activities across government and non-government agencies, coordinate the planning at the local level and contribute to the development of services proposals. This governance structure is designed with a broad view to reshaping the service system. It aims to facilitate participation and communication at different levels within agencies and to ensure an integrated and coordinated approach to the planning and allocation of funds for the development and establishment of new and complementary services.

Although the response rate to the survey of service managers was low, it showed that a high proportion of the clients accessing services were from low income families. Respondents had participated in a number of network activities such as attending interagency meetings, working on joint projects, joint planning and community development that assisted the service network to work effectively to meet the needs of children and families.

3 Key Findings

This section outlines the key research findings from the Review, and is based on analysis of the material gathered from participants and other relevant data. This analysis has been organised into key findings that are critical to the implementation of Families First in Illawarra.

Although there is necessarily some overlap between them, these key findings fall into the following categories: management, planning, implementation, Aboriginal participation and access, system capacity.

The first subsection, *Management,* examines the mechanisms that have affected the structures and processes of Families First management and coordination in its first year of implementation in Illawarra. The second, *Planning*, analyses the introduction of Families First to Illawarra, and the initial and ongoing plans for services and network development that have been made. The *Implementation* of these plans is covered in the third subsection. We argue that *Aboriginal Participation and Access*, while affected by and important to management, planning and implementation, cannot be considered properly in Illawarra within these generic categories.

Finally, while much of Illawarra's *System Capacity* is outside the direct purview of Families First, we found that the introduction of any new strategy will be affected by it. Introduction of Families First into future Areas should work within the service landscape and existing relationships and networks, and take into account factors such as geography, population density and growth, transport and access to metropolitan services.

3.1 Management

The key findings concerned with program management relate to structures, processes, and communication strategies.

Structures

At a regional level, the Human Services Managers Group and IAMG guide the implementation of Families First and other strategies. Some members of the Area Managers Group are also represented on local network groups. This facilitates communication of local concerns to regional management, and regional directions to the local groups. In Wollongong, two working parties have been set up from these Families First management groups to engage departments, NGOs and local government. These groups have the potential to engage historically disconnected sectors in working on transition to school, and working with children with challenging behaviours, and to address universal concerns in locally responsive ways.

In Shoalhaven especially, engagement from Aboriginal communities in Families First planning and management is strong, and critical to the success of Families First implementation. This engagement would not have come about without specific, sustained effort from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal key personnel. While Aboriginal community-based working groups have been set up in both sectors, one of these was set up prior to the implementation of Families First with an aim to foster engagement. Both working groups have access to the institutional resources of

government departments, and one of these groups was especially supported towards participation in the management of Families First by a departmental middle manager:

> I set up the working group to support Families First being rolled out here. From that working group I've been feeding the working group into Families First and we've actually got some of the representatives from the working group, both representing the working group and their organisations, that are now on the network group. (Key Personnel)

While Aboriginal engagement is crucial to the implementation of the Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy, it is clear that Families First key personnel have also purposively sought this engagement. We found that this engagement is critical to the communication and implementation of Families First, and that Families First has already achieved considerable success in improving coordination and communication between services.

However, this level of participation requires time and some smaller organisations do not have the resources to easily accommodate participation even in the local network groups. Similar levels of engagement could also be sought from other sectors. Smaller non-government organisations (NGOs), for example, would benefit if supported by key agencies towards their involvement in Families First management. We return to this point in Section 3.3.

Similarly, the importance given to NGO involvement in Families First management by Families First key personnel is not always clear. Some members of network groups have expressed concerns that strong representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities has not been pursued. Some NGO members have expressed concern that NGO representation has not been treated as a priority to the same extent as departmental participation, a perception that is backed up by some departmental representatives. Participation in both the planning and management of Families First have not been closed processes, and in fact some tensions are evident in the openness of the network groups to new and sporadic participation, which we discuss in more detail in Section 3.2. However, criteria for involvement in the network groups, and the range of participants necessary for successful implementation, should be established early and communicated clearly.

Processes

Participants reported a clear and growing awareness of the role of the Area Managers Group and the network groups in coordinating Families First. One Area Managers Group member reported that this awareness came about through their involvement:

> Now I am, it didn't fall into place immediately for me and it took me some time to get my head around the bigger picture of it but I feel that I've got that now, I've got the idea of what the aim of bringing those key people together is and where [name] is taking us in terms of the planning process and the decision making process too. (Middle Manager)

However, some participants reported that the role of the groups in managing Families First is not always clear and that 'we're sort of getting carried along with the wave of

this is what's happening' (Middle Manager). Key decisions around the funding of complementary services were not always understood to be the responsibility of the management groups, and some scepticism was expressed about the transparency of the planning and consultation processes (we return to this point in Section 3.2). The complexities of managing multiple strategies and differing interests were also widely acknowledged. However, it is evident to us that Families First is widely equated with a few key personnel. We also found that participation in network and management groups does not always translate to a clear understanding of those groups' roles.

The management processes of Families First are also affected by the range of interests represented in them. Departmental representatives noted that they have known about Families First for some time as a strategy with which their department is involved. Smaller organisations, particularly those with precarious funding, have a different relationship to Families First. Participants reported that some organisations initially became involved in network groups because they perceived an advantage in winning Families First funding. Sporadic participation, reported as a force that slows the pace of network meetings and decisions, was also attributed to this perception.

> We had this discussion at the last Families First meeting, why there was such a change of people on the reference group and I suggested that when the information about it first came out no-one was really clear on what Families First was all about and all everybody knew was that there was all this money and everybody jumped on board. And when they realised that hang on a minute it's not going to be that easy to access this money, we're going to have to tender like everybody else, people have been pulling out and they know that they can apply when the tender comes out and not have any involvement and still have an equal chance of getting it. (Fieldworker)

Another participant, a middle manager, was explicit in identifying the fit between Families First and their own organisation. While their participation in management was not contingent on the funding opportunities presented by Families First, it was nevertheless important:

> I became involved right at the outset […] I had known about the onset of Families First for a long time as everybody had and looking forward to it, and also knowing that the services that we'd set were services that we felt were suitable for that funding. So we had a very clear desire to be involved in it from the beginning. (Middle Manager)

The financial interests of some network group and IAMG members need not act as an inhibitor to their participation in all aspects of Families First management except competitive tendering. However, these interests may act as a force in the involvement or otherwise of some NGOs, and in the decision processes around service development. It is therefore important that Families First lead agencies acknowledge that the reasons for involvement in Families First will not be the same for everyone, and that these differences in interests need to be taken into account in strategies to sustain that involvement.

Communication

Effective communication strategies to disseminate accurate information about what Families First is and is not are needed to address many of the issues raised above. Awareness of Families First in organisations that support families and children is already quite high, although its novelty and innovation is not universally recognised. Some of the theoretical underpinnings of Families First, such as research into brain development, is fairly well known in Illawarra. However, the identification of Families First as predominantly a source of funding for services is also apparent, as it is in other Areas. The fact that Families First combines a focus on early intervention and prevention with a service coordination approach was recognised by some participants, but others identified Families First with a particular complementary service, or a particular agency.

The relatively late introduction of Families First into Illawarra has facilitated knowledge of the strategy and the complementary services associated with it. At the time research was being conducted, a number of services were planned but had not yet been implemented, and knowledge of these services also raised the profile of Families First. However, not all of this information was accurate, and communication of the details of these services had not been universally achieved. For example, fieldworkers who will be directly responsible for delivering one particular service knew of that service's planned introduction but had not been informed about its details or the experience of other Areas.

We found other instances of fieldworkers and other participants expressing similar concerns that could be eased by more effective communication. A strategy to address this was the presentation of other Area experiences of Families First to management groups. However, it is important that responsibility for the communication of Families First from these groups out to the service network is held by all members of those groups, and understood to be so. To be effective, communication of Families First has to be accurate, clearly articulate the advantages of involvement, and undertaken by a broad range of people. As we found in other Areas, identification of Families First with a particular agency or individual is likely if the multi-agency approach to Families First is not fully understood. The presence of Families First champions or advocates, who are not Families First workers, facilitates reception of this communication.

It is also important that Families First is communicated through key agencies as a mechanism to ensure that Families First becomes core business. We found a great deal of enthusiasm and support for Families First throughout Illawarra; however, scepticism and disengagement are also evident in some locations. Key personnel within agencies should take responsibility for initiating the processes necessary to change work practices and planning in line with Families First principles, and to ensure that information about Families First is disseminated and received effectively. The multi-agency approach of Families First requires that responsibility for communication and change management is shared across agencies.

3.2   Planning

Planning for Families First services and network development has primarily been carried out through an initial planing day and then through the management groups. While outcomes from these planning processes are continually updated and revised,

the process itself is critically important to Families First implementation and has been subject to some criticism.

Initial Planning

Families First was rolled out later in Illawarra than many other areas, and consequently anticipation of the strategy was high and not always realistic. The precarious existence of many services in the Area, and very high community needs, may have led to unrealistic expectations around what Families First can do. It is also possible that the details of Families First were poorly communicated prior to its introduction. While it may be difficult to avoid the first, and difficult to prevent the second, this build-up may have acted as an inhibitor to its implementation and underlines the need for effective, sustained communication of Families First across all agencies.

While many participants reported satisfaction at the consultation process, and the Area Plan and management that resulted from them, some criticism was expressed by several others. We found a perception that initial planning processes were presented as more transparent than they actually were, in terms of both participation and outcomes. One participant reported that

> We were led to believe it was a consultative process and the services would be involved in shaping the services and deciding what services would be rolled out in this area, although we were told that it was only in two fields of activity. But it seems over all that time that it was very clear that it was going to be supported playgroups, volunteer home visiting […] programs that are being rolled out across the state [as] part of the Families First format. (Middle Manager)

Another said that network meetings were characterised by planning and discussion of some services but not others:

> The volunteer home visiting […] there's no discussion, this is what's happening. And then I think the supported playgroup, I don't know how that came about. But it was a good idea, you know its something that's needed. But the more we talk about it I'm not sure if it is needed, because every time there's "how about we have it here" and they discuss, "oh no, there's already one that comes in here", so I don't know in that respect. Yeah, so there is a lot of direction and then there's the discussion. And sometimes I sit there and think have I missed a meeting. (Middle Manager)

While some participants felt that the consultation process had been unduly protracted when at least some of the outcomes were known before it began, others felt that it had not engaged enough people. Smaller organisations are less likely to be able to accommodate extensive participation in standard consultation processes, and consequently their local knowledge is not fed into the planning process. The heterogeneity of the service landscape requires flexibility in approaches to engaging different organisations. While in some instances this flexibility is evident, participation was not always achieved. Some participants reported that the planning

day was not advertised widely enough, and that those involved in it did not reflect the Area's needs well.

> I'm glad I became involved because at the planning day when we were looking at how to distribute the funds and what projects we should be focussing on in this area not once was there a mention of CALD background people at all, not once. (Fieldworker)

This uneven participation, exemplified by the under-representation of some groups at the planning day and the absence of some who did attend during critical times when decisions were being made, is reflected in the Area Plan, according to some participants.

> They thought this is going to be my opportunity to access this funding and so they were all vouching for their own services so the planning day I think primarily has come out of that and all the outcomes from that, all the projects that have been decided have come out of that […] People who were more [financially] neutral like the council were sometimes there sometimes not […] and I don't think they really have a true representation of the whole community on those planning days or even still on the reference group. (Fieldworker)

It was also noted that the voice of consumers was absent from the planning processes. While the consultation process was regarded as successful, the experience of several agencies indicates that a flexible approach to planning, and effective communication of expectations and parameters is needed.

Ongoing processes

Most participants who are members of the Area Managers Group and network groups commented on the complexity of deciding what services will be funded, and when and where they will begin. They were also very aware of the need to promote Families First as being more than the services it funds. This awareness is likely to facilitate the effective implementation of Families First if management structures retain the representation of a broad range of organisations and services.

Participants reported that the network groups and the Area Managers Group have improved their knowledge and understanding of other services, and identify most of the outcomes of Families First so far to increased coordination of the service network.

> What I do feel is that there is a great deal of value in Illawarra in the way that Families First have been the catalysts for linking up the human services architecture. So having the management group and linking the networks group into that, and then looking upwards to the human services managers, is providing a solid consultation on reporting structure. To me, that has been one of the most valuable things that has happened in these first 12 months. (Middle Manager)

Support for the service network is critical to the implementation of Families First, and is particularly critical in Illawarra, where a number of strategies that rely on a cross-agency approach are being implemented. We found, however, that despite this

investment of time and resources into the network, Families First was not universally known as a strategy that introduces a cross-agency approach and a focus on early intervention and prevention. Families First is sometimes only known as a source of funding, even by members of network groups.

Similarly, uneven knowledge about decisions supporting the Area Plan and service priorities caused some frustration. Processes around approving and ratifying service proposals were not always known by members of the network groups, and nor was the ongoing, continually negotiated nature of service funding (we return to this point in Section 3.3). Acknowledging that ongoing attempts at communicating these processes are being made, participants nevertheless reported some obstacles to universal comprehension.

> I think it is just, there seems to be a little bit of a fear by the people who were first organizing it, to say, "look first year's agenda is already set, this is what it is about first year. There will be some slippage money there will be some money to play with." And I think if you are really up front with that to start up with then people wouldn't be thinking, "oh we will try to get money for this". (Fieldworker)

Whether the time taken for planning is itself the issue, or understanding of why planning takes the time it does, there is a risk that frustration will lead to disengagement. We found some departmental staff who should have been engaged in Families First were not, and some workers from NGOs identified Families First as a strategy in which they were not invited to be involved. One middle manager argued that participation in Families First management requires a commitment of time that itself excludes smaller organisations: 'you've got to be at that table and a lot of agencies can't do that'.

Sustaining Engagement

As we noted in Section 3.1, broad, diverse management strengthens Families First. This includes representation from organisations with a financial interest in Families First funding. In order to sustain the engagement of diverse groups through the planning process, strategies are necessary to ensure that these groups maintain an interest in Families First as something more than a funding source. A number of participants reported knowledge of Families First prior to its implementation in Illawarra. Some larger organisations have changed the focus of their service delivery because of the research and evidence around early brain development that forms Families First's theoretical framework. However, this is not the case in all locations, and some organisations do not see any advantage to their service or clients accruing from participation in Families First.

Strategies to sustain engagement that address the principles of necessity and opportunity should be put in place in all Areas, to ensure that continuity and consistency in implementation can be managed. Sporadic attendance and inconsistent participation in network group meetings was reported across both sectors as disruptive to planning and implementation, and was attributed to organisations becoming involved only because of perceived access to funding. However, these NGOs are not solely responsible for difficulties in maintaining continuity, as some staff from

government departments reported that Families First is of limited interest to them. The centrality of a coordinated service network to Families First requires that Families First is not seen only as individual services, or as the responsibility only of government departments. We found that workers who had attended training or information days about the research and logic behind Families First had a clearer understanding of what Families First is and is not than those who had heard about Families First primarily as planned services.

Communication of Families First is also difficult in the context of the range of other strategies being implemented in Illawarra. The decision of project managers to convene a single network group to manage all these strategies, rather than attempting to run separate management groups for all of them, assists a holistic approach to service planning. This decision also means the details of each strategy do not have to be known by each network group member, which would be an unreasonable requirement. However, there is a tension between presenting Families First as one of a suite of strategies that meets all service needs, and the need for Families First to be known and supported across the service network. The difficulties presented to project managers and other stakeholders by the multiplicity of strategies being implemented in Illawarra are discussed in the next Section.

3.3   Implementation

> Well for children and families, there really hasn't been anything implemented so far […] also locally we haven't even advertised for interest in those playgroups. But I think the benefit will be that we work better together. It may be opening up the way we think about it more and that will have good outcomes. (Middle Manager)

Families First in Illawarra is only in the early stages of the implementation process. It has been operational since September 2002. Over the last year, it has focused on establishing the management structures at the regional and local levels, planning around the priority areas, linking into local service networks and developing service proposals.

Linking into the Service Network

Families First in Illawarra is dedicating resources to link into and further develop the local service networks. Recognition of pre-existing service networks and the commitment of resources to engage them is a necessary component of a successful implementation strategy. To facilitate a service network approach, the management structure guiding the planning and implementation has a number of levels. At the local level, Child Youth and Family networks have been established in Wollongong, Shellharbour/Kiama and Shoalhaven/Ulladulla. The groups include local representatives from key government and non-government agencies. Network conveners act as a link between the various levels. However, we found that the degree to which Families First has been able to link into the service network depends on the level of effective functioning of the pre-existing networks, reflected in a comment from a middle manager:

> [In Sector 1] the parent interagencies […] had only just started in the year before Families First came […] it was taking a while [to form] and there hadn't really been any gelling […] so there weren't

> just natural networks […] So it obviously needed some work and
> people have come and gone and have gotten really disaffected by it,
> there's nothing in it for me, I'm not wasting my time […] I guess a
> bit of hostility, sometimes a bit of mistrust between agencies [which
> predates Families First but is exacerbated by fact that] we're
> dragged together much more often and we just had our own natural
> affiliations before that were working okay and this maybe has
> forced us together in a competitive way and certainly hasn't led to
> improved networks. (Middle Manager)

We found that bringing people together to improve networks worked effectively in
one sector but not in the other. Levels of engagement in the planning and
implementation are increased if the roles of the network and interagency groups are
clearly defined and understood. This requires different mechanisms in each location.
The existing service landscape and relationships need to be taken into account in the
development of strategies to progress service network expansion and to ensure that
proposals developed under Families First for additional services fill gaps and
compliment existing services.

Capacity of Agencies to Participate

The implementation of Families First is premised on the participation of a broad range
of organisations. However, this level of participation, through attending meetings and
working parties and responding to service tenders, requires a considerable time
commitment which some smaller organisations do not have the resources for. The
number of other government strategies implemented in the region has exacerbated this
situation. One manager commented:

> And that's been a problem as far as who's involved, and I agree
> there needs to be a way to include all the potential players […]
> although from what I'm hearing people were notified of it but for
> some reason […] I don't know but a lot of agencies can't allocate
> that amount of time to go to meetings […] We're lucky, we're a
> much bigger agency […] and if they're not at the table they miss
> out. (Middle Manager)

This results in larger organisations being privy to information discussed at meetings
that some smaller organisations cannot attend. This has direct implications for the
tendering process. One fieldworker commented:

> For some reason […] they [large organisations] are able to know
> what is happening before it happens so they have prior knowledge.
> So if you are talking about a service that is operating Australia wide
> or internationally they are obviously in a better position to acquire
> information, and as we know knowledge is power, so it follows.
> (Fieldworker)

Resources should be deployed to develop strategies to promote and facilitate the
active involvement of all relevant agencies, for example resources to cover staff time
to attend meetings or being supported by key agencies in the tendering process.

Implementation Fatigue

Despite Families First being in the region for just over a year, there is already a sense of implementation fatigue. This is partly a result of the vast number of other government strategies being implemented at the same time, each requiring similar commitments in time and resources. Many organisations do not have the capacity to respond to these demands. Although the management structure of Families First has been designed to overcome some of this overlap, smaller organisations who struggle to meet the current demands for their services do not have enough time to participate consistently in the planning and implementation process.

> The impact of so many strategies happening at once is extremely difficult to take on board […] From what I've heard in the community, there's a lot of confusion around who is doing what. And where did it all come from […] Feedback I'm getting from the community is that it is very perplexing and they feel not so well valued, they are bringing in new initiatives without trying to understand what they have been trying to do [...] They have been struggling to grow their service […] and then all of a sudden this swag of an initiative comes pouring out from the heavens, but pouring out with a fair bit of structure attached. And that is not to reflect badly on the Families First team in any way, it is more to reflect on government's choice about going in so many directions at once, rolling out so many initiatives and the impact on community organizations. (Key Personnel)

One of the ways of combating implementation fatigue within Families First is to ensure that the principles of prevention and early intervention and the focus on cross-agency planning and implementation become incorporated into the core business and management practices of agencies at all levels. Including these principles in job descriptions, performance indicators, orientation packages and training courses would assist this. This will help to promote a clearer understanding of Families First and create champions who will make Families First more visible within organisations and the community.

Timing

The implementation of any strategy requires time to build relationships and trust, necessary precursors to the formation of a coordinated service networks. However, as we noted in Section 3.2, we found that some view the implementation process as protracted, others as rushed.

> And a lot of that was said, build on what's happening, we don't want to reinvent the wheel, all those kinds of things, we don't want to duplicate, but it's taken a year and we still haven't seen any money, we still haven't seen any services funded and I think it could have been done much more quickly without having these monthly meetings which is like pulling teeth. And there's been quite a lot of hostility in the non-government sector because of that […] many of us are doing this stuff anyway, many of us are already working with other agencies in the sector and the time involved in all these

> meetings has been enormous […] and for not seeing anything come out of it. (Middle Manager).

Another common issue raised in the interviews about the implementation of Families First in Illawarra centred on the lack of systemic information about what other Areas had done. Participants felt that despite waiting a long time for Families First to arrive they did not have any of the benefits or lessons learned from other Areas' experience, for example the practice guidelines for home visiting are still not available. NSW Health representatives felt that this information would assist them to develop and implement home visiting more successfully.

3.4   Aboriginal Participation and Access

The key findings around Aboriginal participation in and access to Families First implementation relate to management structures and processes, relationships, and decision-making.

Management

Aboriginal participation is present in the network groups in both sectors. This participation is not equivalent in both sectors, however, and nor was this participation brought about by the same processes. In one sector, as noted in Section 3.1, an Aboriginal community based working group was described as being established prior to Families First implementation with one of its roles the support of that implementation. In the other sector, an Aboriginal community based working group is also active and contributes to the management of Families First, but this group was described as set up after the introduction of Families First, and partly as a response to its introduction.

> I think Families First was a bit of a kick-off thing, Families First got rolled out in Illawarra and the community weren't aware of it, and nobody knew what Families First was, and the community were all very negative towards it because they thought there was no consultation on this program. (Key Personnel)

Overall, initial planning and consultation processes engaged the involvement of key Aboriginal organisations and representatives. However, in one sector, planning around one proposed Aboriginal service has been troubled and participants reported an initial lack of communication and sensitivity to local needs. Revising of the planning process for that service was a priority for the network group at the time research was being conducted. However, some participants reported continued confusion around the multiple strategies being introduced, and some criticism of the strength and type of Aboriginal representation at the Regional Coordination Management Group was also expressed.

Aboriginal engagement in Families First management, increased coordination and communication between Aboriginal-specific and other organisations, and delivery of Families First services to Aboriginal communities are all identified, ongoing priorities for Families First implementation. This is reflected in the Area Plan and in the dedication of a specific proportion of the Families First service budget to Aboriginal-specific services. The Families First Project Leader attends the Aboriginal community

based working party in one sector, and Aboriginal representation on the network groups is strong, sustained and active in the other.

Relationships

We found that, as in other Areas, the importance of improving service delivery to Aboriginal communities was recognised across the service network. The Illawarra shows promise in bringing about these improvements, and successes in increasing service coordination are in place. Families First and the network groups in particular were nominated by participants as bringing about stronger links between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal-specific services. A participant from an Aboriginal service reported that:

> It's black and white all, it's sort of broken down a lot of barriers too. I find that Families First, we didn't know lots of people in Department of Housing, but now we do. It has broken down barriers for us, and there's faces to names now. (Middle Manager)

Similarly, a worker from a non Aboriginal-specific service noted the network groups meant that:

> I've got to know people I wouldn't have always got to know. And I can see the benefits of working together on these projects for the good of the community. It builds something different, its not so isolated […] because we've had the Koori workers there too. (Middle Manager)

This developing network of relationships is the product of sustained effort and time. Aboriginal participants reported devoting considerable energy and effort towards ensuring that the network groups, and events such as planning days, have sustained, local Aboriginal representation. Participants from non Aboriginal-specific services reported that partnerships with Aboriginal organisations have been an effective strategy in increasing the accessibility of services to Aboriginal communities. They also noted the importance of personal connections and trust in sustaining these strategies. A relatively novel approach, based around cultural projects, was described as successful in making a service 'more friendly to the Aboriginal community', an approach that also required time: 'it took us two years to get to the point where we could do the work we did in the following two years, it is a process' (Fieldworker).

Disconnections and rivalries are present in Aboriginal communities as they are in non-Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal participants argued that relationships within Aboriginal communities have an impact on the implementation of government programs, and that these relationships have rarely been taken into account.

> Every Aboriginal community's segregated so you're always going to have various factions within the community and I think that's something that various service providers, both government and non-government, have not come to terms with. (Key Personnel)

Strategies have been adopted to accommodate the specificities of local Aboriginal relationships and networks, and increasing participation in the Aboriginal community based working groups is likely to ensure broad input into Families First.

Decisions

As we discuss in Section 3.3, the number and type of new strategies being implemented across Illawarra present difficulties across organisations and levels of management. This is particularly true in Aboriginal communities, where differences between Families First and the Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy are quite difficult to communicate.

While Families First support of Aboriginal programs that are being implemented in Illawarra has, in turn, supported Aboriginal engagement in Families First, some tensions in this engagement are present. Participants pointed out that local Aboriginal communities are not represented at the Regional Coordination Management Group, and only represented at the Area Managers Group by the Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy Project Officer, who reports to it. Families First is not always visible as both a cross-agency approach and a focus on early intervention and prevention. While this is in no way particular to Aboriginal communities, the advantages to Aboriginal organisations and communities in being involved in Families First are also difficult to communicate if the strategy itself is not well known. There are also challenges inherent to implementing Families First across Aboriginal communities. A number of participants reported that the specified age range of Families First implies an unreasonable requirement to divide up the community.

Aboriginal responsibility for funding and service decisions were emphasised as crucial, and the structures to allow this within network groups supported.

> Success and effectiveness can be measured in a number of different ways, particularly when dealing with Aboriginal people, getting them on board is the biggest thing. They're already doing that, they're doing that quite well […] the service delivery definitely, but also the development and implementation of that service delivery. I think what I'd do to see ongoing success is to look at how you make those successes grow upon each other. I think the approach they're taking is very good. (Key Personnel)

Historically, government programs have not always been funded on the basis of local and Aboriginal-identified need. We found that considerable effort has been invested in ensuring that decisions around Aboriginal-specific services are made by members of local Aboriginal communities, and that these decision-making processes show promise in addressing the very high needs of those communities.

3.5 System Capacity

The political, economic and geographical context in which Families First operates inevitably impacts on the implementation process. A number of forces lying outside the control of Families First, including the existing service landscape, relationships between agencies and the capacity of the existing service network to meet current demands, influences the way a new strategy is received and in turn affects agencies' commitment and engagement in the development, planning and implementation stages.

Historical context

Much anticipation surrounded the long awaited introduction of the Families First in Illawarra. As this Area was one of last to roll out Families First, many people had heard about it through various sources. The accuracy of this information varied greatly. That little or no growth funding had been available for some time was also important in this context. Many thought that Families First would be an additional source of funding to meet shortfalls for services dealing with chronic and crisis intervention. The arrival of Families First did not meet these expectations. A middle manager stated:

> A lot of people were involved again because they thought Families First was a saviour for a lot of our services and thought they'd be able to tender for crisis programs, more intensive programs. Very clearly that wasn't the case but it took a while for some services to realise that, and that was very frustrating for them. (Middle Manager)

Also, a sense of cynicism was evident among service providers. Multiple government initiatives over the years requiring different reporting mechanisms and often only offering short-term funding have left many service providers wary of yet another new strategy requiring changes to the way the service system operates. As one fieldworker said:

> I think originally [the information] was fairly vague and general. We would have conversations about what is this really about. You can read the writing and still not understand. There were a lot of questions there, and for me, it was how is it going to be implemented. What was the agenda behind this was really unclear. And the politics in it all as well. You start to think where are they headed, do they keep it really general. So you had to stop and think well what are they really working towards. So I was a bit confused, but probably more wary. (Fieldworker)

Families First cannot control the environment which created these expectations and biases. However it can influence it by clearly and repeatedly articulating what is distinctive about Families First and the boundaries to what it is trying to achieve.

Scarce resources

Services were sceptical about how a prevention and early intervention service network would operate within the crisis framework that exist now. As a middle manager commented:

> And I just think it's the time and the teeth-pulling that has caused people to be put off-side, and also the bitter disappointment that it wasn't going to be funding things that are really badly needed down here. (Middle Manager)

Concerns were raised about how changes to the operation of the service system, for example the introduction of Home Visiting Health and the early identification of needs, could be sustained without over-extending early childhood nurses or other

workers. Also existing resource limitations created blockages in the current service network. Workers are already in the position of referring people to services that they then cannot use because of waiting lists, such as allied health and disability services.

Distance from specialist health services created difficulties for families, particularly those with special needs children. Parents had to travel long distance to access these services and often had to stay over night. The costs associated with this long distance travel as well as absences from their families created additional pressures for these families.

Lack of affordable and regular transport made it difficult for families to access services. The Illawarra covers a large area and urban-based services are very difficult for some people to use. Some use taxis but these are expensive, while others who live out of town use the infrequent bus service but have to spend most of the day in the town centre. Others remain isolated and do not use services such as play groups because of lack of transport.

3.6 Summary

Families First in Illawarra has been supported by strong regional and local *management* structures. Considerable time and resources have been invested in forming and maintaining these structures, although some criticism and confusion around them was evident. Smaller organisations and key community representatives should be supported to participate in Families First management, and the differing capacities and interests of management group members taken into account. Responsibility for communicating the innovations of Families First should be shared across all key agencies.

The *planning* decisions, processes and timing during the first year of Families First in Illawarra have produced a workable Area Plan that addresses local priorities. Some tensions have been generated by the planning process in terms of the participants involved, timing and location of services to be funded, and transparency of communication and processes. Addressing these tensions should be and is a priority for Families First management groups. Future Area Plans should incorporate strategies to increase the level of knowledge of Families First across all agencies and organisations.

The *implementation* of Families First in Illawarra has achieved many of the objectives set out in the 2003-2004 Area Plan. The management structure, strong support from dedicated workers and a priority to build on and strengthen existing service networks has supported the implementation process. However, some agencies' ability to participate in the implementation process is hampered by a lack of understanding of their role and scarce resources. Smaller organisations are often unable to release staff to attend key meetings and working parties. The introduction of multiple strategies aggravates this situation for smaller agencies. Despite waiting a long time for Families First to be introduced, workers felt the benefits of the lessons learnt from other Areas could not be easily accessed.

Aboriginal participation in Families First planning and management, and *access* to services, has been prioritised and the engagement of Aboriginal communities in Families First strengthens the service network and is likely to increase accessibility of

services to Aboriginal communities. The parameters of Families First present difficulties to clear communication and reception, and some planning processes have been troubled. However, Families First management processes demonstrate a commitment to recognising Aboriginal communities' knowledge of their service needs and how to meet them.

The broader political and social context within which Families First operates and the *system capacity* to meet demands for services affects agencies' desire and ability to participate in the implementation process. Although Families First does not have direct control over these factors it can exert some influence. The service community had great expectations about the amount of resources Families First would bring to the Area. These were not met. This resulted in disappointment within services that are unable to meet current demands. Workers were concerned about proposed changes to the way they operate and how they could be sustained. Access to core human services such as specialist medical services and transport were identified as problematic in the Area.

4   Conclusions

The implementation of Families First is complex and multi-layered, and requires changes both within organisations and between organisations. It will be affected by the pre-existing service network and the system capacity, by individual organisations and relationships and the geographical characteristics of the Area. However, as one fieldworker commented:

> There will be benefits out of Families First around the general networks, people knowing who people are but also about trying to actually identify service delivery areas that could be improved just by communicating. (Fieldworker)

Management

The introduction of Families First to Illawarra has seen considerable time invested in establishing and sustaining management groups. While some tensions are evident around this, we nonetheless found that these management structures are, in general, responsive to local needs and particularities and beneficial for the communication of Families First to the service network.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Participation in the management of Families First should involve organisations from across the network of services providing support to families. Differences in organisational size, power and capacity to participate in these networks should be acted on and addressed.

- Management of Families First should include the participation of those who will be involved in tendering for Families First funding for services, and strategies to accommodate any conflicts of interest that arise from this involvement put into place.

- Effective and sustained communication strategies are necessary to ensure the participation of key agencies in the planning, coordination and implementation of Families First, and to maintain engagement from agencies that do not receive funds from Families First to deliver services.

Planning

The planning processes for Families First in Illawarra have generated some tensions, most of which are recognised by members of the Area Managers Group and network groups. At the time of the research, options for addressing these tensions were being considered, and implementation processes for the second and third year of Families First should be more inclusive and transparent. Nonetheless, because the first months of a strategy's presence in an Area are so important to its subsequent visibility and recognition, planning around the introduction and first year of Families First has had a considerable impact.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Initial consultation and subsequent planning processes should be transparent and engage all agencies that provide support for children and families. Planning

processes should take account of local knowledge and be flexible to ensure broad representation and to achieve the ongoing engagement and re-engagement of agencies.

- The management and planning of Families First funded services should be based on local knowledge and needs, and the management processes around these services communicated within and across all relevant agencies.

- Education strategies to increase knowledge of the research basis and philosophical framework of Families First are necessary to sustain engagement in its implementation. Increasing this knowledge should be a specific implementation priority.

Implementation

Families First in Illawarra has achieved many of the key objectives outlined in the Area Plan for 2003. The management structure that has been established, the strong commitment of key personnel, the recognition of and linking into pre-existing networks and dedicated resources to support further network development have facilitated the implementation process.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Building on and strengthening the pre-existing service networks, and the commitment of dedicated resources to engage them, is a necessary component of a successful implementation strategy.

- Clearly defining the role of network groups and other interagency groups in the planning and implementation of Families First will increase the level of engagement of a broader range of services.

- The development and resourcing of strategies to promote and facilitate the active involvement of all relevant agencies is required in acknowledgement of their unequal capacity to consistently participate in the implementation and tendering processes.

- To ensure the sustainability of Families First, early intervention and prevention principles and service coordination must become incorporated into the core business and management practices of agencies at all levels by including these principles in job descriptions, performance indicators, orientation packages and training courses.

- Providing information and feedback about the implementation processes and achievements in other Families First Areas is an effective way of increasing the understanding and commitment of agencies to the strategy.

Aboriginal Participation and Access

Aboriginal engagement in planning, management and implementation is acknowledged as crucial to the success of Families First throughout Illawarra. As in other Areas, improved service delivery to Aboriginal communities is identified as a priority for Families First. We found greater success in achieving this engagement in Illawarra than in other Areas, and recommend that the strategies adopted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and individuals be adopted elsewhere.

We found that many of the forces that affect the overall implementation of Families First are relevant to Aboriginal communities. Local management structures and processes foster increasing recognition of Families First throughout organisations and communities, and smaller as well as larger organisations should be supported towards sustained participation in these structures. We also found factors that are particular to Aboriginal communities' experience of Families First.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- The implementation of Families First is enhanced by the continued involvement of key individuals such as local elders in the management of the strategy

- Aboriginal engagement in Families First is achieved when time, energy and resources are invested in building and maintaining relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and organisations.

- Aboriginal elders and other community representatives hold knowledge about the needs of Aboriginal communities and the best ways to address these needs, and this knowledge should be respected and acted on. This may require a different approach to service provision than is usually taken.

System Capacity

Families First in Illawarra operates within a broad system which it cannot directly control. The geography of the Area and available resources affect the implementation of the strategy. We found that factors such as the current and past political context and expectations acted as barriers to the implementation process. Concerns about the capacity of the service network to meet current demands and services' ability to introduce changes also affected the implementation process.

In summary, lessons from the Families First experience in Illawarra include:

- Clear and repeated communication of the parameters of Families First and what makes it unique is necessary if Families First is to gain broad acceptance.

- Families First infrastructure should act as an advocate for State allocation of funding to meet shortages in all core human service agencies and transport.
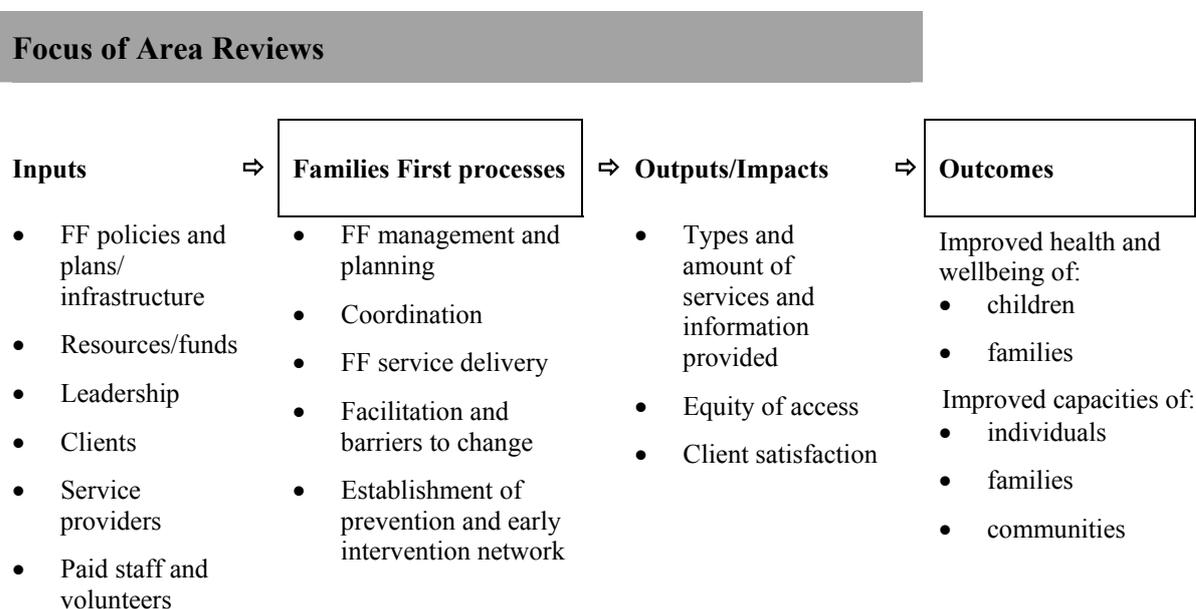
4.1   Conclusion

Overall the Area Review found that the strategies employed and the structures developed in the first year of the implementation in Illawarra resulted in Families First making considerable progress towards achieving core objectives and addressing priority issues. Families First has been support supported by strong regional and local management structures. Considerable time and resources have been invested in forming and maintaining these structures, linking into and supporting existing service networks and engaging Aboriginal communities, although some criticism and confusion around these processes was evident. Addressing these tensions and issues raised concerning the planning process should be a priority for Families First management groups. Future Area Plans should incorporate strategies to increase the level of knowledge of Families First and facilitate active involvement across all agencies and organisations.

Appendix A: Area Review Methodology

Evaluation framework

The overall evaluation framework was based on concepts outlined in the production of welfare approach (Davies and Challis, 1986; Davies, Bebbington and Charnley, 1990). Derived originally from the economic analysis of the production processes, the approach links together service inputs, outputs and outcomes. Applying this approach to the evaluation of Families First the relationship between the different components of the project can be conceptualised in Figure A.1. The approach draws attention to the importance of focusing on not only the outcomes, but also on the prior stages in the process of resourcing and providing supportive services to those families who will benefit most (Thomson et al, 2002).

Figure A.1: Conceptual Approach to the Evaluation Design

Focus of Area Reviews

Inputs ⇨	Families First processes ⇨	Outputs/Impacts ⇨	Outcomes
• FF policies and plans/ infrastructure	• FF management and planning	• Types and amount of services and information provided	Improved health and wellbeing of: • children • families
• Resources/funds	• Coordination		
• Leadership	• FF service delivery	• Equity of access	Improved capacities of: • individuals
• Clients	• Facilitation and barriers to change	• Client satisfaction	• families
• Service providers	• Establishment of prevention and early intervention network		• communities
• Paid staff and volunteers			

Inputs and processes describe the resources of Families First, and the service system and how it operates (including how it links with other services). *Outputs* describe the Families First services that children and families receive as a result of being part of the program, the changes in patterns and integration of services received and satisfaction with the support received. *Outcomes* measure the health and well-being and capacities of children, families and communities.

The Area Reviews methodology focuses predominately on the inputs, process and outputs stages (Thomson et al, 2002). Outcomes from children, families and communities are being monitored by TCO through the Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework (Fisher et al, 2002). The conceptual framework outlined here was used to determine the types of data and how they were collected in the review process to investigate the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What have been the priority implementation issues in this region?

2. What have been the key changes to Families First agencies (those responsible for implementing Families First) and relevant non-government agencies, as a result of the implementation of Families First in this region? Identify key strengths and key challenges in each region?

3. What is the description of the current early intervention and prevention networks in this region? What is the description of Families First networks and quality of networks (measured by density of connections) as a baseline measurement for future comparison?

4. How, and in what ways, have the Families First Framework and the Area implementation plan strengthened and/or reoriented a prevention and early intervention network? Is Families First being implemented according to design, as outlined in the Families First Framework and Area implementation plan?

5. What are the factors both at central government (program and departmental) and regional levels that support or impede the implementation of Families First?

Framework for analysis

Program logic (Department of Finance, 1994) and program theory (Bickman, 1996) are the theoretical tools that were applied in the evaluation data analysis. Analysis through program logic involves identifying and taking into account the presumed logical and causal relationships between inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. Program theory analyses two aspects of the program. First, the program implementation is assessed by examining whether the program inputs are in place as planned. Second, the program theory is investigated by considering whether the implementation occurs in the way it was envisaged and whether the outcomes are as predicted (Bickman, 1996).

Application of the analysis framework

The research questions informed the development of the data collection instruments and the specific questions asked in the interviews and survey of service managers. The report on South West Sydney is framed around these questions and provides a detailed account of how Families First appeared five years after its initial implementation (Thomson et al, 2003).

However, extracting lessons learned from the analysis required a more integrative approach. As a way of synthesising and explaining the data gathered in the Area Review, the program logic model was applied to the following goal-outcome model (Harris, 2003; Figure A.2). This report on Illawarra (and the Orana Far West report) applies this framework to derive generalisable lessons for further implementation. The model consists of five elements including:

- *Organisational structures* - refers to processes such as policies, procedures, systems and practices that reflect the values and objectives of the organisation and enable an change to be managed effectively (NSW Health, 2001:10)

- *Resources* – include people, physical space, administrative support, planning tools and financial support (NSW Health, 2001:14)

- *Staff* – refers to people working within the system with the necessary skills and commitment to contribute to the overall goals of the strategy (NSW Health, 2001:12).

- *Leadership* – Leadership refers to people who are system thinkers and champions. The engage, mobilise and inspire others to act in ways that are consistent with the program's aims and objectives (NSW Health, 2001: 16).

- *Network* – refers to the development of coordinated network of services based on collaboration and partnerships between different government and non-government services.

The model is a means of conceptualising Families First in the broader context of the family service system, which aims to improve child, family and community outcomes (Bronfenbrener, 1992). The model focuses the analysis on whether the capacity of each part of the Families First process enhances the capacity of the family service system more broadly to achieve that goal.

Figure A.2: Conceptual Approach to the Analysis - Goal-outcomes Model
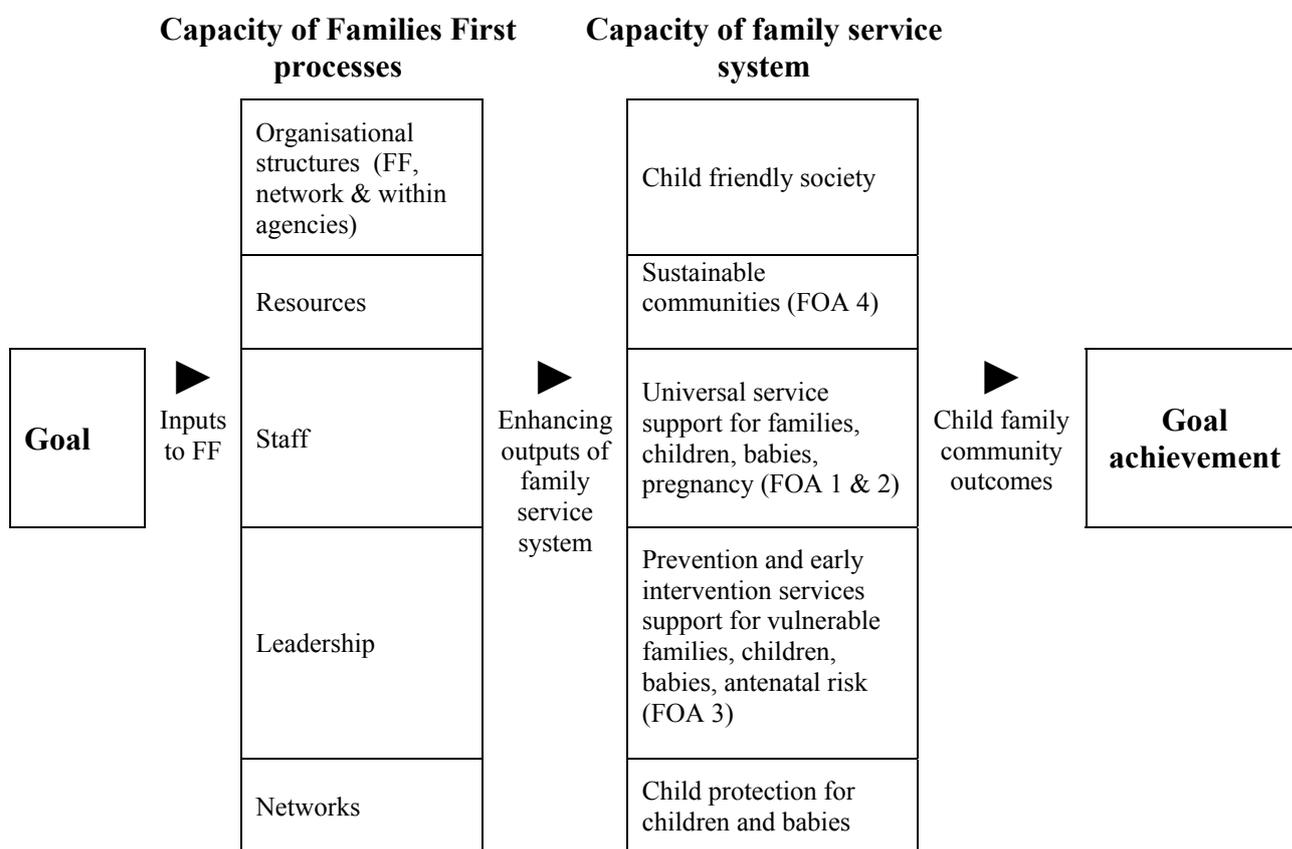
Notes: FOA 1: Supporting parents who are expecting or caring for a new baby
      FOA 2: Supporting families who are caring for infants or small child
      FAO 3: Supporting families who need extra support
      FOA 4: Strengthening the connection between families and communities

Methodology

The Area Review was not designed to evaluate or compare the performance of individual services or each sector but rather to consider the issues emerging at an Area

level. The focus of the Area Review is to report on examples of best practice drawn from the principles of Families First found in each sector. Given this the agencies have generally been de-identified in reporting the findings.

The Area Review of Illawarra forms part of a set of three designed to examine the implementation of Families First at a state level. The Areas chosen represent different geographical locations - metropolitan, regional and remote, at different stages of the implementation process. Families First had been established since 1998 and 2000 in South West Sydney and Orana Far West respectively. The inclusion of Illawarra as part of the Area Review provided a unique opportunity to examine the implementation issues first hand as Families First is being rolled out. Within the Illawarra Area, Wollongong and Shoalhaven were selected as the fieldwork sites. These sectors were chosen as examples of a regional and a rural location with varying levels of infrastructure support and effective service network functioning. The Area Review was conducted over a four-month period from August to November 2003 and included interviews, site observations and surveys.

The Area Review used a triangulated methodology comprised of multiple qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques including document reviews, observation studies, interviews, focus groups and surveys. The methods used are summarised in Figure A.3.

The Area Review methodology captured the implementation of Families First at one point in time. Before and after measures were not collected so the analysis only reports on the current operation of the service network. The methodology was designed so that it can be replicated within and across Areas in the future.

Figure A.3: Summary of Data Collection Methods

Area Review component	No.	Description
Document review		Analysis of documents relating to Families First at a local and central level
Service census	49	A survey of child and family organisations to detail the types of services and level of involvement in Families First
Questionnaire for service managers/coordinators	37	A detailed survey of organisations directly involved in Families First on service inputs, aspects of the service network and service outputs
Observations and site visits	8	Site observation to observe the processes of service delivery and connections with other services
Human Services Management Group and key personnel interviews	21	Interviews discussing the process of managing Families First, the perceived impact and barriers implementation
Project Leader interview	1	Interviews reviewing the development of Families First, the achievements and barriers to implementation
Interviews with middle managers	24	Interviews reviewing the development of Families First, the achievements and barriers to implementation
Fieldworker interviews	44	Interviews exploring their experience with Families First, differences between process goals and practice.
Family interviews	28	Interviews with families in each sector to explore their experience of the service process and network

Document analysis

Documentation relating to Families First at a local and central level was analysed as a means of determining the intentions of Families First and the reflection of those intentions in relation to network development in written records. The documents reviewed included minutes of key meetings relating to Families First such as the Project Management Group and Implementation Groups in each sector, Families First briefing papers, project briefs and reports from projects funded by Families First.

Survey of service managers

A survey of all service managers providing support to families and children aged 0-8 years collected information on the service inputs, aspects of the organisational procedures and processes, network activities and service outputs of organisations in the service network.

Organisations directly involved in Families First were asked to collect some service statistics over a period of a week using the referral tally sheet. These statistics provided a snapshot of the characteristics of families with children aged 0-8 years using services. The following information was collected:

- the number of new and ongoing clients;

- characteristics of new families referred to the organisation;

- referrals received and made by the organisation; and

- informal consultation and information sharing with other agencies.

The IAMG and Child, Youth and Family Networks identified the organisations included in the sample for the service manager survey. The criteria for inclusion were organisations that received and made referrals to other organisations. Some agencies for which it was appropriate to only make referrals to other agencies, for example hospital antenatal clinics, were also included.

Observations and site visits

Eight site observations and observations of meetings were conducted in each sector. Researchers visited parents' groups and attended an interagency meeting in each sector. Informal interviews were conducted with families and service providers during these visits.

Human Services Management Group and Key personnel interviews

Interviews were conducted with 21 key personnel involved in the implementation process of Families First. The regional perspective on the implementation process was gathered from members of the Illawarra Human Services Managers Group, the IAMG, network convenors and the Project Leader.

Middle Managers

Twenty-four interviews were conducted with middle managers from the human service departments involved in Families First, representatives from Aboriginal Medical Services, local government and NGOs. These examined the intersection point between policy implementation and the change in practice.

Fieldworker interviews

Interviews were conducted with 44 fieldworkers in different agencies to examine the differences between the process goals of Families First and what happened in practice working with families. The selection of service fieldworkers was made in consultation with the Illawarra Area Management Group and included people in the following positions:

- allied health worker;

- Child and Family Nurse;

- Early Intervention Specialist;

- Community Development Officer (Department of Housing);

- Aboriginal community midwife;

- Child Protection Specialist (DoCS);

- family support worker;

- children's services workers

- Aboriginal Medical Services

- multicultural children's worker

Family Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 36 families with children 0-8 years to gain insight into the needs and experiences of the service system they have from their perspective. Interviews were usually structured and one-on-one. Informal interviews were undertaken during site visits. The participants were mainly parents. Families were recruited through the service providers involved in the research.

References

Bickman, L. (1996), 'The application of Program Theory to the evaluation of a managed mental health care system', *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 19(2), 111-9.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979), *The Ecology of Human Development*, Cambridge Harvard University Press.

Davies, B. and D. Challis (1986), *Matching Resources to Needs in Community Care*, Gower, Aldershot.

Davies, B., A. Bebbington and H. Charnley, with B. Baines, E. Ferlie, M. Hughes and J. Twigg (1990), *Resources, Needs and Outcomes in Community-Based Care.* Avebury, Aldershot.

Department of Finance (1994), *Doing Evaluations A Practical Guide*, Government Publishing Services, Canberra.

Families First Illawarra Area Plan 2003-2004.

Fisher, K., L. Kemp and J. Tudball (2002), *Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework*, report prepared for the Cabinet Office of New South Wales, www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

Harris, E. (2003), Goal-outcomes Model, Centre for Health Equity, Training and Evaluation, unpublished.

Illawarra Area Management Group, Minutes.

Indicative Model for Human Services Integrated Governance: Illawarra and South East Regions, November 2002.

Illawarra and South East NSW Integrated Human Service Planning and Delivery Terms of Reference, November 2002.

NSW Health (2001), *A Framework for Building Capacity to Improve Health*, www.health.nsw.gov.au

Shoalhaven Child, Youth and Family Network, Minutes.

The Cabinet Office (TCO) (2002), *Families First: A support network for families raising children, Office of Children and Young People*, The Cabinet Office, Sydney.

Thomson, C., K. Fisher and J. Tudball (2002), *Families First Area Review Methodology*, prepared for the Cabinet Officer of New South Wales, www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

Thomson, C., S. Hoffmann and K. Fisher (2003), Families First Area Review, South West Sydney, prepared for the Cabinet Officer of New South Wales, www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

Wollongong Child, Youth and Family Network, Minutes.