



# Annual Report to the Community Services Directorate

**2022-2023**

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## Introduction

This report provides a brief commentary on Families ACT’s work throughout the 2022-23 year and an assessment of our performance based on our annual member and stakeholder survey. The survey was conducted during May 2023. For each deliverable this and last year’s results are presented side by side for comparison. This is the first year where we are also reporting against the 4 outcomes identified in our Deed of Grant.

More detailed information about Families ACT’s work such as policy positions, recent submissions and research reports can be found on its website at [familiesact.org.au](https://familiesact.org.au). In addition, Families ACT provided regular member updates informing its members and supporters in more detail about ongoing work.

# Performance against Deliverables

## 1. Advocacy

**Families ACT provides advocacy and representation through our work with Government, other peak bodies and media.**

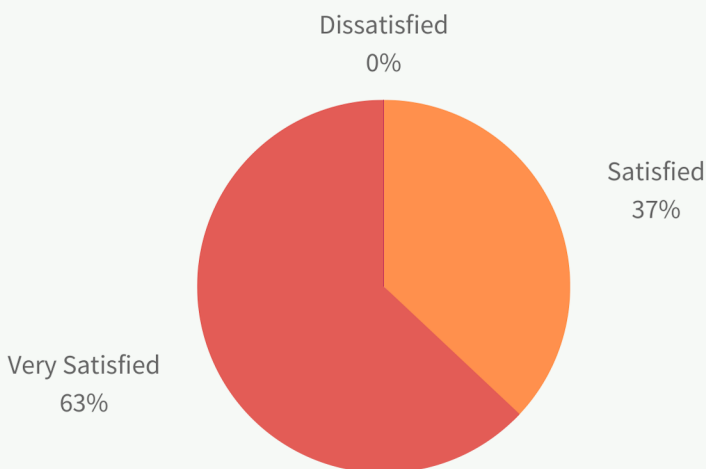
A consistent message from members over the past few years' surveys has been that they want our support to ensure that they are best able to respond to the ACT Government's Commissioning for Social Impact initiative. Families ACT is working with CSD to advocate for genuinely collaborative commissioning and the best possible experience of procurement for our members.

Valuable lessons are being learnt as the peaks go through the commissioning process before other CYFSP services and we continue to be a member of the CYFSP Network Coordinator Governance Group, one of the first Try Test and Learn commissioning projects.

Families ACT is part of ACTCOSS's Peaks CEOs group. Our current work involves negotiating with ACT government about what outcomes reporting will look like for the sector, with the aim of making the process useful to organisations and keeping it as streamlined as possible.

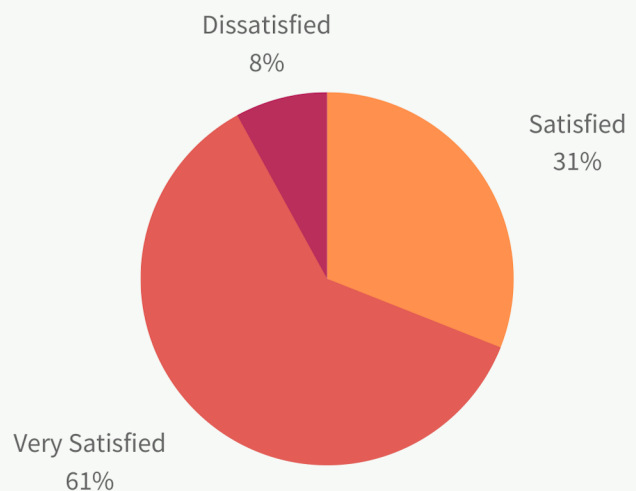
### 2022-2023

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Families ACT's Advocacy and Representation activities



### 2021-2022

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Families ACT's Advocacy and Representation activities



## 2. Capacity Building Contributing to Sector Development

**Families ACT aims to support workers and services to build their capacity to work with children, young people and families.**

In last year’s survey members told us they really value our work in building the capacity of front-line workers to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

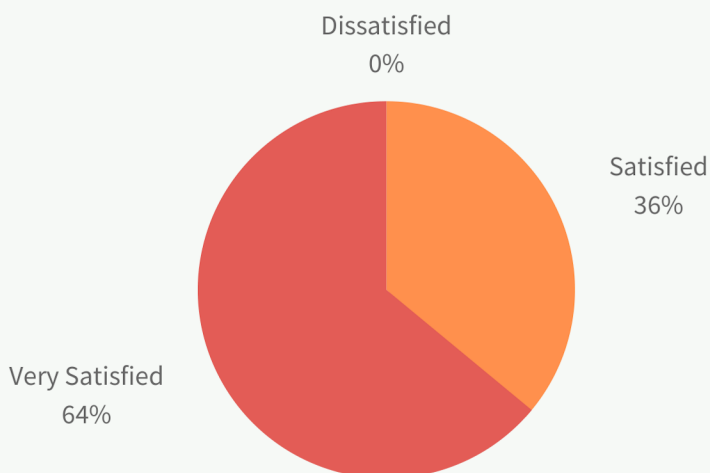
Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) commenced in 2017 and are an example of our leadership in sector development. We welcome the involvement of workers from both inside and outside the CYFSP and as a result this community of practice is thriving.

Happily, this year we have been able to resume our Casework Reflective Tool (CRT) training and address the wait list resulting from the COVID hiatus and churn within the sector. We have delivered four sessions so far in 2022-2023 with more scheduled later this year.

We also facilitated another child protection training for community sector team leaders and middle managers in December 2022. The training, provided by CYPS, focused on the threshold for reporting and strategies for diversion.

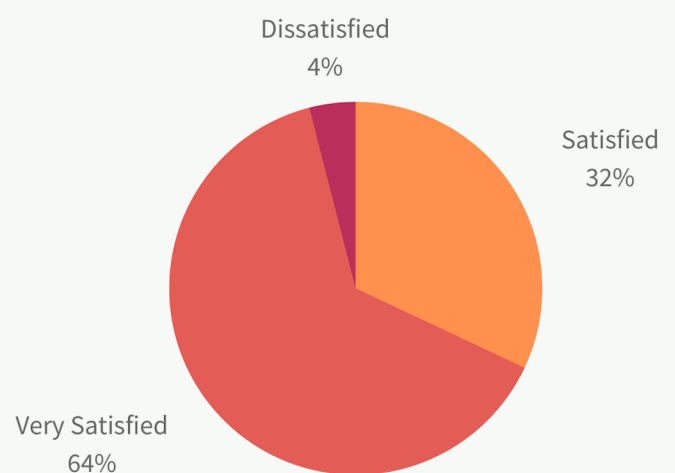
### 2022-2023

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Families ACT's Sector Development activities



### 2021-2022

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Families ACT's Sector Development activities



### 3. Policy Development

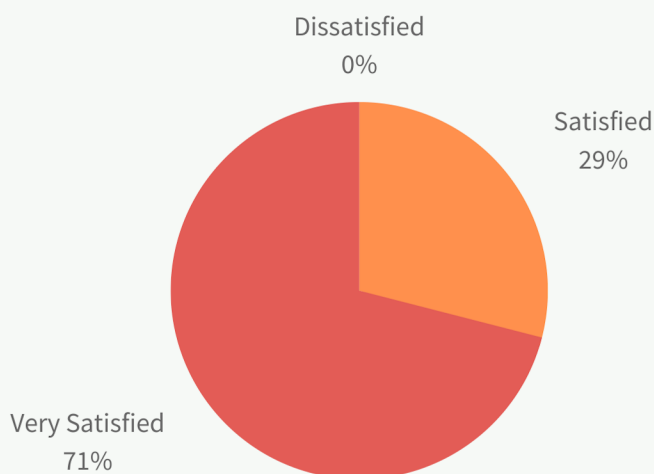
Members have asked us to play an active role in the development of commissioning policy. As part of a group of critical friends to the Minister for Families and Community Services we have been providing advice on the redesign of *A Step Up for Our Kids*. This far-reaching piece of policy design has allowed us to have input into out of home care and child protection reform initiatives.

The [2022 ACT 'Missing Middle' report](#) identified the need for a network to address the complexity that children and young people with moderate to severe mental health concerns face trying to access services. Families ACT has now joined the Child Youth Mental Health Services Network and Service Development Working Group to provide policy input in this area.

We continue to support raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) and have been providing input to ACT Government in the first stage of the process to raise the age to 12. JACS has asked us to provide feedback on the draft legislation, however the measures required to raise the age successfully stretch far beyond legislative change and are critically dependent on the establishment of services in the middle years to divert young people away from the criminal justice system. This has been the focus of our advocacy around the MACR.

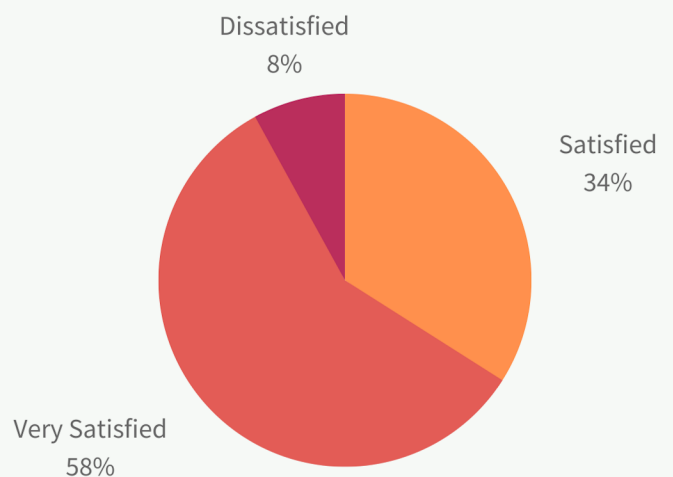
#### 2022-2023

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Families ACT's Policy Development activities



#### 2021-2022

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Families ACT's Policy Development activities



## 4. Leadership and Innovation

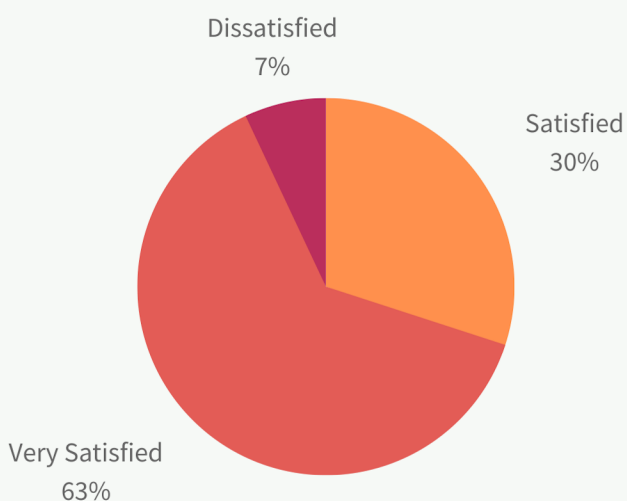
**As a peak body we have a responsibility to identify issues and trends in the ACT service sector and to lead and innovate around them.**

Over the past few years, Families ACT and the Youth Coalition have noted that the quality of support offered to workers can vary greatly from service to service. This can happen when staff without supervisory experience are promoted into team leader roles without dedicated training. This year the two organisations obtained CYFSP workforce development funding to design a reflective supervision training package. There is evidence that such training can benefit staff well-being and retention and improve outcomes for service users. The training has been piloted and is now being rolled out to the sector. Our long-term ambition is that team leaders in CYPS will also participate.

We believe we need to model best practice. A major piece of work this year has been to develop a program logic for our organisation. This has proved challenging as program logics tend to describe discrete programs - the part rather than the whole of what an organisation does. We have found the process of great value in articulating our value proposition and determining performance indicators to evaluate outcomes.

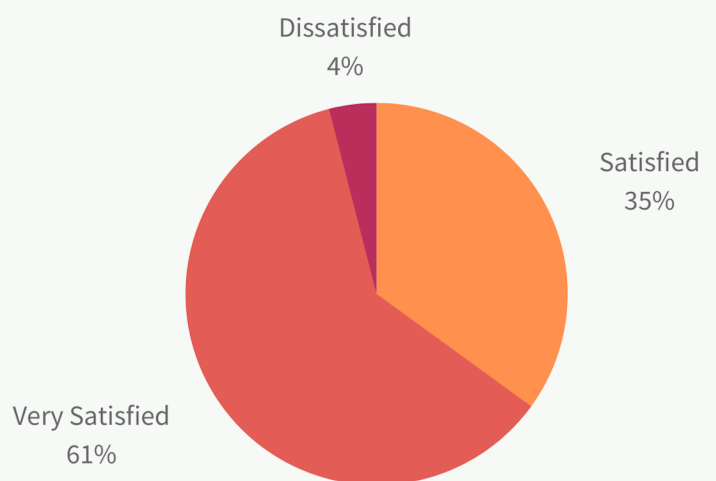
### 2022-2023

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Leadership and Innovation provided by Families ACT



### 2021-2022

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Leadership and Innovation provided by Families ACT



## 5. Information and Advice

**One of Families ACT’s roles is to communicate information and provide advice to members and other stakeholders.**

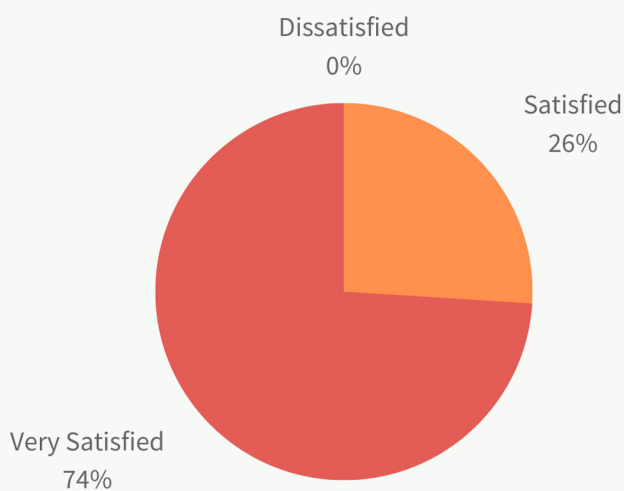
Our monthly member updates provide information about our activities and other important developments in the ACT. The updates have been a response to requests to hear more about what we are doing. A recent refresh of our website has allowed us to renew the look and feel of our update as well as its delivery mode.

Earlier in the year, we focused on amending our website to provide more information about our sector development activities on a newly created sub-page, while our main page now displays upcoming training and events at a glance.

Engagement with our social media continued to increase in the last year, with Families ACT's Facebook following growing by 11% from 610 to 680.

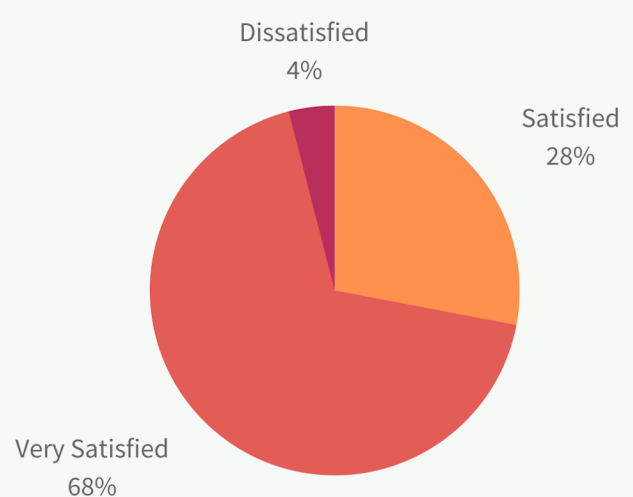
### 2022-2023

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Leadership and Innovation provided by Families ACT



### 2021-2022

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Information and Advice provided by Families ACT



## 6. Collaborative Approaches

Collaboration is a key strategy we employ to counter our limited size and funding, we are more productive when we work closely with our allies. We value our partnerships with members, other services, peak bodies and government highly.

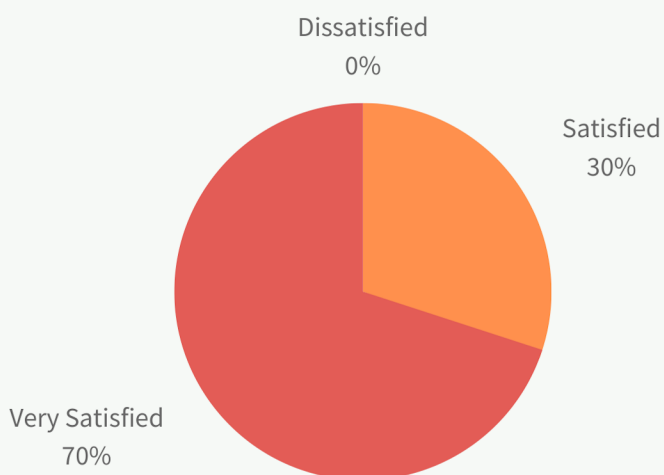
Our membership of the CYFSP Workforce Development and Training (WDT) Sub-Committee continues to afford great opportunities to collaborate around sector development.

When Families ACT became aware that a number of CYFSP agencies were not involved in the original launch of the Next Steps for Our Kids Strategy, we were concerned because the Strategy cannot succeed without sector understanding and buy-in. We worked closely with CSD to facilitate a dedicated re-launch for this stakeholder group.

Our memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Youth Coalition of the ACT has cemented the collaborative relationship that has existed for many years, for example this year we partnered to host a training for working with trans and gender diverse children and young people, responding to an identified need for such training.

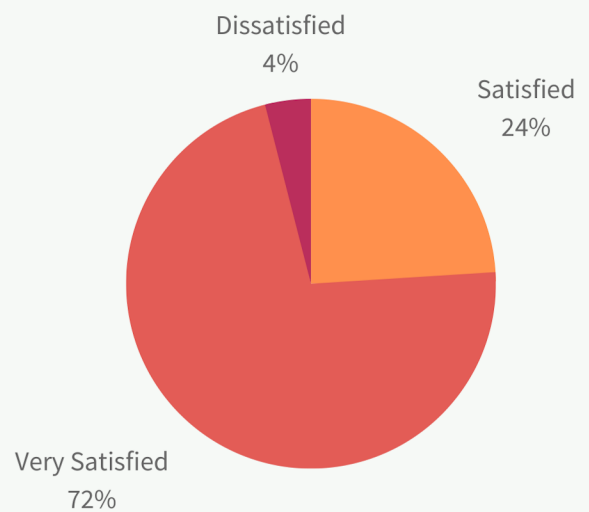
### 2022-2023

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Collaborative activities of Families ACT



### 2021-2022

Percentage of members and stakeholders surveyed who are satisfied with Collaborative activities of Families ACT





## Detailed Member Feedback

Overall, we received 28 complete responses to our 2022-23 member survey. This represents an approximate return rate of 26%. The number of responses rose slightly from last year - up from 26, however one of the key issues created by a relatively small survey sample is the skewing of results where individual responses which do not necessarily represent a majority view can carry a disproportionate loading (e.g. 2 responses equates to approximately 8% of respondents).

While we would always like to receive more completed surveys, we recognise that ours is one of many competing for busy people's time. We are very grateful to all those who participated, particularly those who took the time to provide comments and suggestions which provide such valuable input for reporting and planning purposes.

Of those completing the annual member survey the majority were satisfied or very satisfied with our work.

### STRENGTHS

Most of the member feedback from the survey about our performance over the past year was very positive. Some of the comments were:

“Great team, you both do so much.”

“Families ACT is a fantastic peak that offers great training.”

“Your advocacy is always on point.”

“The newsletters are excellent and keep us updated with the work of Families ACT and developments in the sector.”

“Just continue to be a valuable partner as we work together to achieve better outcomes for children and families.”

### PRIORITIES AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Our continuing role in sector development received the most comments. One respondent made connections between staff development and training and workforce retention. Another noted:

“As the human service system evolves through Commissioning, Families ACT's capacity building skills and ability [to deliver]...training...and support to staff... will become even more important.”

Several respondents highlighted the importance of Casework Reflective Tool training. One said:

“I would love to see more Case Work Reflective Tool Training, we need more people trained in it! It is such a helpful resource and I think it is underutilised.”

There were a couple of requests for the return of Practice Framework training, while the Joint Case Reviews were also mentioned. There was also a request for “further training around CYPS engagement and navigation.”

Our Policy development work was seen as a high priority in shaping the sector:

“Families ACTs voice in relation to Policies that impact children and families is critical in ensuring we shape the sector to ensuring that the ACT Community continues to have a Child centred, family focused view. Families ACT has an essential role in engaging in policy development and advocacy to influence decision-making at all levels.”

“The policy pieces have been very helpful particularly those associated with research in the space of development and best practices.“

One respondent felt that policy development work should focus on:

“understanding the commissioning environment, ensuring that services can develop and mature programs.”

Specific mention was made of *Next Steps for Our Kids* and in particular “*early intervention point[s]*”.

As in last year’s survey a number of respondents wanted us to maintain our advocacy to government to achieve the best possible outcomes for service users through commissioning processes:

“As the sector continues to evolve and the system changes through Commissioning, it's essential to support the development of robust systems and frameworks that can help families in need. Families ACT plays a key role in collaborating with relevant stakeholders, such as service providers, to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.”

One respondent noted:

“Whilst CYFSP is in the middle of commissioning, our understanding that there is more funding rolling out through the Next Steps work. We believe this is bad timing as the sector is not in a position to focus resources on grant opportunities and service innovation due to commissioning work. Is this an area Families ACT could advocate for a more inclusive approach so that the CYFSP and CYPS can work together to workshop innovative practice opportunities in the ACT?”

Broad areas of advocacy were identified:

“Available and affordable housing is always an issue.”

“Early childhood.”

“Domestic and Family Violence.”

A number of specific focus areas were suggested:

“I would like to see FACT play a lead role for a new body of advocacy where there are current advocacy gaps. For example, early childhood.”

“One priority area could be the importance of linking advocacy on safety and wellbeing of children and their families to good practice (including service models and workforce development) in AOD harm minimisation and improved interface of AOD/MH/Child protection services.”

“Development of a service to assess and diagnose ASD and ADHD in ACT. Also OT, speech and allied services to service those diagnosed.”

While respondents appreciated our collaborative work there were suggestions as to how to refine this for example:

“Ensuring there is good collaboration and no duplication with Youth Coalition's work so that both Families ACT and YouthCo play to your strengths.”

“Sharing policy, advocacy and capacity building work with the community sector (relevant areas).”

And in relation to joint advocacy “working out where Families ACT leads and where it backs up a position of others.”

There was support for our role in promoting collaboration with CYPS:

“I would love to see more interface between CYPS and the community sector. I know it's a long game, and I hope FACT can play a role in facilitating this.”

While one respondent said they were uncertain if we “connect routinely with AOD and Mental Health sector Peaks”.

One person wanted us to ensure that we visited member agencies to see what they do and invite members to visit our offices as well.



## Conclusion

Survey respondents were most satisfied with the information and advice we provide to members, with 74% of respondents very satisfied with our performance in this area. This was followed by our policy development activities (71% very satisfied) and collaborative work (70% very satisfied). Only 63% of respondents were very satisfied with our leadership and innovation.

We always value feedback about priorities in our survey comments. This does not mean we will always adopt the suggestions.

Some ideas are too specific for a 1.4FTE organisation to prioritise. Other peaks with more contained target groups benefit from being able to specialise and focus their work, this is not as easy in the area of children and families.

With other suggested focus areas we may consider that there is comparatively reasonable resourcing in an area whereas other areas are missing out. So, for example the need to resource early childhood is well recognised and this period of child development attracts comparatively more focus than others, for example through philanthropic trusts and initiatives like the First 1000 Days. In contrast, the middle years (8 -12) is relatively under-resourced. Our advocacy around raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) is targeted at the development of new services to support children in this age group.

One respondent noted:

“There is still a lot of work to be done to address the service gap for children under the age of 12 who don't meet criteria for youth services, and it is unclear who is responsible for addressing these needs. Families ACT did work in this area years ago and it is clear that more advocacy is needed in this space.”

We appreciate that interest in our sector development work remains high and that our training is highly regarded by our members whether CYFSP funded or in the wider community services sector in the ACT. We are excited by the idea of engaging with ACT Government workers through joint training.

Our investment in a strong working relationship with Government is a recognition that this partnership is essential to arrive at the right policy settings which will benefit vulnerable and marginalised Canberran children and families.

An ACT Government representative noted:

“Families ACT[‘s]...partnership approach has been particularly effective, and I have found that working with them has resulted in positive outcomes...the ability to have candid, honest, and transparent discussions [has been very important].”

## Outcome reporting

This is the first year where we have been asked to directly report against the 4 outcomes identified in our new Deed of Grant. In preparation, we developed a program logic for our organisation to better understand the outcomes we are aiming to achieve.

While we are the peak body for children and families in the ACT, the Represented Group as described in the Deed comprises organisations that work with this cohort and ACT Government as the funding body for these services.

### **Outcome 1: The peak body's activity reflects a sound understanding of the issues that impact on the Represented Group.**

Families ACT's governance structure comprises a skills-based board and an Advisory Council of member representatives. The Advisory Council is composed of representatives of member organisations and informs the Board's decisions about practice issues. This is formalised through a representative from the Council attending board meetings to communicate the Council's views.

The many networks to which we belong (e.g. ACTCOSS peaks, governance groups and advisory bodies) also assist us to triangulate which issues are currently having the greatest impact on our key stakeholders.

Responses to our member and stakeholder survey area 3 'policy development' show that 71% of responders are very satisfied with Families ACT's policy development activities and 63% are very satisfied with the leadership and innovation (area 4) provided by the organisation. The annual member survey allows Families ACT to reflect its understanding of the issues that impact its members and the wider sector in line with outcome 1.

67% of those who responded to Families ACT's May 2023 survey are very satisfied with Families ACT's advocacy and representation activities. One survey respondent felt we did "*excellent work as a peak body.*"

### **Outcome 2: The Represented Group is supported, informed and engaged.**

Families ACT has developed a suite of practice tools to support the work of its members. Information is provided through our monthly updates, targeted emails and website resources as well as our attendance at a range of meetings. Our member survey is our principal annual engagement tool, but we use every opportunity that presents itself to connect with our members.

The responses to survey area 5 'information and advice' show that 74% of respondents are very satisfied and 26% are satisfied with the information and advice provided by Families ACT:

*"The work of Families ACT ensures a level of sector collaboration and unity on policy, reform and standards of practice. The work in this space informs community[and]...give[s insights into]...issues faced by families/YP and children and allows for open pathways of communication to achieve outcomes."*

Survey results in area 2 'Capacity building contributing to sector development' confirm that Families ACT meets outcome 2 with 64% of survey members and stakeholders being very satisfied with its sector development activities.

**Outcome 3: The voices of the Represented Group are heard and/or reflected in the Recipient’s policy advice and systemic advocacy.**

While our size makes it hard to spend as much time as we would ideally like in directly engaging members, we gather their input from all our activities. The suite of practice tools we deliver (for example the JCRs and CRT training) gives us many opportunities to discuss service delivery issues. Our attendance at forums allows us to network with other organisations, while membership of the ACTCOSS Peak CEO’s group gives us an overall picture of issues affecting the ACT.

In our annual member survey, we reflect what we have done over the preceding 12 months in response to member requests and suggestions. This is an important reporting mechanism which assures members that their feedback has been heard which the following comment from a respondent to our 2022-23 member survey felt that we:

*“Raise[ing] awareness of the challenges faced by children, families and the sector that supports them.” They added: “Families ACT is uniquely placed to listen to these voices and advocate on their behalf for policies and programs that support children and families.”*

**Outcome 4: The peak has influence on issues, policies and programs affecting the interests of the Represented Group, including through research and engagement.**

We believe, and we are often told by members, that our influence is disproportionate to our size and resourcing. For example, as part of the Minister’s Critical Friends group we have had a formative impact on the development of the Next Steps strategy. This influence has shaped documents but also communication and sector engagement.

We have been providing advice on raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) to CSD and more recently to JACS on the MACR draft legislation.

Families ACT’s Executive Officer is a member of the CYFSP Workforce Development Subcommittee (WDT) which affords FACT the opportunity to advise and inform on sector development opportunities for Families ACT’s represented group. Families ACT has collaborated with the Youth Coalition of the ACT in the development and implementation of a reflective supervision training package after the need for such a training had been identified in a number of different forums.

Responses by our members and stakeholders to survey area 6 ‘Collaborative Approaches’ confirms that Families ACT successfully delivers under outcome 4:

*“The policy pieces have been very helpful particularly those associated with research in the space of development and best practices. “*

**OUR VISION**

**A Canberra where  
all families thrive**

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