



Annual Report to the Community Services Directorate
2020-2021



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Introduction

This report provides a brief commentary of Families ACT’s work throughout the 2020-21 year and an assessment of our performance based on our annual member and stakeholder survey. The survey was conducted in June 2021. For each deliverable this and last year’s results are presented side by side for comparison.

More detailed information about Families ACT’s work such as policy positions, recent submissions and research reports can be found on its website at www.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

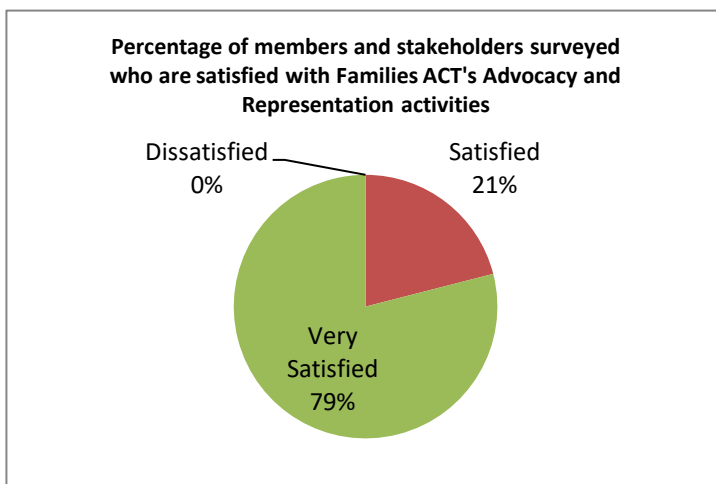
1. Advocacy and Media

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

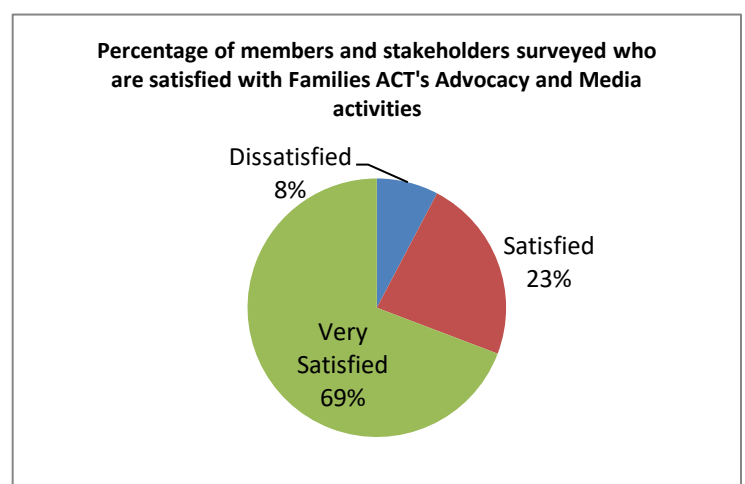
Over the past couple of years members have asked for our support to ensure that they are best able to respond to the ACT Government's Commissioning for Social Impact initiative. They have also requested strong advocacy around re-procurement saying they can find it difficult to voice concerns, particularly around open tender processes.

Families ACT has actively lobbied ACT Government (CSD, the Health Directorate and Minister Stephen-Smith) for genuinely collaborative commissioning. We have participated in an early commissioning process and have given feedback on the experience. We continue to support Government to improve the experience of commissioning for our members.

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2019-2020



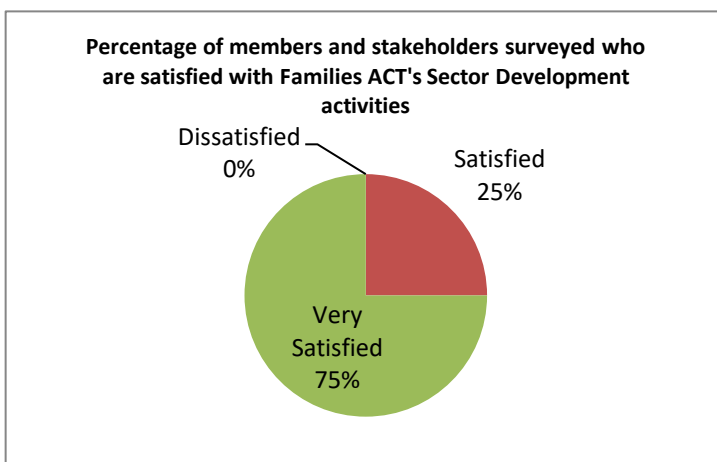
2. Capacity Building Contributing to Sector Development

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

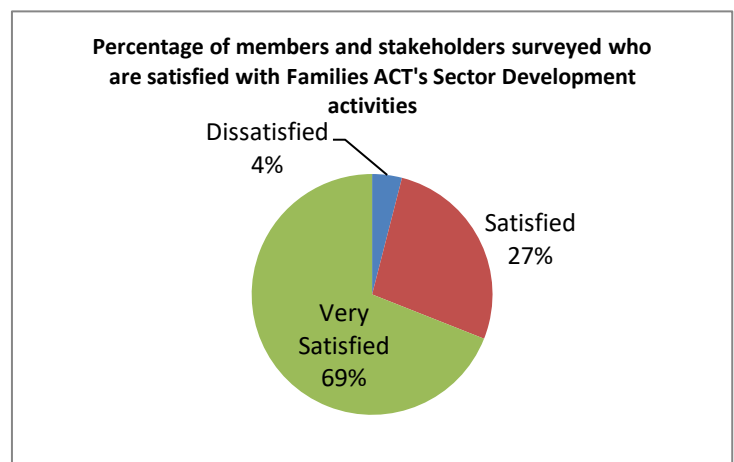
In last year's survey members told us they really value our work in sector development, particularly related to the Casework Reflective Tool and Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) and asked for more focus on these areas.

In the last twelve months we have continued to train CYFSP workers in the Casework Reflective Tool but have also offered the training to our members outside the program at no charge. Our work on JCRs is summarised under Leadership and Innovation.

2020-2021



2019-2020



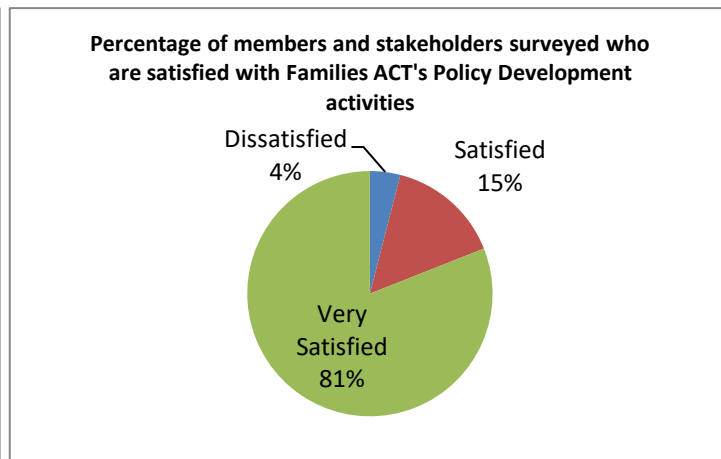
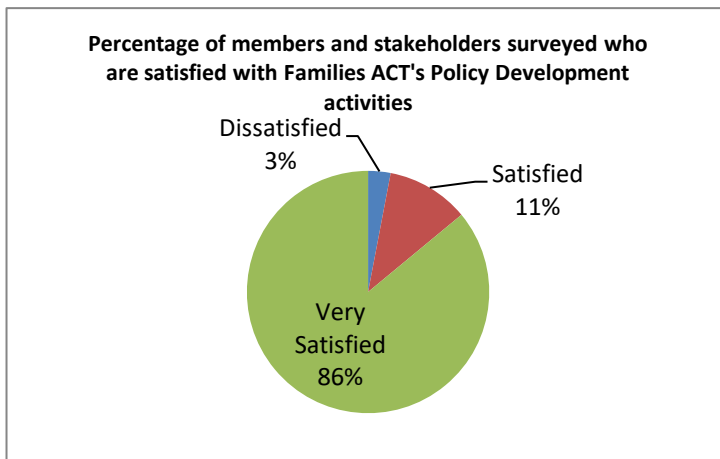
3. Policy Development

In responding to the 2020 survey, members asked us to progress our work on the middle years. The current focus in this area is contributing to the groundwork needed to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility. We believe the middle years is an opportune time to intervene to divert young people away from the criminal justice system by providing better services for this age group.

Members have told us that Families ACT continues to be a well-respected peak body in the ACT and that our advice is listened to by government. We are endeavouring to use this relational capital to improve connections between Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) and the community sector. For example we arranged child protection training for CYFSP practice leaders in the hope of better equipping community sector staff to work with CYPS. This is a longitudinal piece of work.

2020-2021

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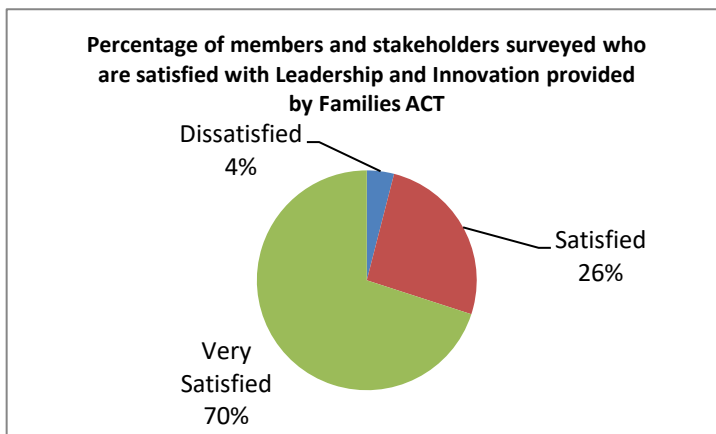


4. Leadership and Innovation

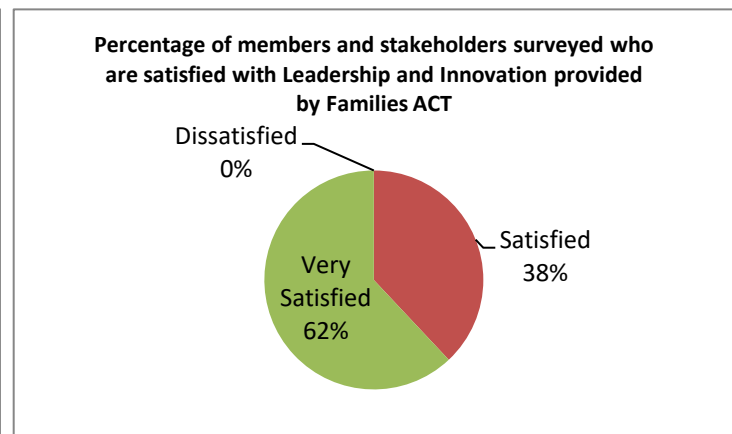
As a peak body, an important role of Families ACT is to provide leadership and innovation. We believe that we provide this through our core work – advocacy and representation, capacity building, policy development and partnership. Over the past 8 years we have developed a suite of practice tools to assist members who work with children, young people and families.

In last year's survey the Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) were identified as an example of our leadership in developing practice in the sector. The JCRs are one of a suite of common language practice tools to assist members who work with vulnerable children, young people and families. JCRs aim to create a culture of inquiry, continuous learning and collaboration that will improve practice for better outcomes for clients and communities. The JCRs have been taking place since 2017. Over the past year we have commissioned an evaluation of the JCRs and have embarked on a JCR improvement project. This is an expression of our commitment to continuously improve the program.

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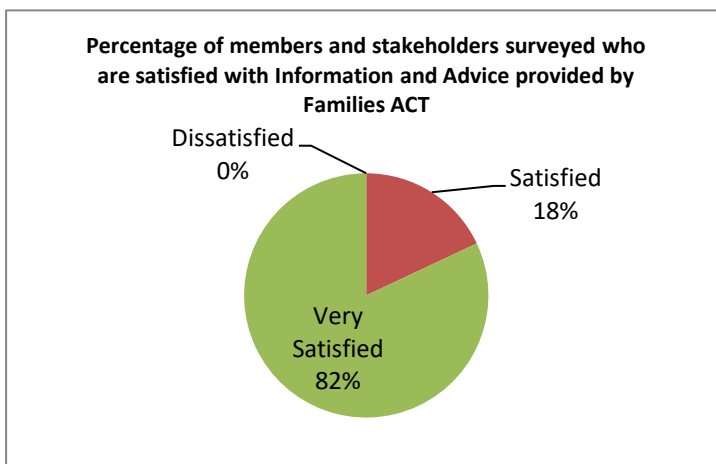


5. Information and Advice

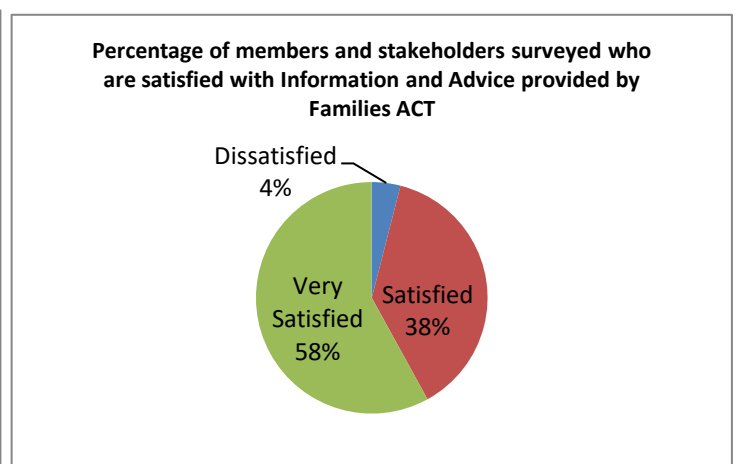
One of Families ACT's roles is to communicate information and provide advice to members and stakeholders.

In last year's survey members asked us to provide more information about our activities. Over the past 12 months we have made a concerted attempt to improve in this area by producing regular member updates. Engagement with our social media has also grown encouragingly. In January 2021 Families ACT's Facebook account had 305 followers compared to 187 the year before (an increase of 63%) and our Twitter account had 121 followers compared to 86 the year before (an increase of 41%).

2020-2021



2019-2020



6. Collaborative Approaches

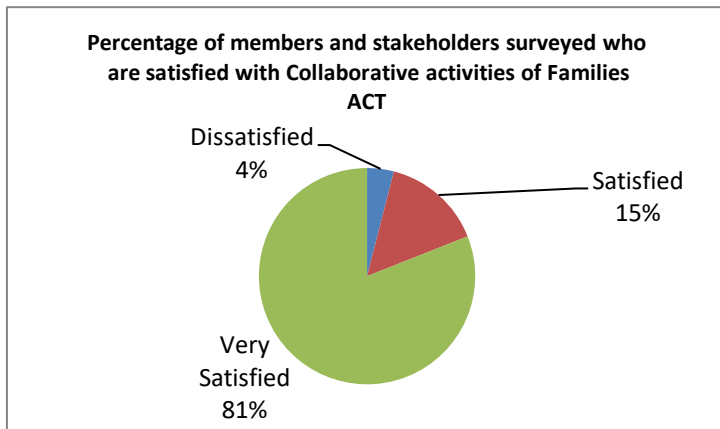
Families ACT values its collaborative relationships with members, other services, peak bodies and government.

Our membership of the CYFSP Workforce Development and Training (WDT) Sub-Committee continues to afford great opportunities to collaborate around sector development. In our last member survey you asked for the reintroduction of trauma training. The WDT is now in the process of rolling this out for the CYFSP.

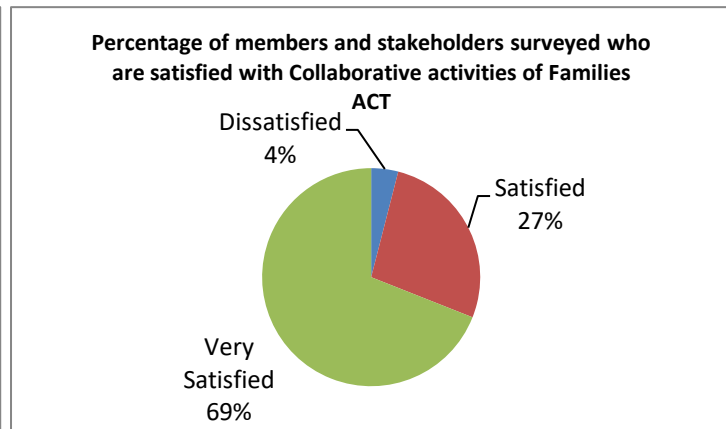
FACT is partnering with the ACT Children and Young People's Commissioner, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, ACTCOSS and Change the Record to advocate to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility (#RaisetheAge) in the ACT. As with all effective partnerships this provides an opportunity to benefit from a range of perspectives and arguments in favour of resetting the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14.

This year we have been working on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Youth Coalition of the ACT with whom we are co-located. The MoU seeks to develop the existing working relationship, exploring new options for collaboration.

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Detailed Member Feedback

Overall, we received 28 responses to our 2020-21 member survey.

Of the respondents:

- frontline workers comprised 10.71%
- program coordinators or team leaders comprised 21.43%
- program managers comprised 21.43%
- senior managers comprised 10.71%
- directors or executive officers comprised 35.71%.

This year we received less feedback from frontline workers with participation falling from 30.77% last year to 10.71% this. Conversely responses from directors and CEOs rose from 11.54% to 35.71%.

Although the number of responses increased slightly from last year (up from 26), this is still markedly less than the 2019 return of 37. This may well be an effect of the fatigue that many in the sector are feeling as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A smaller survey response can skew results (for example one respondent can represent a significant percentage of the total number of respondees) and more importantly less surveys completed diminishes the amount of written feedback which is so valuable input for reporting and planning purposes.

Those members who were very satisfied with our advocacy activities grew by 10% (from 69% to 79%) and with our Sector Development by 6% (from 69% to 75%). This change was more substantial in Collaboration (an increase of 12% from 69% to 81%). As in previous years members were most satisfied with our policy development work (up from 81% - 86%).

The most gratifying result from the survey was that our provision of Information and Advice received the second highest approval rating (those very satisfied rising from 58% to 82%). This was a vindication of a concerted effort to improve in this area following some criticism over the past two years and evidence that our introduction of regular member updates has been valued.

Strengths

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

- *Families ACT have their finger on the pulse when it comes to the community sector and are very responsive to the needs and gaps in service*
- *Thank you for being a collaborative partner and a driving force for best practice*
- *Outstanding work for a small team!*
- *Will and the team and Board should be very proud of the work they do day in day out. One of the greatest supports to the community sector in Canberra and epitomize*

- *what real collaboration is all about .*

Two specific comments reflected our progress in communications with members this year:

- *I have been very impressed by the new approach to communication taken by Families ACT over the past 12 months and I hope the rest of the community feels the same way. Although it can often be time consuming, being able to accurately and quickly relay information about Families ACT, what you are doing, areas you are working on and key issues faced in the community are excellent ways to reach people and organisations further and is exactly how a peak body should be acting. Great work!*
- *Yvonne is a great asset to Families ACT and has done an excellent job in increasing its profile. The policy pieces that have been developed are excellent too!*

Areas for Improvement

The majority of those who responded to our question about potential areas for improvement offered no suggestions or felt that Families ACT was performing well.

One respondent said:

- *as with every year you are doing a great job and are an invaluable asset to the community sector.*

There was no common theme among the feedback provided by those who offered suggestions about how we might improve our performance.

One respondent felt that Families ACT should:

- *be more assertive in ensuring members voices/concerns are raised to government - particularly in relation to the commissioning process. The CYFSP program can only do so much with such limited funding - so peak bodies need to raise these concerns and advocate to government about the inadequacy of the funding levels relative to demand!*

Another that we should

- *increase visibility. Meet with members more frequently and find out their issues*

Another suggestion was the:

- *possible expansion of JCRs to services outside CYFSP funded programs*

One respondent said:

The families sector also has limited opportunities to get together and network and share information and learning. [...] it would be good to have a chance to meet with other family services in a less structured way to talk about the issues we are seeing, including CALD and DV services. Not sure if Families ACT can facilitate this sort of thing, but that's just an idea.

Priorities

A common theme in comments about priorities was support for continuing our current work. For example, one respondent said:

- *please continue with the great work you have done over the past year. Many if not all of the same issues remain priorities as we move forward.*

Members emphasised the importance of our sector development role when delivering or facilitating training for example:

- *capacity building of frontline workers and supporting staff wellbeing to deliver outcomes for the community*
- *rollout of the [Casework] Reflective Tool*
- *trauma training.*

Policy development was equally valued. Some specific suggestions for work in this area were:

- *A strong area of focus should remain in advocacy and policy development particularly in the Child Protection space....Research into how contact is run and managed and facilitated for families and children...space is necessary and it would be good to develop an advocacy approach to this area.*
- *The middle years work you did a few years ago was really good but hadn't really led to a change in services for 8-11 year olds and we still see this as a big need.*

A number of respondents wanted Families ACT to continue its advocacy focus and particularly that:

- *[Families ACT should] be a strong voice for members in the commissioning process*
- *Families ACT continues to represent the sector on many fronts. The next couple of years will be a chance for change and growth. Supporting collective work towards commissioning and sustainability will be extremely valuable*
- *please continue to participate for an inclusive and responsive [commissioning] process, with input from those at the receiving end of planning and delivery of services*
- *ensure Government and Sector are working together to deliver better outcomes for Families.*

A couple of members felt that advocating for increased funding for services should be a priority:

- *fixed budgets for so many years makes it difficult to meet the demand*

- *the CYFSP program can only do so much with such limited funding - so peak bodies need to raise these concerns and advocate to government about the inadequacy of the funding levels relative to demand!*

One respondent made the point that the sector would benefit if Families ACT also received increased funding:

- *You have a small team and its good you focus on doing a few things rather than try to do everything. More funding would lead to more work which would be a good benefit for the sector.*

Conclusion

The annual member survey reveals a 96% satisfaction rate with our performance in all areas (respondents satisfied or very satisfied with our work).

This year we have made strides in better informing our members about our work, but the challenge of communicating what we are doing while not losing momentum with our key pieces of work remains.

As usual we continued to advocate on behalf of our members on important issues such as ACT Government's commissioning reforms as well as how they could best be supported throughout the COVID pandemic.

Despite the ongoing obstacles presented by COVID-19, we managed to restart our face-to-face Casework Reflective Tool training sessions in the latter part of 2021 as well as expanding our Joint Case Review program. 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.

Given that Families ACT receives half the funding of the Youth Coalition of the ACT with whom we are co-located, members regularly comment about this inequity. Members and the ACT Government see our value and recognise how much we do with the very modest funding we receive, but a common theme is how much more we could achieve with a funding increase.