



Annual Report to the Community Services Directorate
2021-2022



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Introduction

This report provides a brief commentary of Families ACT’s work throughout the 2021-22 year and an assessment of our performance based on our annual member and stakeholder survey. The survey was conducted during May and June 2022. For each deliverable this and last year’s results are presented side by side for comparison.

The annual member survey reveals an over 92% satisfaction rate with our performance in all areas (respondents satisfied or very satisfied with our work).

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 also provides regular member updates informing its members and supporters in more detail about ongoing work.

Performance against deliverables

1. Advocacy and Media

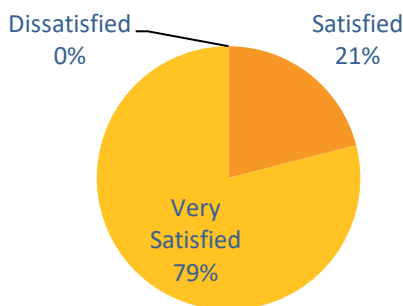
Families ACT provides advocacy and representation through our work with Government, other peak bodies and media.

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 actively with CSD to advocate for genuinely collaborative commissioning. Valuable lessons about the importance of open, honest communication and good faith have been learnt from the peaks' commissioning process. We continue to meet with the Minister for Families and Community Services seeking her commitment to the best possible experience of procurement for our members.

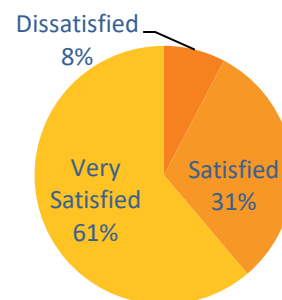
2020-2021

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 Media 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.

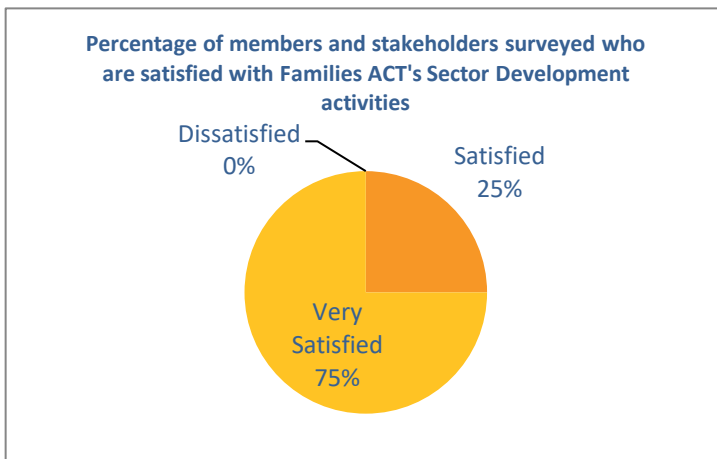
In last year's survey members told us they really value our work in building the capacity of front-line workers to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

We have recently completed a report on the suite of practice tools we have developed over the past 10 years from the Practice Framework in 2012 to the Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) in 2017 and Casework Reflective Tool in 2018. We hope to use this to lobby for increased, ongoing funding to ensure the sustainability of our capacity building work.

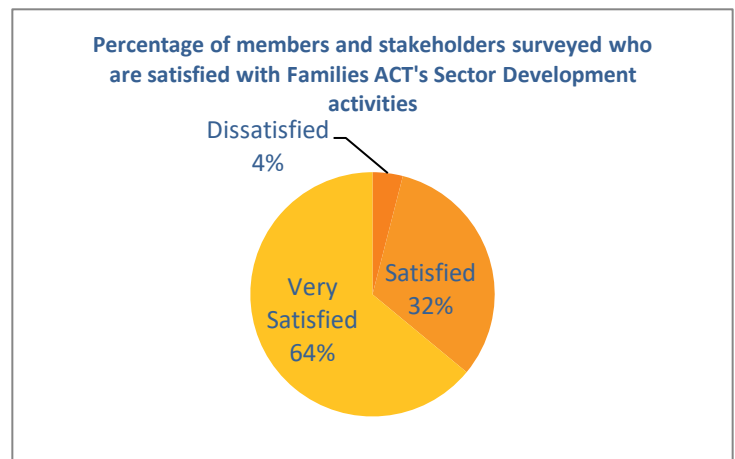
Despite the disruption of the COVID pandemic we have been able to run a number of JCRs over the past year and have responded to a suggestion from last year's survey that we extend JCR invitations to workers outside the CYFSP.

While COVID has prevented us running the Casework Reflective Tool training that we had planned, we have recently gained funding to run more sessions and have taken the opportunity to revise the training in preparation for this.

2020-2021



2021-2022



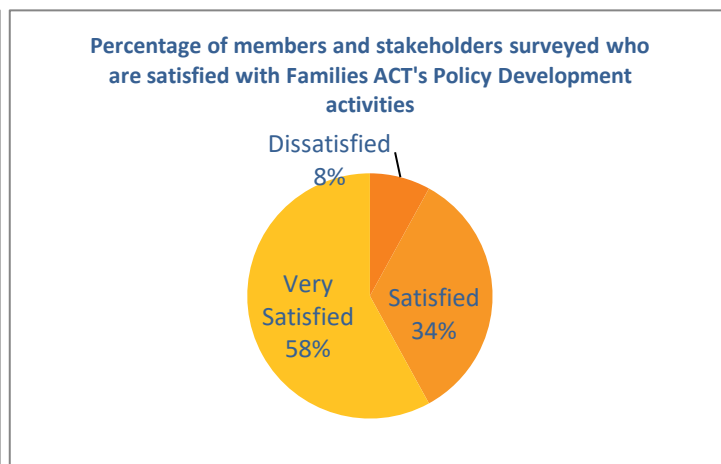
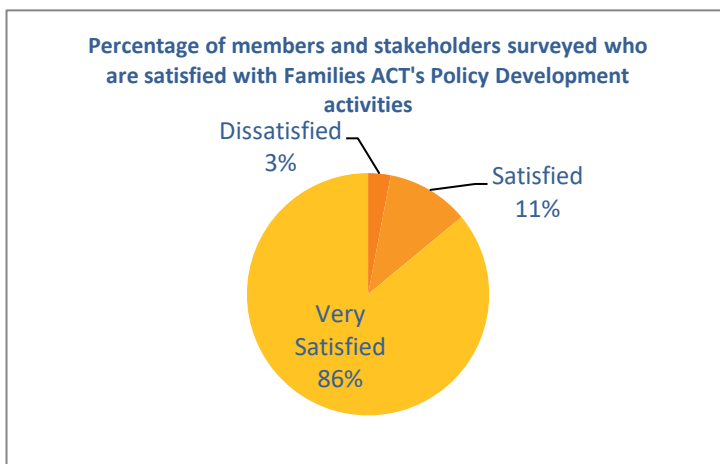
3. Policy Development

As part of our active role in supporting CSD’s commissioning processes we have recently been part of a group of critical friends to the Minister for Families and Community Services providing advice on the redesign of the out of home care and child protection systems in the ACT. ‘Next Steps’ is a far-reaching piece of policy design which has allowed us to have greater input into child protection reform, a policy priority for FACT.

We also continue to support raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR). However, the measures required to do this 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.

2020-2021

2021-2022

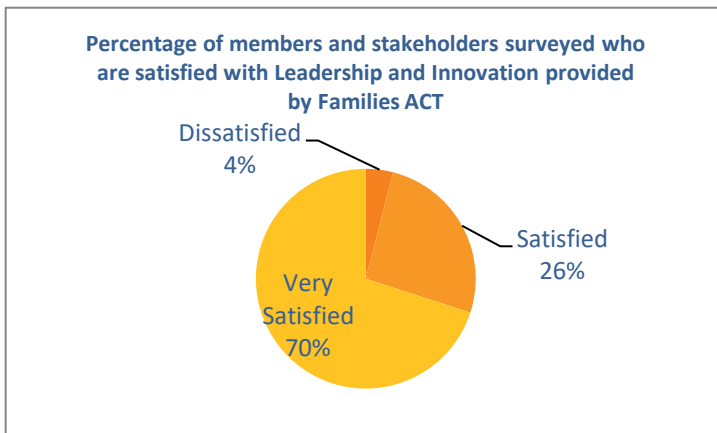


4. Leadership and Innovation

Our strong working relationship with government facilitates the role we play in leadership and innovation. We are members of the Joint Community Government Reference Group and CYFSP Directors Group and use these as well as other forums to promote best practice. For example, over the past year we have played an active role in the redesign of the Network Coordinator positions, one of the first *'Try Test and Learn'* commissioning projects. We have become a member of the Network Coordinator Governance Group and hope to use this opportunity to improve our members' experiences of the larger commissioning process.

In our 2020 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. Following a program evaluation, we have now completed an extensive JCR improvement process, including the development of a communication strategy, comprehensive guidelines, and procedures as well as an evaluation and monitoring framework. This is an expression of our commitment to continuously improve the program.

2020-2021



2021-2022



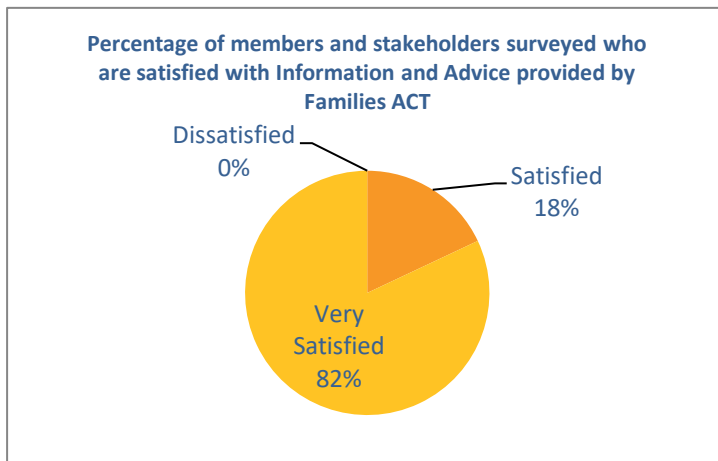
5. Information and Advice

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

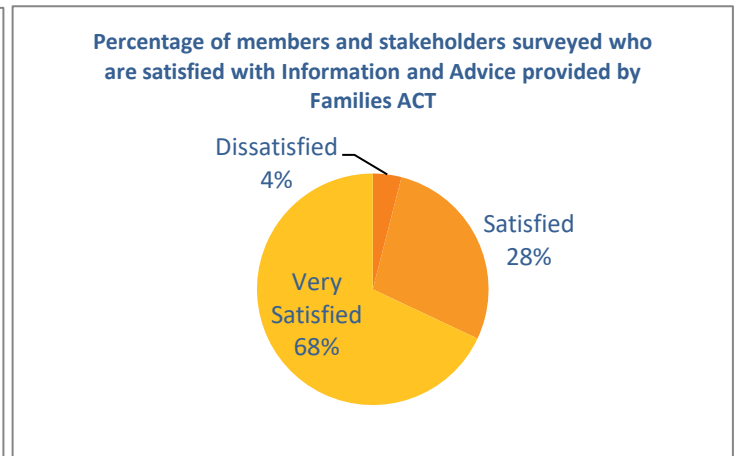
In response to feedback over several surveys we are now publishing a monthly update to members providing information about our activities. The updates have been well received and appreciated by our members.

Engagement with our social media has continued to grow in the last year. In March 2022, Families ACT's Facebook account had 610 followers compared to 305 the year before (an increase of 100%) and our Twitter account had 151 followers compared to 121 the year before (an increase of 24%).

2020-2021



2021-2022



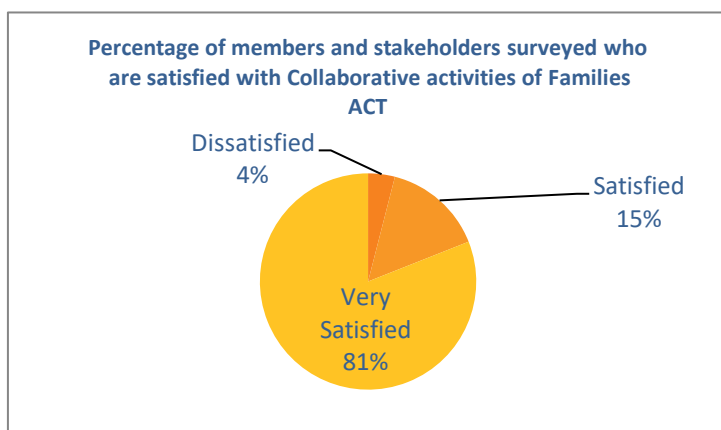
6. Collaborative Approaches

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

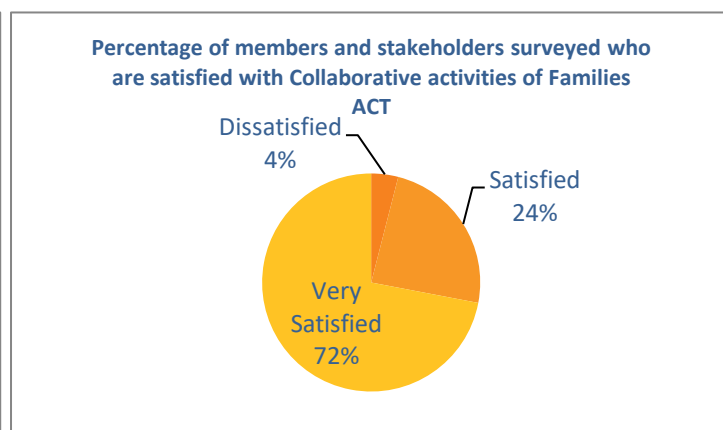
Our membership of the CYFSP Workforce Development and Training (WDT) Sub-Committee continues to afford great opportunities to collaborate around sector development. In our last survey members asked for the reintroduction of trauma training. We have been a strong supporter of this training in the past and are delighted that WDT has now put it in place for CYFSP services.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) we have developed in conjunction with the Youth Coalition of the ACT has just been signed. However, in many ways this just cements the collaborative relationship that already exists. For example, over the past few years the Youth Coalition and Families ACT have been discussing the need for clinical supervision training for community sector managers and team leaders. The two organisations have been successful in gaining funds for the design of a tailored training package which it is hoped will be rolled out in 2023. Many thanks to the Youth Coalition for their lead role in achieving this.

2020-2021



2021-2022



Detailed Member Feedback

Overall, we received 26 complete responses to our 2021-22 member survey. This represents an approximate return rate of 39%.

Of the respondents:

- frontline workers comprised 34.62%
- program coordinators or team leaders comprised 26.92%
- program managers comprised 11.54%
- senior managers comprised 19.23%
- directors or executive officers comprised 7.69%.

This year we received significantly more feedback from frontline workers with participation rising from 10.71% last year to 34.62% this. Conversely responses from directors and CEOs fell from 35.71% to 7.69%.

The number of responses dropped slightly from last year - down from 28, this was despite a longer survey collection period and moving collection a month earlier in an attempt to facilitate more returns. In 2019 we received 37 surveys. The lower response rate may well reflect the fatigue resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the key issues created by a smaller survey sample is the skewing of results. For example a single respondent rating our performance as a "1" across all areas resulted in a 4% dissatisfaction score for all our work. More importantly, less surveys completed diminished the amount of written feedback which provides such valuable input for reporting and planning purposes.

Strengths

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

"FACT does a wonderful job and are very responsive to feedback"

"It's orgs like you that change the way people think"

"FACT does an amazing amount of work on very limited resources"

"Continue to be that great connector between what you are seeing and hearing in the sector and what is being developed and designed in government. Please be that frank and fearless voice that ensures we work together to achieve better outcomes for Canberrans."

"Thanks, you guys really pack a punch."

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:

“Families ACT do great work. Keep your voice strong.”

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

One respondent felt:

“It would be good to see a stronger presence in the local media from Families ACT talking about issues that families are experiencing. It would also help to clarify who the main target group of FACT is. Most of the work seems to focus mainly on services (like advocacy about commissioning) and all the members are community organisations, but the purpose of FACT is to “advocate and work for vulnerable and marginalised children, young people and families in the ACT”. Other peaks seem to have clearer target groups (Carers ACT is for carers, whereas MHCC is for community mental health services etc).”

Other ideas included:

- *More regular and closer connections to agencies*
- *More group catch ups amongst members to share what everyone is doing*
- *Better collaboration with child and family organisations, advocacy for workforce / systemic issues / higher level of involvement with government and non-government working groups*
- *Continuing to advocate for NFP organisations enabling members to have the resources and skills to deliver the necessary services in the community.*

Priorities

Members emphasised the importance of our continuing role in sector development whether delivering or facilitating training:

“Continuing to support capacity building [and] sector development are essential and great progress has already been made in this space.”

They asked for us to:

- *Continue to champion the importance of the suite of tools for practitioners within CYFSP and the broader sector*
- *[Provide] regular Casework tool training sessions*
- *[Provide] training for CYPs staff to have a unified approach to their work*

- *[Facilitate] sector development in the areas of mental health, suicide intervention, case note writing.*

Several respondents identified an advocacy and policy development role for Families ACT around commissioning:

- *Supporting the sector through commissioning*
- *Working in collaboration with Sector and Government, being a part of advocacy and policy development with government in the commissioning space*
- *Supporting the development activities/training/policies that will help in the commissioning of services that address the needs of vulnerable families.*

There were also several suggestions for new areas of advocacy:

“I would really like to see more advocacy from Families ACT in relation to early childhood. COVID has very adversely affected the development of young children, and public child development services in Canberra have dropped off or restricted their delivery due to lock-downs etc. While there is a big focus on middle years kids in different areas, this already has a lot of attention. No one is advocating for younger children and their parents in Canberra, and whole year groups of children are falling through the gaps.”

“Advocate to government for a Child & Family Centre in the Woden, Weston or Molongolo region. Currently there is only one on the southside at Tuggeranong and they have turned me away when I have tried to refer clients to their service as the client is not in their region of Tuggeranong (client in Woden). I have had others say that they are supposed to help but they have turned me away from trying to refer clients in Woden on more than one occasion. We need a Child & Family Centre in the Woden region. One on the whole southside of town is too little for half of Canberra (i.e. all of the south).”

“Priorities should include issues related to children and families including health and early education opportunities- post covid issues - poverty and low income - families under pressure.”

One member felt that FACT should be more involved in:

- *Advocacy for Government funding particularly for adequate wages for staff retention*

While another wrote:

“I believe that it would be good to shift more focus into advocating for service delivery funding as this is an area that appears to be a challenge for many organisations.”

Conclusion

This year we continued to make strides in better informing members about our work, with 68% of respondents very satisfied with our performance in this area. This was second only to survey respondents' rating of our collaborative work (72% very satisfied).

We have continued, as requested over multiple surveys, to advocate on behalf of our members for a best practice commissioning process.

Despite the ongoing obstacles presented by COVID-19, we managed to expand 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.

The work we do represents great value for money. As one member put it:

"FACT does an amazing amount of work on very limited resources."

However, one comment from this year's survey captures an external view of some of the dilemmas our inadequate funding faces us with and the hard decisions we have to make to deliver quality in the face of this obstacle:

"It would be good to see a stronger presence in the local media from Families ACT talking about issues that families are experiencing. It would also help to clarify who the main target group of FACT is. Most of the work seems to focus mainly on services (like advocacy about commissioning) and all the members are community organisations, but the purpose of FACT is to "advocate and work for vulnerable and marginalised children, young people and families in the ACT". Other peaks seem to have clearer target groups (Carers ACT is for carers, whereas MHCC is for community mental health services etc)."

We have made a deliberate decision not to engage with local media about the issues facing children and families because we simply do not have time for it. Our .6 FTE Communications officer's time is also taken up with policy work as well as organising our JCRs. Our communications are deliberately focused on our members and Government.

We are well aware that we exist to promote the wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalised children and families, but with only 1.4 FTE positions we have decided that the best way to do this is to support our members who provide services to them. This is most evident in the development of our suite of tools over the past 10 years. Similarly, the reason we are closely involved in commissioning is because it offers the promise of better outcomes for service users.

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.

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.

FACT has established its credibility with Government and members for the quality of work it does, and we are not prepared to compromise on this. The problem is one of sustainability and the point has now been reached where Families ACT will have to use its reserves to maintain this standard. This is not financially viable into the future and will need to be addressed.