



**Annual Report to the Community Services Directorate
2019-2020**



Introduction

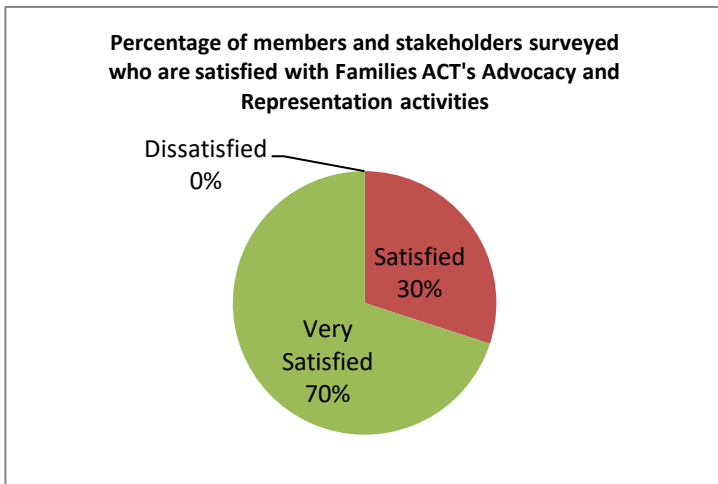
This report provides a brief commentary of Families ACT’s work throughout the 2019-20 year and an assessment of our performance based on our annual member and stakeholder survey. The survey was conducted in July 2020. For each deliverable this and last year’s results are presented side by side for comparison.

1. Advocacy and Media

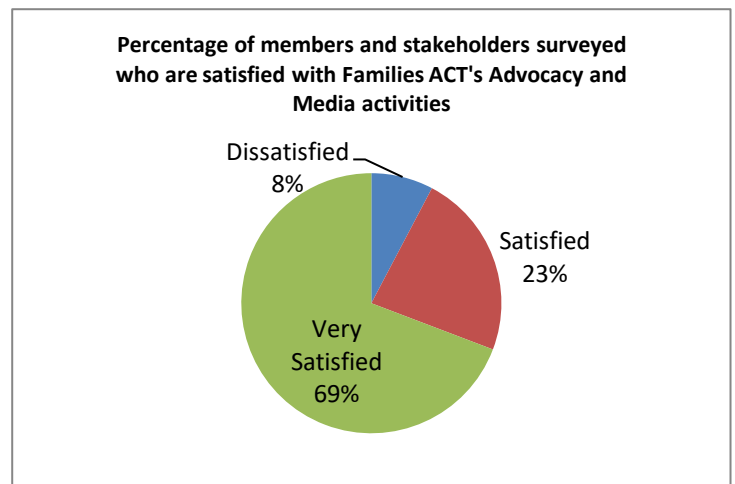
Families ACT (FACT) provides advocacy and representation through our work with Government, other peak bodies and media. Over the past couple of years members have asked for our support to ensure that they are best able to respond to the Early support by Design strategy/Commissioning for Social Impact. 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 supported the Youth Coalition of the ACT’s implementation of the CYFSP Service Improvement Project recognising its value in supporting agencies to effectively argue their value propositions during tendering. Most recently FACT produced a statement on behalf of the CYFSP Director’s group about the forthcoming re-procurement.

2018-2019



2019-2020



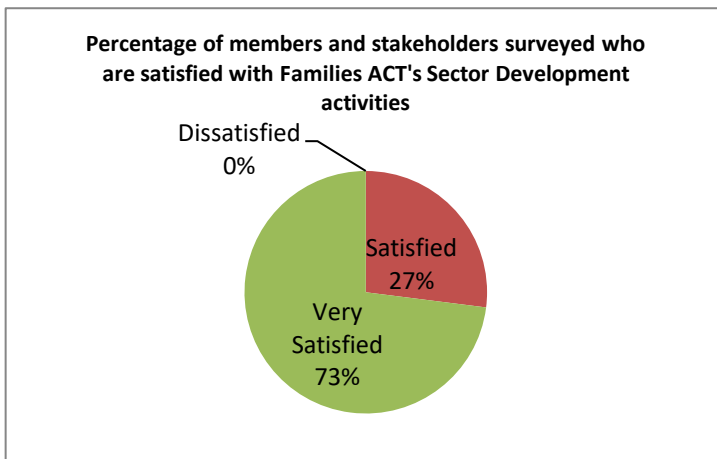
2. Capacity Building Contributing to Sector Development

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

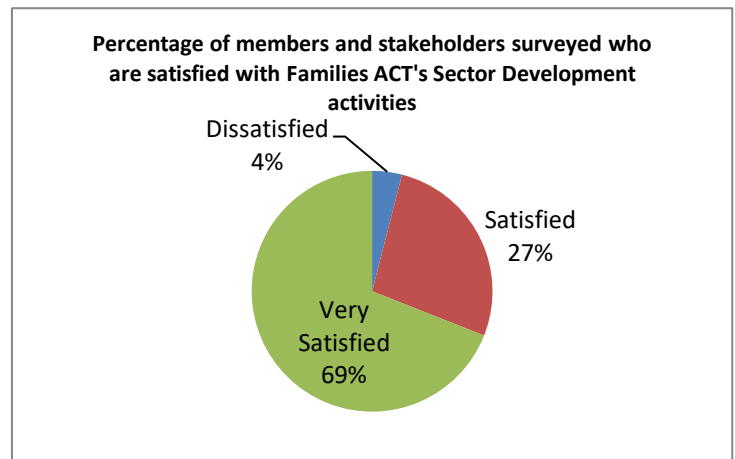
In last year's survey members told us they really value our work in sector development, particularly related to the Casework Tool and Joint Case Reviews and asked for more focus on these areas. In the last twelve months we have begun to roll out Casework Tool training across the CYFSP and are planning for its expansion into other sectors.

In June 2020, we were contracted by the Education Directorate to provide training to 32 of its staff. We have developed a hard copy Practitioner Guide and are nearing completion of an E-Tool. Our work on JCRs is summarised under *Leadership and Innovation*.

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2019-2020



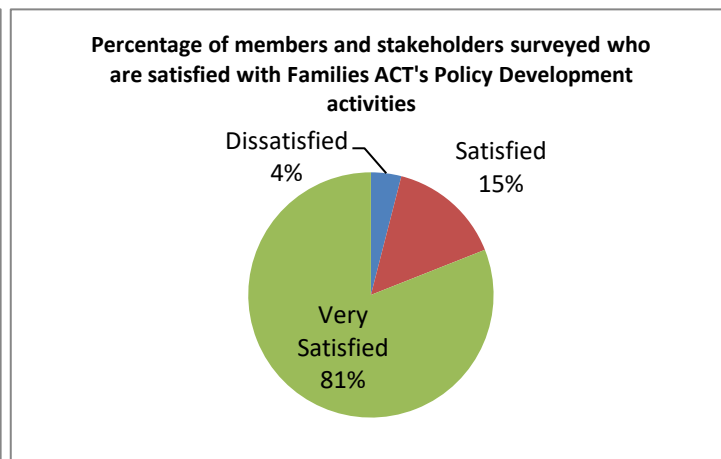
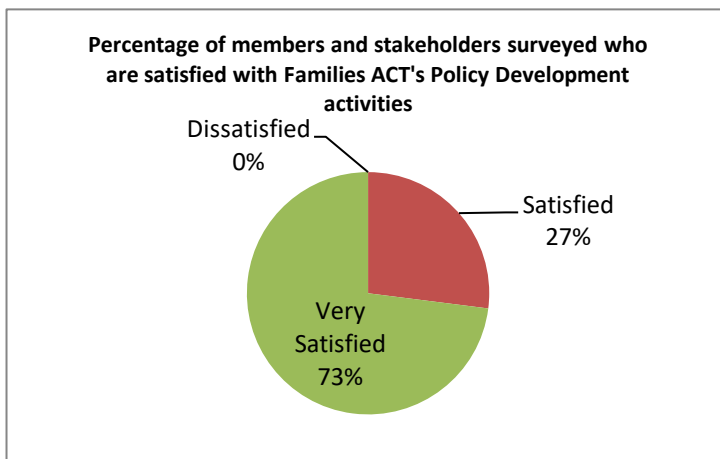
3. Policy Development

In responding to the 2019 survey, members asked us to progress our policy work on the middle years. As a result of our policy work, the ACT Education Directorate has now included questions about the wellbeing of middle years children in its primary school students' survey.

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. Following discussion with the Youth Coalition of the ACT and Families ACT's Board and Advisory Council, we have decided to use our relational skills to try and effect change in the child protection system, starting by improving collaboration between child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) and the community sector. This will be a low-key, longitudinal piece of work.

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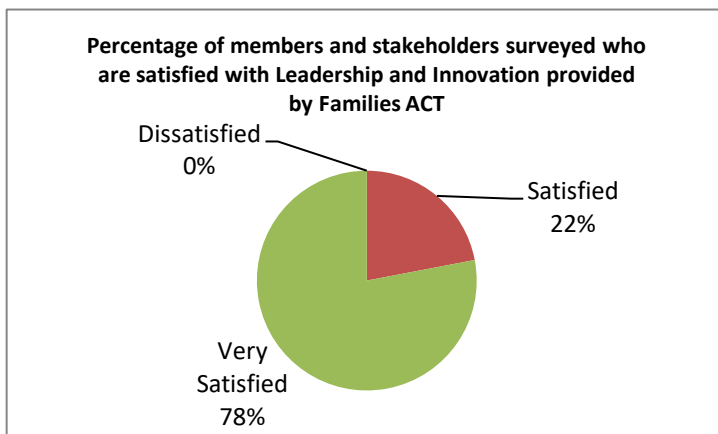
4. Leadership and Innovation

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.

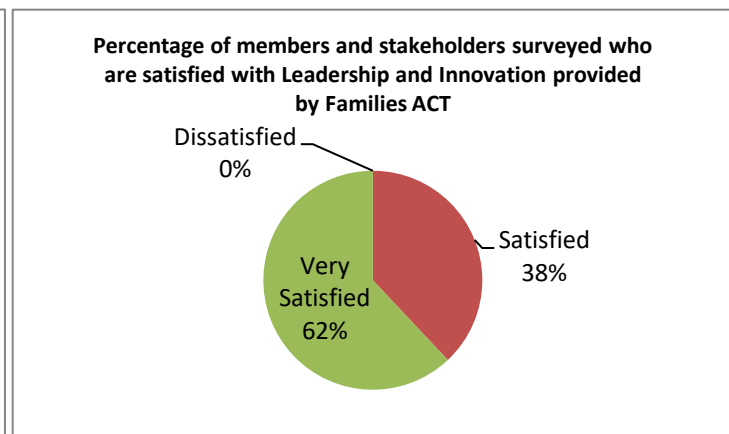
The essence of this work has been to develop a common practice language for workers who come from different professional disciplines. An essential element in this suite of tools is Joint Case Reviews (JCRs). JCRs aim to create a culture of inquiry, continuous learning and collaboration that will improve practice for better outcomes for clients and communities. The JCRs have been taking place since 2017. Over the past year we have developed new training for JCR facilitators and commissioned an evaluation. This is an expression of our commitment to continuously improve the program. The evaluation will be used to seek ongoing funding to further develop and support this initiative.

The recent COVID-19 environment has proven that Families ACT’s systems can keep pace with the challenges of remote work. A year ago, FACT adopted a cloud-based accounting system, while in January we established cloud-based filing systems through Microsoft Sharepoint and set up video communications through Microsoft Teams. These have worked very effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2018-2019



2019-2020



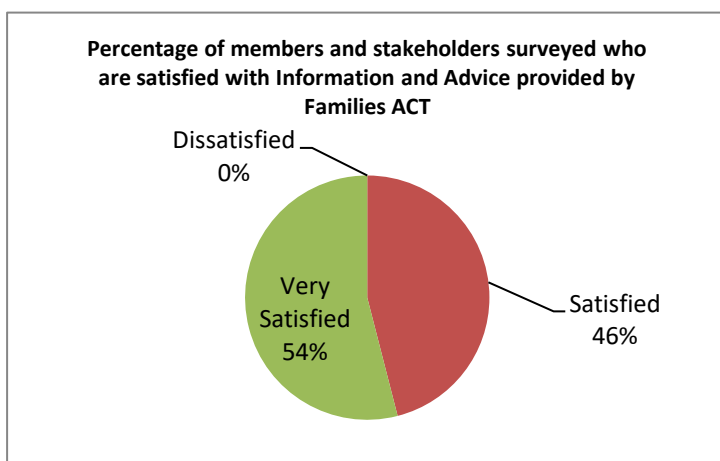
5. Information and Advice

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

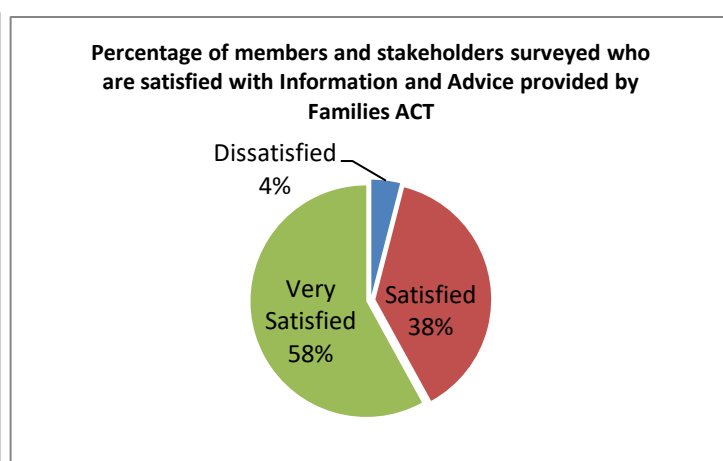
In last year's member survey, we were rated lowest in our provision of Information and Advice. This area is a challenge for us as a small organisation juggling a number of activities. Feedback from members has convinced us to invest our time in social media rather than producing a regular newsletter. We have recently refreshed our website to make it easier to access our Facebook feed by placing this on our Homepage. There has also been an increased focus on postings on our Twitter account this year.

The COVID-19 environment has also provided opportunities to focus on information sharing. Together with the Youth Coalition of the ACT we surveyed members about their experiences of service provision during the Pandemic sharing findings with members and Government. Families ACT has also produced a COVID-19 resources list for workers and service users. This work was again communicated to our members and the wider public via our social media channels (Twitter and Facebook) and targeted emails.

2018-2019



2019-2020



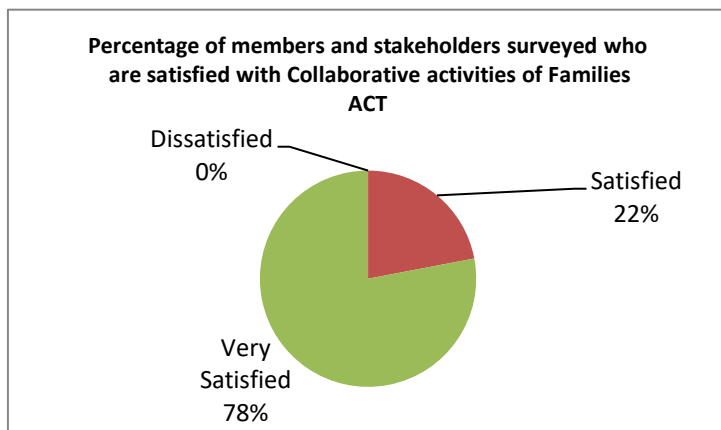
6. Collaborative Approaches

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

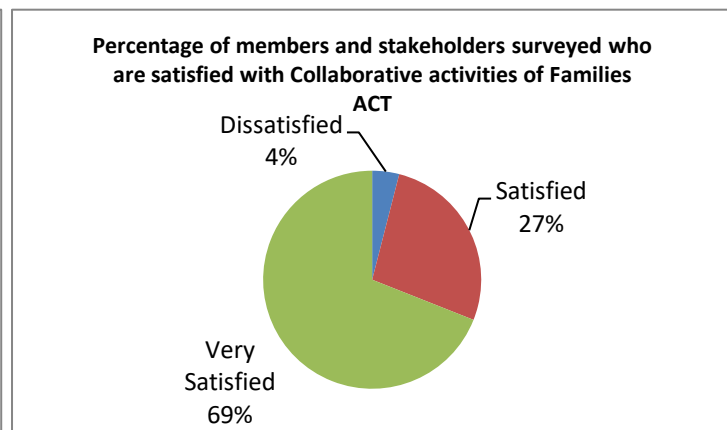
Our membership of the CYFSP Workforce Development and Training (WDT) Sub-Committee continues to afford great opportunities to collaborate around sector development. The WDT comprises representatives from a number of different agencies with an impressive range of skills and experience. Work over the past 12 months to develop a program logic and refine procedures for the group has further enhanced this highly productive environment.

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.

2018-2019



2019-2020



Member Feedback

We received 26 responses to our 2019-20 member survey. Of the respondents:

- frontline workers comprised 30.77%
- program coordinators or team leaders comprised 19.23%
- program managers comprised 19.23%
- senior managers comprised 19.23%
- directors or executive officers comprised 11.54%.

As with last year this represents a growing spread of staff who are responding to the survey. Notably frontline worker participation rose from 21.62% to 30.77%

However, the overall number of responses fell significantly from last year's 37. This may well be an effect of the fatigue that many workers are feeling after bushfires, hail and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As always, a smaller survey response can skew results and we missed the quantity of written feedback we received in 2019 – the most valuable input for reporting and planning purposes.

Those members who were very satisfied as opposed to satisfied with our performance fell slightly for Advocacy (a percentage point) and a little more for Sector Development (4%). This change was more substantial in Collaboration (9%).

Our members were most satisfied with our policy development (up from 73 - 81%) and least satisfied with our Leadership and Innovation (down from 78 – 62%). Again, we were rated lowest in our provision of Information and Advice, although those very satisfied with our performance in the area rose from 54 – 58%. This area continues to be a challenge for us as a small organisation juggling a number of activities. While we believe our efforts to use social media more effectively in communicating what we do have been successful, we need a better strategy for informing our members about our work.

Strengths

The overwhelming majority of feedback from survey respondents was positive. A number of members said they *“valued and appreciated the support”* Families ACT provides. Some of the other comments received were:

- *“The work that Families ACT does is incredibly important and the fact that Families ACT have focused on a non-adversarial relationships approach to advocacy means that Government will listen”.*
- *“Families ACT, while a small peak body, has a large and respected voice. Keep advocating and collaborating, two key components that Families ACT does very well”.*
- *“[Families ACT is] a proactive, well organised and collaborative peak”.*

Areas for Improvement

Approximately a quarter of respondents said they felt that Families ACT did not need to improve its work as a peak body, saying things like *"I think you do a great job"*. Information was the key area singled out for improvement comments included:

- *"I know Families ACT is doing a lot of good work - you can see the passion and commitment of the team in the meetings that I attend. But I don't know enough. Maybe I don't attend enough meetings or maybe Families ACT's great work isn't regularly shared"*.
- *"Please let us know what you are doing more often"*.

One respondent felt that Families ACT neglected the interests of non-CYFSP members and should:

- *"Represent the whole of the families services sector regardless of funding source (not just CYFSP)"*.

Another felt that Families ACT should be involved in much more advocacy and representation of members.

Priorities

Over a third of respondents identified capacity building and sector development as a key priority:

- *"Sector development needs to continue to bring similar services in line with each other"*
- *"Sector development [is needed] to support consistent practice and raise the standards of service"*
- *"[I] would love to see [the] case work tool training expanded"*

One respondent saw a broader role for Families ACT

- *"Helping NFPs get training in multiple areas so that we can meet standards set by government (that they don't factor into tenders)"*.

Policy development and advocacy activities were the second most frequently identified priority:

- *"I believe that Families' ACT role as a peak body is to be the interface between the government funding bodies and services to champion the issues most relevant to the cohort being supported. Therefore, the priority should be policy development to ensure that governments funding focus is in the most appropriate area. Funding needs to be directed to the area most in need at the time"*.

Some of the suggestions for work in this area were more specific:

- *“Create better pathways to collaborative case work; CYPS, CARHU, CAMHS should be triaged so that an inquiry and/or referral goes immediately to the best organisation to deal with the matter. Currently the referrer must talk to each agency in order to ascertain which is the best agency for the client”.*
- *“The past six months has been a challenging time for the Canberra community and while some areas have had to flex down, the community sector has had to rapidly adapt and flex up in response to multiple factors, the latest being COVID-19. COVID-19 has created an environment where innovative is seen as necessary, and that adaptive work practices are now the norm. How do we translate this into long term change and acceptability. How do we adapt our large processes to be more responsive and flexible utilising the lessons learnt from this time.”*

A couple of members felt that gaining increased funding should be a priority. One said:

- *“More funding to have more staff to do more of what you are doing would be wonderful.”*

Conclusion

Over 90% of those who responded to our survey remained satisfied or very satisfied with our performance across all areas of our work.

We are aware of the challenge of communicating what we are doing to our members and other key stakeholders while not losing momentum with our key pieces of work and will amend our communication strategy accordingly in 2020-21.

We are also mindful that, while we are funded through the CYFSP, we have non-CYFSP members. One of the recent initiatives Families ACT’s Board has decided on is to offer Casework Tool training free to these members. We will continue to look for opportunities to respond to their needs.

Respondent feedback continues to provide valuable input into our planning however it is important to recognise that in some cases the work that members would like to see expanded on and prioritised by Families ACT currently exceeds the organisation’s capacity.

Families ACT’s Board and Advisory Council have a strategic plan which they review regularly to determine which areas to prioritise in future planning.