

The development of our Suite of Tools



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A decorative graphic on the right side of the page consists of several overlapping geometric shapes in shades of orange, yellow, and red, including circles and triangles, set against a white background.

Acknowledgement

Families ACT recognises the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and values their contribution to the life of our community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present.

Families ACT owes a particular debt of gratitude to Fiona Macgregor who developed the first of the suite of tools, the Practice Framework, 10 years ago and has continued to champion sector development since then, both as a board member of Families ACT and as a manager in the community sector.

We are thankful to all those who helped to develop, pilot, implement and adopt the suite of tools. The practitioners and managers involved had the difficult task of balancing their workload with their obligations to the pilot process. Their commitment was greatly appreciated.

Our thanks for the development of the Practice Framework to Fiona MacGregor, Kate Butler, Admir Meko and the agencies who volunteered to participate in the pilot:

- Belconnen Community Services (now CRCS)
- Relationships Australia Canberra and Region
- CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn
- Youth and Family Connect - Parentline ACT
- Our Place (auspiced by Barnardos and Anglicare).

Our thanks for the development of Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) to Giovanna Richmond, Fiona MacGregor, the facilitators who make the running of JCRs possible and in particular Dan Gaffney who has been a champion of this tool since its inception.

Our thanks for the development of the Casework Reflective Tool to Kate Butler, Giovanna Richmond, Justin Barker and Fiona MacGregor and the Casework Reflective Tool pilot agencies Anglicare, Barnardos, Capital Region Community Services, PCYC, Messengers Program (Tuggeranong Arts Centre) and Woden Community Service.

Our thanks to the various Community Services Directorate and ACT government staff and management who have supported Families ACT to complete this work.

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The development of our Suite of Tools report

Written by Daina Neverauskas

Edited by Anne Daly, Will Mollison, Yvonne Gritschneider, Fiona McGregor

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Abbreviations

ACU	Australian Catholic University
CFP	Connecting Families Project
CRT	Casework Reflective Tool
CYFSP	Child Youth and Family Services Program
CSD	Community Services Directorate
FACT	Families ACT
FAHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community and Indigenous Affairs
JCR	Joint Case Review
SF	Strengthening Families



Executive Summary

Introduction

The development of contemporary approaches to supporting vulnerable children, young people and families has been well documented in research and practice literature internationally and in Australia for over 50 years (e.g. Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd February 2004, ThinkPlace 2013).

The introduction of the Child Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP) in 2012 was a reorientation of the service system in the ACT to better address the needs of this population.

Inherent in this refocusing was the need for practitioners to have new tools to undertake significantly more complex work. Over a 10-year period Families ACT has developed and auspiced a suite of tools for this purpose.

What is Families ACT's Suite of Practice Tools?

The tools comprise the:

- CYFSP Practice Framework for Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families
- the Strengthening Families Approach
- Joint Case Reviews (JCRs)
- the Casework Reflective Tool (CRT).

Why develop a suite of tools?

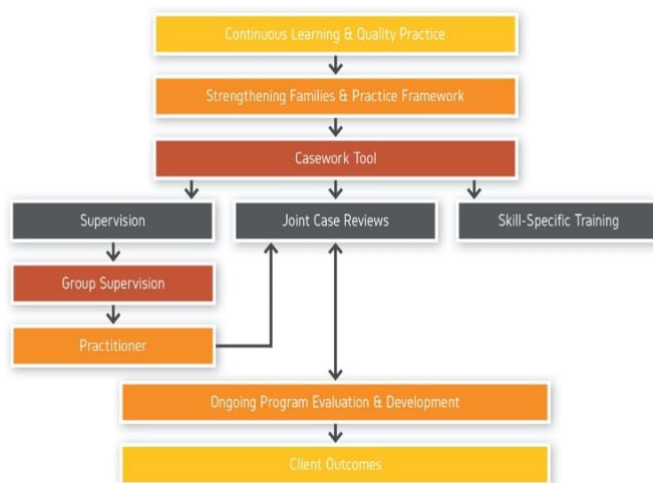
The ACT community services sector has a varied workforce with differing professional experience and qualifications. A common practice language is needed to facilitate collaborative work, an essential element in working with clients with complex issues. The tools represent a strategic approach to improving outcomes for vulnerable clients, supporting practitioners performing complex and often stressful work.

How were the tools developed?

The tools are grounded in research and are evidence-based. Practitioners have been

involved at every stage of their creation and implementation.

The Community Services Directorate has been a partner from the outset of their development providing funding and an



authorising environment for their integration into CYFSP service delivery.

What are the foundations of the tools?

- Collaboration
- Supervision and Reflective Practice
- Evidence Based & Evidence Growing Practice
- Theoretical and Practice Knowledge – service providers and service users.

They are:

- Child/Young Person Centred
- Family Focused and Culturally Responsive
- Strengths Based, Flexible and Responsive.

Benefits of the tools

The key stakeholders who have benefited in a range of ways from these tools are:

- Clients
- Organisations and their staff
- The ACT government

'The JCR model empowers my practice; it provides structure and the Practice



Framework is embedded' (Training participant)

The sector has increasingly embraced these supports for practice, using the Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool in a range of ways including for induction of new staff, structuring case discussions and conducting evaluation.

The tools all provide a feedback mechanism for identifying areas for further development. This has resulted in their ongoing improvement and also in the development of additional training initiatives. For example, the Youth Coalition and FACT have sought funding from the Workforce Development sub-committee for the development of a new training package for the sector on supervision.

The tools have become imbedded in CYFSP contracts thus providing an authorising environment.

'Having practice standards helps with commissioning and tailoring of programs.' (Director, CSD)

Their development has also affirmed the role of peaks in working with the Directorate, Ministers, and practitioners to improve the professionalism of the sector.

'The role of peaks as friends of government is to keep the dialogue open and to reinvigorate and consolidate consistent practice.' (CEO, Community sector)

FACT's Board has recognised the benefits of training as many organisations as possible in the use of the common tools. It recognises that cost may be an impediment to those of its members who are not part of the CYFSP and therefore not eligible for free training. It has therefore decided to provide the training free to members outside CYFSP (e.g., the YWCA domestic violence service and Toora Women's Inc.).

In addition, promotion of the tools outside the CYFSP has enabled the provision of "fee

for service" training (e.g. staff of the Student Wellbeing Programs in the ACT Education and Training Directorate) delivering revenue for FACT to support other profit for purpose initiatives.

Funding

Families ACT has allocated a disproportionate amount of its limited resources to the development of the tools. The work has also been supported by the Community Services Directory (CSD) providing additional funding over the 10 years. A total of \$ 358,245 has been invested over the 10 years since 2010.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of the suite of tools has not always gone smoothly with a range of issues impacting ongoing sustainability. These issues included:

- staff turnover
- FACT's limited training capacity
- lack of a consistent authorising environment
- lack of a common language.

Some specific challenges relate just to the JCRs.

Other training is required to support use of the Tools.

Future Directions

A number of measures are needed to ensure:

- ongoing sustainability
- expansion of the reach of the suite of tools
- further evaluation of the impact on clients, government, and the community sector.



Introduction

The development of contemporary approaches to supporting vulnerable children, young people and families has been well documented in research and practice literature internationally and in Australia for over 50 years (Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd February 2004, ThinkPlace 2013). The introduction of the Child Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP) in 2012 was a reorientation of the service system in the ACT to better address the needs of this population. Inherent in this refocusing was the need for practitioners to have new tools to undertake significantly more complex work.

Over the past 10 years Families ACT has made a priority of sector development, creating and auspicing a suite of tools (The Tools) for working with vulnerable and marginalised children and families.

The sector has increasingly embraced these supports for practice, using the Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool (CRT) in a range of ways including for inducting new staff, structuring case discussions and evaluating practice. Since 2016 approximately 50 training and Joint Case Review (JCR) sessions have been held with some 600 practitioners attending sessions (see Training and Resources section for more detail).

This sector development work has hinged on a strong partnership with government who have believed in the Tools, funded their development and provided an authorising environment, mandating their use through service and funding agreements.

'The role of peaks as friends of government needs to keep the dialogue open, reinvigorate and consolidating consistent practice' (Director, CSD).

The Tools remain a critical component of effective care for vulnerable families, promoting a common practice language, collaboration and reflective practice. Arguably vulnerable clients have benefitted most from the Tools' underpinning collaborative approaches.

The four (4) tools are:

- the CYFSP Practice Framework for Working with Vulnerable Children, Young people and Families
- the Strengthening Families Approach
- Joint Case Reviews
- The Casework Reflective Tool.

This report documents the development of each tool and its roll out as part of a broader sector development strategy.



About Families ACT

Families ACT (FACT) is a territory peak, not-for-profit, organisation which advocates and works for vulnerable and marginalised children, young people and families in the ACT and surrounding region to improve their physical, social and emotional health. FACT has a broad and inclusive view of what constitutes a family and strives to improve the wellbeing of all families.

FACT is one of two (2) territory peaks fully funded under the CYFSP (the other being the Youth Coalition of the ACT). Receiving half the funding of its counterpart, it has had to focus its work tightly but has determined that sector development will be a key priority.

'The role of FACT is to work with the directorate, ministers, and the sector – since colocation with Youth Coalition the structured work of the two organisations engaging with the sector and the directorate has affected a rise in the professionalism of the sector' (CEO Community sector).

Report methodology

This report was developed by:

- Collating and using existing documents to develop a cohesive narrative
- Researching the background to the Tools including literature, documents
- Interviewing key stakeholders
- Consulting with a working group of key stakeholders to ensure the desired quality of the final document.

The working group comprised:

- Will Mollison Executive Officer, FACT
- Fiona MacGregor Consultant
- Prof. Anne Daly Public Officer FACT Board
- Yvonne Gritschneider Policy, Media, Research, FACT
- Daina Neverauskas Consultant

Interviews were conducted with the following key stakeholders:

- Fiona MacGregor Consultant
- Will Mollison Executive Officer, FACT
- Yvonne Gritschneider JCR program coordinator, FACT
- Hannah Watts Director, Policy and Development, Youth Coalition of the ACT
- Dr Louise Bassett Executive Branch Manager, Policy & Service Design Community Services Directorate
- Dan Gaffney CYFS Coordinator, Anglicare
- Chris Redmond Former CEO Woden Community Services



Context of the development of the Suite of Tools

The community sector in the ACT is diverse and comprises practitioners with a range of qualifications including youth work, welfare work and social work. These diverse qualifications and skills add a richness to the workforce, but can make collaborative work difficult without a common practice language.

Prior to the inception of the CYFSP in 2011 there had been very little sector-wide training provided.

'Practitioners reported considerable isolation and in particular limited collaboration and cooperation across agencies and between government and community sector' (Training Participant).

It was this environment that prompted FACT to develop the suite of tools.

The Tools are research-based, but most importantly practitioners have been involved at every level in their development and implementation using an action learning approach. Working in the community sector with vulnerable children, young people and families is an inexact science and practice needs to adapt to the changing circumstances of the people we are working with. The focus on practice means that the tools are dynamic and can respond to changes as required. Because of this they have continued to evolve and improve with use.

As the work has progressed, areas for development have been identified and additional programs such as Action Learning for Leaders and training focused on theoretical and practice knowledge such as trauma informed practice training and child protection training have been offered across the CYFSP. The Youth Coalition of the ACT and FACT are now collaborating to create a clinical supervision training package.

Common elements

As each tool has been implemented, the action research model underpinning its development has helped to identify the need for other tools. Thus, the tools are sequential and closely interrelated.

The tools have a shared foundation in:

- Collaborative Practice
- Supervision and Reflective Practice
- Evidence Based & Evidence Growing Practice
- Theoretical and Practice Knowledge – service providers and service users.

Their shared key principles are:

- Child/Young Person Centred
- Family Focused and Culturally Responsive
- Strengths Based, Flexible and Responsive.

The Tools are based on an understanding that joint training will promote shared practice and develop trust and understanding between staff (White & Winkworth 2012).

They also embody current practice methodologies such as a systems approach and a focus on prevention/early intervention and the achievement of outcomes.

Action learning/evaluation

Action learning is a process of actively participating in organisational change while conducting research (Wadsworth 1997.) It is a flexible spiral process which allows action (change, improvement) and research (understanding, knowledge) to be achieved at the same time. The understanding allows more informed change and at the same time is informed by that change. People affected by the change are usually involved in the action research. This allows the understanding to be widely shared and the change to be pursued with commitment (Dick, 2002).

The development of the suite of tools has been grounded in a cycle of evaluation and change. At all stages of the implementation, piloting and training, the Practice Framework, JCRs and the CRT have been evaluated. Feedback from participants has been collated and used to adjust content and presentations. For example, with the Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool there has been a continuing shift in the balance of training from theoretical input to the increasing use of case studies to ground new knowledge in workers' day to day experiences.

In the case of the CRT, pre and post testing has been conducted to gauge the extent of growth in participant knowledge and understanding of the training content. Qualitative feedback has also been gathered. This process has just been developed for JCRs.

In addition, a Program Logic has been created for the Practice Framework and JCRs.

These tools have also been evaluated. Evaluation findings have informed a revision of the tools and their implementation. The evaluations are presented in the following documents.

- Youth Coalition of the ACT *Joint Case Review Program Evaluation Report A report for Families ACT and the Child, Youth and Family Support Program (CYFSP) Workforce Development Sub-Committee* June 2020 (Barry, E. & Barker, J. 2020)
- Casework Reflective Tool Training Evaluation 2020 (Families ACT 2020)

Practitioners tried and tested fitness for purpose and provided feedback which enabled tweaking of the tools. An evaluation framework ensures that there is no end point to the tools and enables continuing incremental developments.



The Child Youth and Family Services Program

The ACT Government's Child Youth and Family services Program (CYFSP) was established in 2012 and represented a refocusing of the welfare service system from primary care services for the population at large to secondary and tertiary interventions for children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage. The CYFSP framework document states "our primary goal...is to improve the lives of the most vulnerable members of our community" (ACT CS 2012).

Integrating funding aimed to:

- Decrease complexity in the range of services being delivered
- Improve the capacity of service providers to meet the needs of children, young people and families
- Improve the promotion of services to children, young people and families
- Provide a range of services that meet specific needs
- Increase data to inform service improvement (Barker, Lawson, McArthur 2014).

The types of services provided under the CYFSP include case management, groupwork, youth engagement and intensive long-term support.

The CYFSP funds twenty-seven service providers which provide programs to deliver a range of service types:

- Information, Engagement and Coordination Services
- Network Coordination
- Case Management Services
- Youth Engagement Services
- Therapeutic Services
- Group Programs
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Services
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Engagement Services
- Intensive Intervention Service
- Young Carers and their Families Engagement and Support Service
- Peak Services (including the two peak agencies of FACT and Youth Coalition, with ACTCOSS receiving funding for the Gulunga program).

To support Child, Youth and Family Services provided by community-based, non-government organisations a Service Delivery Framework was developed to outline the context for service delivery, namely to:

- Decrease the complexity of the service system by streamlining the number of intake, referral and information pathways and stand-alone service providers
- Improve the capacity of funded service providers to work in partnership with primary service providers, particularly education and health, and specialist/targeted services (Barker, Lawson, McArthur 2014).

Following the development of the Service Delivery Framework Families ACT was concerned that there were no tools to support the significantly more complex work agencies would need to undertake. In response to FACT's concern the Community Services Directorate (CSD) commissioned



the development of the CYFSP Practice Framework. The Practice Framework gives workers from different disciplines and professional backgrounds a common practice language. It prioritises the safety, development and wellbeing of children and young people, providing practitioners with a series of practice triggers to support their work, including a focus on phases of practice.

The Practice Framework

The need to develop a practice framework in family support services in the ACT dates back to 2004. In their *Review of the Family Services in the ACT*, Morgan Disney & Associates identified the need for a common coherent practice framework within which services could work (Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd 2004). In particular they recognised that staff in collaborating organisations needed to undertake shared training and that organisations and funding bodies needed to provide the resources necessary to support this (Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd 2004).

During the Connecting Families Project in 2009 the Practice Framework was conceptualised. The aim of this project was to link vulnerable families reported to Care and Protection with relevant and appropriate community services. This process was conducted through an assessment of issues concerning each family, analysing steps undertaken and identifying further actions required to address their needs. The project was funded by Department of Families, Housing, Community and Indigenous Affairs (FACHSIA) and brought together several major regional services. The project commenced in late 2009 and was intended to operate for three months. However, based on its positive results and impact, it was extended until the end of 2011 (Meko 2013).

The Practice Framework Project set out to facilitate the process of improving the ways community services for vulnerable children, young people and families are provided within the ACT. It explored ways to increase collaboration between government and non-government institutions and organisations. It promoted an evidence-based culture of practice and assisted organisations to adapt to the changes in practice required under the provisions of the new Service Delivery Framework of the Office for Children, Youth and Families, Community Services Directorate (CSD).

The Collaboration Rubric developed by Michael White and Gail Winkworth was influential in informing this work; in that White and Winkworth strongly argued that effective collaboration to improve outcomes for clients depends on organisations' willingness to develop shared ways of working (White & Winkworth 2012).

In November 2010, the Community Services Directorate (CSD) confirmed funding for Families ACT to conduct the Practice Framework project. It was anticipated that the development of the Practice Framework would take 12 months, however delays in implementing the CYFSP also delayed the Practice Framework's development.

In retrospect this was not a bad thing as FACT decided to seek additional funding to pilot the tool and develop specific training for this purpose. Lessons learnt from piloting assisted with the subsequent rollout of the Framework in 2013. Principal among these lessons was that the Framework needed to be better explained and promoted to the sector.

Some participants in the pilot felt that their involvement (in some cases mandated without their knowledge by their managers) constituted a judgement that their practice was substandard. As a result, FACT's key messaging about the tool is that it is a support for practice for those working with complex cases and vulnerable clients.

The CYFSP Practice Framework was developed and trialled between 2011 and 2013. A number of participants have found that the training has supported them to be better practitioners:



"I found the action learning was a 'solution-focussed' way of reflecting on practice, 'realising that I had the answers and knowledge, I just had to explore the options. The structure and the way sessions were conducted, offered a safe opportunity for both professional and self-development.'

"I have attended this training twice and took different things away from both sessions ...most of all the second session showed me how much I have integrated the Practice Framework into my work."

Figure 1: Quotes from Practice Framework training participants in 2012 & 2013

The primary project documents were developed by Fiona MacGregor who produced the Practice Framework (Appendix 1). Its structure is based on successful similar frameworks and is primarily adapted from the work of Marie Connolly 'Practice Frameworks: Conceptual maps to guide interventions in child welfare' (Connolly 2007).

The development process for the Practice Framework was highly inclusive and informed by a number of focus groups and meetings with practitioners and managers. A Program Logic was developed by Kate Butler in close consultation and with critical input from sector directors, CEOs and other key stakeholders. The Families ACT Practice Framework Project Report April 2013 documents the development of the Practice Framework and the pilot process which ran from May to September 2012 (Meko 2013). The extensive literature that guided the development of the Framework is available on [Families ACT's website](#).

Participants valued the collaborative learning opportunities:

" I really appreciated the networking opportunities provided, sharing experiences with other agencies and the long-term vision of the Framework"

"I love the casework exercises and reflecting with others"

Figure 2: Quotes from Practice Framework training participants

A series of practice guidelines were developed to support the Practice Framework around:

- Active engagement
- Active holding
- Reflective practice
- Collaborative practice
- Sharing information.



Strengthening families

The Strengthening Families Project was the first major ACT Government Human Services Cluster-Community Services sector partnership. Its aim was to analyse and address the failure of the service system to adequately respond to and cater for the most vulnerable families in the ACT community. The project utilised international research from the United Kingdom and Scandinavia and was facilitated by Canberra Design Group ThinkPlace (ThinkPlace 2013). It focused on elements of service design that led to improved outcomes for participants. An initial pilot that worked with 10 families to map and understand their service experience and to identify the barriers they experienced in accessing the services they needed (ACT CSD 2013). The aim of the pilot was to empower vulnerable families to engage with the service system by allowing the voice of the family to be heard through their direct involvement in co-designing their individualised service response. The aim was for families to build on their innate capabilities to reach a stage where they could at least navigate the service system unassisted and ultimately reach a stage where services were no longer required.

Through the pilot several key practice principles were clearly identified that were evidence-based and would promote best practice when engaging with vulnerable families:

- Every door is the right door
- Only ask clients to tell their story once
- Engage the client actively in co-design of their own plan
- One lead worker to coordinate a co-designed plan and other service support.

The pilot affirmed the practice principles of the CYFSP Practice Framework and developed the idea of the Lead Worker as the key service contact for each family. The Lead Worker role was central to the coordination of services in a family led, co-designed plan. As identified in the evaluation of the *Strengthening Families Project*, Lead Workers strongly endorsed the Communities of Practice even though they were not underpinned by a methodology or professional learning framework (Mark Evans 2013).

The approach shares the Practice Frameworks principle, in that it is:

- Strengths based
- Child/young person-centred and family focused
- Collaborative and reflective.

As a result of the initial pilot, 50 families who had ongoing intensive service experience across Community and Government services were included in an expanded trial (*Strengthening Families Project*). This trial ran from mid-2014 to mid-2016. Throughout the trial regular *Communities of Practice* were held to support Lead Workers, to promote continuous professional learning and to improve practice. At the end of 2016 it was decided by the key government and community partners to transition Strengthening Families to a “business as usual” model. One of the challenges was how to maintain the Lead Worker Communities of Practice while ensuring that they operated within a supportive model of professional learning that created a culture of inquiry, continuous learning and collaboration. Youth workers were also participating in their own Community of practice - the Youth Worker Practice Network established by the Youth Coalition. The youth sector saw the potential to further expand their cross-sector activities.

It was at this point that FACT became aware of a model of Joint Case Review which had been developed by Dr Giovanna Richmond from the Australian Catholic University (ACU) to assist in implementing Communities of Practice (Richmond 2015). This model had been developed using international research and knowledge and was designed to provide structured learning activities



that involved practitioners from different services (Richmond 2015). The Joint Case Review (JCR) model was modified and adapted to meet the needs of practitioners in the ACT including content from the *Joint Case Review Train the Trainer Program* presented by Giovanna Richmond (Richmond 2015).

Joint Case Review (JCRs)

From 2017 JCRs have become part of the Child Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP) practice with Community Services Directorate (CSD) making JCR attendance an expectation under their funding agreements for services providing casework. The ACT is the first and currently only jurisdiction in Australia requiring case management services to train their employees and frontline caseworkers in the JCR model.

JCRs are structured group learning activities which provide opportunities for problem solving, sharing knowledge and collaboration across the community service system in the ACT. They examine the journey of individuals and families through the phases of the casework process using de-identified cases.

They provide an opportunity to review developments with vulnerable families by identifying key theories and research and assist in the development and the dissemination of new practices. A key focus is on changing the language of review in practice to 'good' and 'problematic' practice and avoid the language of 'errors' and 'mistakes'

JCRs promote opportunities for reflective discussion on casework practice using a professional learning methodology -de-personalising practice approaches for growth in:

- reflective capacity
- critical analysis
- increased collaborative practice.

Principles of Joint Case Reviews (JCRs)

The following five key principles drive practitioners' reflection through the JCRs.

- Collaboration
- Participation
- Systems approach
- Holistic - attention to psychosocial processes
- Deep learning.



Case study

Natalie self-referred for family support approximately 18 months ago. Natalie (Mum), Eric (Dad) and five children aged 13, 11, 9, 3 and 2 have a long history with Community Support Services and Child Youth Protection Services, including past removal and return of children. Over the past 18 months, staffing changes have led to three different workers getting to know the family and it appeared each week a new issue would arise. Natalie is currently seeking support around housing, emergency relief and for the rubbish in the house.

The family currently resides in a four-bedroom housing property and are on the priority wait list for a larger home. Natalie allows other children to stay at the property, so on home visits, the current worker has sighted 12 children in the home at one time. Natalie will regularly ask for food and fuel vouchers, and if she has no money she will go and buy things on after pay. The property is often overcrowded with broken furniture and excess rubbish. Multiple tip runs and skip bins have been provided previously.

The police are often called to the family home due to family violence between the siblings and damage to the property. The father Eric has previously been charged and incarcerated for assaulting the 13-year-old daughter Charlie. The children attend a local school, although teachers often share concerns for the 11-year-old son Tom and his engagement levels. Natalie says Tom is very aggressive, especially at home.

Natalie has a number of other services involved and if one service cannot assist with something (emergency food/fuel relief) Natalie utilises other lifelines. During a visit, Natalie told the worker that it is sometimes too much to deal with.

The worker has been supporting Natalie to identify her areas of strength. The worker has not had any success in engaging Eric, despite attempts to involve him in the support process. Natalie has shown willingness to engage with the worker, but has said that no one really seems to understand what she is dealing with.

Figure 3: an example of a JCR case study for reflective discussion amongst participants

In 2020 Families ACT obtained funding from the Workforce Development Sub-Committee (of the ACT Community Services Directorate's Child, Youth and Family Services Program) to evaluate the JCR program. The evaluation collected data based on respondents' self-reported perceptions of how well the JCRs had achieved their intended short-term outcomes (Barry, E. & Barker, J. 2020). While these findings need to be interpreted with caution:

- *Nearly all respondents agreed that the JCR Program has improved collaboration between practitioners and services and fostered a culture of sharing information and expertise.*
- *The majority of respondents agreed that the JCR Program has improved their self-awareness and confidence as practitioners and enhanced their value of the professional work of CYFSP practitioners. They described feeling more confident in their practice and in networking with other practitioners.*
- *Approximately half of respondents agreed that the JCR Program has improved their reflective practice focused on problem-solving. Approximately half of respondents also agreed that the JCR Program has helped them to develop new skills and knowledge, increased the use of strengths-based language, and established clearer communication between practitioners and services.*



“Great case study. My group really explored their own deeper understandings of our role in wholistic family work.”

“Great representation of different services.”

“I always think the most useful thing is the networking and meeting and understanding other workers.”

Figure 4: Feedback from practitioners attending JCRs in 2021

Families ACT has now implemented the findings of the evaluation of the Joint Case Review (JCR) Program improving the administration, communication and oversight of the program, through:

- The development of comprehensive JCR Program Guidelines
- The development and implementation of a communication plan for the JCR Program
- The development and implementation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

Further information on the JCRs can be found on [Families ACT’s website](#).

Casework Reflective Tool

The need for a Casework Reflective Tool (CRT) was identified as early as 2013 when Families ACT commissioned research on *Case Management Practice and the ACT Child Youth and Family Services Program* (Butler 2013). FACT was concerned that there did not appear to be a shared understanding and common practice language of casework, case management and case coordination. A key element of a common language, reflective practice had been identified in the Strengthening Families work completed by ThinkPlace between 2010-13 and they provided training on reflective practice to Lead Workers (ThinkPlace 2013), but there was no casework tool.

The need was further highlighted when the *Strengthening Families Project* was transitioning to a business as “usual model” (2017) and during the implementation of Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) in CYFSP funded Case Management services. Lead agencies and practitioners in the community sector recognised that, to successfully embed the principles of the Practice Framework and Strengthening Families, joined up work, consistency of practice and common tools needed to be adopted. In 2017 Families ACT applied for funding through the Workforce Development Sub-Committee to develop the Casework Reflective Tool.

FACT commissioned Giovanna Richmond to research and develop a draft Casework Reflective Tool Guide (Richmond 2018). To further support and inform the development of the CRT, FACT engaged the Institute of Child Protection Studies at ACU to survey the CYFSP on their understanding of casework and case management (Barker 2018). The work confirmed Kate Butler’s 2013 findings that there was a need for a common casework practice language. The extensive literature that guided the development of CRT is available on [Families ACT’s website](#).

Giovanna Richmond’s initial work was collated and further developed by Fiona McGregor who co-designed and trialled the tool with practitioners and key stakeholders. These practitioners and key stakeholders subsequently became critical friends in the design of the first Casework Reflective Tool training.



The Casework Reflective Tool aims to:

- Encourage a common language for case management
- Increase the focus on family-led and family-driven Phases of Work and outcomes
- Emphasise strengthening the learning environment in which programs operate that includes the Practice Framework, reflective tools and case reviews
- Develop clearer roles, responsibilities, skills and knowledge of the workforce in the context of case work and leading practice
- Enhance accessibility to knowledge on fundamental principles, values & best practice in case management
- Reinforce the implementation of the Practice Framework
- Explore the transferability of a case management framework
- Provide improved clarity into the evidence informed processes of case management
- Provide opportunity for reflection by practitioners on case management
- Improve clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Assist in the development of a skill base for case management.

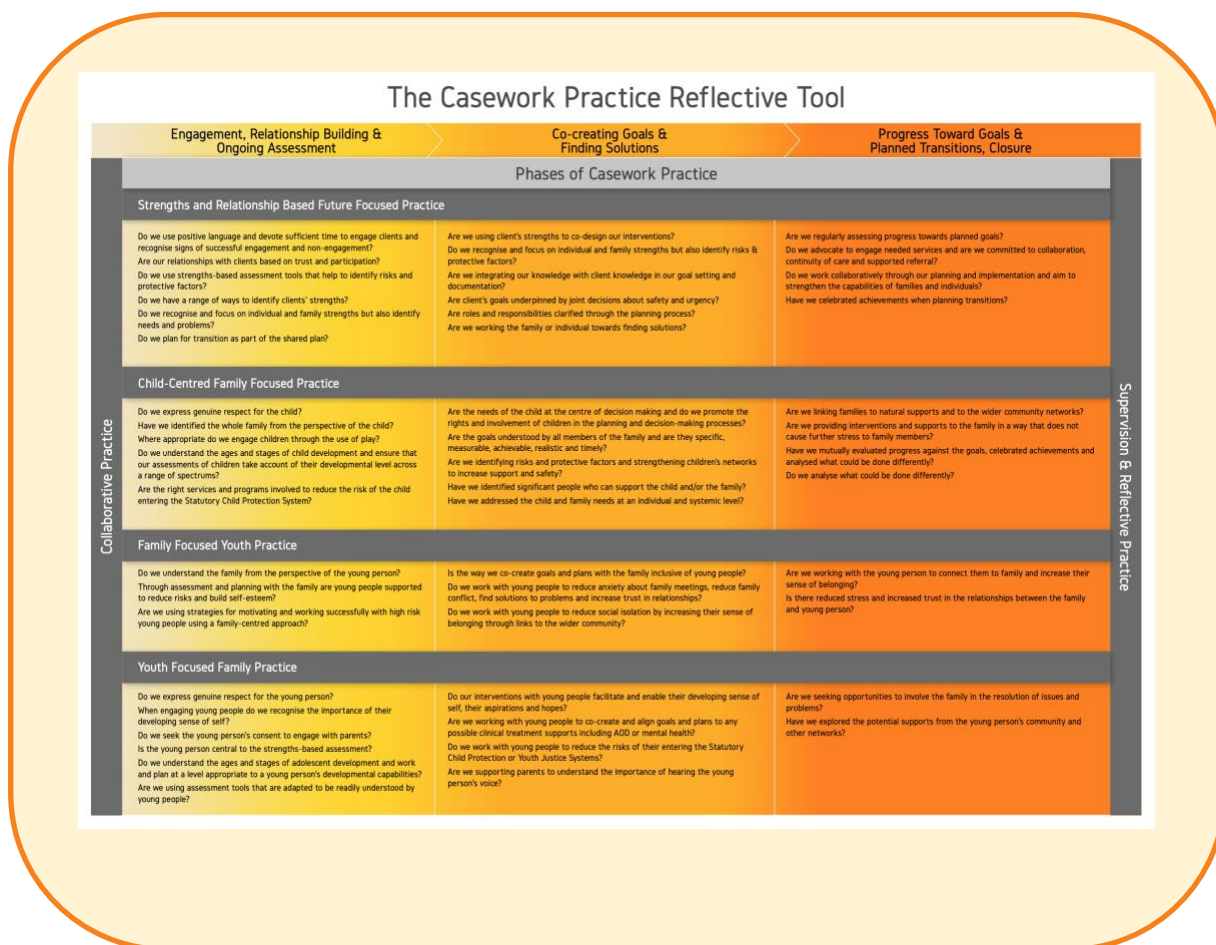


Figure 5: Casework Practice Reflective Tool

In 2019 Families ACT went on to provide this training to 28 staff from 6 agencies providing CYFSP services – Anglicare, Barnardos, Capital Region Community Services, PCYC, Messengers Program (Tuggeranong Arts Centre) and Woden Community Service.

Included as a part of each training package was the provision of two follow up visits to staff in their agencies within three months of completing training. The visits gathered feedback about the use of the Tool in everyday practice and supported its implementation.

Feedback from the visits was that the tool promoted improved reflective capacity and increased confidence as well as greater understanding of the principles of evidence-based casework practice, in particular strengths-based practice, and a stronger focus on improving outcomes for clients.

In 2020 CSD contracted Families ACT to run 3 Casework Reflective Tool trainings for staff from CYFSP services.

The Families ACT Casework Reflective Tool Training 2020 Evaluation (Families ACT 2021) confirmed that, from the outset of the development of the Casework Reflective Tool, training had been an iterative process.

The overwhelming majority of trainees valued the case discussion highly and provided minor suggestions for improving this part of the session, and the majority of participants had no suggestions for improving the training.

“Using the Casework Reflective Tool is a great service enhancement.”

“The Tool...prompts collaboration, discussion and reflection “

Figure 6: Quotes from Casework Reflective Tool training participants in 2021

Pre- and post-testing has played an important part in ascertaining the impact of CRT training. Participants were asked to provide a unique identifier so it was possible to compare their pre- and post-tests.

All participants who rated themselves as Not very good or Average in one or more domains in the pre-test rated themselves more highly in these areas post training. All but one participant reported an increase in confidence in using the Tool as a result of the training. The number of Excellent ratings rose from 4 to 34 (Families ACT 2022).

The piloting of the training and its evaluation had revealed 4 areas for improvement:

- Spending more time going over the structure of the Casework Tool for trainees who are unfamiliar with it
- Paring down the number of questions guiding each case study discussion and including these questions on the case study sheets
- Extending the session by a half hour to provide more time to cover the theoretical part of the session and for case study discussion
- Bringing forward the timing of follow up visits to better support participant teams as they implement the Tool.

All of these elements have been implemented. This has met with a favourable response from participants.

Further information on the CRT can be found on [Families ACT’s website](#).



Methodology for developing and supporting quality casework practice

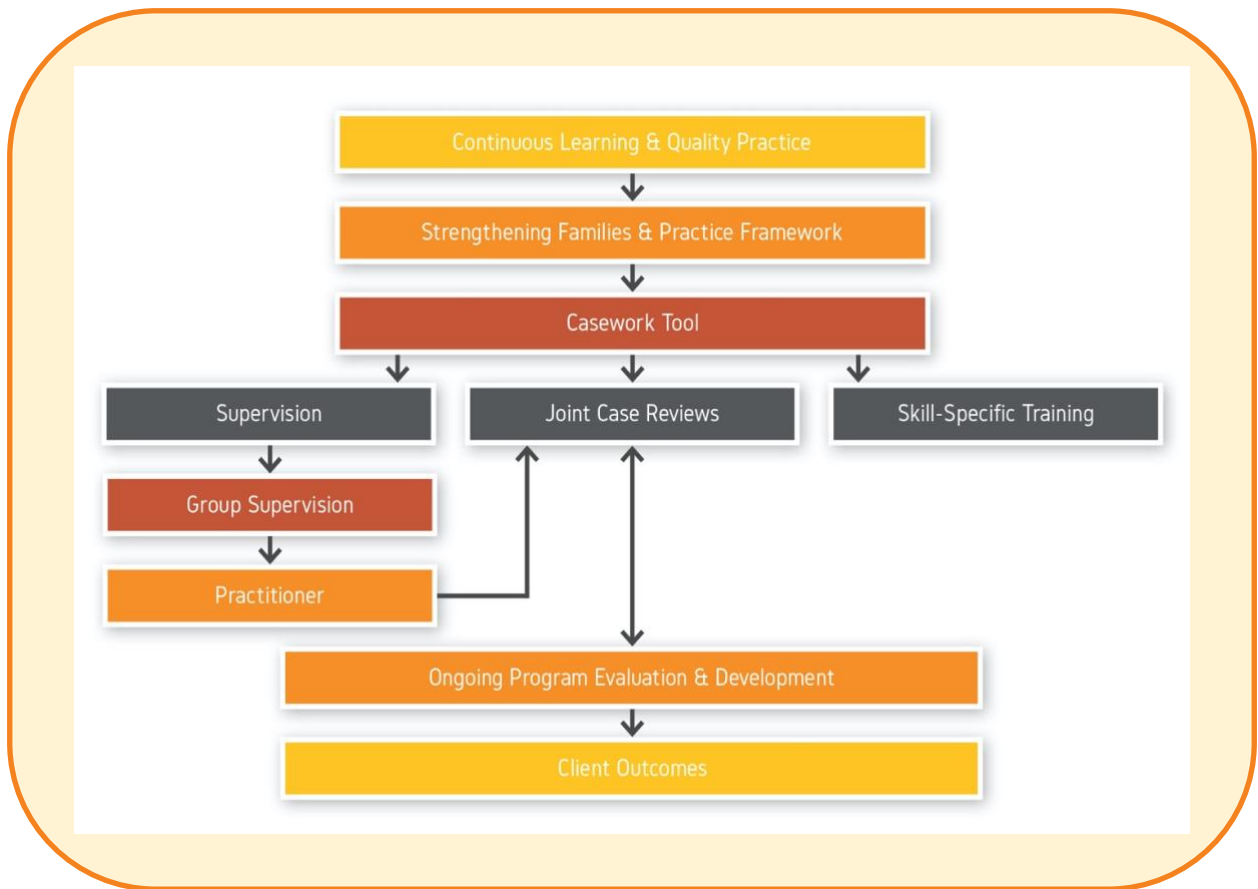


Figure 7: Methodology for developing and supporting quality casework practice

FACT’s methodology for developing and supporting quality casework practice is underpinned by a philosophy of continuous learning. This philosophy flows through the Strengthening Families approach, Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool.

Reflective opportunities provided by individual and group supervision and Joint Case Reviews form a positive feedback loop with the Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool. This environment promotes ongoing program evaluation and development with the overarching goal of improved client outcomes.

Funding

Families ACT has allocated a disproportionate amount of its limited resources to the development of the tools. The work has also been supported by the Community Services Directory (CSD) providing additional funding over the 10 years. In particular, the Workforce Development Sub-Committee has supported various initiatives.

A total of \$358,245 in additional grants has been invested over the 10 years since 2010. A list of all grants received is available in Appendix 3.

Training and Resources

Training

Following the completion of Practice Framework pilot FACT set out to establish regular training to the sector. Minimal resourcing has meant comprehensive records have not been kept, however records show the extent of the training offered and attended.

In 2016 four (4) Practice trainings were held with 100 -120 staff attending.

From 2017-2019 hybrid training in both Strengthening Families and the Practice Framework was provided six (6) times with a further 100- 120 staff attending.

Training in the Casework Reflective Tool began in 2017 followed by annual training 2-3 times per year (except in 2020 due to Covid restrictions). Attendance varies between 10-15 practitioners per training. To date, approximately 150 practitioners have attended.

Seven (7) JCRs have been held annually since 2017 (except in 2020 due to Covid restrictions). Each year between 80 - 100 practitioners have participated.

Resources

To support the development and implementation of the Suite of Tools FACT has produced various resources and publications. These have been widely distributed and used by practitioners in their day-to-day work. They have particularly assisted in training.

Posters

- CYFSP Practice Framework for Working with Vulnerable Children, Young People and their Families
- The Casework Reflective Tool

Practice Guidelines

- Active engagement
- Active holding
- Reflective practice
- Collaborative practice
- Sharing information

Booklets/ Training Guides

- Casework Reflective Tool: Practitioner Guide
- Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) facilitator guide 2021
- Joint Case Reviews (JCRs) Facilitator starter pack 2021





Figure 8: Examples of booklets and training guides

Presentations

- An Introduction to the Practice Framework
- JCR Facilitator training
- An Introduction to the Suite of Tools
- The Casework Reflective Tool
- The Casework Reflective Tool – Education and Training Directorate

Publications

- Admir Meko *The Practice Framework Project Report* April 2013
- Kate Butler *Case Management Practice and the ACT Child Youth and Family Services Program* September 2013
- Dr Justin Barker *Perspectives on Case management: A qualitative exploration of workers understanding of case management* Institute of Child Protection Studies Australian Catholic University January 2018
- Youth Coalition of the ACT *Joint Case Review Program Evaluation Report* A report for Families ACT and the Child, Youth and Family Support Program (CYFSP) Workforce Development Sub-Committee June 2020
- Families ACT *Casework Reflective Tool Training Evaluation 2020* March 2021

Benefits of the Tools

The key stakeholders who have benefited in a range of ways from these tools are:

- Clients
- Organisations and their staff
- The ACT government.

'The JCR model empowers my practice, it provides structure and the Practice Framework is embedded' (Training participant).

The sector has increasingly embraced these supports for practice, using the Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool in a range of ways including for induction of new staff, structuring case discussions and conducting evaluation.

The training in the tools has also confirmed the value of joint training in developing networks and building collaboration.

'The tool...prompts collaboration, discussion and reflection' (Training participant).

The Tools all provide a feedback mechanism for identifying areas for further development. This has resulted in their ongoing improvement and in the development of additional training initiatives. These have included Action Learning for Leaders and training focused on theoretical and practice knowledge such as trauma informed practice training and child protection training.

More recently the Youth Coalition and FACT and have sought funding from the Workforce Development sub-committee for the development of a new training package for the sector on supervision. This is in direct response to the need to improve consistency and quality of practice and to foster a stronger culture of reflective practice across the sector.

The tools have become embedded in CYFSP contracts thus providing an authorising environment.

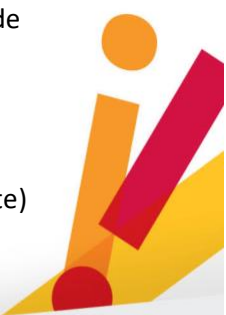
'Having practice standards helps with commissioning and tailoring of programs.'
(CSD Director).

Their development has also affirmed the role of peaks in working with the Directorate, Ministers, and practitioners to improve the professionalism of the sector.

'The role of peaks as friends of government is to keep the dialogue open and to reinvigorate and consolidate consistent practice.' (CEO, community services).

FACT's Board has recognised the benefits of training as many organisations as possible in the use of the common tools. It recognises that cost may be an impediment to those of its members who are not part of the CYFSP and therefore not eligible for free training. It has therefore decided to provide the training free to members outside CYFSP (e.g. the YWCA domestic violence service and Toora Women's Inc.).

In addition, promotion of the tools outside the CYFSP has enabled the provision of 'fee for service' training (e.g. staff of the Student Wellbeing Programs in the ACT Education and Training Directorate) delivering revenue for FACT to support other profit for purpose initiatives.



Challenges implementing the Tools

The implementation of the suite of tools has not always gone smoothly with a range of issues impacting ongoing sustainability.

Staff turnover

Continuous turnover of staff in the CYFSP means that there are always new staff requiring training, while experienced practitioners are lost to the sector. This churn is a result of a number of factors including job insecurity and uncertainty about ongoing provision of funding, comparatively poor pay and conditions and changes in program priorities.

Training capacity

Staff churn puts additional stress on FACT to provide more training when the organisation lacks the resources to do this, relying on volunteer support. In contrast, because of its size, the Youth Coalition is able to dedicate a senior full-time position to sector development. The bushfires and Covid have further compounded this resulting in training not being offered as regularly as required leaving practitioners new to the sector without sufficient training.

*‘CRT training has been irregular – maybe need to consider IP and training options as people may already be using the tool without being trained’
(Community sector manager).*

Unfortunately, even the exploration of mechanisms to address this lack of training requires resources that Families ACT does not currently have.

Consistent authorising environment

There appears to be a lack of support and recognition of the value of tools and their critical role in professional development by middle and senior management in some agencies. These managers are often struggling to balance competing work priorities and releasing staff for training can be problematic. Practitioners do not always feel enabled to attend training or to take on professional development opportunities like becoming JCR facilitators.

‘Please involve Director level in this training somehow as they are the decision-makers and it is a top-down approach...to make sure we are...able to practise like this if numbers in caseloads are...high’ (training participant).

Common language

A number of workers in the CYFSP have emphasised the way that the common practice language embedded in the Practice Framework and Casework Reflective Tool can support collaboration with other professionals. This is particularly important when shared clients are involved.

However, CYFSP funded programs identify significant barriers to collaborative work with vulnerable clients when they encounter staff from other agencies or programs who do not share the same practice language. These may be from Government agencies, in schools and in health, but also with other community sector agencies who are not familiar with the Practice Framework or the Casework Reflective Tool. They find it frustrating attempting joined up work where other practitioners have not been trained in the use of these tools.

A significant challenge is achieving a critical mass of practitioners across NGOs and government who are trained in use of the Tools. FACT has maintained for some time that the true potential of the

suite of tools can only be achieved when workers both in and outside the CYFSP are familiar with them.

Other training required to support use of the tools

During the process evaluation of the ACT CYFSP in 2014, despite the promising findings regarding the familiarity and usefulness of the Practice Framework, the evaluation identified that there continued to be an absence of any other shared tools and frameworks within the CYFSP. These included Information sharing protocols, a common assessment framework, and shared data systems and protocols (Barker, Lawson, McArthur 2014). The development of common strengths-based assessment tools continues to be a priority.

Heightened awareness of better practice resulting from training in the tools means that practitioners can be placed in situations where they feel obliged to address inadequate practice but feel ill equipped to do so. The planned work on a supervision training package should help to address this issue.

JCR specific issues

The JCRs continue to be very well received. Families ACT has successfully implemented the recommendations from the 2020 JCR evaluation report and the program has evolved significantly as a result, making it more popular than ever. In addition, there continues to be pressure to further expand the intended audience beyond CYFSP service to build better cross-sector collaboration and improve the practice capacity of practitioners in other services (Barry, Barker 2020). This has revealed a further vulnerability as the improved program now consumes much more of Families ACT's limited resources and yet demand to attend a JCR session often outstrips places available (Families ACT 2022).

Sustainability of JCRs relies on having a pool of committed facilitators. While many practitioners have been trained as facilitators, only a small proportion go on to be actively involved in the running of groups.

One key stakeholder believes that this is because their role is not recognised as the *'..professional development opportunity that it is'* (JCR Facilitator).

In addition, competing organisational needs mean that staff are not released to be facilitators.

'There is an ongoing conflict at management level between the needs of the organisation versus the needs of the sector' (Practitioner).



Future directions

The ongoing sustainability, expansion of the reach of the suite of tools and further evaluation of the impact on clients, will depend on a commitment to the program by government and the community sector.

Ongoing sustainability

- The Directorate needs to provide leadership to promote collaboration and improved connection between elements of the service system by:
 - Making suite of tools training a requirement for staff with CYFSP and other programs, including CEOs and managers
 - Making suite of tools training a requirement for managers and senior management within the other government funded community sector organisations
 - Setting targets and requiring reporting from CYFSP agencies on the release of staff to attend suite of tools training.
- The Directorate and community sector organisations need to commit to ongoing sector-wide professional learning enabling improved practice and the building of collaboration (White & Winkworth 2012).
- Increased core funding is needed for FACT for a fulltime dedicated sector development role with responsibility for CYFSP Practice Framework, Strengthening Families, JCRs and CRT Training. This training could then become an integral part of induction to working in the sector.
- FACT needs to review its training methods to increase accessibility and make training available in different forms.
- The collaborative work of the Youth Coalition and FACT could be expanded to push for further reform of the sector such as the development of information sharing protocols, a common assessment framework, and shared data systems.
- FACT needs to continue to promote the valuable role the suite of tools plays in the sector to Government, CEO's and senior managers of community sector organisations.

Expansion outside of CYFSP

- Some Student Welfare Teams in ACT Public High Schools have been trained in use of the CRT and other schools may also be interested. The development of a training program specifically for schools as well as support for implementation of the CRT is required.
- Other non CYFSP community sector services have also been trained in the CRT (e.g. Toora Women's Inc., the YWCA domestic violence service) and more organisations have expressed an interest. The development of a training program that includes non CYFSP services is required.
- FACT could explore the possibility of extending training on the suite of tools to government and community sector organisations outside the CYFSP.



Evaluation

- The impact on outcomes for clients can only be properly ascertained with a wider dissemination of the tools across and beyond CYFSP services and measured over time.

Funding for an impact evaluation for clients should be made a priority by Government.

'Areas for improvement – have we met targets for children in out of home care, building greater engagement with the Directorate, Child protection, education and police to enable greater action with people experiencing greatest vulnerability' (CEO community service).

- Government needs to fund commissioning of new research on embeddedness of the tools.

Other Training

- There are implications for the ACT Tertiary Education and Training sectors. New graduates, particularly in the Youth Sector, have little or no training in the practice principles of casework. For the sector generally preservice education should incorporate greater emphasis on strengths-based, outcomes-focused practice that places co-design at the centre of client work. The partnership of Youth Coalition and FACT should continue to lobby for joint preservice education.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Timelines

- **2009 - 2011** The Practice Framework (PF)
- **2010** Recommissioning of family and youth programs
- **2011-2014** *Service Delivery Framework*
- **2013** *Case Management Practice and the ACT Child Youth and Family Services Program*
- **2013** Practice Frameworks adopted by CSD for implementation across CYFSP
- **2014** Human Services Blueprint
- **2015** Strengthening families
- **2015** Joint Case Review
- **2017-2018** Case Management Framework Project
- **2017** The Community Sector and Government partners in the *Strengthening Families* Project agreed to transition the key elements of the project to 'a business as usual' model.
- **2018** Perspectives on Case management: A qualitative exploration of workers understanding of case management The Institute of Child Protection Studies,
- **2018** Common casework tool
- **2018** Proposal for the delivery Professional Learning to the staff of the Off Campus High School Education Program and for the Trialling of the Case Work Tool
- **2019-2020** Casework Reflective Tool Training Pilot
- **2020** Joint Case review program evaluation Report
- **2020** Joint Case Reviews – Program Improvement Project
- **2021** Casework Reflective Tool Training Evaluation
- **2021** JCR toolkit
- **2021** Child protection training
- **2021/22** Supervision training tool kit project



Appendix 2: Practice Framework document

A Practice Framework for Working with Vulnerable Children, Young People & their Families Phases of the Work				
Practice Principles	Collaborative Practice			Client Focused Evaluation
	Engagement, Relationship Building & Assessment	Setting Goals & Finding Solutions	Progress Towards Goals and Improved Outcomes	
Service User Knowledge, Theoretical & Practice Knowledge	Child/Young Person Centred Are we considering the whole child/young person - their safety, development & wellbeing? Are we engaging & building a relationship with the child/young person & supporting them to express their views? Are we using play based methods of engaging children? Are we using assessments that are child/young person friendly? Have we told the child/young person they can talk to us or someone they trust about their concerns? Have we obtained explicit consent from young people for information to be shared with family members?	Is the child/young person at the centre of planning and decision making? Is the child/young person actively involved in making decisions? What strategies can the child/young person use to help solve problems? Are we considering the needs and wishes of each child/young person? Are we reflecting the child/young person's experience in all records?	Are we actively supporting the child/young person to achieve their goals? Are we having regular meetings with the child/young person to review progress towards goals and celebrate success? Does child/young person feel that problems are being solved and that their circumstances are improving? Is information being sought from and shared with all relevant agencies?	Evidence Based & Evidence Growing The child/young person feels that their concerns have been listened to. The child/young person feels that their needs are being met and that they are safe. The child/young person has been involved in making decisions? The child/young person can identify the progress they have made and that their success has been celebrated. Families feel accepted, respected and understood. Families are less isolated and feel more connected. Families have developed improved problem solving skills and know when to seek support. Families are more resilient. Clients feel that services have been tailored to meet their individual needs. Clients feel that their priorities for change have been addressed. Clients have not had to repeat their story to a range of services. Clients believe services are accessible and responsive.
	Family Focused and Culturally Responsive Are we consulting with other agencies before engaging the family and letting the family tell their story? Are we providing family support that strengthens stability? Are we being respectful and non-judgemental in all contacts with families? Are we encouraging family ownership of issues and solutions and being specific about concerns? Are we working in partnership with the family and promoting strong bonds within the family? Do we have explicit consent to share information? Do we understand what is culturally important to the child/young person and their family? Are we demonstrating respect for the client's culture? Have we considered the cultural issues that may influence the way we work with the child/young person and their family?	Have we included all family members in goal setting, planning and decision making? Are goals and plans realistic and achievable? Have families determined the time frame to achieve goals? Have we identified formal and informal supports for the family? Are cultural supports being provided to the child/young person and their family? Have we considered cultural needs in the development of plans? Are we working with the family to develop partnerships and working collaboratively with other agencies to find solutions?	Are plans and goals being regularly reviewed? Are we having regular meetings with the family to discuss progress, set new priorities and celebrate success? Are broader support systems that could support the family being utilised? Are family skills and relationships being strengthened and are they acquiring new skills? Have we considered the cultural issues that influence the way in which we work with the child/young person and their family?	
	Strengths Based, Flexible and Responsive Are we meeting with clients in environments where they feel comfortable and safe? Are we working with clients to identify strengths and build on these strengths? Have problems and difficulties been acknowledged and plans set to overcome them? Are problematic behaviours being challenged? Are we developing a relationship with the family that fosters change? Have we persevered even when we met resistance? Are we actively linking clients to other appropriate services through supported referrals?	Are plans and goals linked to client strengths and resources? Are plans and decisions client led? Are all professionals working collaboratively with the client to develop plans, identify barriers and find ways to overcome them? Are all professionals working together to support the client to implement the plans? Is there effective communication between all the services working with the client?	Are goals being met and success acknowledged and celebrated? Are the right services being provided at the right time? Has a respectful relationship been established? Is service provision being managed and coordinated? Are clients being supported while waiting to access services?	
Supervision and Reflective Practice				

Appendix 3: Suite of Tools funding details

Initial Grant for Development of Practice Framework	Dec 2010	\$120,000
Developing training and piloting the Practice Framework	June 2012	\$27,000
Development of the Practice Framework Guidelines	July 2012	\$24,000
Practice Framework/Strengthening Families training	May 2017	\$15,000
Development and piloting of the Casework Reflective Tool	April 2018	\$24,450
Practice Framework/Strengthening Families training	Oct 2018	\$13,750
JCR facilitator training and mentoring	Oct 2018	\$21,250
Practice Framework/Strengthening Families training	June 2019	\$12,500
Casework Reflective Tool training pilot	Oct 2019	\$18,200
JCR Evaluation	Jan 2020	\$23,245
Casework Reflective Tool roll out and Training	Jan 2020	\$28,050
Joint Case Reviews - Program Improvement Project	Dec 2020	\$30,800







OUR VISION

A Canberra where all families thrive

FAMILIES ACT
46 CLIANTHUS STREET
O'CONNOR ACT 2602

ABN 28 268 108 837
familiesact.org.au