Local networks of high quality, integrated services that support families and young people at risk.

THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

Service Standards

Revised January 2016

FOREWORD

Approaches to the protection of children can be conceptualised in a similar way to the public health services model of primary, secondary and tertiary levels of intervention. This serves to illustrate the relational aspects in child protection service delivery (see Table 1.1 below).

Most families require access to a broad range of services to support the wellbeing of themselves and their children. Some require additional services to address particular vulnerabilities and need. Families are generally able to identify their own service needs and negotiate the system, particularly in the primary or universal services domain.

Some individuals and families will at times require specialist and targeted secondary services to respond to their needs. A small number of families will require tertiary statutory child protection services to keep children safe.

Table 1.1   Levels of Intervention to Protect Children.

Intervention	Target Group	Definition
Primary or Universal	Whole communities and families generally.	Services/interventions that build capacity in communities and families to address common needs and prevent problems from arising.
Secondary	Families who are vulnerable or in crisis. Families at risk of child abuse or neglect.	Targeted services that support families and children to address identified risks and prevent them from escalating.
Tertiary	Families in which child abuse or neglect has occurred.	Services to prevent abuse or neglect from re-occurring and to alleviate the impacts of abuse or neglect.

Western Australian Family Support Networks

Western Australian (WA) Family Support Networks (FSNs) are a partnership of community sector services and the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department), providing a common entry point to services, delivering earlier, targeted support to families.

FSNs operate at the secondary services level providing access to integrated services and support for families, children and young people who are at risk or

facing an immediate crisis. FSNs play an important role in the early intervention and provision of support and services to prevent a family's situation from worsening to the point where it requires a statutory response. Families may also need support to re-establish themselves following a tertiary or crisis intervention.

Families will typically present with complex and multiple needs, and may be affected by one or more of the following:

- violence or threats of violence in the home;
- misuse of alcohol, drugs and/or other substances;
- mental health issues;
- recurring financial crises due to low income and/or limited budgeting skills;
- homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless;
- serious family conflict or problematic family relationships; and
- inadequate parenting skills.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles support and underpin FSN service standards and operation:

1. *Integration* – services work together in a planned and systematic way toward agreed, shared goals. The focus for agencies is to promote the integration of services locally, regionally and between sectors.

2. *Early intervention* – the identification of risk and appropriate intervention early in the life of a child, early in the formation of a family and early in the development of a problem is critical to success.

3. *Strengths based* – even in the most difficult of circumstances, individuals and families possess knowledge and resources that can form part of the solution to their current situation.

4. *Child centred* – children's unique vulnerabilities are placed at the centre of assessments and actions, including when the direct recipient of the service is a parent.

5. *Family focused, client directed and community based* – families are supported to address the issues they experience and strengthen their connection to their community.

6. *Policy connects to practice* – the development of policies to address risk and crisis maximise benefits to individuals, families and service providers. Strategic policy connects directly with service delivery and with related policy in other agencies.

7. ***Evidence based approaches*** – agencies commit to designing high quality services using research evidence and good practice and will evaluate the effectiveness of their services.

8. ***Non-stigmatising*** – services are provided to individuals and families in a respectful way that encourages them to seek help when needed.

9. ***Inclusive and holistic*** – services respond to the diversity of culture in the population and work to meet the needs of children, individuals and families.

10. ***Accountable and transparent*** – agencies operate in a way that is accountable to clients and other agencies. Processes and systems are clear and easy to understand.

INTRODUCTION

Service Standards for FSNs are vital in ensuring that FSN agencies maintain and improve the quality of their services. These service standards have been designed to support the effective functioning of agencies operating within FSNs. The best interests of children, young people and families accessing services from the FSN were considered paramount in the development of these standards.

Upon signing the FSN Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)[1] to become a partner agency of a FSN, agencies agree to adhere to the *Western Australian Family Support Network Service Standards* as a minimum for operation across the State.

Objectives

The objectives of the FSNs Service Standards are to:

- Empower children, young people and/or families by defining what standards they can expect when accessing services in the FSN.
- Provide clarity for agencies and their staff by outlining the expectations and responsibilities for good practice.
- Guide operations and provide consistency in approach across the State.
- Inform the development of local FSN policies and procedures.
- Provide a basis for assessing performance and improving service quality.

Service Standards

The service standards fall into eight broad categories:

1. safety and wellbeing;
2. assessment, planning and referral;
3. access and equity;
4. responding to need;
5. service integration;
6. accountability and governance;
7. staff recruitment, training and development; and
8. complaints and disputes.

Each service standard contains three components:

- the category;
- an overarching high level standard which outlines the intent of the standard; and
- the supporting standards.

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[1] The MOU formalises the arrangements between the lead agency and partner agencies participating within the Family Support Network and establishes the protocols that will govern FSN operations.

The Standards

Standard 1 - Safety and Wellbeing

Family Support Networks will support vulnerable children, young people and families to resolve crises and promote the safety and wellbeing of themselves and their family members.

Standard 2 - Assessment, Planning and Referral

Family Support Networks have a common and consistent process for identifying the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families and referring them appropriately to services.

Standard 3 - Access and Equity

Family Support Networks have strategies to maximise access for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Standard 4 - Responding to need

Family Support Networks respond effectively to the needs of children, young people and families and support them in achieving positive outcomes.

Standard 5 - Service Integration ~ practice and services

Family Support Networks work collaboratively and provide an integrated service response to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families.

Standard 6 - Accountability and Governance

Family Support Networks are accountable and provide clear leadership and management.

Standard 7 - Staff Recruitment, Training and Development

Family Support Networks staff have the knowledge and skills to support positive outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Standard 8 - Complaints and Disputes

Children, young people and families are free to raise and have resolved any complaints or disputes with regard to Family Support Networks.

Standard 1 - Safety and Wellbeing

Family Support Networks will support vulnerable children, young people and families to resolve crises and promote the safety and wellbeing of themselves and their family members.

Supporting standards:

a) FSNs provide vulnerable and at risk families with a level of service delivery and case management (if required) that is reflective of their needs.

b) Children are involved in the process of ascertaining and promoting their safety in accordance with their age, capacity and development.

c) Children, young people and families are empowered and supported to participate in identifying and resolving their own crisis.

d) FSN[2] partner agencies liaise with the common entry point team's[3] Leader Child Protection or the Department for Child Protection and Family Support where concerns for a child's safety and wellbeing exist and refer cases to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support as appropriate.

Standard 2 - Assessment, Planning and Referral

Family Support Networks have a common and consistent process for identifying the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families and referring them appropriately to services.

Supporting Standards:

a) The common entry point team and FSN partner agencies operate within the *WA Family Support Networks Assessment, Planning and Referral Framework* when assessing and referring vulnerable children, young people and/or families.

b) The assessment, planning and referral process is transparent and inclusive of children, young people and families.

c) Children, young people and families are made aware of information that is recorded and how they can access it.

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[2] Reference to FSNs includes the common entry point team, the lead agency and partner agencies.
[3] The common entry point team includes an Alliance Manager, two Assessment and Support Officers and a Leader Child Protection.

d) The common entry point team and member agencies support children, young people and families to access the most appropriate services as soon as possible.

e) Children, young people and families receiving services will be advised of processes and timeframes.

f) Agencies forming the FSN are guided by the WA Family Support Networks Information Sharing Protocol – *Secondary Services Working Together* when undertaking assessments and referring vulnerable children, young people and families both internally and externally to the FSN.

g) Families are aware of the role of the Leader Child Protection within the FSN and will be informed if the Leader Child Protection worker is consulted during the assessment process. The reason for their involvement will be communicated in a clear, respectful and transparent manner.

h) Common entry point teams have extensive knowledge of, and established referral pathways with FSN partner agencies and other universal, secondary and tertiary services.

Standard 3 - Access and Equity

Family Support Networks have strategies to maximise access for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Supporting standards:

a) Each FSN is easily accessible and provides vulnerable children, young people and families entry into the local service system.

b) FSN's operate under a local 1300 telephone number.

c) Information dissemination, promotional strategies and service design will reflect the nature of the FSN's target population and local community.

d) Each member agency adopts a 'no wrong door' philosophy, referring those who contact them but do not require that specific service to an appropriate service, for example services that are required from outside of the FSN or to the common entry point team for assessment and allocation of service.

e) The common entry point team and service delivery agencies are sensitive to diversity and responsive to differences in culture, religion, language, gender, and the particular needs of people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. FSNs are inclusive and where appropriate services are tailored to meet the needs of people with a disability.

Standard 4 - Responding to need

Family Support Networks respond effectively to the needs of children, young people and families and support them in achieving positive outcomes.

Supporting standards:

a) Children, young people and families have their needs assessed and prioritised based on the level of assessed risk.

b) Where a family has been assessed as requiring a service but is waitlisted for allocation, an active holding strategy will be employed consistent with the needs of the family and available interim support options.

c) An integrated case management model will be used for families accessing a FSN who require multiple service responses. This will include the development of a relevant assessment and a holistic plan.

d) Decision making processes will be undertaken in partnership with the child, young person and family.

e) FSNs adopt a child centred[4] and strengths based approach to practice that positions children at the centre of all interactions.

Standard 5 - Service Integration ~ practice and services

Family Support Networks work collaboratively and provide an integrated service response to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families.

Supporting standards:

a) FSN staff are supported to participate in joint capacity building strategies to maximise their understanding of integrated ways of working and to assist with collaboration.

b) FSNs will share information as appropriate, consistent with relevant legislation and approved Information Sharing Protocols.

c) FSNs are well networked with strong linkages and referral pathways to other universal, secondary and tertiary services and families are supported to access the services that can best meet their needs.

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[4] A child centred approach keeps the interests and the well-being of children central in the process of assessment and action, even when the direct recipient of a service is a parent.

d) The local governance structure reviews processes and procedures and carries out joint planning for FSN operations.

Standard 6 - Accountability and Governance

Family Support Networks are accountable and provide clear leadership and management.

Supporting standards:

a) FSNs operate in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding which formally binds each agency to an agreed approach to service delivery and clearly outlines the local approach to the operation of the FSN.

b) FSNs are guided by local Steering Groups with membership from government and community sector agencies and service providers.

c) The lead agency is responsible for the establishment and management of the FSN, including responsibility for the common entry point team.

d) All partner agencies have policies and procedures that enable staff to carry out their responsibilities and ensure the delivery of services that support vulnerable children, young people and families.

e) FSNs, services users and key stakeholders participate in evaluation activities as required in determining the efficiency and effectiveness of each FSN.

Standard 7 - Staff Recruitment, Training and Development

Family Support Network staff have the knowledge and skills to support positive outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Supporting Standards:

a) Recruitment strategies are targeted to attract appropriately qualified and/or experienced staff who match the needs of the service.

b) A collaborative team approach will be required by FSN agencies and investment in team building strategies will be supported.

c) FSNs have a capacity building strategy and staff are supported to participate in professional development and training.

d) All staff have undergone required screening prior to commencing employment, including Criminal Record checks and where applicable, a Working with Children Check.

Standard 8 - Complaints and Disputes

Children, young people and families are free to raise and have resolved any complaints or disputes with regard to Family Support Networks.

Supporting standards:

a) FSNs implement strategies to encourage children, young people and families to provide comment and feedback on the standard and adequacy of the service they receive.

b) Each partner agency[5] has a documented complaints procedure available to the public.

c) FSNs encourage an environment where complaints are seen as an opportunity for service improvement and will be taken seriously without judgement or blame.

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[5] The lead agency in each FSN, as a partner agency, is responsible for complaints management relating specifically to the common entry point team.