

A practical and collaborative approach to evaluating an integrated service delivery model

Department for Child Protection, Western Australia



In 2012, the Department of Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) in Western Australia developed and initiated a pilot of an integrated family support network to better respond to the needs of vulnerable children and their families. In order to assess its progress, KPMG in Australia was engaged to evaluate the new pilot model and conduct a cost benefit analysis.

An integrated approach to delivering secondary family support services

With such a large number of vulnerable families needing services, it's no surprise that the number one challenge facing child protection services in Australia is how to meet the increasing demand with the limited resources within the system. CPFS's implementation of their large-scale reform agenda to integrate family support services across Western Australia was a response to this issue of how to better manage demand.

An "integrated service system" provides a 'joined-up' or 'wrap-around' response with services tailored to meet differing levels of need experienced by vulnerable children and families. In the integrated

service response, child protection is seen as everyone's responsibility, not just the responsibility of the statutory child protection service.

There is strong emerging evidence that integrated and coordinated interventions are having a positive impact on the families that they serve, by proactively addressing the needs of children and families earlier, and by developing this support based on a holistic view of the child and family.

Specialized experience brings depth of knowledge

KPMG in Australia has extensive experience in the human and social services (HSS) sector and had

successfully undertaken a large number of evaluations of similar initiatives, which led to CPFS engaging the firm to evaluate the progress and efficiency of the newly implemented integrated family support network. In addition, KPMG was to undertake a cost benefit analysis of the implementation of the family support network.

To undertake the evaluation, KPMG assembled a team specializing in child protection and research and evaluation. The diversity of the team and its familiarity with implementing and evaluating integrated service systems in Victoria and Tasmania demonstrated the breadth of experience available to achieve the project's objectives. The team had also worked with CPFS in Western Australia previously

and was able to demonstrate that they understood the current family services environment.

Collaboration is key to success

KPMG's overall approach to the evaluation was practical, considered and consultative. To succeed and deliver on objectives, the project needed to be undertaken in collaboration with CPFS.

One of the main considerations of the project was that the integrated model – the family support network site – had not been in place for a long period of time. With this in mind the team created effective solutions to collect reliable data.

To evaluate CPFS's Network Innovation site, KPMG suggested an Action Research and Participatory Evaluation approach for the project. In essence, Action Research is a system for individuals to use their work as the basis for learning. It is an iterative process that uses learning to influence the way

things are done and then continually reviews the process to improve it.

The Action Research and Participatory Evaluation approach is especially beneficial for reform projects because it supports effective outcomes, makes the implementation process more manageable, provides an opportunity to 'observe and reflect' and promotes greater collaboration through the sharing of lessons learned. It has been demonstrated to improve performance and benefit clients greatly.

Collaboration was central to the overall project. The KPMG team worked with CPFS to facilitate workshops and conduct individual discussions. As part of the evaluation, KPMG involved key stakeholders in the process, promoting a greater understanding of critical issues and contextual factors. By engaging with key stakeholders, participants and staff were more likely to understand and use the findings of the evaluation to improve service delivery.

Results positively impact vulnerable children and their families

KPMG's report to CPFS on the progress of their integrated service system found positive signs of increased coordination between agencies, resulting in a decrease in inquiries from vulnerable families and children to child protection. With the potential duplication of resources reduced, agencies within the family support network were able to see more complex cases. KPMG's evaluation also found evidence that the family support network was leading to improvements in circumstances for the majority of vulnerable children and their families, including their ability to better resolve crises, improve their capabilities and reduce risk factors for children.

As a result of KPMG's work, CPFS was able to report on the cost savings that were realized by implementing an integrated service model. KPMG's evaluation helped create a roadmap for future improvements to the integrated system and similar models. Most importantly, the positive benefits of the integrated system are felt by those who need it most, the children and families the system serves.

View KPMG's evaluation on the CPFS family support network.

“KPMG's evaluation of our integrated service system helped paint a clear picture of the efficiencies the new system delivered in partnership with the community services sector was bringing to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. Their report will help us make decisions on how we will implement similar models in the future.”

Julie Dixon

Director Individual and Family Support
Department for Child Protection and Family Support

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