

**Family and Relationship Services  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT  
STRATEGY 2012 – 2017**

**CONSULTATION  
DRAFT  
(November 2011)**

## Introduction

Family and relationships services (F&RS) provision is a specialist area of social and community services, largely provided by non-government or community-based organisations, both secular and faith-based. Many of the services are funded through government programs.

The work of family and relationships services has become increasingly complex. In some aspects of the work there is extensive legislation, as well as regulation and explicit practice standards and procedures to guide the professionals working with families and children. In other aspects, there is little regulation and few standards or accepted best practice models, and heavy reliance on the skills and capacity of individuals. In all aspects of the work the stakes are high and the professionals and their employing agencies carry a high level of responsibility for the safety and well-being of individuals, in particular children. "As well as improving clients' lives, the effective provision of these kinds of services has significant flow-on effects throughout the economy and society, further emphasising the need for a stable and sustainable workforce"<sup>1</sup>.

Family and relationships services (F&RS) recognise the need for professionals to have the capacity to recognise the impact upon clients of employment and housing pressures, mental ill-health, substance abuse and other factors and to refer clients appropriately when required. There is growing emphasis on identifying and averting problems early. This is reflected in government policy and in preferred service delivery models in health and human services, the law, police and corrections which emphasise the importance of prevention and early intervention.

The complex inter-relationship of economic, health, cultural and environmental factors on family relationships and safe environments for children mean that a skilled and experienced workforce is essential for the provision of quality services to families.

The skills and knowledge of the F&RS workforce overlap with those required by other areas of the human services sector. Moreover, many of the services (such as family counselling and family dispute resolution) would not be appropriate for provision by a workforce of new graduates with limited experience. Consequently, the F&RS providers are frequently competing for an experienced, senior workforce against providers of other important human services.

## Purpose

The purpose of the *Family and Relationship Services Workforce Development Strategy 2012-2017* is to provide direction for the F&RS sector and to plan the necessary steps to secure and develop the capacity of the family relationship services sector to meet the needs of Australian families now and into the future by providing quality services and timely support, delivered by a skilled workforce.

## Principles

This Workforce Development Strategy has been developed by Family & Relationship Services Sector with support from FRSA and is based on the following principles:

1. It is essential to sustain and build Australia's capacity to provide quality services to families in an environment of growing demand and complexity
2. Professionals working with families under stress must be skilled, appropriately qualified, acknowledged and supported.
3. Planning and consultation between service providers, policy makers, professional bodies, training providers and funding bodies is essential to ensure the sustainability and quality of service provision.

## **Development of this strategy**

The *Family and Relationship Services Workforce Development Strategy 2012 – 2017* has been developed by the Family and Relationship Services Sector following initial work by the Joint Sector-Government Working Group on Workforce Development.

In recognition of the significance of the workforce issues, FRSA and FaHCSIA convened a Joint Sector-Government Working Group on Workforce Development in 2008. The Working Group had representatives from both the sector and government, including RTO's and the Community Services Health Industry Skills Council (CSHISC) and was requested to:

1. Review current workforce pressures including driving and restraining factors that impact on the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff;
2. Identify priorities for further research and consultation to identify common challenges and examples of successful workforce strategies;
3. Develop agreed principles for the development of the family relationship services workforce including the projected needs of the sector and clients;
4. Identify synergies with broader Australian Government's initiatives in workforce development and investment in other sectors; and
5. Prepare advice to both Government and the sector on workforce development strategies and the way forward.

One of the difficulties faced by the Working Group was the lack of data and information about the F&RS workforce. Before 2009, there was no definitive academic research that focused on the family & relationship services workforce in Australia, and other research about the sector has tended to overlook or only touch on workforce matters<sup>2</sup>. In 2009, FaHCSIA commissioned Colmar Brunton Social Research organisation to undertake a two stage mapping project of the F&RS sector to gather data on the characteristics of the workforce.

### **Priority areas of work**

The priority areas of work identified in this Strategy are:

1. Ensuring workforce supply to meet current and future need
2. Acknowledging, supporting and retaining the existing workforce
3. Building capacity of the workforce to deal with increased complexity.

## Priority area I

### Ensuring workforce supply to meet current and future need

---

#### Objective I.1: Improve the ability of F&RS organisations to attract the right people at the right time to meet community need

---

| Objective   | Strategy  |
|---|---|
| <b>I.1 Improve the ability of F&amp;RS organisations to attract the right people at the right time to meet community need</b> | <b>I.1.1 Improve remuneration levels for practitioners in family and relationship services to better reflect the value of the work performed.</b> |

#### Recruitment Challenges

The delivery of family and relationship services is labour intensive and relies almost exclusively on the capacity of an organisation to recruit and retain appropriately qualified staff. Difficulties with recruitment can compromise the continuity and effectiveness of service delivery and put pressure on existing staff. When this occurs across a number of agencies there can be an impact on overall program performance resulting in longer waiting lists, reduced throughput and higher per capita costs.

Difficulties in recruitment currently pose a considerable threat to continuity of service delivery and the ability to deliver essential programs at a level that meets community expectations.

#### Current Remuneration Levels

The 2009 survey of the FRSA workforce<sup>3</sup> found that overall the sector seeks to employ people with a high level of skills, qualifications and experience; however, the pay levels for these experienced staff are not competitive with other sectors (e.g. public sector or private sector). The estimated shortfall in salaries for F&RS practitioners (including qualified and experienced counsellors, mediators and family dispute resolution practitioners) between the community-based FRS sector and the public sector are between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per annum for each full time equivalent position.<sup>4</sup>

Services providers report finding it increasingly difficult to attract experienced practitioners and have difficulty filling vacancies. The biggest pool of potential employees are new graduates with little experience, who are unlikely to have the skills and professional networks to adequately identify, support and refer clients with complex needs or to work effectively without close supervision and mentoring. There is evidence that these new graduates<sup>5</sup> use the sector to gain experience and then move on into better paying positions in the public or private sector. This makes it very difficult for service providers to sustain quality service delivery.

#### Addressing Remuneration Issues

A major national test case on pay equity for community sector employees, submitted by the Australian Services Union (ASU), supported by the Federal government<sup>6</sup>, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission<sup>7</sup> and based on the new Fair Work Act, is now before Fair Work Australia. A decision from Fair Work Australia is expected by December 2011 and the outcome of the case will determine minimum pay rates for employees in the family and relationships services sector nationally. If successful, the national pay equity case will have substantial direct and indirect impacts on family and relationship services.

Reforms were also recommended by the Productivity Commission's Report on the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector (2010),<sup>8</sup> which concluded that Australian

governments purchasing community services need to base funding on relevant market wages for equivalent positions (recommendation 10.1).

There is strong support for the national test case across the sector. In fact, the evidence in the FRS sector is so compelling and the shortages in some specialist roles is so serious that FRSA member organisations will need to take steps to improve remuneration levels, regardless of the outcome of the pay equity case that is now before Fair Work Australia.

Upward movement in wages will also impact upon government procurement for family and relationship services and program delivery.

Wage rises will impact substantially on the cost of service delivery. The community sector will be unable to absorb the wage increases without a flow-on impact on service delivery. The sector is already contributing a significant amount.

The inevitability of higher labour costs points to the urgent need for the Boards and senior management of organisations providing services, FRSA and the government agencies procuring services to undertake collaborative planning that will ensure an adequate workforce to meet community need for family and relationships services. Suggested next steps are included in Table 2.

| Objective  | Strategy   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1.1 Improve the ability of F&amp;RS organisations to attract the right people at the right time to meet community need</b></p> | <p><b>1.1.2. Improve access to affordable training programs and certification processes for essential Family Law programs that are facing immediate risk due to workforce shortages.</b></p> |

### **Barriers to supply of FDR practitioners**

Since 2006 the Family Law System has required that anyone seeking to resolve a parenting dispute in the Family Court must first attempt Family Dispute Resolution, unless an exception applies due to urgency, family violence or child abuse or neglect.<sup>9</sup> These processes demonstrate government's commitment to promoting non-adversarial dispute resolution and to provide support and educational services for separating families - a commitment that is fully supported by the sector.

To demonstrate that Family Dispute Resolution has been attempted the applicant must produce a certificate (Section 601) from an accredited FDR practitioner. Practitioners must be accredited and listed on the register in order to issue Section 601 certificates.

Coinciding with the introduction of *Family Law (Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners) Regulations 2008*, government worked with the Industry Skills Council and the sector to develop a Vocational Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution that would be the compulsory requirement for a practitioner to be accredited under the Accreditation Standards. For practitioners registered at February 2009, the government provided subsidised training and assessment in the three required competencies until May 2009.

Subsequently, transition arrangements to accredit existing practitioners and to recognise their prior learning (RPL) have been put in place, whereby practitioners are required to demonstrate competency in 3 of the 6 units of the Vocational Diploma and provide evidence of other equivalent training/qualifications, with a deadline of 30 June 2011. Some other qualifications are acceptable for accreditation (e.g. accreditation under the *National Mediation Accreditation Scheme*).

As at July 2010, 6 registered training organisations (RTOs) offer the Vocational Graduate Diploma, with none based in Queensland, Tasmania or the Northern Territory. FRSA member organisations are experiencing geographic and financial barriers to accessing the training. The cost of attending the compulsory in-person component of training or the required interviews for RPL (particularly for employees from rural and remote regions) is considerable

and the 'narrowness' of the job opportunities arising from the qualification mean that there is little incentive for personal investment in training by individual practitioners. The RTOs offering the FDR Vocational Diploma are not eligible to offer fee-help for students and member organisations from rural/remote areas estimate that the cost of achieving accreditation for an existing staff member is more than \$10,000 per person<sup>10</sup>. A 2010 application by FRSA, through the Industry Skills Council to DEEWR for places in the Vocational Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution to be subsidised under the Enterprise Based Productivity Places program was unsuccessful. A further 2011 application is pending.

There is a high level of concern within the FRSA membership about the current barriers to ensuring an adequate supply of FDR practitioners within AGD time frames. Without better access to the qualifications, providers report that some large geographically and socio-economically disadvantaged areas will have access to few if any registered FDR practitioners.

This Strategy proposes a number of urgent steps to address risks to the provision of FDR services to the most economically and geographically disadvantaged clients. Achieving 'fee-help' eligibility for all RTOs offering the FDR Vocational Diploma will be an important first step. Other steps may include funding for providers in disadvantaged areas to complete training requirements and additional resources to fast-track RPL processes to avert program failure. Such resourcing would comply with the Productivity Commission's recommendation that 'Australian governments should ensure that service agreements and contracts include provision for reasonable compensation for providers for the costs imposed by changes in government policy that affect the delivery of the contracted service.'<sup>11</sup>

| Objective  | Strategy  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1.1 Improve the ability of F&amp;RS organisations to attract the right people at the right time to meet community need</b></p> | <p><b>1.1.3 Enhance the capacity of providers to offer stable employment opportunities.</b></p> |

### **Stability of employment in the FRS sector**

The majority (56%) of family and relationships services delivered by FRSA member organisations are funded through competitive fixed-term government contracts. As a result, the ability for member organisations to provide certainty to employees is limited. Engaging employees for any longer than the contracted period means that the organisation carries the risk of funding shortfalls. This issue is not unique to the F&RS sector and evidence submitted from a range of community service groups to the Productivity Commission in 2009-2010 clearly demonstrated the impact of short term competitive contracts on an organisation's ability to attract and retain staff, and to offer training and professional development. The Commission recommended improving funding certainty for those not-for-profit organisations involved in the delivery of government services. Improved certainty and clarity of funding (recommendation 11.1) and contracts of appropriate length (recommendation 12.5) would improve loan viability for service providers.

A commitment to at least 3 year funding cycles and where possible longer cycles would provide greater capacity to attract new staff because contracts of a longer duration offer opportunities for professional development and career progression.

In programs that are new and experimental it may be reasonable to run a pilot over 12 months but always with a view to 3 year funding program if successful. Service providers (in both the government and non-government sector) have pointed to the need for additional time for innovative programs to be funded<sup>12</sup> and the importance of adequate contract duration for addressing workforce issues. Not only does funding for more than one year allow time for the outcomes of new approaches to be identified and evaluated, but longer project periods help to attract and motivate the staff who are involved in trialling the

program and this contributes to the evidence base for best practice and new models of service delivery.

This Strategy proposes steps for collaborative planning to achieve longer term contracts that will offer greater employment stability and therefore increase the attraction of F&RS work in the market place.

### **Staffing for Children's Contact Services**

There are 35 Children's Contact Services (CCS) funded by the Federal Government's Attorney-General's portfolio and administered by the Family Support Program. These are provided by FRSA member organisations. There are also a small number of unfunded contact services, provided either by community organisations or by private providers<sup>13</sup>. Children's Contact Services provide a safe, neutral place to assist parents with the changeover of children; and supervised contact to assist separated parents to manage contact arrangements, especially where there are concerns about safety. They are intended to assist the children of separated parents to have contact with and establish and maintain a relationship with their other parent and family members.

The workforce mapping project data indicates the CCS workforce has the highest rate of part-time (46%) and casual (32%) employment in the sector. CCS workers also reported the lowest rate of pay for this FRS specialist workforce and employers reported the highest number of new employees in CCS roles (59% in the role for less than 12 months). A survey conducted by the Australian Children's Contact Services Association (ACCSA) as part of a feasibility study into the compulsory accreditation of staff<sup>14</sup> found that 6% of CCS staff were full-time, with 39% part-time and 59% casual. The same survey found that across CCS providers, 39% of the workforce has one year or less experience in working in children's contact services.

After-hours and weekend work is necessarily associated with providing Children's Contact Services. This involves penalty rates which have now increased significantly under the Fair Work Act and requires flexible working hours and rostering systems within an organisation. However, the significant reliance on a casual, inexperienced workforce raises questions about the sustainability of quality service provision and places an unnecessary administrative burden on employers.

AGD is investigating the feasibility of requiring compulsory accreditation of Children's Contact Services workers in Australia. Research by ACCSA indicated broad support for the phasing of such a system<sup>15</sup>. Increased 'professionalisation' of the sector is identified as an objective (1.3) of this Strategy. However, where work is predominantly casual, the imposition of mandatory training requirements can be problematic. Research for the Industry Skills Council indicates '*on every measure used by the ABS, casual workers in the community services and health industries fare worse with regard to training access.*'<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is important to learn from the experience of compulsory accreditation for FDR practitioners and to ensure collaborative planning, access, resources and communication for a smooth introduction of any accreditation requirements without risk to service provision

---

## **Objective 1.2: Increase the availability and take-up rates of VET and Higher Education programs that lead to careers in the Sector**

---

| Objective  | Strategy   |
|--|--|
| <b>1.2 Increase the availability and take-up of VET and Higher Ed programs that lead to a career in Sector</b> | <b>1.2.1 Develop better links between education providers, professional bodies and the sector.</b> |

## Qualification Pathways and Entry Points

Improved training and professional development for practitioners was identified in the 2004 FRSP program review<sup>17</sup> as a critical challenge for the sector. It was recommended that improvement in this area begin at the level of undergraduate education, as many agencies reported that they prefer not to employ new graduates because they do not have the requisite skills or experience.

Simple solutions to this situation are influenced by the fact that entry points and pathways into the sector are provided by a variety of degree programs and vocational training<sup>18</sup>. Work is required (possibly in collaboration with professional bodies such as ASSW and APS) to develop consistent articulation arrangements from VET programs into higher education courses. Transparent, consistent articulation processes would be a step towards developing direct pathways into the family relationship services sector.

There is scope to improve undergraduate education by developing strong partnerships with universities to encourage students in social welfare, social work, counselling, psychology and other human services degrees to undertake specialist courses in mediation, family dispute resolution and/or counselling. A number of FRSA members already have well established partnerships that warrant recognition.

Another approach (successfully applied in the health sector nationally) has been the development of government-supported incentives for education providers and professional bodies to modify curricula and training programs to facilitate the supply of graduates with appropriate core training<sup>19</sup>. This model could be considered for the FRS sector.

The recent Mapping Project of the F&RS workforce<sup>20</sup> recommended that more be done to engage students in family and relationship services to improve awareness of this sector and develop pathways into positions. This might occur through greater use of student placements and traineeships and/or sector leaders becoming involved in delivering lectures/presentations as part of tertiary and vocational courses. Field placement at Family Relationship Centres, internship programs, and supported employment for students during academic breaks could provide further incentives for graduates to enter the sector (recognising that this is already occurring in some cases).

Again, using the health sector as an example, where workforce shortages have been identified, some government-sponsored initiatives have been developed to encourage and facilitate the placement of students/trainees in appropriate settings. Exploration of similar models, developed in collaboration with government for the F&RS sector is warranted.

There are some limitations to focusing at the undergraduate level, although new graduates provide a potential source of labour, inexperienced workers tend to require intensive supervision, and investing in this group may be seen to divert resources to staff least likely to stay (CWA & FaHCSIA, 2006). However, policy levers could be used to encourage new graduates to stay for a minimum period of time in the sector, using the approach adopted by the Australian government following the Bradley Report's recommendations<sup>21</sup>. Such an approach could involve retrospective subsidisation of course fees following completion of a minimum period of service in the F&RS sector. Further, the development of supervisory senior practitioner roles is identified in the Strategy as an important aspect of enhancing career paths for existing staff (Strategies 2.1.1. and 2.1.2).

It may be that work in this area would be better focused on post-graduate qualifications or vocational training accessed by older, more experienced workers. Other models such as targeted 'cadetships' for mature age workers or incentives for experienced workers in related fields to transfer to the FRS could be explored (see Strategy 1.2.3).

| Objective   | Strategy  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1.2 Increase the availability and take-up of VET and Higher Ed programs that lead to a career in Sector</b></p> | <p><b>1.2.2 Develop approaches that address the recruitment and training of a workforce that will meet the needs of specific groups in the community.</b></p> |

An undersupply of suitably qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff experienced in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has been documented, along with shortages of workers in rural and remote locations, and of male workers.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment**

In its 2010-2013 Reconciliation Action Plan<sup>22</sup> (RAP) FRSA has committed to increase training, employment and professional development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the F&RS sector. This will be done by:

- convening and supporting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioner network.
- supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioner involvement in the FRSA National conference and other events ( i.e. workshop delivery and event attendance)
- encouraging member organisations to provide opportunities to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment and non-Indigenous employment rates (e.g. identifying and sharing strategies for increasing or enhancing employment opportunities in member organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples)

This F&RS Strategy would set an aspirational target of 2.6 per cent of the F&RS workforce being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by 2017<sup>23</sup>; and FRSA would facilitate planning, prioritisation, target setting, monitoring, and reporting of progress to member organisations.

Some immediate opportunities have arisen to work with government to train Indigenous people in family and relationships services, including the new Indigenous Family Safety Agenda and its (2010-2013) *Strong Fathers Strong Families* initiative. More recently, during 2011-12, AGD have provided FRSA with one-off funding to trial a modest FDR Scholarships program for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander workers and those from Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Communities.

There are also some successful models for training specialist Indigenous workers that service providers and government partners could explore, such as programs which provides a mix of university-based teaching through a partner university and workplace-based training – with trainees in paid training positions in services.

Specific training and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners to meet and share experiences is also important. Initial training programs offered by FaHCSIA were resource intensive, but beneficial for all parties. FRSA should explore the feasibility of further collaboration with FaHCSIA to continue to offer similar programs.

In a 2009 survey conducted by the AIFS, sector staff reported relatively low levels of confidence in their ability to provide services for Indigenous families. In the RAP FRSA has also committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency training for practitioners working in family support services through:

- Promoting training opportunities;
- Connecting training providers and practitioners;
- Working with training providers and universities;

- Encouraging investment in training (by funding bodies, service providers, corporate sponsors, philanthropic donors and communities);
- Recognising the value of ongoing skills development; and
- Understanding and working to address barriers to training – particularly for smaller organisations and those in rural/remote locations.

FRSA was actively involved with the Secretariat of National and Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in the development of a resource for F&RS organisations working with Indigenous families<sup>24</sup> to develop culturally appropriate professional practice and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This resource development was funded by FaHCSIA and now needs to be taken up in training programs and continuing professional development at the local level across the sector in order to maximise the benefit of that investment. FRSA & SNAICC have also partnered to jointly develop and run Cultural Competence training workshops for members based on the resource.

As with many other Strategies identified for the sector, this calls for a collaborative approach between providers and with the government, possibly facilitated by FRSA, to identify particular initiatives and opportunities.

### **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

Recent data indicates that 5% of current employees work primarily and 49% work sometimes with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. In an employee survey 19% of the F&RS workforce self-identified as being from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In the AIFS Evaluation Study employees reported a lack of confidence in their ability to work with the range of CALD clients.

Best practice strategies have been suggested as: avoiding attempts to match clients with support staff from the same background, and instead incorporating diversity into policy and planning throughout the organisation, including through regular consultation, access and equity statements, professional development, and networking.<sup>25</sup>

The variety of cultural and language groups in some locations points to the need for broader training. To avoid duplication effort, partnership with governments and other service providers to develop training content that is current, broadly applicable and available to all geographic locations would make sense.

At the same time roles and career paths for a specialist option in CALD family and relationship services delivery could be explored with education and government partners.

### **Regional, Rural and Remote Service Delivery**

Across the NGO sector Australian research<sup>26</sup> consistently highlights the difficulty rural and remote services face in attracting staff, especially where NGO employers cannot offer support for relocation and access to professional development opportunities. While the flexibility of generalist roles in rural services give workers wide opportunities for skill development, jobs of this nature have also been associated with high levels of stress, relating to multiple and ambiguous roles, professional isolation, visibility in the community, and challenges around confidentiality, personal privacy and safety.<sup>27</sup>

Strategies at the sectoral level could be introduced to address the specific needs of rural and regional practitioners. These needs include professional support and advice, strong referral networks and opportunities for training and respite. Most recently, the Australian Government acknowledged the demanding practice context of rural work and the greater needs of these practitioners by agreeing to allocate funding to assist rural practitioners to attend conferences and professional development courses (CWA & FaHCSIA, 2006). Such funding initiatives need to be sustained and expanded to support rural workers' development and the delivery of quality services.

In terms of attracting skilled practitioners to regional/rural areas, the sector could facilitate the involvement of member organisations in local recruitment initiatives, whereby small

business, education providers and health and community services providers form an alliance to provide attractive packages for potential recruits. These packages may include a con-joint appointment with a local VET provider or university that allows some teaching or research in addition to their paid role as a practitioner; and can include in-kind supply of goods and services (e.g. car hire and accommodation) for potential recruits and their immediate families to visit the location as part of the recruitment process, and meet key contacts (e.g. schools, real estate) who will facilitate re-location. Such models have been successfully used in regional Victoria to attract health professionals and trainees<sup>28</sup>.

## Men & Fathers

The F&RS sector has a predominantly female workforce. This mirrors the community sector as a whole. When it comes to services for children and families, the challenge of attracting male workers to jobs is a persistent theme.<sup>29</sup>

The FSP is the primary source of investment in formal services that support men and their family relationships. Funding for *Mensline Australia* and more than 250 Men and Family Relationship (MFR) services across Australia is distributed through this program.

FRSA and Crisis Support Services (CSS) established two leadership groups in 2008 to provide high level advice on the needs of men within the context of their family relationships. Part of the brief for the *Men and Family Strategic Leadership Group* is identifying and developing links across government portfolios to increase capacity to respond effectively to the relationship needs of men and their families. This group could facilitate sector-government collaboration in workforce development, linked to its concurrent work on identifying innovation in practice.

Similarly, part of the brief of the *Men and Family Relationships Sector Development Group* is to identify priorities for capacity building and sector development across service networks. This group has already provided an important forum for the sharing of information and ideas, through its practitioner network and its bi-annual conference. This group could provide expert advice as to workforce development priorities and local level recruitment strategies that could be expanded to address workforce shortages.

The opportunities for synergies to be developed with grass roots movements like the Men's Shed were identified by FRSA and CCS when they established the National Men and Family Leadership Groups in 2008 (and more recently in the *National Workforce Strategy*). A strategy to reach potential pools of men to be trained and supported to work with other men and their families at the local level as mentors, educators and counsellors is likely to reap benefits. Similarly, other avenues could be identified to reach men who are transitioning to retirement, early retirees, seeking to move from physically demanding work (e.g. building or rural industries) or contemplating a late career change. FRSA could lead the sector in exploring targeted initiatives to attract mature age men to training and working in the sector.

The *National Workforce Strategy* also identifies the need to increase workforce participation rates of men of 'prime working age' (25 – 64 years)<sup>30</sup> and a national policy approach is likely to be developed which the sector should monitor for applicability to the FRS workforce.

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>1.2 Increase the availability and take-up of VET and Higher Ed programs that lead to a career in FRS</b> | <b>1.2.3 Target mature aged workers with appropriate backgrounds to move into the F&amp;RS sector.</b> |

Government policy levers provide incentives for people to remain in the workforce. The *National Workforce Strategy* identifies increasing the workforce participation rate as a key priority and sets a target of 69% by 2025 (the present level being 65.1%)<sup>31</sup>. It proposes taxation reform and more flexible working arrangements, as well as targeting specific groups in the community with low participation rates: including older workers (55 to 64 years). It should be expected that existing policy levers (like *Transition to Retirement* arrangements enabling partial access to superannuation funds and continued working life) will be further developed

and additional incentives for people to remain in the workforce will be introduced by government.

In February 2010, the Australian government announced the \$43.3 M Productive Ageing Package to provide vital training and support for older workers who want to stay in the workforce<sup>32</sup>. Much of the access to the target workforce could be achieved by building strong links with and promoting F&RS work to the providers of Job Services Australia, who will influence the information, training choices and support provided to mature age applicants under this program.

Considering some of the special features of the F&RS workforce, there could be other significant potential for targeted strategies aimed at attracting mature age workers to join the sector or to return to the sector.

---

### **Objective 1.3: Raise awareness of the professional nature of FRS work**

---

| Objective  | Strategy  |
|--|---|
| <b>1.3 Raise awareness of the professional nature of F&amp;RS work</b> | <b>1.3.1 Support ongoing professionalisation and development of professional standards for the family and relationship services sector.</b> |

There is evidence that in industries like community services, where the workforce is drawn from a range of backgrounds and there is no single professional identity, the recognition of a 'skills component' of the work is more difficult to achieve. The Industry Skills Council argues that *"without the professional umbrella, or the notion of belonging to a skills-based fraternity, workers themselves have difficulty comprehending the value of skills – both to preserve and upgrade."*<sup>33</sup> Recognition of family and relationship services work as a skills-based profession is also crucial to the attraction of people to the sector.

The term 'professionalisation' is usually associated with the identification and requirement of specific skills, training and standards of practice. A renewed focus on professionalisation of the workforce has been proposed as a way to retain experienced practitioners and attract new graduates into the sector.<sup>34</sup>

The government has an interest in ensuring that funded services are delivered in accordance with quality standards (FRSP Approval Requirements) and operational guidelines and the professionalism of practitioners on the front line of service delivery is a major determinant of the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the services provided.

Major developments in the professionalisation of this sector occurred in the 1970s and 1980s but progress continues today. Recent examples of professionalisation are outlined in the Background document.

It has been suggested<sup>35</sup> that FRSA take a leadership role in coordinating and unifying collective activities across the relevant professional associations and representative bodies to support professionalisation in the F&RS sector, specifically in leading the development of professional standards. Potential obstacles include the disparate professional identities and educational backgrounds of practitioners, and the fact that there are a variety of professional standards and/or competency standards already in place. A starting point could be to examine the common ground across existing standards and test sector support for further work in this area.

Another potential role for FRSA is to facilitate and support the development of practitioner resources in areas of practice more specific to working with families than those generally contained in broader professional standards and guidelines.

There is also scope for FaHCSIA and the sector to review and update the Quality Strategy developed for the Family Relationship services Sector in 2001-02 that included Best Practice Standards for Family Support (2003) and research on relevant accreditation systems.

| Objective  | Strategy   |
|--|--|
| <b>I.3 Raise awareness of the professional nature of F&amp;RS work</b> | <b>I.3.2 Promote the benefits of a career in F&amp;RS and build on existing strengths.</b> |

The sometimes disparate professional identities and educational backgrounds of practitioners can be regarded as a complicating factor for workforce development in the sector. But at the same time it is a strength that could be utilised in ensuring workforce supply and retention.

The factors providing greatest work satisfaction (reported by staff *after* joining the sector) were: type of work (85%), co-workers competencies (80%) and location of work (78%). This data implies strengths that could be further developed and emphasised when promoting the benefits of F&RS work to prospective trainees and employees. These include the positives of working in partnership with people with diverse backgrounds and complementary skill sets and the learning opportunities, support and professional development that can be provided through a multidisciplinary team-based approach to service delivery.

The elements of the location of work that are attractive to both potential and current staff could be further explored and promoted, as could the potential for part-time flexible hours and work outside routine business hours that could be attractive to potential staff, depending on their career stage, family commitments and lifestyle. The attractiveness and benefits of employment is important to convey and there is a need to inform marketing and communications messages that will increase the understanding of the potential recruits, the general public, careers counsellors and jobs networks.

---

#### **Objective I.4: Link workforce planning to community needs**

---

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>I.4 Link workforce planning to community needs</b> | <b>I.4.1 Build systems to inform needs-based workforce planning.</b> |

Until now, workforce planning within the F&RS sector has either taken place at the enterprise level or has been 'reactive' in response to government policy and program change. In order to effectively plan for and shape the F&RS workforce of the future, the sector would benefit from collaborative processes across the sector and with government and training providers, interpreting data on community need and future trends and being proactive as a sector in planning the skill-base, roles and types of services that are likely to be required in the future.

The development of sector wide planning, based on forecast community need would also assist the sector to work with and advise Skills Australia, which, as a result of the Bradley review, is now charged with monitoring the effectiveness of the VET and higher education in contributing to adequate workforce supply and informing government policy on areas of workforce shortage that may need attention.

## Priority area 2

# Acknowledging, developing and retaining the existing workforce

### Objective 2.1: Recognise the value and strengths of the existing FRS workforce

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>2.1 Recognise the value and strengths of the existing F&amp;RS workforce</b> | <b>2.1.1 Develop new classifications and career paths with remuneration linked to competence, experience and attainment of qualifications.</b> |

#### Staff Retention

Worker satisfaction has been consistently identified as a key strength of the non-profit community services workforce both in Australia and overseas<sup>36</sup>. The F&RS sector has a reputation for providing employees with attractive job roles and opportunities to engage in early intervention and prevention work.

In the workforce mapping project<sup>37</sup> where employees were intending to leave the sector or were unsure of their future intentions, aside from pay rates, the main concerns were a lack of career path, low levels of acknowledgement for work and inflexible hours. The project report recommend that strategies for increasing 'employee engagement' including staff involvement in decision-making and flexible working hours could be promoted in family and relationship services.

Overall, the sector has relatively good retention rates in many roles, with an average of 3.6 years of employment with the current employer reported and 10.2 years in the community services sector. This data reflects the reported satisfaction with the type of work and that working in the sector meets with or exceeds expectations for the majority of employees (77%).

#### Work roles and career opportunities

The structure of work roles in family and relationship services has the potential to impact on both recruitment and retention. Recent reports<sup>38</sup> have suggested that the sector give consideration to:

- Creating non-professional roles to re-allocate tasks that do not need high levels of training;
- Increasing support through job sharing, secondment opportunities and mentoring programs;<sup>39</sup>
- Reduce administration load on practitioners, maximise client contact and monitor case loads;<sup>40</sup>
- Create more specialist positions to concentrate skills in some areas.

With the goals of improved remuneration rates and increased professionalisation already identified in this Strategy, it is important to address the consequent need to develop consistent roles, levels of remuneration across the sector and transparent career progression structures that are linked to the acknowledgment and reward for skill attainment, competence and experience. Extensive consultation and planning is needed, based on industry knowledge and projections of community needs into the future (see Objective 1.4).

Other comparable workforce strategies are also proposing the development of more 'assistant' roles to reduce the administrative burden on practitioners and facilitate more practitioner time to work directly with clients. Some examples of these are the consideration of 'psychology assistants' and 'social work assistants'<sup>41</sup>.

Issues of pay rates have been addressed in Priority area 1 and would of course flow on to the current workforce, however sound planning and prompt consistent communication of any changes arising from industrial decisions are crucial to retention, as are smooth, transparent transition processes if changes are introduced.

### **Portable Entitlement Schemes**

The community sector is diverse but over half of the family and relationship services are delivered by relatively small organisations (annual turnover under \$2M). To advance and gain a mix of experience practitioners and middle managers may need to move between organisations and perhaps spend time in public and/or private sector roles. Indeed this is actively encouraged by many in the sector who see this as valuable experience.

As people move between one employer and another they often lose accrued entitlements such as sick leave and long service leave which can be a disincentive. The potential benefits of schemes that make these entitlements portable across community sector employers and related sectors have been under discussion in various jurisdictions for a number of years. Schemes have been in place for some time in the construction and cleaning industries and have provided a model for schemes developed or developing in community service sectors. The ACT has recently established a scheme, both Victoria and Queensland have commitments to developing and implementing a scheme and there may be other jurisdictions in which they have been established or may be under consideration.

Family Relationship Services are likely to be included in State/Territory portability schemes which will be of some advantage to employees. The potential for a national scheme to be developed down the track warrants further consideration.

| Objective  | Strategy  |
|--|---|
| <b>2.1 Recognise the value and strengths of the existing FRS workforce</b> | <b>2.1.2 Develop senior level practitioner roles as an alternative to management roles.</b> |

In the human services and health sectors, traditional career structures have evolved whereby, after a certain period of service as a practitioner, opportunities for senior level progression are limited and the accepted career path has been for senior practitioners to move into management roles. In other national workforce strategies currently under development, the need to provide an alternative pathway for senior level practitioners has been identified.

These roles would provide an incentive for experienced practitioners to remain in the sector and could contribute to workforce development through the provision of supervision and mentoring for less experienced practitioners (see Strategy 3.2.2) and the capacity of the workforce to better provide services for families with complex needs. Consideration could also be given to developing senior practitioner roles that include a right of private practice, or are linked to teaching and research roles with local education and training providers, so that work at the front-line can be continually informed by current research on best practice and led by senior practitioners.

The creation of such roles could also contribute to better recognition that management roles in the F&RS require specific skills and experience, professional development and support. Just as practitioner roles are becoming more complex, so too are management roles in the sector. The complexity of financial arrangements, contractual and legal obligations and accountability requirements for community-based organisations were acknowledged in the Productivity Commission's (2010) report. This means that career progression into senior management roles without adequate training and professional development is not feasible in the community services sector (see Strategy 3.2.3).

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>2.1 Recognise the value and strengths of the existing F&amp;RS workforce</b> | <b>2.1.3 Share knowledge and experience in workforce issues.</b> |

Strategies in related sectors, such as Disability Services, have facilitated the sharing of information and ideas between organisations within the sector, particularly where the sector largely consists of small-medium sized organisations with resource and expertise limitations.

But there is evidence that the shift to competitive, contractual funding arrangements for service delivery from non-government providers is fuelling competitive behaviour and providing barriers to collaboration in a range of workforce development and management matters across the health and community services sector.<sup>42</sup>

A policy shift towards consumer empowerment of service purchase through 'voucher' systems in the F&RS sector could exacerbate this competition and, if it happens, would be a disincentive for F&RS providers to share experience and ideas about what works' in terms of workforce development.

There is an important role here for the FRSA to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources and for government to participate in supporting 'demonstration' projects that trial evidence-based workforce initiatives and evaluate them so that proven successful programs can be shared with other organisations. Demonstration projects for workforce development could work effectively within the F&RS, provided there is support and commitment from providers and government.

---

### **Objective 2.2: Keep pace with the labour market**

---

| Objective                                   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>2.2 Keep pace with the labour market</b> | <b>2.2.1 Enhance the capacity of providers to keep pace with wage increases in the future.</b> |

### **Funding Cycles, Indexation & Timeframes**

It is difficult to provide job security or undertake forward planning – including individual career development – when operating in a context of short term or uncertain funding agreements. Some argue that short-term funding contracts result in short-term staffing, which place relationship building, overall service quality, and service continuity at risk<sup>43</sup>.

At the conclusion of the funding cycle service providers also report significant challenges with tight timelines for renegotiation of new or existing contractual arrangements. At the extreme this leaves organisations running the risk of having to give employees notice or be in breach of industrial relations requirements. It can mean organisations carry an increased liability for employment costs until final agreements are in place and funding granted, creating undue stress on staff and effecting client service delivery.

This increased stress and organisational liability ranges from challenges around the timing of ongoing lease negotiations of premises in which programs are located, commitment to ongoing involvement in supporting a range of other collaborative projects and future development of innovative responses to the needs of Australian families.

A rate of indexation in Service Agreements that is based on relevant indices that accurately reflect the increasing costs of service delivery will assist service providers in accommodating wage increases. Gaps of more than 2% between the indexation rates of Service Agreements and rates of actual wage rises have existed in the sector for more than three years.

FRSA has and will continue to work with government partners to achieve indexation rates that more closely reflect the national labour price index and time frames that allow for smooth renegotiation of contracts and greater certainty for employees.

| Objective                                   | Strategy  |
|---|---|
| <b>2.2 Keep pace with the labour market</b> | <b>2.2.2 Maintain up-to-date workforce mapping information to inform workforce development and maintain sector engagement in strategy development, implementation and monitoring.</b> |

In the past, the lack of data on the Sector workforce has made it difficult to formulate policy and sector development plans. Clear recommendations have emerged only when projects such as program reviews have been commissioned. Even now, having just commissioned a Workforce Mapping project FRSA cannot be accurate about key factors such as the number of people who work in this sector or total expenditure on training. The mapping project has provided a starting point for understanding and monitoring the Sector workforce but there is value in building on this.

To maintain and grow our understanding of the current workforce, a more regular approach to eliciting their views would be valuable. An annual or bi-annual survey could be used to monitor trends and identify any new or emerging issues.

Repeating the Workforce Mapping survey of organisations is a more demanding task that would require some resource commitment, but is perceived as necessary in order to inform workforce planning and development.

Another important group that may be worth tapping for information would be potential employees – students and new graduates who may be considering (or could be persuaded to consider) a career in family and relationship services. A survey or series of focus groups could be conducted through University and Training Organisations perhaps once every 3 years to explore perceptions of this sector and career expectations.

## Priority area 3

### Building capacity of the workforce to deal with increased complexity

#### Objective 3.1: Facilitate access to professional development to identify, support and refer clients with co-existing problems and complex needs

| Objective   | Strategy  |
|---|---|
| <b>3.1 Facilitate access to professional development to identify, support and refer clients with co-existing problems</b> | <b>3.1.1 Broaden access to Continuing Professional Development.</b> |

Training and professional development programs are important for improving capacity and job satisfaction, and for communicating organisational commitment to workers and clients.<sup>44</sup> They also build an individual's confidence to use effective referral pathways and to know when and how to support, intervene and refer clients with complex needs.

The 2004 review of the FRSP<sup>45</sup> recommended cross-agency and joint training as a cost effective use of sectoral infrastructure. This strategy provides the additional benefit of facilitating greater collaboration between service providers and practitioners, which may be undermined where funding is allocated through competitive tendering processes.

As a first step, the sector needs to conduct an audit of the current qualifications and training available to the sector, including in-house programs and training units that offer specialist courses throughout the sector and any recognition of courses by relevant professional bodies. The audit should also include examination of the IT platforms and formats used for training delivery, with a goal of reaching some consistency across the sector that will facilitate access to staff in any location or organisation.

Existing programs that have been proven successful could be offered more widely through the sector. Support for the adaptation of programs for on-line delivery would be a cost-effective, equitable way to improve access.

The same audit process could gather data on how organisations support and encourage staff to complete CPD and to broaden their qualifications and skills. Successful approaches, such as scholarships, fee subsidy, in-house mentoring programs etc could be identified, evaluated and considered for expansion more broadly across the sector.

At the national level, FRSA can continue to work with government to address the difficulties that RTOs within the sector face in accessing Fee Help for their students.

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>3.1 Facilitate access to professional development to identify, support and refer clients with co-existing problems</b> | <b>3.1.2 Develop partnerships with other specialist sub-sectors.</b> |

The frequency of co-existing problems in families means that practitioners need to have effective referral pathways and current 'system literacy' so that appropriate advice and support can be easily obtained for both clients and the practitioners themselves. This means that professional development should include opportunities for staff to learn how other specialist agencies work with the same client groups, how to identify commonly occurring conditions, how and when to refer to other agencies, and how to work in collaboration with agencies providing services to the same families.

Identified training needs for the F&RS sector include<sup>46</sup> working cross culturally, especially with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and remote communities; alcohol and other drugs; legal obligations; family group conferencing; and mental health.

Because of high levels of co-existing problems, some State/Territory governments have fostered collaboration between mental health and drug and alcohol services so that workers in both agencies learn the basics of each sub-specialty area<sup>47</sup>. Similarly, joint training and ongoing professional development arrangements have been developed between organisations that allow for sharing resources, training, secondments, 'shadowing' and shared supervision arrangements. This is a model that could be adapted in the F&RS sector.

FRSA has a potential role in developing frameworks or templates for member organisations to adapt at the local level for negotiating training and resource sharing partnerships that will provide learning opportunities for their staff and enhance service delivery to clients.

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>3.1 Facilitate access to professional development to identify, support and refer clients with co-existing problems</b> | <b>3.1.3 Create senior practitioner and supervision roles.</b> |

The quality of supervision is the strongest predictor of worker satisfaction in child welfare, with at least two hours of weekly supervision associated with higher levels of satisfaction.<sup>48</sup> Other research has shown the lack of adequate supervision is a major influence on the decision to leave a job, particularly when workers are professionally isolated and dealing with complex cases<sup>49</sup>.

Strategy 2.1.2 proposes the development of improved career pathways for senior practitioners that will encourage experienced staff to remain in practice. These senior practitioner roles would be important in providing advice, mentoring and supervision of less experienced or geographically isolated staff. If shared between organisations, the roles could assist both small and large providers to support and retain staff, build sector capacity to work with families with complex needs and contribute to the sustainability of quality service provision.

---

### **Objective 3.2: Develop the capacity of people in the sector to lead and manage change**

---

| Objective   | Strategy  |
|---|---|
| <b>3.2 Develop the capacity of people in the sector to lead and manage change</b> | <b>3.2.1 Improve organisational leadership and governance capacity.</b> |

In early 2009, FaHCSIA commissioned FRSA to consult with service providers about the current and future needs of the Family Relationship and children's services sector in the area of leadership and governance.

*"Leadership is the art of inspiring people to follow the mission of an organisation and to daily enact its values." "[Governance means]to direct, guide and oversee decision making and other accountability structures, including policy and procedures, allocation of resources, all based on ethical work practice".*<sup>50</sup>

Service providers identified both strengths and weaknesses in leadership development across the sector. There are very good examples of comprehensive programs within some organisations and strong interest in a sector-wide approach to enhancing the capacity of organisations to support the next generation of leaders.

The recommendations of the FRSA report were to:

- invest in leadership and governance development programs that are tailored to the community service context and adaptable to suit different purposes;
- engage with training providers to enhance access to affordable leadership and governance training, particularly in rural and remote areas through coordination, planning and support;
- develop strategies to enhance the uptake of governance training amongst board members;
- recognise leadership and governance strengths within the sector to build confidence, and attract and retain talent.

| Objective   | Strategy  |
|---|---|
| <b>3.2 Develop the capacity of people in the sector to lead and manage change</b> | <b>3.2.2 Identify and foster 'practice' leadership.</b> |

Being an effective practice leader requires a set of skills different from being a good practitioner<sup>51</sup>. The literature acknowledges the importance of supporting and equipping leaders with the high level skills they will need (e.g. leading and developing teams, understanding organisational systems, processes and interdependencies, redesigning services etc). It also suggests that there must be recognition and reward systems in place for practice leaders, and organisational cultures that value and encourage leadership as a vehicle for improving service delivery and performance.<sup>52</sup>

The literature points to some key potential barriers to effective practice leadership in the human services and health sector, including workloads; practitioners' lacking the leadership skills required for the role; and a lack of adequate support for practitioners who take leadership roles.<sup>53</sup> Just as with the provision of training and professional development, a critical element in leadership development appears to be the ability to free up the time of practice leaders to allow them to pursue the larger change agenda. Similarly, confusing practice leadership with management of services means that potential professional leaders are consumed by management tasks and accountabilities.

The development and fostering of practice leadership needs to be linked with Strategies 2.1.2 and 3.2.2 to support the attraction and retention of experienced practitioners and the development of services that can adapt to meet the complex needs of clients.

| Objective   | Strategy   |
|---|--|
| <b>3.2 Develop the capacity of people in the sector to lead and manage change</b> | <b>3.2.3 Further build the capacity of managers.</b> |

Current career pathways in the Sector mean that career progression will usually involve a move out of the practice environment and into management roles. This can result in expert practitioners feeling 'inexpert' in management skills.

Strategies 2.1.3 and 3.2.2 have recommended alternative career pathways for skilled practitioners who wish to continue practising. It follows that the sector also needs to develop separate career pathways for those who wish to progress to management roles.

Training and capacity building of managers, including practitioners who choose to move into management positions, is crucial.

FRSA could work with training providers to develop programs that are relevant to the management challenges in the sector, are affordable and accessible. These programs will need to develop skills for strategic planning, preparing tenders, attending to the legal side of contracting and service delivery, evaluating and costing services, and ensuring accountability to funding agencies.<sup>54</sup> To underpin many of the workforce strategies proposed for 2012-2017, management programs should also include skills in negotiating partnerships and developing and managing shared programs and shared resources.

DRAFT

### Table 3 Summary, Implementation Steps and Time Frames

The Workforce Development Strategy is structured to address three priority areas of work that have been identified by the sector and in the research literature. A summary of the objectives and strategies in each of these priority areas is provided below. Implementation steps and proposed time frames involving the sector, FRSA, government partners and other networks are also provided.

| Priority areas of work  |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| I Ensuring workforce supply to meet current and future need   |  |  |
| Objectives  | Strategies   | Implementation steps<br>Time frame : S=short (Year 1) M= medium (Years 2-3)<br>L=longer term (Years 4-5)   |
| <b>I.1 Improve the ability of F&amp;RS organisations to attract the right people at the right time to meet community need</b> | <b>I.1.1 Improve remuneration levels for practitioners in family and relationship services to better reflect the value of the work performed.</b>                          | <p>I.1.1.1 Sector (through FRSA and other networks) to support the current national equal remuneration test case for the community services sector. <b>S</b></p> <p>I.1.1.2 FRSA and its member organisations, through their Boards and senior management, to collaboratively support and develop new standard classifications, career structures &amp; remuneration levels for FRS practitioners, for introduction across the F&amp;RS sector regardless of the outcome of the national equal remuneration case. <b>S</b></p> <p>I.1.1.3 FRSA to work with government partners to review the impact of changes to remuneration levels on government procurement processes and FSP service delivery and planning; <b>S</b> and to plan for the phased introduction of new classifications, career structures and remuneration levels over a 3-5 year period. <b>M- L</b></p> |
|   | <b>I.1.2 Improve access to training programs &amp; certification processes for essential Family Law programs that are facing immediate risk due to workforce shortages</b> | I.1.2.1 FRSA and government partners immediately meet to identify, cost and implement short term assistance for FDR practitioners and their employing agencies to access subsidised certification training by all sector RTO providers. <b>S</b>   |
|   | <b>I.1.3 Enhance the capacity of providers to offer stable employment opportunities</b>  | I.1.3.1 FRSA to work with government to achieve minimum 3 year funding agreements for family and relationship services funded through the Family Support Program to improve clarity of funding and appropriate contract length. This needs to occur in time for the planned alignment of FSP agreements from July 2011. <b>S</b>   |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |  | <p>1.1.3.2 Explore with government the potential for funding of new or experimental programs to continue past initial pilot or trial stages to facilitate recruitment &amp; retention enabling meaningful evaluation. <b>M</b></p> <p>1.1.3.3 Explore the creation of positions funded by networks of providers and where practitioners work across more than one organisation. <b>M</b></p> <p>1.1.3.4 Develop systems for portability of entitlements for employees moving within the F&amp;RS sector. <b>M</b></p> <p>1.1.3.5 Explore the establishment of con-joint appointments between the public sector, private sector and the not-for-profit sector. <b>L</b></p>   |
| <p><b>1.2 Increase the availability and take-up of VET and Higher Ed programs that lead to a career in F&amp;RS</b></p> | <p><b>1.2.1 Develop better links between education providers, professional bodies and the F&amp;RS sector</b></p>  | <p>1.2.1.1 Continue to strengthen the partnership with the CSH Industry Skills Council in monitoring the take up rates and content of the CHC08 Training Package. <b>S-M</b></p> <p>1.2.1.2 Prepare a case to submit to State/Territory governments to obtain placement of FDR and Children’s Contact Services on the priority occupations lists for States/Territories; seek supported training places through the Productivity Places Program. CHC08. <b>S</b></p> <p>1.2.1.3 Facilitate involvement of professional bodies, such as the AASW and APS, the FRSA and government to achieve minimum standards of F&amp;RS curriculum content in tertiary courses in Social Work, Psychology and other relevant disciplines. <b>M- L</b></p> <p>1.2.1.4 Build a strong relationship with Skills Australia by facilitating data collection and other input into the monitoring of the effectiveness of government policy related to education support for areas of high workforce shortage. <b>M-L</b></p> |
|   | <p><b>1.2.2 Develop approaches that address the recruitment and training of a workforce that will meet the needs of specific groups in the community</b></p> | <p>1.2.2.1 Continue to implement the three actions in the reconciliation Action Plan that will increase training, employment and professional development of Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander staff. <b>S,M,L</b></p> <p>1.2.2.2 Explore potential workforce development opportunities arising from the <i>Strong Families Strong Fathers</i> initiative <b>S</b></p> <p>1.2.2.3 Together with government partners and education providers, explore the feasibility of expanding successful health training models for Indigenous workers to the F&amp;RS sector. <b>S-M</b></p>  |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  |  | <p>1.2.2.4 Work with government partners and training providers to facilitate the take up of the SNAICC’s cultural competenc resource in training programs across the sector. <b>S</b></p> <p>1.2.2.5 Work with these partners to broaden cultural competence training, sharing resources with other sectors where possible. <b>S-M</b></p> <p>1.2.2.6 Develop guidelines for regional and remote service providers to develop partnerships with other local agencies to attract and recruit staff, based on successful models in the health sector. <b>M</b></p> <p>1.2.2.7 Extend existing successful government-supported initiatives that support training and professional development of rural practitioners. <b>M</b></p> <p>1.2.2.8 Support the existing Men and Family Relationships Leadership groups, the continuation of their current activities, and the implementation of their advice and expertise on MFR workforce issues. <b>S,M,L</b></p> |
|  | <b>1.2.3 Target mature aged workers with appropriate backgrounds to move into the F&amp;RS sector</b>                                      | <p>1.2.3.1 Develop a targeted recruitment strategy to attract mid-career or later-career workforce to join the sector. <b>S</b></p> <p>1.2.3.2 Work with government to develop incentives and a communications strategy to encourage practitioners to return to the FRS workforce. <b>M-L</b></p>   |
| <b>1.3 Raise awareness of the professional nature of F&amp;RS work</b> | <b>1.3.1 Support ongoing professionalisation and development of professional standards for the family and relationship services sector</b> | <p>1.3.1.1 Conduct a review of existing standards in this sector to assess the need and/or benefits of further standards development. <b>M</b></p> <p>1.3.1.2 Conduct a feasibility study into the development of a ‘Professional Standards’ Board. <b>S</b></p>  |
|  | <b>1.3.2 Promote the benefits of a career in FRS and build on existing strengths</b>   | <p>1.3.2.1 Monitor, review and promote the availability of flexible hours and family friendly working arrangements. <b>S-M</b></p> <p>1.3.2.2 FRSA member organisations to collaborate with government to develop promotional materials that inform the community about services available through the F&amp;RS sector and the evidence. <b>S-M</b></p>   |
| <b>1.4 Link workforce planning to community needs</b>                  | <b>1.4.1 Build systems to inform needs-based workforce planning</b>  | <p>1.4.1.1 FRSA to initiate and facilitate collaborative processes of data sharing and interpretation that will inform the planning of skill-base, roles and services that will meet future community need. <b>M</b></p>  |

| <b>2 Acknowledging, developing and retaining the existing workforce</b>         |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Objectives</b>   | <b>Strategies</b>   | <b>Implementation steps</b><br>Time frame : S=short (Year 1) M= medium (Years 2-3)<br>L=longer term (Years 4-5)  |
| <b>2.1 Recognise the value and strengths of the existing F&amp;RS workforce</b> | <b>2.1.1 Develop new classifications and career paths with remuneration linked to competence, experience and attainment of qualifications</b> | <p>2.1.1.1 Collaboration in development of standard classifications, career structures and remuneration levels for F&amp;RS practitioners (building on 1.3.1.1). <b>M-L</b></p> <p>2.1.1.2 Member organisations to identify the most timely opportunity to phase in new F&amp;RS job classifications and remuneration levels in accordance with the requirements of the industrial instruments in their workplace. <b>S</b></p> <p>2.1.1.3 Plan, communicate and implement a prompt and smooth transition process for existing staff to be classified and remunerated under a new F&amp;RS sector structure. <b>S</b></p> <p>2.1.1.4 Explore the development of practitioner roles that include standard arrangements for rights of private practice. <b>S-M</b></p> |
|   | <b>2.1.2 Develop senior level practitioner roles as an alternative to management roles</b>  | 2.1.2.1 As part of the work in 1.1.1.2 (above) develop specific roles that can be deployed across organisations to provide senior level practice advice and supervision of junior staff. <b>S-M</b>  |
|   | <b>2.1.3 Share knowledge and experience in workforce issues</b>   | <p>2.1.3.1 Share examples of reward and recognition programs across the sector and collaborate to develop higher rewards such as post-graduate scholarships, conference subsidies and international study tours. <b>S</b></p> <p>2.1.3.2 Identify and share strategies for developing sector-wide career pathways. <b>M</b></p>  |
| <b>2.2 Keep pace with the labour market</b>                                     | <b>2.2.1 Enhance the capacity of providers to keep pace with wage increases in the future</b>   | 2.2.1.1 Work with government funders to achieve indexation rates in longer term contracts that more accurately reflect the increased cost of labour (links to 1.1.3.1). This needs to occur in time for the planned alignment of FSP agreements from July 2011. <b>S</b>   |
|   | <b>2.2.3 Maintain up-to-date workforce mapping information to inform</b>  | 2.2.3.1 Survey employees within the sector on an annual basis; <b>S,M,L</b>  |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | <b>workforce development and maintain sector engagement in strategy development, implementation and monitoring:</b> | 2.2.3.2 Survey FRS Provider Organisations on a bi-annual basis; and/or <b>M</b><br>2.2.3.3 Build workforce mapping capacity into future data collection systems for the Family Support Program. <b>M-L</b>  |
| <b>3. Building capacity of the workforce to deal with increased complexity.</b>   |   |   |
| <b>Objectives</b>   | <b>Strategies</b>   | <b>Implementation steps</b><br>Time frame : S=short (Year 1) M= medium (Years 2-3)<br>L=longer term (Years 4-5)   |
| <b>3.1 Facilitate access to professional development to identify, support and refer clients with co-existing problems</b> | <b>3.1.1 Broaden access to CPD</b>  | 3.1.1.1 Conduct an audit of current qualifications and training available in the sector. The audit should also examine IT platforms and formats used for training delivery; and incentives and supports provided by organisations for staff to complete training and CPD. <b>S</b><br>3.1.1.2 Explore the feasibility of achieving uniform IT platforms and formats for training, and for the creation of sector-wide scholarships, conference subsidies etc <b>M</b><br>3.1.1.3 Develop rewards linked to attainment of additional qualifications <b>M-L</b> |
|   | <b>3.1.2 Develop partnerships with other specialist sub-sectors</b>   | 3.1.2.1 Develop frameworks/templates for negotiating training and resource sharing with agencies in other sectors at the local level <b>M</b>   |
|   | <b>3.1.3 Create senior practitioner and supervision roles</b>   | 3.1.3.1 As part of 2.2.1.2 (above) ensure that new senior practitioner roles incorporate expertise, advice and supervision of others in working with people with complex needs and co-existing conditions. <b>M-L</b>   |
| <b>3.2 Develop the capacity of people in the sector to lead and manage change</b>   | <b>3.2.1 Improve organisational leadership and governance capacity</b>  | 3.2.1.1 Implement the recommendations of FRSA's 2009 report about current and future needs of the sector in the area of leadership and governance. <b>S-M</b>   |
|   | <b>3.2.2 Identify and foster 'practice' leadership</b>  | 3.2.2.1 Build on the development of new senior practitioner roles to facilitate leadership from these roles in the development and implementation of evidence-based practice across the sector. <b>L</b>  |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
|  | <b>3.2.3 Further build the capacity of managers</b> | 3.2.3.1 Work with training providers to develop programs that are relevant to the management challenges in the sector. <b>M</b><br>3.2.3.2 Ensure that managers are trained in negotiating partnerships and developing and managing shared programs that will underpin this Strategy. <b>S-M</b> |
|--|---|--|

DRAFT

## Appendix I

### Partners in workforce development in the sector:

- The **Family and Relationship Services Sector** - there are 105 community organisations that receive funding to deliver Family and Relationship Services (F&RS) which are provided through more than 550 locations across Australia by an estimated 7,000 professionals from a range of disciplines including counselling, social work, family law, psychology, community development as well as management and administration.
- **Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA)** is the national peak body for family relationship services. FRSA's membership is diverse encompassing provider organisations that range in size and the diversity of programs they deliver across the spectrum of family relationship services and broader family and community support programs.
- The **Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (FaHCSIA)** administers Australian Government investment in Family and Relationship Services (F&RS) as part of the broader Family Support Program (FSP) encompassing Family & Parenting Services and Family Law Services.
- The **Attorney-General's Department (AGD)** has policy responsibility for the Family Law Services provided through the Family Support Program. These services are a critical part of the broader family law system for which this Department is responsible.

Other partners in workforce development are:

- Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council
- Law Council of Australia – Family Law Section
- Australian Association of Social Workers
- Australian Psychological Society
- Australian Counselling Association
- National Accreditation Council for Alternative Dispute Resolution (NADRAC)
- Marriage and Relationship Education Association of Australia (MAREAA)
- Australian Children's Contact Services Association (ACCSA)

### Development of this strategy

The *Family and Relationship Services Workforce Development Strategy 2012 – 2017* has been developed by the Family and Relationship Services Sector following initial work by the Joint Sector-Government Working Group on Workforce Development.

In recognition of the significance of the workforce issues, FRSA and FaHCSIA convened a Joint Sector-Government Working Group on Workforce Development in 2008. The Working Group had representatives from both the sector and government, including RTO's and the Community Services Health Industry Skills Council (CSHISC) and was requested to:

1. Review current workforce pressures including driving and restraining factors that impact on the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff;
2. Identify priorities for further research and consultation to identify common challenges and examples of successful workforce strategies;
3. Develop agreed principles for the development of the family relationship services workforce including the projected needs of the sector and clients;
4. Identify synergies with broader Australian Government's initiatives in workforce development and investment in other sectors; and
5. Prepare advice to both Government and the sector on workforce development strategies and the way forward.

One of the difficulties faced by the Working Group was the lack of data and information about the F&RS workforce. Before 2009, there was no definitive academic research that focused on the family relationship services workforce in Australia, and other research about

the sector has tended to overlook or only touch on workforce matters<sup>55</sup>. In 2009, FaHCSIA commissioned Colmar Brunton Social Research organisation to undertake a two stage mapping project of the Family and Relationship Services (F&RS) sector to gather data on the characteristics of the workforce. Along with other generic community service workforce information, data from this mapping project and extensive sector experience has provided a solid basis upon which to construct this draft F&RS Workforce Development Strategy.

DRAFT

## References

- <sup>1</sup> England P, Budig M, Folbre, N. (2002). Wages of virtue: The relative pay of care work. *Social Problems*, 49(4), 455–473. Quoted in AFRC Issues No. 5 (2009), *Workforce issues across the family relationship services sector: Models, responses and strategies*, by Natasha Cortis, Sharni Chan and Fiona Hilferty. Available from [www.aifs.gov.au/afrc](http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc)
- <sup>2</sup> AFRC (2009)
- <sup>3</sup> Colmar Brunton (2009) *Workforce Mapping Study 2009 Report of results from an Organisational Survey and an Employee Survey*. Available from <http://www.frsa.org.au>
- <sup>4</sup> In consultations conducted in 2007 with FRSA member organisations (unpublished)
- <sup>5</sup> Colmar Brunton (2009)
- <sup>6</sup> The Hon Julia Gillard MP (2009) *Community sector workers to move to Fair Work system and seek national pay equity order*. Media release 4 November 2009. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion.
- <sup>7</sup> [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media\\_releases/2009/108\\_09.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2009/108_09.html) accessed 16/7/10
- <sup>8</sup> Productivity Commission (2010) *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector, Research report*. February 2010. <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/not-for-profit/report>
- <sup>9</sup> Family Law regards court proceedings relating to children as a last resort. Where separating couples are unable to reach agreement about the parenting arrangements for their children, they need to apply to the court for a parenting order.
- <sup>10</sup> Based on \$1,200 per course unit, travel and accommodations costs, back-filling and administration costs for the employer.
- <sup>11</sup> Productivity Commission (2010) Recommendation 11.2
- <sup>12</sup> National consultations with rural and remote health workforce and the mental health workforce conducted by Siggins Miller (2010) unpublished, prepared for relevant standing committee and advisory committee of Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council.
- <sup>13</sup> ACCSA (2009) *Feasibility Study into Compulsory Accreditation for Children's Contact Service Workers*. Provided to the authors by the Australian Children's Contact Services Association [www.accsa.org.au](http://www.accsa.org.au)
- <sup>14</sup> ACCSA (2009)
- <sup>15</sup> ACCSA (2009)
- <sup>16</sup> Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2009) *Environmental Scan*. [Research conducted by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney] p.40.
- <sup>17</sup> Urbis Keys Young (2004) *Review of the Family Relationship Services Program* [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/FRSP/frsp\\_review\\_062004/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/FRSP/frsp_review_062004/Pages/default.aspx)
- <sup>18</sup> AFRC (2009)
- <sup>19</sup> DoHA (2008) *Mental Health in Tertiary Curricula measure* <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/mentalhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/tertiary-curricula-1>
- <sup>20</sup> Colmar Brunton (2009)
- <sup>21</sup> DEEWR (2009) *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* <http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Pages/TransformingAustraliasHESystem.aspx>
- <sup>22</sup> Family Relationship Services Australia *Reconciliation Action Plan 2010-2013* [www.frsa.org.au](http://www.frsa.org.au)
- <sup>23</sup> Based on the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation
- <sup>24</sup> SNAICC (2010) *Working and Walking Together: Supporting Family Relationship Services to Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Organisations*. [www.snaicc.asn.au/publications](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/publications)

- 
- <sup>25</sup> Bini M (2003). *A culturally diverse workforce: culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) staff recruitment and retention for disability services*, Report for the Victorian Department of Human Services, Melbourne
- <sup>26</sup> Cortis N, Hilferty F, Chan S and Tannous K (2009) *Labour dynamics and the non-government community services workforce in NSW*, Social Policy Research Centre. SPRC Report 10/09. Available from [www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/Report10\\_09\\_LabourDynamics\\_and\\_NGOs.pdf](http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/Report10_09_LabourDynamics_and_NGOs.pdf)
- <sup>27</sup> Green, R. (2003). Social Work in Rural Areas: a personal and professional challenge. *Australian Social Work*, 56(3): 209-219
- <sup>28</sup> For example the *Border Medical Recruitment Taskforce* in Albury-Wodonga where different providers have formed this taskforce as a partnership and recruit together and communicate together. Over the last 3-4 years they have recruited 25 specialists and 30 GPs to the area. [Siggins Miller research, unpublished].
- <sup>29</sup> Cortis et al (2009)
- <sup>30</sup> Skills Australia (2010) *Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy* p. 3 <http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/>
- <sup>31</sup> Skills Australia (2010)
- <sup>32</sup> The Hon Wayne Swan & Senator the Hon Mark Arbib (February 2010), *Productive Ageing Package announcement media release* [http://www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/arbib/media/releases/pages/article\\_100201\\_124031.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/ministers/arbib/media/releases/pages/article_100201_124031.aspx)
- <sup>33</sup> Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2009) *Environmental Scan*. [Research conducted by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney]
- <sup>34</sup> AFRC (2009)
- <sup>35</sup> AFRC (2009)
- <sup>36</sup> Cortis et al (2009) cite Light 2002, 2003; Borzaga and Tortia, 2006 and Stalker et al, 2007 and Barth et al, 2008.
- <sup>37</sup> Colmar Brunton (2009)
- <sup>38</sup> AFRC (2009) and Colmar Brunton (2009)
- <sup>39</sup> AFRC (2009) citing Flaxman et al (2009)
- <sup>40</sup> Meagher G, Cortis N, Healy K (2009). Strategic challenges in child welfare services. In K. Rummery, I. Greener, & C. Holden (Eds) *Social Policy Review 21: Analysis and debate in social policy, 2009*. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press.
- <sup>41</sup> MHWAC (2010) *National Mental Health Workforce Strategy and Plan*, currently in draft form and due for release later in 2010. (Assistant roles advocated by the Australian Psychology Association and the Australian Associations of Social Workers in the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy)
- <sup>42</sup> Spooner C, Dadich, A (2008). *Non-government organisations in the alcohol and other drugs sector: issues and options for sustainability*. ANCD Research Paper 17. A report prepared by the Social; WRC 2008; Productivity Commission 2010; and Productivity Commission (2010)
- <sup>43</sup> Cortis et al. (2009)
- <sup>44</sup> Hodgkin, S. (2002). 'Competing Demands, Competing Solutions, Differing Constructions of the problem of Recruitment and Retention of Frontline Rural Child Protection Staff'. *Australian Social Work*, 55(3): 193-203.
- <sup>45</sup> Urbis Keys Young (2004)
- <sup>46</sup> CWA & FaHCSIA (2006)
- <sup>47</sup> For example, the Victorian government's training placement rotation scheme for workers in mental health and drug & alcohol services. (National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2010-2015)
- <sup>48</sup> Barth et al (2008: 204) cited in Cortis et al (2009)
- <sup>49</sup> Robinson S, Murrells T, Smith E et al (2005). Retaining the mental health nursing workforce: Early indicators of retention and attrition. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 14(4): 230-242
- <sup>50</sup> Participant responses in FRSA's survey on Leadership and Governance (2009)

---

<sup>51</sup> Siggins Miller (2008) Managed Clinical Networks - a literature review (. Available from: <http://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/cannet-homepage/multidisciplinary-care/overview.aspx>

<sup>52</sup> Ham C (2003) Improving the performance of health services: the role of clinical leadership *The Lancet* Published online March 25, 2003 <http://image.thelancet.com/extras/02art8342web.pdf>;

Reinersten J (1998) Physicians as leaders in the improvement of health care systems. *Annals of Internal Medicine* 128 (10) 833-838

<sup>53</sup> Davidson P, Elliott Daly J (2006) Clinical leadership in contemporary clinical practice: implications for nursing in Australia. *Journal of Nursing Management* 14: 180–187

<sup>54</sup> McDonald, C. (1999) 'Human Service Professionals in the Community Services Industry', *Australian Social Work*, 52(1): 17-25.

<sup>55</sup> AFRC (2009)

DRAFT