

BACKGROUND PAPER

Family and Relationship Services WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2012 – 2017

Consultation Draft

November 2011

About this document

This document contains additional information and research that informed the joint Government/Sector Working Group convened by Family Relationships Services Australia (FRSA) in the preparation of the *Family and Relationship Services (F&RS) Workforce Development Strategy 2012-2017*.

Other key documents that are linked to the Strategy are:

Family and Relationship Services Australia *Reconciliation Action Plan 2010-2013*

Family and Relationship Services Australia (2009) *Leadership & Governance Consultation Report : Supporting the Development of Future Leaders in Family and Parenting Services, Perspectives from the Field*

Crisis Support Services and Family Relationship Services Australia (2008) *Terms of Reference: National Men and Family Leadership Groups*

Australian Institute of Family Studies (2009) *Evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms*

Skills Australia (2010) *Australian Workforce Futures A National Workforce Development Strategy*

Colmar Brunton (2009) *Workforce Mapping Study: Report of results from an Organisational Survey and an Employee Survey* prepared for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

A list of other references from peer reviewed literature and other documents is provided at the end of this document.

Colmar Brunton's (2009) report on the workforce mapping project draws together evidence from a survey of organisations and a survey of employees to investigate some of the key areas of challenge in the Family & Relationship Services (F&RS) workforce. It confirms the problems being experienced in recruitment, retention and training and explores some of the driving and restraining factors.

The Working Group remains committed to the need for high level strategic planning and collaborative efforts across the family services sector. This Workforce Development Strategy is the first step towards coordinated future activity to address workforce issues. This complements and supports the work of individual organisations, programs or service types.

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Background and scope

The F&RS workforce consists of a range of professionals, including but not limited to social workers, psychologists, counsellors, psycho-social therapists, educators, mediators, dispute resolution practitioners, experts in family law, support staff and managers. Many of these staff share core skills, training, knowledge and expertise with staff in other areas of community services, such as drug and alcohol, mental health and disability services; or in child protection and young people's services; or in areas of the law. Unlike many other areas of community services, the nature and responsibility of FR&S work does not lend itself to the use of volunteers and consequently FRS providers need to pay for and develop the skills of their staff.

The Family and Relationship Services sector is diverse and difficult to define. There are a number of Federal and State Government programs that provide funding for services that support families, children and young people. Community organisations working in this area typically attract a mix of funding and deliver a range of services¹. One slice of the sector is the 103 community-based organisations that receive Federal Government funding to deliver the 'Family Relationship Services' stream within the Family Support Program², administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. This is a relatively large stream of service delivery distributing \$270M per annum for services delivered in more than 650 locations across Australia. The size and scope of individual provider organisations varies, with 47% of the sector being small-medium sized organisations with 20-99 employees, 34% large organisations (100+ employees) and 19% small organisations (fewer than 20 employees). These organisations are members of the peak body Family Relationships Services Australia (FRSA) and many of the organisations and their staff have other professional networks and memberships

Within the Family & Relationship Services stream of the Family Support Program, there are a number of programs assisting families who have separated ('post separation services'). These services operate as part of the Family Law System as well as in the family support

¹ Colmar Brunton (2009) *Workforce Mapping Study 2009 Report of results from an Organisational Survey and an Employee Survey* found that funding from the government's FSP accounted for an average of 47% of total funding for FRSA member organisations and 56% of the funding for family and relationships services delivered by member organisations in the sector.

² Formerly known as the Family Relationship Services Program [name change occurred in February 2009].

arena. Some programs, including Family Dispute Resolution and Family Counselling are recognised within the *Family Law Act 1975* and are subject to specific accreditation requirements under that legislation. Other programs such as Children's Contact Services are relied upon by the Family Courts and other parts of the Family Law System to provide service options for families accessing the Family Court. In addition there are a range of services provided by the sector that help to prevent family breakdown where possible, support families through the separation process if it occurs and maximise the safety and well being of children living in families where relationships are under stress. The F&RS community-based organisations currently provide government-funded services on a fixed-term, contracted basis. New funding allocated over the past 5 years has involved a competitive selection process.

Other services provided by F&RS organisations may be free to clients or provided on a fee-for-service basis, depending on the clients' ability to pay.

This Strategy relates to the workforce of Australian organisations that are providing relationships and support services to families (regardless of funding source or program). It has been developed in consultation with partners in the sector with responsibility for and commitment to F&RS planning and delivery. Details of the partners and the process to develop this strategy are outlined in Appendix 1.

The need for F&RS

Since the mid-1970's there has been increased social acceptance and legal recognition of different forms of relationships. Rates of registered marriage have decreased³ while the number of de facto relationships has more than doubled over the past twenty years⁴. National data indicates that one-third (34%) of people aged 18 years and over have had a live-in relationship that has subsequently ended. For people aged 35 years or over, 95% have had at least one marriage or de facto relationship. This included 18% who had two relationships and 7% who had three or more⁵. While marriage rates have fallen over the past ten years, divorce rates have remained steady; and at the same time de facto relationships have increased. The probability of de facto relationships ending in separation has also increased. A de facto relationship ending in separation is at least three times as likely as a marriage ending in divorce within five years (25-38% vs 7-9%).⁶

Most children aged 0–14 years live in couple families (83% in 2007) and 17% of children live in one-parent families. Trends in living arrangements show that the proportion of children living in two-parent families decreases as children get older, and conversely the proportion living in one-parent families increases.

Evidence suggests the importance of family economic circumstances, parental health status and family functioning on levels of stress within a family and on the development, health, wellbeing and life outcomes for children⁷. At the most recent census⁸, there were 421,300 low-income households with children aged 0–12 years and around 15%, or 543,600, children aged 0-14 years lived in jobless families⁹.

³ ABS (2008b) *Marriages, Australia, 2007*. ABS cat. no. 3306.0.55.001. Canberra: ABS

⁴ ABS (2009) *Australian Social Trends, March 2009*. ABS cat. no. 102.0 Canberra: ABS

⁵ ABS (2009) *Australian Social Trends 4102.0*

⁶ Qu L Weston R (2008) *Snapshots of family relationships*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/snapshots/ssreport08/>

⁷ AIHW (2009) *A Picture of Australia's Children*. Several studies cited in Chapter 26.

⁸ ABS (2006). *Measures of Australia's progress, 2006*. ABS cat. no. 1370.0. Canberra: ABS.

⁹ ABS (2006 Census) unpublished data cited in AIHW (2009) p. 87.

Thirteen per cent of parents living with children aged 0-14 years (approximately 446,000 parents) rate their health as fair or poor¹⁰. One in five children is living with a parent who has experienced some mental ill-health in the past twelve months¹¹. Up to 75% of parents with a mental health condition are likely to have a co-existing drug and alcohol problem¹².

Extrapolation from State-based data¹³ from families with children aged 0-12 years indicates that: 16% of families reported poor family functioning; that this was more likely to be reported in families where a child had special health care needs; and that families reporting poor functioning were more likely to live in low socio-economic areas¹⁴.

On some measures (e.g. unemployment and labour force participation) circumstances for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have improved slightly. In terms of health and wellbeing, however, the First Australians continue to demonstrate poorer outcomes, including higher rates of parental ill-health (29%), overcrowded living conditions (27%) and over-representation in the child protection system (over six times the rate of non-Indigenous children in 2005-2006).¹⁵ The recently released Indigenous Family Safety Agenda¹⁶ has identified the need for additional family support and parenting education for vulnerable families, including a new program for men's parenting education.

Population projections for 2031 indicate that the number of families (two parent, single parent; partners with or without children) is expected to increase by between 35% and 47% above 2006 numbers¹⁷. Longer life expectancy¹⁸ will mean an increased proportion of older couples and/or higher probability of parents having dual responsibility for their elderly parents as well as their own children or grandchildren.

The most recent survey of community service providers¹⁹ found that between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, the rate of increase in demand for family services was 12% - second only to the rate of increase in demand for housing and homelessness services (13%).

Processes aiming to achieve the agreement of separating partners (outside or prior to involvement in the court system) about child rearing arrangements and distribution of material assets and income are now essential under the Family Law Act. The F&RS sector is a major provider of these essential services and with the projected increase in family numbers and demand, workforce supply and retention issues are brought into immediate focus.

¹⁰ ABS (2008a) The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2008 ABS cat no. 4704.0

¹¹ AIHW (2009) p. 93.

¹² Data on co-existing mental health and drug and alcohol problems is scant. This figure is based on estimates of depression and anxiety co-existing with substance abuse problems, the consensus of various sources that informed the National Co-morbidity Project (DoHA)
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-publicat-document-metadata-comorbidity.htm>

¹³ Based on Victorian DHS data (2007) cited in AIHW (2009) p.85

¹⁴ AIHW (2009) Section VI pp. 83-100

¹⁵ ABS (2008a) The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2008 ABS cat no. 4704.0

¹⁶ http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/families/Pages/indig_fam_safety_agenda.aspx released 17/7/2010 accessed 19/7/2010

¹⁷ ABS (2010) Household and Family Projections, Australia, 2006 to 2031 ABS cat. no. 3236.0. Canberra: ABS

¹⁸ ABS (2008) Population Projections Australia 2006 to 2101. ABS cat. no. 3236.0. Canberra: ABS

¹⁹ ACOSS (2010) *Australian Community Sector Survey Report 2010* Volume I – National. ACOSS paper 161

Special aspects of the Family Relationship Services workforce

There has been no single pathway into F&RS work and arguably one of the strengths of the workforce is that it comprises people from a range of professional backgrounds. The majority of the current workforce is degree-qualified (55% postgraduate), has 5-10 years experience in the community services sector (57%), is female (80%) and over 40 years of age (71%). A 2009 survey of the current F&RS workforce indicated that the competency of their co-workers was a major source of job satisfaction²⁰.

The current workforce reports that the key original attraction to the F&RS sector was the nature of the work and that this continues to be the main source of job satisfaction. Those who leave the sector reportedly do so predominantly because of low levels of satisfaction with the community services sector, in particular low remuneration levels and lack of career path.²¹

This poses particular challenges for workforce development and planning in the F&RS sector, as many of the service providers are small-medium sized organisations with limited sources of funding, consequent short-term planning horizons, contractual obligations to government and stiff competition for experienced staff from the rest of the community services, health, disability and legal sectors. The service delivery context is also becoming more complex and demanding both within family and relationship services and more broadly across the community services sector²².

There is increasing evidence and awareness of the complex stressors on families. This means that F&RS requires an experienced, highly skilled workforce. Effective F&RS practice calls for the ability to identify a range of potentially high risk contributing factors, to have effective referral pathways and to know when and how to support, intervene and refer. Strong professional networks, knowledge and application of best practice in counselling, relationships education and dispute resolution are essential to effective service delivery. Detailed understanding of family law processes, as well as cultural sensitivity, high level interpersonal skills and judgment are required and the intimate and personal nature of the work does not lend itself to the introduction of early career stage practitioners without close supervision and mentoring.

The provision of quality professional services to individuals, families and children has significant flow-on benefits for the recipients of the services, for communities, for the economy and for society in general. Conversely, inappropriate or poor quality services delivered by inexperienced or underqualified staff can have serious negative consequences.

Recent mapping of the F&RS workforce and a survey of current employees points to a shortage of skilled staff in particular areas, especially children's contact services and family dispute resolution. These shortages are caused by a combination of the inability to attract skilled practitioners to new or vacant positions and barriers to access mandatory training and delays in certification processes. **These shortages place some essential government programs at risk and require urgent attention.**

Recruitment Challenges

Since 2006, family relationship services have expanded more than threefold as part of the Family Law Reform Agenda and increased investment in early intervention programs. As a sector, service providers have worked hard to deliver these new and expanded programs. The most significant challenge has been recruitment, consistently reported as an area of difficulty across all jurisdictions and program types but most particularly in program areas requiring specific qualifications or experience (e.g. Family Dispute Resolution, Children's

²⁰ Colmar Brunton (2009)

²¹ Colmar Brunton (2009)

²² Victoria Government (2008). *The Victorian Government's Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations*, available at www.dpcd.vic.gov.au

Contact Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Workers) and regional, rural or remote locations.

The recent workforce mapping project undertaken by Colmar Brunton (2009) reported that one fifth of organisations experienced problems within the past 12 months: having unfilled vacancies after advertising and filling positions with staff that have less experience or fewer qualifications than intended. Almost two thirds (62%) of organisations had either a problem with unfilled vacancies after advertising (31%) or a problem filling positions with less qualified staff (31%). Only 18% of organisations indicated no problem with unfilled vacancies or employing less qualified staff. Organisations listed the top three key barriers they perceived to recruitment of staff. These were:

- Remuneration / salary (84%),
- Lack of career path opportunities (37%), and
- Type of work (31%).

In the same project, the majority of employees surveyed (70%) listed pay rates and career opportunities as the two main elements they were least satisfied with in their current roles, despite neither of these two being their key reasons for being attracted to the sector in the first place. Remuneration and salary were also reported by 78% of organisations as a barrier to retaining staff. This was followed by career path opportunities (63%), work stress (41%), work load (37%), and type of work (26%).

Colmar Brunton conclude *"It is clear that the most obvious issue to address in terms of retention is the perceived pay disparity between the F&RS sector and (in particular) government; and also the relative pay disparity across organisations within the sector."*

Current Remuneration Levels

Table 2 below provides a summary of positions, salary levels and qualification requirements.

Table 2: Remuneration rates by position / role (Colmar Brunton, 2009)

Position	Mean FTE p.a. gross salary		Requisite Qualifications (% of organisations)
	Organisation survey	Employee survey	
Management (CEO / Senior Exec)	\$95,338	\$88,703	Bachelor degree (66%) or Post-graduate degree (48%)
Program Manager	\$65,457	\$67,965	Bachelor degree (73%) or Post-graduate degree (21%)
Supervisor / Team Leader	\$57,340	\$55,088	Bachelor degree (73% of organisations), or a Diploma (23%)
Practitioner	\$53,095	\$53,536	Bachelor degree (68% of organisations), or a Diploma (23%);
Counsellor	\$50,724	\$49,582	Bachelor degree (61%), Post-graduate degree (17%) or Diploma (17%)
Educator	\$47,792	\$49,170	Bachelor degree (56%) or Diploma (21%)
Children's Contact Service worker	\$43,703	\$49,250	Bachelor degree (30%) or Diploma (30%)
Administration	\$41,744	\$43,179	Certificate (48%)

In consultations conducted in 2007, FRSA estimated the gap in salaries for F&RS practitioners (including qualified and experienced counsellors, mediators and family dispute resolution

practitioners) between the community-based F&RS sector and the public sector as between \$15,000 and \$30,000 per annum for each full time equivalent position.

Case studies from 2008:

A large Sydney based provider reports that their counsellors and mediators are paid in the order of \$50,000 per annum, compared to \$80,000 per annum for comparable positions in other sectors – including the private sector, the Family Court and state government agencies.

A regional provider in QLD compared their salary award rates to those in the public sector award for equivalent work, which revealed a gap of between \$12,000 per annum for entry level positions up to \$18,000 per annum for more experienced positions.

Information from exit interviews in 2008:

Relationship educator/counsellor offered a position in government at a salary more than double the hourly rate the current employer could afford to pay.

Senior counsellor left for a State Government position at \$25,000 more per annum for similar levels of responsibility.

Well qualified practitioner had to return to State Government employment as they were unable to manage the drop in salary at over \$25,000 per annum.

As a result of the salary discrepancy, community sector providers are finding it increasingly difficult to attract experienced practitioners and have difficulty filling these and other specialist vacancies. They are also finding that the biggest pool of employees are new graduates who 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 providers to sustain quality service delivery.

These problems are not unique to the family & relationship services sector. Similar issues have been identified across the community services sector. In Victoria and South Australia, peak agencies and key informants have identified recruitment and retention as key areas for workforce development (Cortis et al, 2009 citing VCOSS, 2007, 2008 and Carson et al, 2007). The Australian Community Sector Survey²³ conducted by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has consistently reported over recent years that community services experience:

- average staff turnover higher than the all Australian industry average;
- difficulty in attracting appropriately qualified staff; and
- increasing demand and complexity of client needs.

Nonetheless improving remuneration levels in family services would be a fundamental and significant move towards addressing recruitment challenges. Indeed this is repeatedly referred to as the central issue for community sector providers in recruiting and retaining staff.

Colmar Brunton (2009) found that overall the sector seeks to employ people with a high base of skills, qualifications and experience; however, the pay levels are not competitive with other sectors (e.g. public sector or private sector). The table below provides a summary of positions, salary levels and qualification requirements.

²³ ACOSS (2007, 2008, 2009)

Addressing Remuneration Issues

The Federal Government has stated a broad commitment to addressing workforce issues in the community sector however a more specific commitment to adjust program funding in line with wage cost increases is imperative to secure ongoing levels of service delivery to Australian families. This increased government investment could rightly be premised on a commitment by the sector to ensure that increased funding flows directly into wages maximising the potential impact on recruitment.

This would require collaboration between service providers and funding bodies to accurately determine the additional cost of service delivery; adjust funding levels accordingly and ensure that remuneration levels do increase. There needs to be mutual understanding and communication for this to occur. Funding bodies have sometimes funded individual sub-programs more generously (e.g. Family Relationship Centres) or provided 'catch up' funding increases (e.g. 30% increase in 2005 in lieu of indexation over several years prior to that) in the belief that this should positively impact remuneration levels, then criticised service providers for not passing on the increases. However, organisations cannot pay higher wage rates to staff in one service, such as an FRC, than they pay for staff with the same qualifications and position in their other services or pay more for a year and then drop wages back when indexation again falls behind wage rises. Providers have been frustrated that additional funding has been insufficient and inconsistent to address remuneration levels, instead being applied to training and infrastructure projects or the creation of some better paid supervisory positions to improve career path opportunities.

To achieve a wholesale improvement in remuneration levels, agreement on cost and funding levels need to be reached at a program or sector level and it needs to be sustainable with commitments by both the sector and the funding body to address remuneration levels specifically.

Lessons can be learnt from Queensland, where the successful 'Good Work Fair Pay' campaign²⁴ presented evidence of pay differences between the NGO and government sectors ranging from \$7,000 - \$35,000 p.a. in award wage rates for comparable roles. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) pay equity decision on May 6th, 2009 acknowledged the historical undervaluing of the work performed by NGOs who deliver much needed services to the most disadvantaged people and substantially increased award wage rates²⁵.

The impact on one Queensland provider is demonstrated as a case study below (July 2010):

In 2007/08, the year of introduction of FRCs, the average hourly pay rate for staff (excluding allowances and on costs) was \$18.69. After the QIRC decision in May 2009, when staff moved to the new State award, the average annual hourly rate moved to \$20.81 (10% increase above the previous year). The first complete financial year at the new rate was 2009/2010, resulting in an average hourly rate of \$24.67 (16% increase over the previous year).

"In 2009/2010, the first full year of the new award, we projected a wage increase of 11%. However the changes to the award resulted in a reduced number of hours, and a higher than expected dollar per hour increase. The wage increase was further compounded by the large number of staff not only received the increase, but also earned increment increases (which were themselves increased)."

²⁴ Information on the campaign, wage case decision and implementation is available at www.qcross.org.au.

²⁵ Read the full decision at http://www.qcross.org.au/upload/5875_QIRC%20Decision%20-%20SACS%20Award%20_2_2006-05-09.pdf

In the same organisation, the number of hours worked in 2009/2010 reduced by 5,500 hours. Efforts were made to limit reduction in hours to staff not directly involved in service provision, so that service delivery could be maintained. Nevertheless, the provider estimates that the cost to the organisation of the QIRC decision was \$2.5M.

The provider sees a number of workforce consequences associated with increased remuneration in the current service environment:

- Overall the number of hours worked will be reduced.
- Other non wage costs will be reduced, including training.
- There will be a reduced number of non service delivery staff, which means less administration support and higher reliance of service delivery staff to do their own administration tasks.

On the positive side, there will be

- There will be lower staff turnover – a significant reduction, due to more staff receiving increment increases/ being paid at top of levels pay scale.

In terms of the impact on service delivery, the provider sees the following implications for their organisations:

- There will be reduced administration support, service delivery staff devote more time to administration work.
- There will be less service delivery (e.g. there has been a material drop within aged care services provided by our organisation already). Fewer counsellors will be replaced in other programs in the first 2 years of the new wages structure.
- Program viability will now be questioned in many cases.

Barriers to supply of FDR practitioners

Member organisations of FRSA have reported concerns about the supply of qualified staffing to deliver services under the *Family Law Services* component of the FSP²⁶, in particular Family Dispute Resolution (FDR). These services (among others under the FSP) 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.

The 65 Family Relationship Centres (FRC) that have been phased in since 2006, and were funded by government to provide 2 to 3 hours of free FDR for families²⁷. Publicly funded FDR that is subsidised but generally not 'free' is also provided by Family Dispute Resolution Services and Regional Family Dispute Resolution Services across Australia. Legal Assistance Services such as Legal Aid also provide some forms of FDR with government funding. There are also private practitioners who are accredited to issue certificates who operate on a fee-for-service basis. These private practitioners may be lawyers, mediators etc and their charges are based on market rates, without government regulation.

The Vocational Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution is one of a suite of F&RS related training programs developed by the government, the sector and the Industry Skills Council to provide a pathway to accreditation as a Family Dispute Resolution practitioner, eligible to be accredited and listed on the register and to issue Section 601 certificates.

²⁶ These services are part of the FSP administered by FaHCSIA, but are funded by the AGD.

²⁷ The 2010-2011 Federal budget announced the introduction of means testing from July 2011 and a reduction of free FDR to 1 hour for families with income \$50,000 pa., and a charge of \$30 per hour for the second and third hours. This compares with an estimated average private practitioner fee of \$150 per hour [Lawyers Weekly 13/5/2010] http://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/blogs/top_stories/archive/2010/05/13/budget-cuts-take-swipe-at-adr.aspx

As at July 2010, 6 registered training organisations (RTOs) offer the Vocational Graduate Diploma, with none based in Queensland, Tasmania or the Northern Territory. None of these RTOs are able to offer Fee Help to their students. This is because the training providers also deliver other non-training services and therefore do not meet the current eligibility requirements for RTOs to offer Fee Help.

Identifying this as an area of need FRSA, submitted an application through the Industry Skills Council, for inclusion of the Vocational Graduate Diploma (and other FRS related programs) in the Enterprise-based Productivity Places Program (PPP) administered by DEEWR. This could have resulted in subsidy for F&RS organisations to have their staff trained and accredited as FDR practitioners. FRSA was notified in July 2010 that its application for inclusion of F&RS programs in the PPP had been unsuccessful. In August 2010 FRSA lodged another joint submission with Sector RTO's for similar funds, the results of which are not yet determined.

Stability of employment; certainty of funding and wage indexation in the Sector

In the Workforce Mapping project (Colmar Brunton, 2009) the majority of organisations surveyed expressed frustration with the impact of relatively short funding cycles and uncertainty over future funding and the impact this has on staff. 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. Colmar Brunton (2009) cite Cortis et al. (2009) who argue that short-term funding contracts result in short-term staffing, which place relationship building, overall service quality, and service continuity at risk.

In the past organisations believed there was a commitment to a minimum term of 3 years for family and relationship services funded programs. This has not been the case in recent years as service agreements have been brought into alignment to support the implementation of the Family Support Program in 2011. A commitment to return to 'at least' 3 year funding cycles and where possible longer cycles would provide greater certainty for staff. In programs that are new and experimental it may be reasonable to run a pilot over 12 months but still with a view to 3 year funding if successful.

Even when a service has a 3 year funding agreement there is some uncertainty about the amount of funding that will be paid each year because annual indexation is not determined until mid-year and has not kept pace with cost increases impacting on service providers. The rationale behind annual indexation on F&RS funding is to recognise that the costs associated with service delivery change over time and in order to maintain an agreed quantum of service, the funding requires adjustment. However, the rate of indexation applied over the past 4 years has not kept pace with wage increases, resulting in an erosion of the funding distributed. Indexation has been consistently around 2% (2.0% in 2008-09, 2.1% in 2007-08 and 1.7% in 2006-07). Yet service providers have reported cost increases in the order of 4% (consistent with increases in the labour price index for each year – 3.9% in 2008-09, 4.1% in 2007-08 and 4.0% in 2006-07). Wage costs account for approximately 72% of all funding provided to F&RS providers²⁸, sometimes up to 85% for some providers. In real terms the gap between indexation and wage increases has seen the sector absorbing around \$2.5M in cost increases annually which is not sustainable.

It would also assist providers to plan for wage increases if they had some certainty around indexation over the course of a Service Agreement and if the rate of indexation were to be based on relevant indices that accurately reflect the increasing costs of service delivery.

At the conclusion of the funding cycle service providers also report significant challenges with unrealistically tight timelines for renegotiation of new or existing contractual

²⁸ Ernst & Young (2006) p 26

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.

It has also been suggested that the sector could do more to promote organisational attractiveness. Colmar Brunton (2009) cite the definitions of organisational attractiveness by Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable (2001) as "an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward an organisation and toward viewing the organisation as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship." Attractiveness (and benefits of employment) is important to convey when aiming to optimise recruitment strategies. There is a lack of quantified knowledge about what makes working within the FRS sector attractive to both current and future employees. This lack of understanding in general from outside of the sector (e.g. of the type of work and job roles in the community sector) could provide an opportunity for developing marketing and communications messages which may increase organisational attractiveness and potentially the number of employees within the sector by increasing understanding of the general public, careers counsellors and jobs networks.

For example, the UK 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy includes: a targeted approach to graduate recruitment that involves exploring ways to fast track recruitment as well as raising the profiles of jobs in the children's services workforce. Action related to raising the profile of family and relationship services in relevant education and training programs as well as promoting the F&RS as 'employers of choice' may be of some benefit.

Qualification pathways, entry points and professionalisation

The core strategy for addressing workforce challenges at the occupational level involves the continued professionalisation of the family relationship services sector. 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 (AFRC, 2009) which promotes the concept of professionalisation as a "collective mobility project" (Larson, 1977 cited in AFRC 2009) in which occupation groups seek to improve not only their economic position and working conditions, but also their status and prestige.

The Federal Government has an interest in ensuring that funded services are delivered in accordance with quality standards (FRSP Approval Requirements) and operational guidelines. 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 80s but progress continues today. Recent examples of professionalisation include:

- Federal Government introduction of accreditation requirements for Family Dispute Resolution practitioners as part of the Family Law Reforms in 2006.
- Federal Government investment in the development of new vocational qualifications in 2007-08, including:
 - Certificate IV in Children's Contact Service Work
 - Diploma of Children's Contact Service Work
 - Diploma of Family Intake and Support Work
 - Vocational Graduate Diploma of Relationship Counselling

- Vocational Graduate Diploma of Family Dispute Resolution
- Certificate IV in Relationship Education
- Diploma of Relationship Education
- The development of competency standards by the Marriage and Relationship Education Association of Australia (MAREAA) which have been ratified by the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, provides a “benchmark” for training programs for relationship educators – positioning Australia ahead of the UK and the US in terms of training requirements for marriage educators (MAREAA, cited in van Acker, 2008).

Family Relationship Services Australia has worked to establish connections with professional associations and representative bodies, including:

- 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)

These bodies also have established relationships with FaHCSIA and AGD. Their memberships would include many of the practitioners that work within family and relationship services as well as provider organisations (where appropriate).

It has been suggested that FRSA take a leadership role in coordinating and unifying collective action across these various bodies to support professionalisation in the F&RS sector, specifically in leading the development of professional standards (AFRC 2009). 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. Perhaps a starting point would 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. For example, while there are existing standards for counselling and therapy there is a dearth of resources that specifically support couple counselling alongside therapeutic interventions for children. Identifying and responding to gaps, in collaboration with funding bodies and professional associations may be less problematic than standards development.

Another potential area of action would be for FaHCSIA and the Sector to review 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.

Having developed the CHC08 VET training programs, further work is needed in the community services sector to develop clear and consistent articulation arrangements from these VET programs into higher education programs. A recent study by the CSH ISC showed that there are Social Work degrees offered by 26 Australian universities, yet only 15 have arrangements for direct credit for specific VET courses; and only 11 of the 36 universities offering degrees in Psychology/Psychological Sciences give credit for specific VET courses. Transparent, consistent articulation processes would be a step towards developing direct pathways into the family & relationship services sector.

Policy levers applied to curricula and training

Using the health sector as an example, where workforce shortages have been identified, government-sponsored initiatives have been developed to encourage the inclusion of core curriculum components and to attract students and trainees to courses. Some initiatives facilitate the placement of students/trainees in appropriate settings, such as regional settings linked to regional education facilities.

In mental health, the Department of Health and Ageing has provided funding for curriculum review and standardisation to develop a consistent approach in courses in a range of disciplines so that core skills and knowledge in mental health are included in all relevant undergraduate programs. The *Mental Health in Tertiary Curricula* Initiative commenced in 2006 and provided \$5.6M over 5 years²⁹. As a result of this initiative, for instance, core curriculum in mental health has been developed for all social work courses and occupational therapy courses.

In Psychiatry, the Department of Health and Ageing worked with the relevant professional body and service providers to develop a targeted program to attract more psychiatry trainees to the field. This involved the funding of training places in targeted settings, such as regional services, community services etc. Early evaluation of the project³⁰ shows that it has been successful in attracting more graduates to choose a career in mental health and in attracting more people to work outside metropolitan areas. For allied health service provision in rural areas, similar initiatives have been used. Such models could be applied to the FRS sector.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment

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. Indeed, the female-dominated workforce, combined with the persistent sex-typing of work involving emotional engagement, may deter men from working in the sector, and contribute to relatively low pay and poor training. A further challenge is the diversity of occupations and qualifications in family relationship services, which means there are several uncoordinated pathways into these jobs, a range of qualification levels, and no core professional identity.

In its Reconciliation Action Plan FRSA has 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.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Framework³¹ provides for cultural respect training for all health staff working in relevant services. There are opportunities,

²⁹ DoHA *Mental Health in Tertiary Curricula*

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/mentalhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/tertiary-curricula-1>

³⁰ O'Connor D, Spratt C (2010) *The Australian Government's new specialist training program: outcomes for psychiatry trainees* (manuscript submitted to MJA May 2010)

³¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Framework (draft) 2010-2015

through collaboration with relevant Indigenous peak bodies and government departments, for sharing of resources and joint training programs for human services staff working with Indigenous clients.

Further, since the brief of the Framework is to contribute to the AHMAC and Ministerial Council of Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) reform agenda, FRSA's actions in its Reconciliation Action Plan link to those of this Framework. This would mean that the intended outcomes of FRSA workforce strategies related to developing a workforce appropriate to serve Indigenous people would be:

1. Increased and improved recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in family and relationships services;
2. Improved delivery of the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to prepare them for work in the family and relationships sector and support ongoing development in the workplace
3. Improved education and training of family and relationship services professionals to ensure they have the skills and understanding to provide services that meet the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are culturally sensitive.³²

There are also some successful models for training specialist Indigenous workers that service providers and government partners could explore. For instance, in western NSW, the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker Training Program³³ (which provides a mix of university-based teaching through Charles Sturt University and workplace-based training – with trainees in paid training positions) has been successfully implemented and evaluated, and recently won an award. An important aspect of the model is that program graduates are guaranteed employment upon completion of the course. The principles and approaches from such a program could be adapted for the FRS sector.

Some immediate opportunities have arisen to work with government to train Indigenous people in family and relationships services. As a result of the COAG National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery, the new Indigenous Family Safety Agenda has been released by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The agenda includes the new (2010-2013) *Strong Fathers Strong Families* initiative, which has been created in recognition of the important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have in parenting and families. The Australian Government will also provide \$6 million over three years and, among other things, the initiative will fund programs for men about parenting and community activities promoting fatherhood and grandfatherhood.

The Indigenous Family Safety Agenda will also fund initiatives that provide increased services to support vulnerable families and support for people who experience family violence. This additional pool of funds could provide opportunities for local programs that will begin to develop workforce in Indigenous communities, such as Indigenous educators and counsellors.

FRSA data indicate that 2% of current F&RS employees work primarily with Indigenous clients and 39% sometimes work with Indigenous clients. Employers estimated that 6% of their staff is Indigenous, although in the employee survey 1% of respondents self-identified as being Indigenous.

³² Adapted from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Framework (draft) 2010-2015

³³ NSW Health and Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (2009) *NSW Aboriginal Mental Health Worker Training Program: Implementation Review* <http://www.crcah.org.au/publications/downloads/NSW-Aboriginal-Mental-Health-Worker-Training-Program-Impl-Review.pdf>

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Australia has a diverse mix of cultures. Almost a quarter of Australia's population was born overseas, with people from over 200 countries. The 2006 Census showed 80% of Australia's overseas-born population lived in capital cities. The median age of those born in European countries was 56 years and for those born in Asian countries it was 37 years³⁴. This reflects changing migration patterns and government immigration policies and is reflected in much of the Australian community services sector workforce research, which often examines the aged care workforce requirements to care for older people from European backgrounds (e.g. Italian and Greek). In terms of the F&RS sector, that data suggest that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people using family and relationship services are likely to be from a more diverse range of backgrounds than in previous decades.

In 2006, 41% of couple relationships (both registered and social marriages) one or both members of the couple were born overseas. Almost twice as many Australian born women as men were with partners born in Southern and Eastern Europe (59,900 to 30,600). Meanwhile, three times as many Australian-born men than women had partners born in South-East and North-East Asia (51,200 to 15,100). It should be noted that birthplace is only one cultural background measure and partners born in different countries commonly share similar ancestries³⁵.

In Victoria, clients of disability services were found to be more culturally diverse than the workforce, with the workforce lacking in strategies to recruit staff from CALD backgrounds. Best practice strategies avoided one to one matching of people with disabilities and support staff from the same background, but rather incorporated diversity into policy and planning throughout the organisation, including through regular consultation, access and equity statements, professional development, and networking (Bini, 2003).

Armstrong et al (2010)³⁶ examined barriers for CALD people in accessing FDR services. In terms of workforce, they concluded that there was a need to foster a culturally competent workforce and processes that facilitate the effective participation of CALD clients. They suggested that organisations undertake a cultural self-assessment, and develop practices to recruit, retain and develop a culturally competent workforce, so that workers are aware of the influence of their own cultural contexts. While training is necessary, they suggested this is not sufficient and that workers need to undertake ongoing reflection in a sustained and structured way. They propose the employment of bilingual or bicultural staff, although other authors (e.g. Bini 2003) question the feasibility of this as a core strategy, considering the diversity of CALD groups in the community. No doubt, local level strategies based on local demographics are called for which could more feasibly develop staff from local CALD groups to better meet the needs of the local community.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA)³⁷ has documented the barriers for workforce participation by CALD people in Australia. These barriers include, but are not limited to:

- lack of English language proficiency;
- different levels of education and literacy;
- unfamiliarity with a new culture and customs;

³⁴ ABS (2006) *A Picture of the Nation 2006.0*

³⁵ ABS (2006) *A Picture of the Nation 2006.0*

³⁶ Armstrong S, Butler R and Bruce P (2010) *Enhancing access to family dispute resolution for families from CALD backgrounds*. 11th AIFS Conference, Melbourne, 6-9 July 2010
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/conferences/aifs11/docs/armstrong.pdf>

³⁷ FECCA (2008) *Submission to the Minimum Wage review of the Australian Fair Pay Commission*.
<http://www.dhi.gov.au/Multicultural-Mental-Health-Australia/home/default.aspx>

- likely life-experience of trauma (such as torture, dispossession, abuse by those in authority);
- being the target of negative stereotypes and racist behaviour at work;
- a diminished idea of self-worth;
- difficulties with having qualifications recognised;
- skills atrophy;
- humanitarian entrants from small and emerging communities being unable to demonstrate previously held qualifications due to their inability to bring relevant documents from their country of origin;
- limited knowledge of services available.

As with other areas of workforce development, there could be opportunities to extend or adapt the efforts of others in related sub-sectors. For instance, the Australian Cultural Competency Audit Tool (ACCAT)³⁸ currently being developed by Multicultural Mental Health Australia may have adaptability to the F&RS sector. There should also be opportunities created by the National Workforce Strategy's emphasis on language and literacy training to increase workforce participation.

An 'Area of Need' program, similar to State/Territory programs that address health workforce shortages in underserved areas could be developed in collaboration with professional bodies. This would mean that CALD people whose qualifications are not recognised in Australia may be placed in supervised roles to both provide services and work towards accreditation by the relevant professional body. Exploratory research and discussions with the relevant bodies such as the APS, AASW and ACCA may be warranted.

Workforce diversity yields important benefits for both clients and organisations. In the family and relationship services targeted strategies have been identified for increasing the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, men and employees with diverse cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds. Employment opportunities for older workers have also been addressed in the Strategy.

Regional, rural and remote service delivery

Recruitment and training issues experienced across the sector are multiplied substantially in regional, rural and remote areas.

Cortis et al (2009) find that across the NGO sector Australian research 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 (Green, 2003).

Strategies at the sectoral level could also be introduced to address the specific needs of rural and regional practitioners. In a recent study examining effective service delivery in regional, rural and remote areas, Roufeil and Battye (2008) argued that the most effective ways to build sustainable services is through making changes to the "training environment, maximising workforce participation and service re-engineering" (p. 4). They maintain that reform of rural services should focus on the kinds of employer initiatives which could be introduced to improve service delivery, rather than the usual focus on the constraints of the rural environment and practitioner characteristics. Most recently, the Australian Government

³⁸ Multicultural Mental Health Australia <http://www.dhi.gov.au/Multicultural-Mental-Health-Australia/Program-Areas/Workforce-Development/default.aspx>

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 delivery of quality services.

Men and Fathers

The F&RS sector has a predominantly (80%) female workforce. When it comes to providing services for children and families, the challenge of attracting male workers to jobs is a persistent theme.

Potential opportunities to develop the workforce serving Indigenous communities through the *Strong Fathers Strong Families* have been identified above. The *National Workforce Strategy* identifies the need to engage existing workers and mature aged people in the education and training system. It also highlights the importance of labour force participation rates for the maintenance of economic and social health of the community.

Skills Australia profile the *Men's Shed* movement as an example of engaging men, maintaining and expanding men's social networks, providing healthcare information, education and work related skills and encouraging men to participate in projects that can benefit the whole community. The movement is also developing a cohort of male mentors and trainers.

Staff retention

It is important to recognise that not-for-profit organisations are generally experienced at ensuring their people feel valued and engaged - more so than any other sector or industry. It is after all, the not-for-profit sector that relies heavily on volunteers who work for free as well as employees on salaries well below commensurate value in the private or public sector. It should therefore not be assumed that these organisations lack either the will or the competency to use non monetary rewards and recognition to attract and retain staff.

Indeed, worker satisfaction has been consistently identified as a key strength of the non-profit community services workforce both in Australia and overseas). Summarising the literature on factors that contribute to satisfaction, Cortis et al (2009)³⁹ identify:

- Workers confidence in their organisation's leadership;
- Positive organisational culture;
- A sense of performing meaningful work that benefits others;
- Autonomy and variety in job roles; and
- Quality and frequency of clinical supervision.

The F&RS sector has a reputation for providing employees with attractive job roles and opportunities to engage in early intervention and prevention work. This is reflected in the Workforce Mapping project's finding that the three key reasons employees were *originally attracted* to working in the F&RS sector included:

- Type of work (73%),
- Location of work (32%), and
- Training and professional development opportunities (27%).

Further, that the three aspects employees were *most satisfied* with were:

- Type of Work (85% satisfied),
- Co-workers' competencies (80% satisfied), and
- Location of workplace (78% satisfied).

³⁹ Cortis et al 2009 cite Light 2002, 2003; Borzaga and Tortia, 2006 and Stalker et al, 2007 and Barth et al, 2008.

Nonetheless there is always room for improving the capacity of the sector to engage and value its people, particularly where sector-wide strategies may serve to enhance or support individual organisations. Some of the practical mechanisms for this suggested by various reviews and reports⁴⁰ include:

1. Identify and share strategies for developing sector-wide career pathways, including 'senior practitioner' roles or 'practice managers' that allow more experienced practitioners to progress without having to move away from practice and into management and administrative roles.
2. 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 – more possible at the sector or regional level than individual organisation level.
3. Increase professional development and training opportunities through sector-wide strategies for developing more intensive and accredited training as well as secondment and placement opportunities.
4. Review, monitor and support the availability of flexible hours and family friendly working arrangements, (which is particularly important for attracting and retaining female workers and for retaining workers aged between 25 and 40 – see Meagher, 2005 cited in AFRC 2009).

Comparable approaches have been linked to decreased turnover and absenteeism costs in other sectors. Skills Australia's report of workforce development activities in the Disability Services sector indicates that sharing of knowledge between organisations within the sector on practical ways to overcome perceived barriers to workforce retention (such as how to make job sharing and flexible hours work in a comparable organisation) can be valuable in expanding local successes more broadly across the sector⁴¹. The report also confirms the importance of the engagement of staff in developing strategies at the ideas generation stage.

In the workforce mapping project (Colmar Brunton, 2009) of the 7% of employees intending to leave the sector and the 32% who were unsure of their future intentions, aside from pay rates, the main concerns were lack of career path, low level of acknowledgement for work and inflexible hours. In response, Colmar Brunton recommend that strategies for increasing 'employee engagement' including staff involvement in decision-making and flexible working hours be promoted in family and relationship services. Comparable approaches have been linked to decreased turnover and absenteeism costs in other sectors.

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. Both AFRC (2009) and Colmar Brunton (2009) have suggested that the F&RS 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. (AFRC 2009 citing Flaxman et al., 2009).
- Reduce administration load on practitioners, maximise client contact and monitor case loads (Meagher et al., 2009)
- Create more specialist positions to concentrate skills in some areas.

Colmar Brunton have also identified the importance of promoting accurate expectations in both potential employees outside the sector, and existing employees within it, of work in FRSP

⁴⁰ Colmar Brunton 2009, AFRC 2009, FRSP Review 2006

⁴¹ Skills Australia (2010) *National Workforce Strategy*. p.53 and Appendix 6.

funded services. Organisational transparency is essential in promoting employee understanding of the workplace, including an accurate expectation of the sector.

Continuing professional development

Improved training and professional development for practitioners was identified in the Urbis Keys Young (2004) program review 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 partly hampered by the fact that pathways into the sector are provided by a variety of degree programs and vocational training⁴². There are a high number of entry points and pathways into the sector.

It has been suggested that 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. This would help carve out direct pathways into the family & relationship services sector. Strong lobbying by sector representatives could help specify relevant courses as compulsory content for certain human services degrees. A number of FRSA members already have well established partnerships that warrant recognition. It is likely that the benefits as well as the challenges would be of interest to the sector more broadly.

Colmar Brunton (2009) recommend 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).

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). 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.

There is a need to provide training to existing F&RS staff, particularly around issues where the workforce currently lacks capacity. Possible activities could include:

- Developing and delivering training around management skills for service delivery staff who have been promoted to management levels – including financial management, governance and contract management. This could also include identifying ways of improving access to existing management training. FaHCSIA is currently working to develop training around working in consortia for F&RS staff.
- Developing, or improving access, to training, or post graduate qualifications, around specialist areas or issues – ie alcohol and drug training, training around legal obligations (including Equal Employment Opportunity), family group conferencing training, mental health training, family specific training based on identified need
- Working to address the difficulties that RTOs within the sector face in accessing Fee Help for their students

⁴² AFRC (2009)

- Establishing scholarships for workers already within the sector to undertake training and qualifications
- Consideration of the current in-house training delivered by organisations and whether that training could be recognised by RTO's/accredited.

Barth et al (2008: 204 cited in Cortis et al 2009) found the quality of supervision to be the strongest predictor of worker satisfaction in child welfare, with at least two hours of weekly supervision associated with higher levels of satisfaction.

Organisational support for training

A further set of organisational supports relates to:

- Training and professional development programs, provided internally or externally with employer support or subsidy for new and existing employees. This is important for improving capacity and job satisfaction, and for communicating organisational commitment to workers and clients (Curry et al., 2007; Hodgkin, 2002).
- Identified training needs in family & relationship services include working cross culturally, especially with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and remote communities (CWA & FaHCSIA, 2006), and management and leadership training (FaHCSIA, 2008).
- Investing in training for new employees can provide important orientation and networking opportunities. For more long-standing staff, training is a way to update and develop skills and reflect on their work. Technology offers ways to reach rural workers and ensure they can participate in training and professional development activities.
- Where organisations support staff to complete tertiary studies, they should also foster a work environment that facilitates staff completion of training, and supports graduates' transitions to work or to higher positions (Lonne & Cheers, 2004).
- As well as supporting tertiary studies or offering short professional courses to their own staff, some family & relationship services have training units that offer specialist courses throughout the sector. Some short courses are endorsed by the Australian Association of Social Workers and the Australian Psychological Association, making them especially attractive to staff and organisations. While courses are likely to be difficult and costly for organisations in rural and remote locations, technologies may provide some opportunities, as recommended by the sector (CWA & FaHCSIA, 2006).
- In areas where formal training is not available, informal on-the-job training along with mentoring offers ways to train local workers and improve service sustainability (Flaxman et al., 2009).
- Completion of a stocktake of the current qualifications and training available to the sector.

Leadership and governance

"Leadership is the art of inspiring people to follow the mission of an organisation and to daily enact its values" [Participant in FRSA's survey on Leadership and Governance, 2009]

Cortis et al 2009 A further set of pressures raising the need for a highly skilled workforce relate to management and administration. Those in non-government organisations have been needed to use skills and competencies defined primarily by the managerial, rather than the practice environment for which they were trained. These include 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 (McDonald, 1999).

In early 2009, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) commissioned Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) to consult with

service providers about the current and future needs of the family, parenting and children's services sector in the area of leadership and governance. This work was to complement another project commissioned by FaHCSIA in which Families Australia has scoped the leadership and governance training options currently available to the sector. Both projects are to inform FaHCSIA's deliberations regarding potential investment in the development of leadership and/or governance training.

Consultation occurred through an online survey completed by 154 respondents and 21 in-depth interviews with executives from a cross section of organisations. Participants in both the survey and the interviews included CEOs, Senior Executives, Service and Program Managers from organisations ranging in size, location and function.

The capacity to articulate a clear mission and then engage people in its achievement was consistently identified as the primary role of leaders in this sector, requiring qualities such as:

- Communication skills
- Vision/inspiration
- Identifying talent in others
- Strategic skills
- Experience and practice wisdom

Survey respondents and interview participants 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.

In the past, the lack of data on the F&RS workforce has made it difficult to formulate policy and sector development responses. Clear recommendations have emerged only when projects such as program reviews have been commissioned. Even now, having just commissioned a Workforce Mapping project we 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 F&RS workforce but there is value in building on this.

Workforce data

To maintain and grow our understanding of the current workforce, a more regular approach to eliciting their views may be valuable. An annual or bi-annual survey could be used to monitor trends and identify any new or emerging issues. This does not need to be resource intensive, it could be run as a voluntary online survey with invitations to participate distributed via email circulation lists such as FRSA's e-bulletin and AFRC subscribers.

Topics that might be considered for inclusion could be:

- Current job satisfaction – driving and restraining factors
- Career development intentions/expectations
- Training and development needs

Repeating the Workforce Mapping survey of organisations is a more demanding task that would require some resource commitment. It is also disappointing that the response rate to this survey was not complete. There is scope for this to be modified to a 'point in time' survey to reduce the administrative burden associated with response. Run either annually or bi-annually this could be simplified to:

- Estimated number of employees in F&RS programs – actual and FTE
- Estimated proportion by gender, cultural background etc

- Confirm key job roles, qualifications and salary levels from previous survey response (not likely to change often but may be significant when it does)
- Recruitment challenges
- Turnover rate
- Copy of workforce development plans or strategies at agency level

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.

Appendix A

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