



Family Relationship Services
AUSTRALIA

2nd FRSA National Conference
24 - 26 November 2009

Children and Families: Reducing Risk,
Building Resilience



CONFERENCE EVALUATION REPORT

Sponsors

This conference would not have been possible without the generosity of our sponsors:

Conference Partners:



Australian Government
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**Department of Families,
Housing, Community Services
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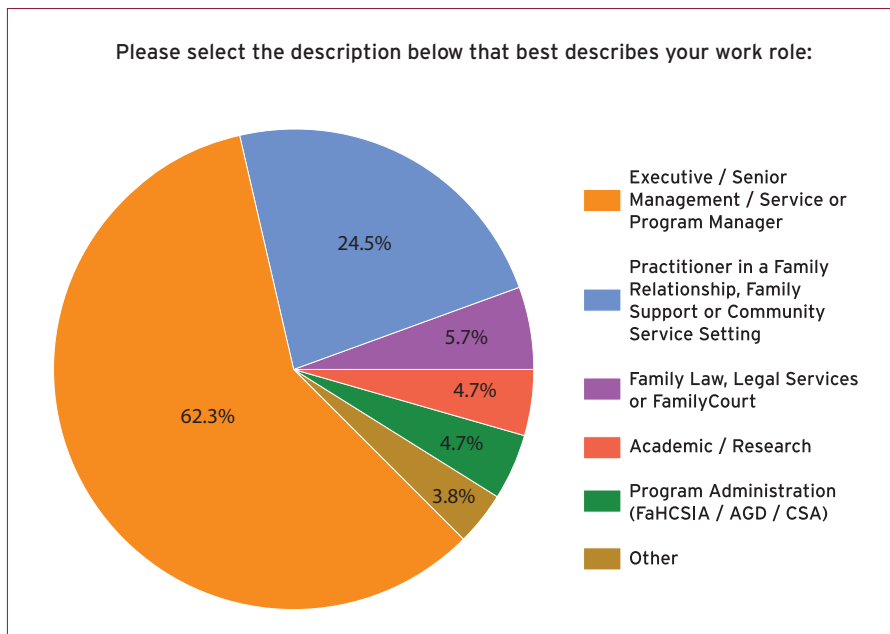
The 2nd FRSA National Conference 2009 ‘Children and Families: Reducing Risk, Building Resilience’ was held in Sydney from 24 – 26 November. In total 456 people attended the conference over the four days with over 400 people on each day.

Evaluation feedback was provided through a written or online survey completed by 151 conference delegates.

Big Picture

More than 88% of survey respondents rated the conference ‘above average’ or ‘excellent’ overall. Specifically, the following features of the conference were consistently rated highly by the majority of respondents¹:

- Quality of speakers and presenters
- Event schedule
- Program mix of plenary/workshop sessions
- Administration and support
- Venue and facilities
- Social events and networking opportunities
- Folder and satchel information
- Value for money



Delegate comments:

“Wonderfully executed conference – Congratulations!”

“The conference provided the opportunity to reflect on our organisation at a distance and through varying lenses”.

“I can say that this has become my preferred conference of the year. Well done!”

Relevance

In planning this conference FRSA analysed the mix of delegates from last year’s conference in Cairns and took into account the introduction of the Family Support Program. The conference was structured to provide sessions and speakers that were relevant to a variety of positions and organisations that work within the family support sector. This included relationship services, childrens services, family law, researchers and academics and program administrators. The variety of the conference program attracted a broader range of delegates, as indicated in the survey respondents by work role graph.

Whilst the conference aimed to be engaging and informative, attracting a broader audience also

provided significant networking opportunities for delegates to build connections with related service sectors.

To determine if the conference was relevant for the variety of delegates that attended, survey respondents were asked to rate how relevant the conference was to their work. The responses were:

- High (72%)
- Moderate (26%)
- Low (2%)

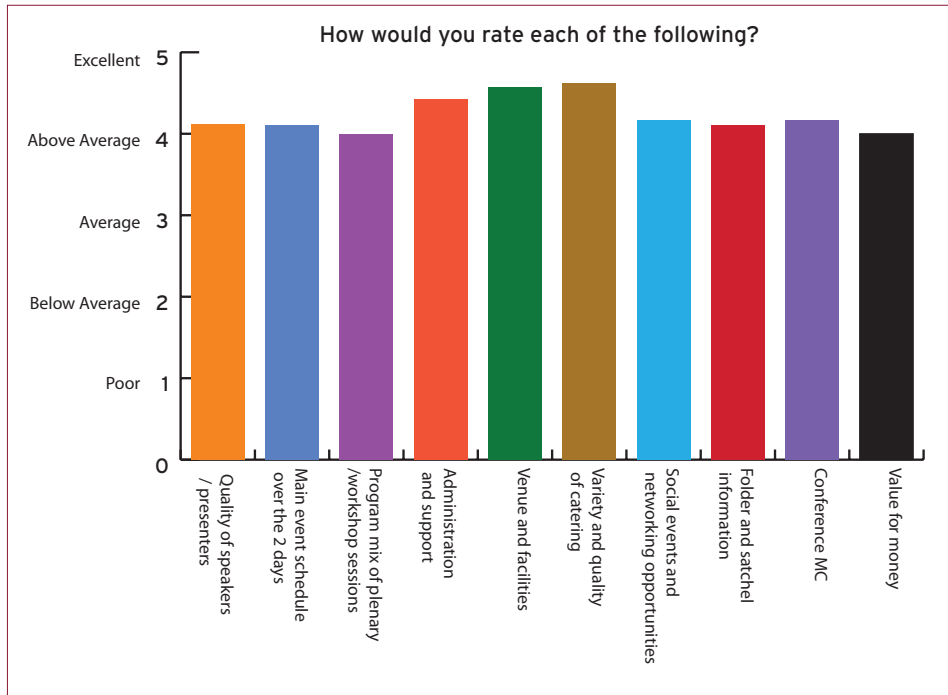
¹ Attracted a score of ‘above average’ or ‘excellent’ by more than 87% of survey respondents.

Pre-conference Workshops

Two pre-conference workshops were offered on 24 November, the day before the main program commenced:

- Pre-conference Workshop A: Perspectives on Risk Assessment and Safety with Families Affected by Violence
- Pre-conference Workshop B: Working with Children and Young People to Support Recovery and Build Resilience

A total of 168 delegates attended one of each of the workshops and 44 of these completed the evaluation survey. Overall, the rating for these workshops was high, with over 90% of evaluation survey respondents indicating that they thought it was 'above average' or 'excellent'. Furthermore, the satisfaction with the quality of these workshops was high as demonstrated in the graph below:



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ON PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS.



FRSA Registration Desk



Dixie Link-Gordon, Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Corporation

Keynote/Plenary and Panel Sessions

Most of the respondents commented positively on the mix of speakers and the opportunities to hear from International speakers. Overall the quality of the keynote and plenary sessions was rated highly by over 82% of respondents.

Five keynotes were rated 'excellent' by the majority of survey respondents:

- Professor Richard Chisholm AM (University of Sydney)
- Professor Janet R Johnston (San Jose University)
- Anthony Douglas (CAFCASS, UK)
- Professor Alan Hayes (Australia Institute of Family Studies)
- Dr Jenn McIntosh (La Trobe University)

Other popular sessions included:

- *Measuring Impact – Are Families and Communities Better Off?* – Robert Fitzgerald (Productivity Commission), Cheryl Kernot (Centre for Social Impact) and Jo Cavanagh (Family Life)
- *Building Resilience through Engagement, Empowerment and Self-help Resources* – Gillian Calvert (NSW Children's Commissioner 1999 - 2009), Cynthia Morton (Emotional Fitness Australia) and Katrina Baird (Child Support Agency)
- *Closing Address* – The Hon Robert McClelland MP (Attorney General)
- *Research Presentation: The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma in Intimate Partner Homicide* – Dr Carolyn Harris Johnson (Curtain University)
- *Research Presentation: Lessons from the Stronger Families and Communities Evaluation: Strategies to Engage Hard to Reach Families* – Professor Ilan Katz (Social Policy and Research Centre) and Professor Alan Hayes (Australian Institute of Family Studies)



Samantha Page (Executive Director, FRSA), Anthony Douglas (Cafcass), Chief Justice Diana Bryant (Family Court) and Dr Jenn McIntosh (La Trobe University)

Delegate comments:

"I like the mix of policy, research and practice presentations"

"It's fantastic to have the opportunity to participate and be exposed to such expertise – Thanks"

"This panel was excellent with a wide range of food for thought and opportunities"



Keynote Address: Professor Janet R Johnston (US)

Performances

In recognition of different learning styles and the power of stories, the conference program included performances which highlighted the impact of family conflict and family violence on individuals and relationships.

The Choir of No More Knocks which promotes itself as 'a response to the need for creative spaces for women who had suffered violence and abuse in their homes' performed on the first day of the conference. The Choir was formed in October 2007 by Carrie's Place, a service for women and their children experiencing domestic violence in the Maitland area in New South Wales.

The Alex Buzo Company also performed an excerpt from the play 'Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah', which explores themes of cultural and generational conflict in a 21st century story of two Australian Afghani Muslim women and the tension within a family over wearing the headscarf.

Both performances were rated highly in evaluation feedback, with delegates commenting that it provided an opportunity for reflection and brought a human aspect to the conference.



Choir of No More Knocks



Alex Buzo Company perform Shafana and Aunt Sarrinah

Concurrent Sessions

The concurrent sessions that were highly attended included:

- *Integrating Family Law Services* – Federal Magistrate Keith Slack and Senior Family Consultant Marie Adams (Federal Magistrate Court Australia), Julie Jackson and Colleen Brown (Legal Aid WA), Mandy Flahavin (Relationships Australia WA) and Stephen Clarke (Centrecare)
- *Children in the Crossfire* – Bruce Robertson (Centacare Broken Bay), Samantha Aldridge (Relationships Australia QLD) and Lisa Whittaker-Nichols (Anglicare WA)
- *Policy and Programs: Future Directions* – Toni Pirani (Attorney-Generals Department) and Robyn Fleming (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)
- *The Wellbeing of Children after Separation* – Research Consortium
- *Shared Care Decision-making* – Christina Sadowski (University of Ballarat) and Dr Jenn McIntosh (La Trobe University), Professor Thea Brown (Monash University), Dr Alan Campbell (University of South Australia)
- *Youth at Risk* – Joe Tighe and Tristram Pigram (Men's Outreach Service Broome)

The sessions rated most highly ('excellent') were:

- *Cultural Competence with Indigenous Families* – Don Mallard and Cheryl Ross (Relationships Australia NT), Mark Lawrence (SNAICC)
- *Working with Stepfamilies* – Stephen Clarke (Centrecare) and Dr Pamela Henry (Edith Cowan University), Daniela Zimmermann and Steve Martin (Stepfamilies Australia), Cassandra Dowling (Centacare Tasmania)
- *HOPE: Hands on Parenting Education* – Helen Rimington (Drummond Street Relationship Centre)

Feedback from respondents suggested that overall the variety of concurrent sessions was thought-provoking, and well structured. Particular praise was given to those that suggested solutions to service delivery issues and discussed new ways to improve practice.

Delegate comments:

"All thought-provoking!"

"Great presentation – it gave me hope"

Social Events

An estimated 250 people attended the conference welcome event. There was positive feedback that it was an enjoyable evening with great performers. Entertainment was provided by Thullii Dreaming, an Aboriginal owned and operated dance group situated in Western Sydney, offering entertaining and informative rituals of Aboriginal culture. There was also performances by Circo Blurto, a high spirited youth circus from the Blue Mountains and DRUMBEAT: Discovering Relationships Using Music, Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts (a music therapy program designed by Holyoake Drug and Alcohol Service to engage at risk young people). Delegates found the welcome event useful for networking and some requested more facilitated networking at future events.

The Conference Dinner was held on the evening of the main conference first day at the Opera House Marquee. Attendance was estimated at 344 people. Overall the feedback was positive, however some participants commented that the catering was insufficient, and there should have been more available seating. Respondents commented that the venue was fantastic, as was the entertainment provided by Dance Central and Peppermint Jam.



Thullii Dreaming



Circo Blurto



Conference Dinner



Dance Central Bollywood Dancers

Highlights

The quality of speakers and presenters was identified by the majority of respondents as a highlight of the conference.

Evaluation feedback suggested changes for future conferences including more time for presentations by International keynotes and more opportunities for participant engagement. Delegates were also keen for inclusion of content related to working with Indigenous and culturally diverse families.

Participants also identified other highlights including opportunities to network with other practitioners, reflect on practice, the performances and the opportunity to hear about research.

The conference t-shirts were given as a gift to all presenters along with Thullii Dreaming products, which included bush tucker herbs, spices, fruits, jams and sauces. Keynote presenters received copies of Jukurrpa diaries and calendars developed by the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD). Visit www.thullii.com.au or www.IAD.edu.au for more information

Study Tours

This year FRSA held study tours which were led by an experienced facilitator and took delegates to local family support sites. In total 30 participants attended one of the three tours:

- New Developments in Services for Children
- Strengths Based Approaches to Family Support
- Working with Invisible Groups of Men

23 of the delegates completed the evaluation survey. From feedback received, participants rated the tours above average or excellent.

Participants commented that the combination of an experienced facilitator, visiting services and networking was most valuable.

Delegate comments:

“In an effort to offer 'so much' it was probably a bit 'too much'. Lets make it 3 days!”

“I valued the networking and hearing an overview of the field and where its at as well as future directions”

“Congratulations to the organisers - this is the best conference I have ever attended”



DRUMBEAT

Delegate comments:

“This tour exceeded my expectations!”

“It was great to hear what other services are doing and to see it in action”

Sponsorship

Sponsorship of the 2009 FRSA National Conference offered an exceptional opportunity to support the sharing of knowledge and practice. The support of sponsors is very important to the success of the conference. It also provides delegates with valuable exposure to key products and information from founders, sponsors, suppliers and partners including training and research institutes.

Sponsorship allowed FRSA to bring International guests speakers to the conference and also provide travel subsidies to 22 practitioners from rural and remote areas as far away as Broome.

This year the conference also had 13 exhibition booths which received excellent feedback from respondents. Delegates found these to be informative and a good opportunity for networking.



The above are examples of some of the conference exhibition booths



Delegate comments:

"It was great to see the Government Departments collaborating by sponsoring the event"

"I hope to see exhibition booths at the next conference too - Great displays"

Acknowledgments

Overall this conference was successful because of the hard work and generosity of many, our thanks in particular to the:

- FRSA Conference Reference Group, chaired by Anne Hollonds;
- FRSA Staff, particularly Steve Hackett, Bonnie Montgomery and Elly Smith;
- Volunteers – Sue Williams, Rob Cavanagh and Daphne Hudson-Hamilton;
- Keynote and concurrent session speakers;
- Sponsors.