

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES



# **FAMILIES FIRST AREA REVIEW METHODOLOGY**

**FOR THE CABINET OFFICE OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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University of New South Wales Consortium  
Social Policy Research Centre  
Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation  
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School of Women's and Children's Health  
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## Families First Area Review Methodology Summary

Table 1 summarises the data collection methods and data sets to explain the relationship between the research analysis and the aims of the Families First Area Reviews.

**Table 1: Families First Area Review Methodology Summary**

		Aim 1: Priority issues for the Area	Aim 2: Key changes to the practices of service networks to reflect the principles of Families First early intervention and collaboration	Aims 3 and 4: Course of development and implementation of prevention and early intervention network	Aim 5: Barriers and facilitators			
	Descriptive role	Describing the priority issues for the Area	Changes to network due to FF - within organisation (focus on early intervention)	Characteristics of network – degree and quality	Network consistency with framework and plans in terms of early intervention	Changes to network due to FF - external to organisation (collaborative approach)	Barriers to network development	Facilitators to network development
1.	Document analysis	Inputs, processes, outputs	x	x	x	x		
2.	Service census	Inputs, outputs						
3.	Service provider	Inputs, Processes, outputs	x	x	x	x	x	x
4.	Network density matrix	Processes		x	x			
5.	Observation and site visits	Processes, outputs	x	x	x	x		
6.	Middle Managers	Inputs, processes, outputs	x	x	x	x	x	x
7.	Key Personnel interviews	Inputs, processes	x	x	x			
8.	Regional officer	Inputs, processes, outputs	x	x	x	x	x	x
9.	Fieldworker interviews	Processes, outputs	x	x	x	x	x	x
10.	Family interviews	Processes, outputs	x	x	x	x		

## **1 Introduction**

This document outlines the methodology for the process evaluation through the Area Reviews of three geographical areas implementing Families First in 2002-2003.

The Area Reviews which focus on the statewide development and implementation of Families First are one of the evaluation activities for Families First. Other activities include local Area evaluations, as determined by the Regional Officers Group and program evaluation of the projects funded through Families First and the Outcome Evaluation Framework, which is a population outcomes measure at the state and Families First Planning areas level.

Overall the evaluation considers whether Families First has been effective in supporting families and communities in NSW to care for children using an early intervention approach and in developing linkages between specialised health, education, community and other policies. The Area Review component of the evaluation focuses on the development and implementation of the Families First strategy.

A summary table of the Area Review methodology is presented at the beginning of this document, including the aims, data collection methods and links to the conceptual framework (Table 1). Section 2 describes the relationship between the processes of Families First and the role of the Area Reviews. Section 3 lists the aims of the Area Reviews. Section 4 presents the conceptual approach and analysis framework for the methodology. Section 5 details the data collection methods. Section 6 describes the data sources in relation to the conceptual approach and Section 7 discusses the reasons for selecting the three Areas to be examined and summarises the research timetable.

## 2 Background

At its core, Families First is concerned with the welfare of young children and the implications that this has for long-term outcomes in health, education and social development in childhood and adult life. To achieve this, an early intervention approach is used which identifies children and families most likely to require further assistance. Drawing primarily on existing services and resources, the program is concerned with developing a network of universal and targeted services to provide support to parents, carers and communities early before problems become entrenched.

Families First emphasises the coordination of existing specialist service providers into an integrated network, pooling information, eliminating duplication and maximising the effectiveness of existing resources by making appropriate referrals and through effective collaborative arrangements for follow-up support of client families over time. It is recognised that the improved coordination of services has the potential to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and to help provide cost-effective solutions within the levels of existing resources (O’Looney, 1993; Fine, 1997). However, local and international experience to date suggests that improving the coordination of otherwise independent services, particularly those from different sectors (health, welfare, education etc) is generally more difficult in practice than is anticipated, and that outcomes subsequently often fall short of expectations (Bruner, 1992; Harbert, Finnegan and Tyler, 1997; Fine and Pancharatnam, 1999). Hence, monitoring the development and implementation of effective arrangements for the coordination of services, and providing practical and timely advice to program managers through the Area Reviews is of fundamental importance to the implementation of Families First.

### 3 Aims

The aims of the Area Reviews are to investigate the following questions.

1. What have been the priority implementation issues in this region?
2. What have been the key changes to Families First agencies (those responsible for implementing Families First) and relevant non government agencies, as a result of the implementation of Families First in this region? Identify key strengths and key challenges in each region
3. What is the description of the current early intervention and prevention networks in this region? What is the description of Families First networks and quality of networks (measured by density of connections) as a baseline measurement for future comparison?
4. How, and in what ways, have the Families First Framework and the area implementation plan strengthened and/or reoriented a prevention and early intervention network? Is Families First being implemented according to design, as outlined in the Families First Framework and area implementation plan?
5. What are the factors both at central government (program and departmental) and regional levels that support or impede the implementation of Families First?

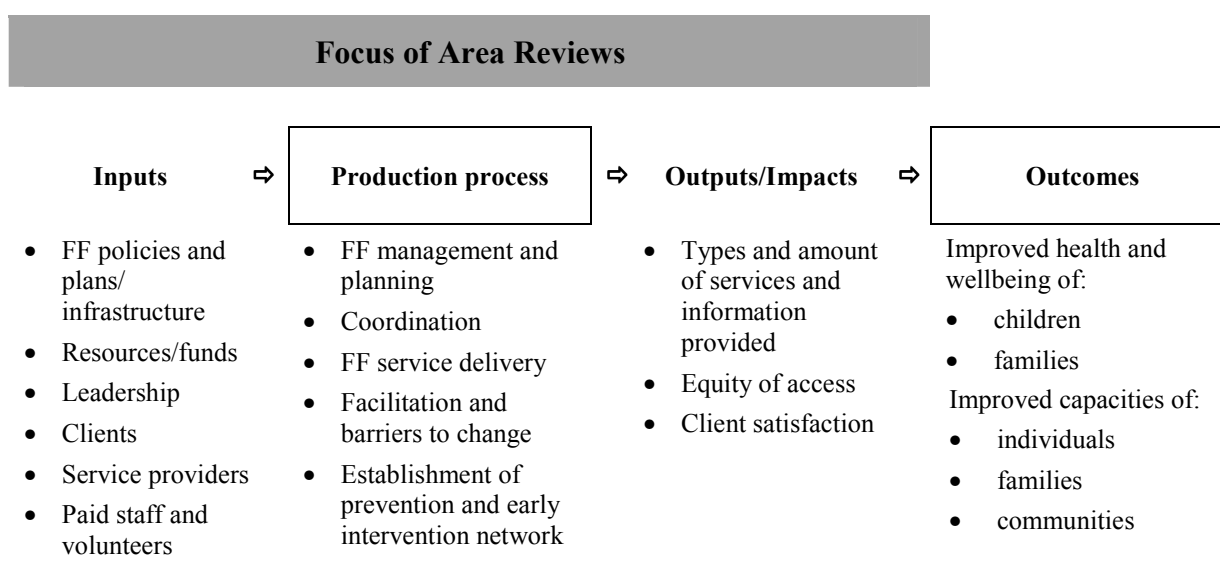
## 4 Conceptual Approach and Analysis Framework

The Area Reviews are a type of formative or process evaluation, monitoring the extent that services are delivered in the form envisaged by the agencies responsible for policy development. Where the results of the policy are not those envisaged by the central authorities, the design, based on the principles of action research, seeks to inform current and future developments of Families First (recognising that change inevitably results from the research process; Wadsworth, 1993). The methodology has been designed so that it can be replicated within and across Areas in possible future studies.

The methodology for the Area Reviews is based on a concepts outlined in the *Production of Welfare Approach*, (Davies and Challis, 1986; Davies, Bebbington and Charnley, 1990). Derived originally from the economic analysis of the production processes, the approach links together service inputs, outputs and outcomes. Drawing these together is the production process itself.

Applying this approach to Families First the relationship between the different components of the project can be conceptualised in Figure 1. The approach draws attention to the importance of focussing on not only the outcomes, but also on the prior stages in the process of resourcing and providing supportive services to those families who will benefit most.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Approach**



Inputs and processes describe the resources of Families First and service system and how it operates (including how it links with other services). The outputs describe the Families First services that children and families receive as a result of being part of the program, the changes in patterns and integration of services received and satisfaction with the support received. Outcomes measure the health and wellbeing and capacities of children, families and communities. The Area Reviews methodology focuses predominately on the inputs, process and outputs stages. Child, family and community outcomes are being evaluated by TCO through the Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework.

Program logic (Department of Finance, 1994) and program theory (Bickman, 1996) are the theoretical tools that will be applied in the evaluation data analysis. Analysis through program logic involves identifying and taking into account the presumed logical and causal relationships between inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. Program theory analyses two aspects of the program. First, the program implementation is assessed by examining whether the program inputs are in place as planned. Second, the program theory is investigated by considering whether the implementation occurs in the way it was envisaged and whether the outcomes are as predicted (Bickman, 1996).

## **5 Data Collection Methods**

To effectively review an Area the evaluators must become familiar with both the characteristics of the Area and the nature of the Families First initiative in the Area. Familiarity will be gained through analysis of documents, service inputs and output data, interviews with key stakeholders and field visits to each Area. Key stakeholders include: project officers, service providers, children and families.

This section describes the data collection methods and instruments to be used in the Area Reviews. A triangulated methodology will be employed to explore the process of development and implementation and the experiences of stakeholders from a number of angles to overcome the limitations of using only one method (Dockrell, 1995; Sarantakos, 1993). This will be achieved by using the multiple data collection techniques outlined in the following section and summarised in Table 1.

### **5.1 Document Analysis**

Documentation relating to Families First at a local and central level will be analysed as a means of determining the intentions of Families First and the reflection of those intentions in relation to network development in written records.

### **5.2 Service Census**

A service census of child and family organisations in the Area will be conducted to describe the service landscape in terms of the types of services and level of organisational involvement in Families First. The Service Census will be conducted with service managers from the following service sectors:

- health services (eg antenatal; birth; postnatal; early childhood health clinic; accident and emergency; paediatric services; mental health; allied health eg speech, physiotherapy; Aboriginal Medical Services; other);
- education (eg preschool, primary school, specialist education services, supplementary services such as priority schools, disability support units and integrated support);
- child care (eg formal such as centres, family day care, home-based care, occasional care, multipurpose, mobile; specialist eg Aboriginal; informal such as playgroups);
- early childhood family support (eg Family Support Services, family workers, home-visiting, parent education and information);
- disability (eg early intervention services; respite);
- care and protection (eg Community Service Centres, out of home care);
- public and community housing and support services; and
- community facilities and networks (eg community centres; public libraries; local government).

Information to be collected by written questionnaire will include:

- Type of services and size of organisation
- Number of clients and type of target groups
- Practice of service network objectives
- Knowledge of the aims and the objectives of Families First
- Level of involvement in Families First and reasons for not being involved.

### **5.3 Service Provider Profile**

The Service Provider Profile (Survey of Managers/Coordinators) will be used to describe the service inputs, aspects of the organisational procedures and processes and service outputs in the service network. This detailed data will be collected from organisations directly involved in Families First, a subset of the organisations list above. Organisations receiving a Service Provider Profile questionnaire will not be sent a Service Census questionnaire, as the census questions will be incorporated.

Information to be collected will include:

- Type of services and size of organisation
- Number of clients and type of target groups
- Operation of a service network:
  - Client focus
  - Frequency of referrals received and made, from and to whom
  - Participation in service network activities (eg meetings, processes, information)
  - Practice of service network objectives
- Assessment of impact
- Knowledge of the aims and the objectives of Families First
- Facilitators or obstacles to change eg key person in a leadership role.

### **5.4 Network Density Matrix**

A network density matrix will be developed from the data relating to the operation of a service network such as referrals obtained from the Service Provider Profile. This will quantify the degree of network activity between participating organisations in the network.

### **5.5 Observation and Site Visits**

The evaluators will attend at least two Regional Officer Group meetings and other interagency meetings within each Area to observe the operation of the service network.

Information to be collected will include:

- Procedures for information sharing
- Early intervention and prevention focus
- Interaction between and within service sectors.

A one-day site observation of a service provider within the Families First network will be conducted in each Area. The aim of the site observation is to observe the processes of service delivery and connections with other services. If possible the service provider will be matched across the three Areas. Possible locations for the site observation include an Early Childhood Centre or a supported playgroup.

Information to be collected will include:

- Service organisation and delivery
- Information sharing
- Referral processes
- Internal and external coordination processes
- Increased time spent on co-ordination
- Linkages between services in other sectors
- Community building activities.

### **5.6 Middle Manager Interviews**

Middle manager interviews focused on the perspective of managers implementing Families First in South West Sydney. The aim of the interviews was to examine the intersection point of policy implementation and change in practice as middle managers are expected to lead the change process. Middle managers from the human service Departments involved in Families First were interviewed in addition to representatives from local government and NGOs.

Issues to be discussed will include:

- Factors that facilitate successful achievement of aims and objectives of Families First
- Factors that prevented the achievement of the aims and objectives
- Perceived impact of Families First
- Barriers and difficulties.

### **5.7 Key Personnel Interviews**

A small number of face-to-face interviews or focus groups involving key personnel from TCO such as the Director, Social Policy Branch, Manager, Office of Children and Young People and Project Leaders will be conducted to gain the State level perspective on the implementation process of Families First.

Topics to be discussed in the interviews will include:

- Process of implementation of Families First at the State level
- Perceived impact of Families First
- Barriers and difficulties.

### **5.8 Regional Officer Interviews**

Interviews will be conducted with members of the Regional Officers Group from the different service sectors in each Area.

Topics to be discussed in the interviews will include:

- Process of managing Families First (central, Area and community)
- Perceived impact of Families First
- Barriers and difficulties
- Agency strategy, local planning and service delivery to incorporate Family First principles
- Agency, Area and service aims and objectives compared to Families First principles
- Processes eg organisation processes (central, local and services)
- Interagency processes
- Community building activities
- Future strategies to be implemented.

### **5.9 Fieldworker Interviews**

Interviews will be conducted with ten fieldworkers in different service sectors to examine the differences between process goals and practice. Examples of possible participants are listed below.

- Child and family health nurse
- Hospital based midwife
- Family worker funded through Families First
- Family Support Worker CSGP funded
- Volunteer coordinator
- Community-based paediatric allied health worker, eg: social worker, OT, physio, speech therapist, psychologist
- Early intervention service staff
- Department of Education and Training specialist staff
- Preschool, child care director
- Early Learning Primary-school based staff
- Specialist Client Service Officer – Housing

- Community Renewal Officers
- Aboriginal Specialist Service –family & child specific and specialist NESB
- Department of Community Services child protection staff
- Supported playgroup coordinator
- Schools as Communities Coordinator.

Interview topics to be discussed will include:

- Knowledge of aims and objectives of Families First
- Changes in processes as a result of Families First eg screening, assessment, targeting, referral, review
- Service network delivery mechanisms (referrals, information exchange)
- Community building activities
- Barriers and difficulties
- Perceived impact of Families First.

### **5.10 Family Interviews**

Ten families will be interviewed about their experience of the service process and network. Service providers involved in the fieldworker interviews will recruit families to be interviewed. Families' perceptions of the operation of the service network will be compared to those of service providers. This information will provide case study material on impact of Families First.

Information to be discussed in the interviews will include:

- Experience of referral processes and service delivery
- Unmet needs
- Ways to improve the network and delivery system.

## 6 Data Sources

This section outlines how the sources of data relate to the conceptual and analytical framework in terms of inputs, processes and outputs. The context in which Families First is operating will also be described.

### 6.1 The Context of Families First

The social, economic and population context in which Families First is being implemented will be described. This includes the macroclimate in NSW, related NSW and Commonwealth initiatives, the socio-economic context of the Families First Areas being reviewed, a description of the population in those Areas and a description of the service providers and organisations operating in the Families First Areas. The service landscape for interventions focused on child and family outcomes will be described and services involved and not involved in the Families First initiative will be identified. Data will be collected about central, regional and local government levels, service providers and community organisations.

The following data sources will be used to collect relevant contextual information.

Contextual items	Instruments and data sets
Major government initiatives and policy directions	Government reports and policy documents
Economic conditions eg unemployment rate, birth rate, population growth	ABS data
Characteristics of families within Families First Areas	ABS data
Service provider landscape	Service census

### 6.2 Service Inputs

The evaluation of how local services have been implemented in terms of the central government's intentions must begin with a clear understanding of those intentions. UNSW will collect and study the documents and plans generated and revised by various organisations at the level of central government and confirm its interpretation and intentions by conducting a small number of face-to-face interviews or focus groups involving key personnel. In addition to ensuring that the researchers have a good comprehension of the intentions of central government, this process will also provide direct evidence on the inter-organisational relationships.

In addition information on service inputs, the resources entered in the system and the clients covered by the services provided will be collected.

The following instruments and data sources will be used to collect relevant service input information.

Input items	Instruments and data sets
Families First Policies	Families First reports and policy documents, interviews with key personnel from TCO
Client demographics	Services administrative data, Service Census and Service Provider Profile
Service provider organisation and staff	Service Provider data profile
Resources	Annual reports, service provider profile

### 6.3 Organisational Procedures and Processes

Because the Families First is essentially concerned with organisational and inter-organisational change, this component of the Area Review is regarded as critical. It will provide a context within which to interpret the more quantitative data on inputs and outputs.

This component of the Area Review relates to the processes of service delivery and how services are organised. This includes types of service delivery, internal and external coordination and planning of the delivery, the management and organisation of the Families First Initiative and the extent to which the service networks have been made aware of and have attempted to incorporate the principles of Families First.

Service coverage, targeting measures, and evidence of appropriate patterns of referral and response will also be examined. A review of referrals and client records, together with statistics on the frequency and timing of referrals will reveal the extent of service delivery patterns.

The study of organisational procedures and processes will be based on document review, observation and interviews with key service personnel. The process of change will be observed by attendance at selected meetings and by interviews and focus groups with the families, project officers, Families First service providers and other service providers.

The following instruments and data sources will be used to collect relevant organisational procedures and process information.

Process items	Instruments and data sets
Families First policy, management, planning	Families First reports and policy documents, interviews with key personnel from TCO
Organisational and implementation processes	Departmental documents, practice manuals key stakeholders and service provider interviews; observations visits
Families First service delivery	Departmental documents, practice manuals, key stakeholders interviews; observations visits
Data systems management	Interviews ROGS and service providers
Service network	Service administrative data, service census, service provider and client interviews
Network density	Service administrative data, service provider and client interviews
Facilitation and barriers to change	Services census, interviews and focus groups with stakeholders

## 6.4 Service Outputs

The fourth type of data to be collected in the Area Reviews will be the outputs from the processes of service delivery. This includes two parts: the type and amount of services and the quality of the service network expected from the goals of the Families First Initiative.

First, the services delivered to clients will be described in terms of types and amount of services by the characteristics of users, so as to inform questions of the quality of the match between population need and output using service administrative data and information collected from a mailed questionnaire (the service provider profile). The following instruments and data sources will be used to collect relevant service output information.

Output items	Instruments and data sets
Type, amount Families First services	Administrative data, Families First data, service provider profile
Service Delivery mechanisms	Service administrative data, service provider and client interviews
Perceived impact	Key stakeholder interviews

## 7 Area Selection and Research Timetable

Three Families First Areas will be involved in the Area Review: South West Sydney Orana Far West and the Illawarra. The advantage of these selections is that the evaluation may be able to observe the effects of the introduction of the initiative in progressive years. Two localities in each Area will be investigated in greater detail.

The Areas, South West Sydney, Orana Far West and the Illawarra, include a metropolitan, rural and regional location (Table 2). These Areas represent the variety of locations and service availability. Population characteristics were used to ensure that disadvantaged families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders families, those from different cultural backgrounds and children with a disability were represented in the nominated Areas. The research timetable is presented in Table 3.

**Table 2: Characteristics of Nominated Areas for Review**

Area	Location	Need	Other Characteristics
South West Sydney	Metropolitan	high	Low socioeconomic status High level of public housing High levels of unemployment High proportion of cultural diversity High level of notifications of abuse or neglect
Orana Far West	Rural and remote	highest	Low socioeconomic status High levels of unemployment High proportion of Aboriginal people High level of notifications of abuse or neglect Low levels of service provision
Illawarra	Regional	middle	Low socioeconomic status High levels of unemployment High proportion of new estate development High level of notifications of abuse or neglect

**Table 3: Research Timetable**

Year	2002												2003											
	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D				
<b>Area 1 - South West Sydney</b>																								
<b>Data collection</b>																								
<i>Government Level</i>																								
Document Review																								
Interviews																								
<i>Service Provider Level</i>																								
Document Review																								
Service Census																								
Service Provider Profile																								
Site visit and observation																								
Service Provider and stakeholder interviews																								
<i>Client Level</i>																								
Client Interviews																								
<b>Area 2 – Orana Far West</b>																								
<b>Data collection</b>																								
<i>Government Level</i>																								
Document Review																								
Interviews																								
<i>Service Provider Level</i>																								
Document Review																								
Service Census																								
Service Provider Profile																								
Site visit and observation																								
Service Provider and stakeholder interviews																								
<i>Client Level</i>																								
Client Interviews																								
<b>Area 3 – Illawarra</b>																								
<b>Data collection</b>																								
<i>Government Level</i>																								
Document Review																								
Interviews																								
<i>Service Provider Level</i>																								
Document Review																								
Service Census																								
Service Provider Profile																								
Site visit and observation																								
Service Provider and stakeholder interviews																								
<i>Client Level</i>																								
Client Interviews																								
<b>Reports</b>																								
Draft Report																								
Final Reports																								

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