

# **Independent Review of the Family Law Pathways Networks**

**Prepared for the  
Attorney-General's Department**



**August 2012**

### ***Acknowledgements***

Without the cooperation and support of Family Law Pathways Network representatives, undertaking the review would not have been possible. Encompass would like to thank project officers, auspice agencies, steering committees and members across Australia who often expressed their enthusiasm for the FLPN initiative and generously gave their time to describe the value of the networks to them and their clients, as well as areas for improvement.

### ***Disclaimer***

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Attorney-General's Department. Whilst all reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of this report, no liability is assumed for any errors or omissions.

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## CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	i
Summary of recommendations .....	vi
BACKGROUND .....	1
Overview of the FLPNs .....	1
2009 internal review .....	2
Purpose of this review .....	3
METHODOLOGY .....	3
Framework for this report .....	4
1 ENGAGING MEMBERS IN THE FLPNs .....	6
Summary .....	8
2 TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	9
Information dissemination .....	9
Training and professional development activities .....	9
Impacts for members .....	11
Summary .....	14
3 NETWORKING .....	16
Networking activities .....	16
Participation levels .....	17
Barriers to participating in networking .....	17
Impacts for members .....	19
Summary .....	20
4 IMPROVING REFERRAL PROCESSES .....	22
Referral activities .....	22
Service directories .....	23
Court kiosks .....	24
Impacts for members .....	27
Impacts for families and children .....	29
Summary .....	30
5 LINKAGES WITH SPECIALIST SERVICES .....	32
Family violence, child protection, mental health, drug & alcohol services .....	32
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services .....	35
Linkages with CALD services .....	38
Summary .....	39
6 OTHER POTENTIAL ROLES OF THE FLPNs .....	41
Summary .....	44
7 NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND ROLES .....	45
Auspicing the networks .....	45
Steering the networks – steering committees .....	47
Coordinating and facilitating the networks – project officer roles .....	52
Interface between auspice / steering committees / project officers .....	55
Summary .....	56

8 INTER-NETWORK SUPPORT AND COORDINATION .....	58
'Coordination/support' and 'mentoring' as additional objectives.....	58
State-wide coordination role.....	60
National inter-network communication .....	61
Summary .....	63
9 COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY.....	65
Website options .....	67
Conferencing options .....	69
Summary .....	70
10 FUNDING ADMINISTRATION.....	71
Funding term.....	71
Categorisation and funding levels .....	73
In-kind contributions and support .....	74
Summary .....	76
GLOSSARY and ACRONYMS .....	77
APPENDIX A NETWORKS, AUSPICE AGENCIES AND CATEGORIES .	78
APPENDIX B LIST OF NETWORKS / PERSONS CONSULTED .....	79
APPENDIX C FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEW OF OUTCOMES.....	80
REFERENCES.....	81

**Note about case examples:**

*Throughout the report, case examples are provided about the activities of some of the FLPNs. It should be noted that these are not exhaustive and are not provided as exemplars of best practice. They simply serve as illustrative examples. It is acknowledged that other FLPNs may be doing similar or different things to those provided as examples.*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Through an investment of \$2.8m/annum, the Attorney-General's Department funds 36 Family Law Pathways Networks (FLPNs) across Australia. Their aim is to support, at a local level, the development of a co-ordinated family law system that assists separated and separating families to promptly and seamlessly access legal services and human services.

There are 7 networks across Victoria, 12 across NSW, and 9 across Queensland. Single networks operate across Western Australia and South Australia. There are 2 networks in each of the Northern Territory, ACT and region, and Tasmania. There is therefore considerable diversity in the geographic size, population density and number of separate population centres, in the areas covered by individual networks. All networks are funded to work towards six core objectives related to developing and maintaining: strong links with locally based providers, appropriate referral mechanisms, shared understanding of the roles of network members, awareness of services and training available, cross-sector training, ways to share information, and inter-network coordination and support.

The purpose of this independent review of the FLPNs was to produce an overall picture of the operation of the networks, and to assess the value of the networks against the objectives and the value to family law system professionals. The terms of reference included other matters specific to the categorisation of the networks, the funding term, use of technology, and potential other roles for FLPNs to contribute to family law system development.

The methodology for the review, undertaken by Encompass Family and Community, included desktop review of reporting and work-plan documents, face-to-face consultation with 12 of the FLPNs from across each state and territory, further discussion with networks through teleconference, telephone and email, and on-line surveys of general members of FLPNs (951 respondents, an estimated 13.2% participation rate), FLPN project officers (35 respondents), FLPN steering committees (35) and auspices (31). Other stakeholders were also consulted including senior judiciary and court officials and Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA).

### **Participation in the networks**

An estimated 7,000 - 8,000 individuals and agencies across the nation are associated with a FLPN, with information flow-on through the further distribution of electronic communication. The review found a reasonable balance of legal and human services practitioners are involved, with 22% of respondents to the general survey being legal practitioners. However some small regional networks struggle to engage private family law practitioners. Gaps in the overall FLPN membership include drug and alcohol services and mental health services. With some exceptions, FLPNs are not yet actively engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) services.

### **Training and professional development**

There is no doubt that all networks meet the objective of 'developing and maintaining cross-sector training'. A range of small and large scale events are held each year. This is the main public activity of the FLPNs. The review found that the training and professional development activities are highly valued by

network members, and that there is undoubtedly increased practitioner knowledge and understanding of the complexities of the family law system and of the needs of children and families as a result. Information sharing through the distribution of e-bulletins is also a common strategy – input to the review indicates that the role of FLPNs in keeping members informed of relevant developments in both family law and human services (such as research about the needs of children in separating families) is valued.

Training and professional development also help build stronger working relationships across the family law system. The review found that this is best facilitated by cross-sectoral small group seminars, experiential learning with real-life scenarios, and, for larger events, combining key-note speakers with local cross-sector panels.

Most FLPNs are using training and professional development to build not only understanding but also stronger working relationships between the legal and human services sectors. The review found that more attention needs to be paid by some to the networking objective of professional development, particularly in the capital cities. Networks have found that offering high level judicial speakers is attractive to legal practitioners, and have used this strategy to good effect. Input to the review from general members reinforced the need to ensure that training and professional development activities are relevant and accessible to both sectors, and to members outside the main population centre/s.

## **Networking**

All FLPNs engage in activities designed to bring agencies and practitioners together and share information to promote understanding of roles. The review found that this broad objective is clearly being achieved for the majority of the FLPNs. There is very strong feedback about the positive impacts within the family law system.

The main barriers to participation in network activities are the pressure of workloads, and geographic distance. The review found that a focus on networking *per se* (and as a planned, rather than incidental, outcome of professional development activities) is important to the success of FLPNs. Input to the review identified that this is harder to achieve in the capital cities where the service system is more complex and numbers of practitioners greater. It was also found that, in SA and WA which have a single FLPN for the state, ensuring that networking occurs in the regions requires specific attention and strategies.

Effective networking takes considerable project officer time using a community development approach. The review found that networks are more effective where there is significant investment in paid worker time commensurate with the population and geographic area to be covered, the project worker takes an energetic developmental approach, and the project officer is independently 'visible', ie, not seen as under the direction of a particular agency.

There is considerable variation in the proportion of the budget which FLPNs expend on the project officer role, even between networks of similar size for funding purposes. All FLPNs are encouraged to place priority, when budgeting, on apportioning sufficient funds to engage one or more project officers for enough hours to develop and maintain an effective network.

## **Improving referrals**

The review found considerable anecdotal evidence of families and children benefitting from the streamlining of appropriate referrals between professionals (legal and human services) and through court-ordered referrals, as a result of FLPN networking.

Directing time and effort to developing *and* maintaining good professional relationships is crucial, particularly in geographic areas and sectors with high worker turnover. Having up-to-date, comprehensive contact information, for example, service directories, is important – input to the review identified the lack of a ‘service directory’ as a barrier to good referral practice in some places. It is recommended that this be specifically identified as an appropriate matter for attention by FLPNs where necessary, and FLPNs are encouraged to share learnings about different options for making directories available and updating them.

Twenty of the FLPNs are involved in coordinating or operating a ‘court kiosk’. Barriers include the logistical issues of staffing kiosks in the capital cities where the Family Law Courts may be sitting daily. Although there needs to be ongoing evaluation and clarification of purpose and roles, ‘kiosks’ were viewed favourably by steering committee members and judicial officers consulted during the review. It is recommended that, where no ‘kiosk’ or similar information-provision activity exists in the Court setting, FLPNs consider their role in facilitating a kiosk.

## **Linkages with specialist services**

The active participation of representatives from the child protection, alcohol and drug, and mental health sectors varies from network to network, but is generally low. Domestic and family violence workers are reportedly active as general members and on steering committees.

In general, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are not well engaged in steering committee activity. Many steering committees have taken seriously the need to involve and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and to provide appropriate training to non-Indigenous members about working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. However the review found that there were also indications of engagement plans being limited (eg, offering invitations) and therefore ineffective.

It is recommended that FLPN action-plans for involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD practitioners/agencies be required to be more clearly articulated and reported.

## **Additional roles**

Few persons consulted had views about additional roles which FLPNs might undertake towards a more effective family law system. However an examination of activities already being taken by some FLPNs indicated these potential roles: making information directly available to the public, in particular to self-represented litigants, provision of policy advice about the operation of the family law system, research around relevant issues through linkages with tertiary institutions, and an advocacy role in relation to system issues or the needs of particular client groups.

It is not recommended that any 'additional requirements' be formalised across the board, given the limited capacity of many of the FLPNs, but there is leeway for these types of initiatives to be mentioned in the Policy Guidelines as additional activity options.

### **Network governance and roles**

The review found that a well-functioning FLPN has a balance between the auspice, steering committee, and project officer – all are essential, with specific roles. Despite some variation, this 'balanced triangle' reflects how most of the FLPNs function. Variations such as who chairs the steering committee, having a two-tier structure, having sub-committees or not, and having regional representatives or not, are reflective of issues such as size and distance and are not significant in themselves.

An imbalance between auspice, steering committee and project officer/s (too much overlap of roles, or uneven influence) leads to dysfunction in a FLPN. There were a few instances observed during the review where some 'imbalance' is occurring, to the detriment of the FLPN being as effective as possible. The review found that a reiteration and clarification of the role of the steering committee, *vis a vis* that of the auspice, may be useful. In line with this, it is recommended that the full budget of a FLPN is transparently shared with the steering committee for work-planning purposes, and that, to remove any ambiguity, the Policy Guidelines state that a project officer or officers will be employed or engaged for each FLPN.

Indicators that a FLPN may not be fully functional should trigger a review of that FLPN by the auspice or steering committee as relevant, supported by the Attorney-General's Department. These indicators may include: complaints about a network being non-active, complaints about significant imbalance in steering committee membership, large amounts of unexpended funds, regional membership or core sectors not engaging in or being offered FLPN activities, or the project officer position being vacant or 'temporary' for extended periods.

### **Inter-network support and coordination**

Considerable informal inter-network support and collaboration occurs, but there is confusion about the 'additional objectives' of coordination and mentoring. FLPNs in receipt of what they perceived as 'support' (coordination and mentoring) did find this useful, in the main. In some cases, however, it was viewed as unsolicited, unnecessary and imposed. A terminology change to simply 'support' is recommended, as well as greater specificity and mutual written agreement to underpin any formal funded inter-network 'support' arrangement.

The value of the state-wide coordination role was affirmed by most (though not all) of the FLPNs in the states where 7 or more FLPNs are able to come together once or twice a year and share ideas (NSW, Vic, Qld). The review found that greater transparency is required about the funding for state-wide coordination, its purpose and parameters, with a formal process of collaborative decision-making between all involved FLPNs.

The review heard numerous arguments in favour of formal inter-network communication at a national level, including an annual meeting of project officers. It was perceived that opportunities for the exchange of ideas and learnings would benefit the FLPN program overall, as well as support all project officers in what was described as a fairly isolated role. It is proposed that a role of 'national



network facilitator' be considered as a means to facilitate the various methods by which inter-network communication might occur.

It is recommended that a proposal for the role of a 'national network facilitator', including responsibilities and interface with the FLPNs, and how such a position might be auspiced and funded (possibly through a 3-4% levy from within existing budgets), be drafted for specific consultation with the FLPNs.

## **Communication technology**

There was widespread feedback that the FRO website does not meet the needs of FLPNs as it is difficult for project officers and members to access and to keep up-to-date. FLPNs argue that establishing and maintaining a separate website would be an effective use of funds, streamlining the dissemination of information to members. The review found that the costs of setting up and maintaining a specific website (within stated guidelines) need not be prohibitive, and the use of a website would likely bring cost-benefits. It is therefore recommended that removal of the prohibition on separate websites is considered.

There is considerable variation between the networks regarding the current and projected use of modern communication technologies. Some have set up wikis and Facebook pages. Most of the networks do not yet make use of on-line options for meetings and conferences, which relates in part to lack of reliable broadband coverage, and misconceptions about cost and technological complexity. The review found that there are a number of relatively inexpensive options available for on-line meetings and seminars, some of which are being successfully used by a small number of FLPNs. It is suggested that FLPNs explore the potential of various options in relation to their particular needs, and that all FLPNs who are trialling use of new communication technology share learnings with others.

## **Funding administration**

The review found widespread agreement that the current annual funding term leads to instability, particularly in employment security and retention of project officers. Several auspices and steering committees asserted that the one-year term is inconsistent with the community development approach required to form alliances and plan projects over periods longer than twelve months. In particular, this is difficult when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and in being able to commit to forward planning for collaborative research projects. A strong preference for a three-year term was expressed.

The estimated financial value of in-kind contributions by auspice agencies (in particular) and other steering committee members was considerable. For auspices, it ranged from \$5,000 to \$25,000 per annum for individual networks, with some comment that the degree of stakeholder input to FLPN activities was 'beyond monetary value'. It is clear that the networks attract considerable value-adding on top of the funds outlaid.

There is confusion and some dissatisfaction about the 'medium' and 'small' tags for categorising networks for funding purposes. It is recommended that neutral terms are adopted.

## Summary of recommendations

Recommendations 1 to 10 concern up-dates and/or clarification to the FLPN Policy Guidelines, for the consideration of the Attorney-General's Department in consultation with the FLPNs.

### *Recommendation 1*

That the FLPN Policy Guidelines specify that training and professional development opportunities provided substantially by a FLPN should meet all the following criteria – be cross-sectoral (ie, relevant to legal and human service practitioners), be relevant to the development of the family law system, be responsive to the identified learning needs of local practitioners, and include specific opportunities for cross-sectoral networking to help build stronger working relationships across the family law system.

### *Recommendation 2*

That it is identified in the FLPN Policy Guidelines that, where FLPN members do not have access to a local directory or directories relevant to the family law system, it is an appropriate FLPN role to develop and maintain this resource.

### *Recommendation 3*

That FLPNs which haven't already done so are encouraged to consider their role in facilitating 'information kiosks' at the Family Law Courts, in association with the court registries and others within the service system, to facilitate access by the Court and by other users (eg, parents, family members, legal practitioners, self-represented litigants) to information about local family law services and supported referral processes. This may entail liaising with the courts to overcome structural and practical issues. Any implementation plans for 'court kiosks' should incorporate a clear role statement and objectives, and action research to evaluate achievement of objectives.

### *Recommendation 4*

That all FLPNs be required to develop and implement specific action plans to ensure the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and appropriate community members in the networks. These actions should focus on purposeful and appropriate engagement, through commitment to establishing respectful ongoing relationships, rather than the goal of steering committee attendance *per se*.

### *Recommendation 5*

That all FLPNs be required to develop and implement specific action plans for the engagement of appropriate practitioners related to any prominent CALD communities within their area.

### *Recommendation 6*

That the respective roles of the auspice and steering committee are further clarified within the FLPN Policy Guidelines, including an expectation that the full FLPN budget is transparently shared with the steering committee for work-planning purposes.

*Recommendation 7*

That the expectation that FLPNs will engage a person or persons in the designated role of project officer/s is made clear and unambiguous in the FLPN Policy Guidelines.

*Recommendation 8*

That, within the FLPN Policy Guidelines, the concept of 'coordination' be replaced with the concept of 'support' when referring to the assistance to be given by one FLPN to another (other than state-wide). Further, that when it is proposed that a FLPN will receive funds to 'support' another, the FLPN Policy Guidelines specify that both FLPNs will be consulted and a mutual written agreement will be entered into to clarify the purpose and the actions which will be taken.

*Recommendation 9*

That in relation to the existing state-wide coordination role as outlined in the FLPN Policy Guidelines, the concept of 'coordination' be replaced with the concept of 'inter-network communication', with increased clarity about the purpose and the activities which will be undertaken.

*Recommendation 10*

That in jurisdictions where funding is available for state-wide 'inter-network communication', all the FLPNs within the state should collaboratively develop a single work-plan detailing the agreed state-wide activities. The funding for state-wide 'inter-network communication' should be itemised separately from other FLPN funds within the responsible FLPN's budget.

Recommendations 11 and 12 concern national inter-network communication. It is suggested that the Attorney-General's Department considers options for implementing these recommendations in consultation with the FLPNs.

*Recommendation 11*

That a means to fund/enable project officers (and steering committee representatives) to come together nationally every one or two years to share information and learnings is considered, given the low number of FLPN project officers (with therefore limited opportunity for face-to-face sharing of learnings with people in like positions) and the value of their facilitation role to the overall family law system.

*Recommendation 12*

That a 'national network facilitator' role be developed, as a means to facilitate national inter-network communication on an ongoing basis between the FLPNs across the nation. It is recommended that the responsibilities of the proposed national role, how it might be funded (possibly through a 3-4% levy from within existing budgets), and potential tendering arrangements for auspicing, be drafted for specific consultation with the FLPNs.

Recommendations 13 to 15 concern program administration issues, and are raised for the consideration of the Attorney-General's Department.

*Recommendation 13*

That the Attorney-General's Department considers the issue of approval for the establishment of individual FLPN websites, within specified parameters and guidelines. These guidelines, to be considered in consultation with the FLPNs, may include: branding, consistency, FLPN websites presenting as independent of auspice sites, appropriate inclusions and linkages, and a review role for AGD.

*Recommendation 14*

That the Attorney-General's Department considers a change to a three-year funding term for FLPNs, with annual allocation and reporting, to provide greater security and certainty for employment of project officers and to better enable forward planning.

*Recommendation 15*

That the funding categories for FLPNs be re-labelled to replace the current 'large', 'medium' and 'small' wording with neutral terms such as Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.

## BACKGROUND

Through the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Family Law Pathways Networks (FLPNs) have been funded for over a decade across Australia to help ensure that services engaging with separated and separating families – the courts, legal services, support and mediation services – are professional, proactive, relevant, timely and comprehensive.

The FLPNs are promoted by Attorney-General's as a key component of the family law system. Their aim is to support, at a local level, the development of a co-ordinated family law system that assists separated and separating families to promptly and seamlessly access legal services and human services.

FLPNs fit with the Commonwealth Government's commitment to 'everyday access to justice'<sup>1</sup>. While this involves lawyers and courts, the strategy relies on people having fair and equitable access to information, support and opportunities to experience justice.

FLPNs necessarily involve local, cross-sector and multi-disciplinary legal and human service professionals in the family law system, within a specified geographic area. As families often experience complex and difficult relationship issues, the system also involves drug and alcohol, domestic and family violence, child protection, and mental health service providers, including those agencies working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families.

### Overview of the FLPNs

Attorney-General's provides annual funding to an auspice agency for each network, under a funding agreement. The majority of networks are auspiced by an organisation operating a local Family Relationship Centre (FRC) or a Family Relationship Service, with three networks auspiced by the jurisdiction's Legal Aid Commission. The auspice provides strategic oversight and manages the funding provided under the agreement. An independent, local steering committee oversees network activities around information sharing, networking and professional development. A project officer is the local public face and facilitator for each network.

There are 7 networks across Victoria, 12 across NSW, and 9 across Queensland. Single networks operate for the whole of Western Australia and South Australia. There are 2 networks in each of the Northern Territory, ACT and region, and Tasmania. There is therefore considerable diversity in the geographic size, population density and number of separate population centres, in the areas covered by individual networks.

Some of the 36 FLPNs have been operating, initially without Departmental funding, for almost a decade. Others commenced during 2010-11, with the most recent (Mackay / Whitsunday) commencing in February 2012. Appendix A names each network, auspice agency and categorisation for funding purposes – 22 'small', 9 'medium/ metropolitan/ regional', and 5 'large/ metropolitan'.

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<sup>1</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2012) *Access to Justice*  
<<http://www.ag.gov.au/Publications/Pages/AStrategicFrameworkforAccessToJusticeintheFederalCivlJusticeSystem.aspx>>, accessed on 28 May 2012

All networks are funded to work towards six core objectives, with the goal of improved, integrated service delivery to separating and separated families and children:

- establish and maintain links with local network members and providers associated with the family law system
- develop and maintain:
  - referral mechanisms between local providers
  - a shared understanding of network members' roles and those of key organisations
  - members' awareness of products, services and training
  - cross-sector training for network members and key organisations
  - information sharing mechanisms within the network.

While respecting the independence of other networks, some large and medium networks are funded for additional objectives relating to:

- coordinating meetings, events, conferences or training courses
- providing court-related information to networks that do not have ready access to details such as court sessions and circuit information
- a support role for other networks, for example, liaison with peak professional bodies
- a mentoring role for new networks.

## **2009 internal review**

An internal review of the FLPN program conducted by the Attorney-General's Department in 2009<sup>2</sup> found that the objectives relating to working together to generate an informed network and better client outcomes were being achieved. Identified benefits included that Legal Aid and community legal centres were facilitating referrals to the Family Relationship Centres. The review also found that links with child protection and domestic and family violence agencies were in place.

Identified concerns included the need for improved linkages with law societies and the difficulties of working with the Courts in areas where there is no strong court presence. The review also found that relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and CALD organisations were not well developed.

Following the internal review, to improve geographic coverage, investment in the program was increased to \$2.8m/annum to resource networks across Australia. Funding of new networks was allocated to agencies delivering a Family Relationship Centre. The review also led to:

- certain networks in regional and capital city locations being designated to undertake a coordination role and/ or support role with newer networks
- the requirement of an interagency steering committee for each network.

Policy guidelines<sup>3</sup> released by the Department in June 2011 set out the policy intent, roles, responsibilities and accountability requirements.

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<sup>2</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2009) *Evaluation of the Pathways Networks - Main Points*, provided to the reviewers by the Department for the specific purpose of providing background for this independent review.

<sup>3</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2011) *Policy Guidelines: Family Law Pathways Networks*. The Department, Canberra.

## **Purpose of this review**

In April 2012, Attorney-General's contracted Encompass Family and Community to undertake an independent review of the FLPNs to produce an overall picture of the operation of the networks. Specifically, the terms of reference included:

1. an assessment of the value of the funding for the networks against their objectives
2. an assessment of the value of the networks to family law system professionals who are assisting separated and separating families
3. the identification and prioritisation of other roles the networks could potentially undertake which would contribute to a more effective and efficient family law system, which would deliver better outcomes for separated and separating families
4. advice on the applicability of current categories of networks and associated funding levels and geographic coverage
5. advice on the term of current funding agreements and any impact on networks being able to reasonably plan for and achieve the program's objectives
6. an assessment of the range and adequacy of the various governance models developed by networks
7. identification and analysis of the constraints and challenges for the networks and response options
8. identification and analysis of achievements and benefits of the networks in contributing to the ongoing development of the family law system
9. identification of opportunities and associated costs in the use of a variety of communication technologies and/or social networking tools (eg, wikis, Facebook, Skype video).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Given the review objective to produce an overall picture of the operations of FLPNs through consultation with stakeholders, and taking account of the relatively short timeframe, the methodology balanced comprehensiveness and efficiency to gather the various stakeholders' views.

In preparation, the following tasks were undertaken:

- desktop review of final reports for 2010-11 and work plans for 2011-12, Policy Guidelines, sample funding agreements between the Department and auspicing agencies, and the main points from the 2009 internal review
- desktop review of resources and other materials developed by various networks to achieve funded objectives
- literature review about meeting the often complex and multiple needs of children and families in the family law system and effective partnerships and pathways between legal and human services practitioners.

To gather the views of those most closely associated with each of the 36 networks, the primary data collection method was on-line surveys distributed through each network's nominated key contact. These were surveys of:

- project officers (n=35)
- steering committees (n=35) – 1 survey was requested to be completed for each network

- auspice agencies (n=31) – 1 survey was requested to be completed on behalf of each auspice
- general network members – the web-link and explanatory material were distributed to all 'contacts' in email groups maintained by project officers.

It is estimated that the survey link for general members was distributed to over 7,900 email addresses<sup>4</sup>. Further, reflective of how the networks operate, some of these contacts distributed the link within their networks or organisations. There were 951 respondents from across the 36 networks – a roughly estimated response rate of 13.2%.

A very brief survey was also distributed through the Family Law Section of the Law Council of Australia, to its regional representatives, targeting those not aware of/involved in FLPNs. Twelve responses of a possible 35 were received – only one respondent had had no contact with a FLPN.

Twelve face-to-face meetings were held with network representatives (ie, project officer, steering committee and/or auspice agency). These included a mix of small, medium and large networks across Australia, some with regional or state-wide responsibilities.

Semi-structured telephone consultations were also held with representatives (project officers, auspice agency and/or steering committee) of 13 small and medium networks. Further telephone and email contact occurred with project officers and steering committee representatives from the majority of the networks.

Through an introduction by the Department, semi-structured interviews were held with the following, and with other court officials as listed in Appendix B:

- Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia (FCoA)
- Chief Federal Magistrate of the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia
- Chief Judge of the Family Court of Western Australia
- Principal Registrar, Family Court of Australia
- Principal, Child Dispute Services, Family Law Courts of Australia.

Consultation also occurred with:

- Director, Family Law Section, Law Council of Australia
- CEO and Deputy Director, Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA).

See Appendix B for details about the network and organisational representatives with whom consultations were held. Optional information-giving teleconferences were conducted prior to commencing data collection and during the review. 54 network representatives took part.

The framework for the review is at Appendix C.

### **Framework for this report**

The achievement of better outcomes for separating and separated families and children is underpinned by legal practitioners and human services practitioners having an up-to-date understanding and knowledge about the issues for families

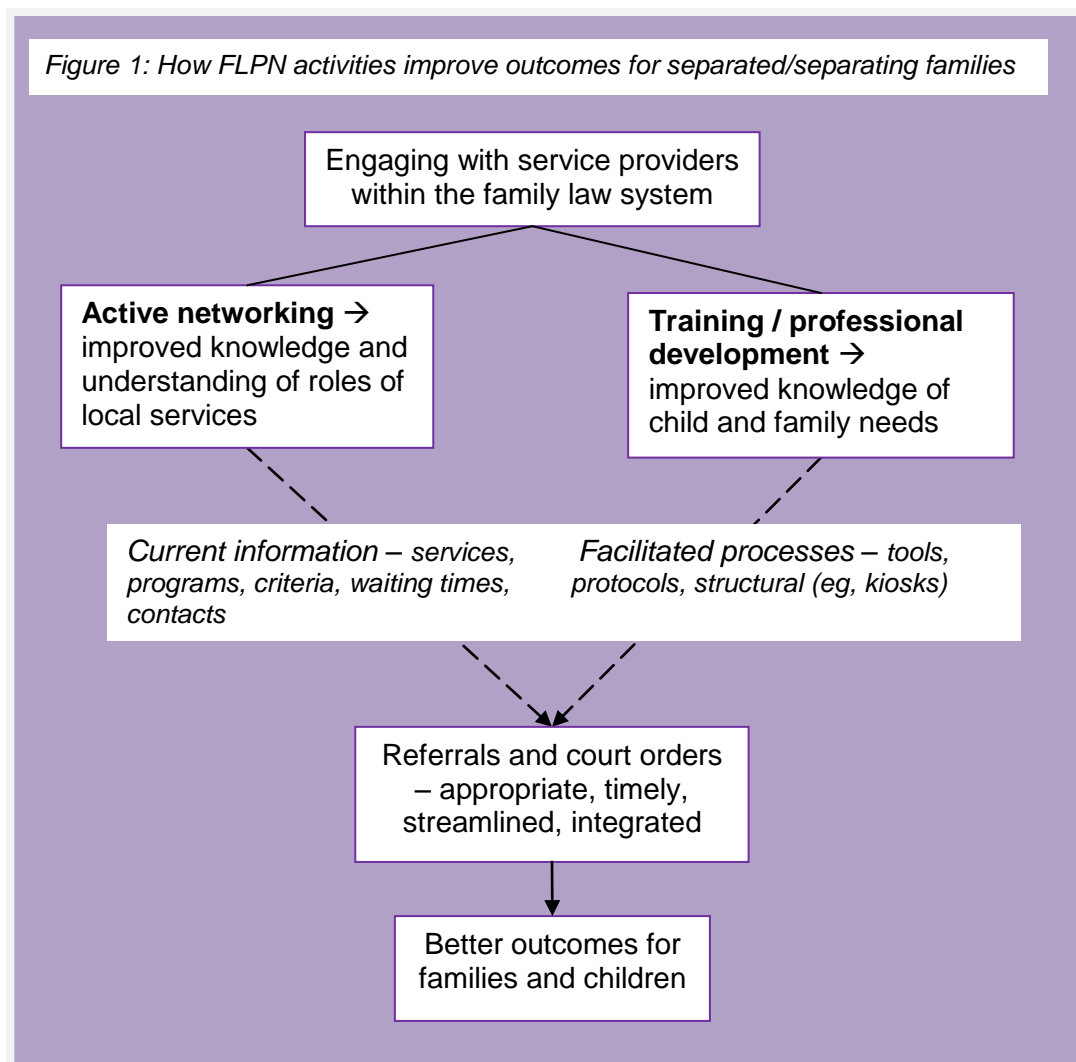
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<sup>4</sup> The number is based on the sum of the number of contacts for 35 networks as advised during the review, but does not include where the survey link was subsequently forwarded within networks or organisations.



and how these can be addressed locally in an integrated way. The logic of the FLPN program therefore is that by actively engaging in the core activities of networking and training/professional development, participants have the opportunity to gain a shared understanding of other practitioners' roles and child and family needs. Further facilitated by information sharing and resources that support referrals between practitioners, referrals and court orders are potentially more appropriate, timely, and streamlined. Outcomes for families and children are therefore improved. Figure 1 sets out this logic.

This report is structured in line with Figure 1, with sections on each of the core activities of the FLPNs – engaging, training/professional development, networking, and improving referrals. Because of the importance of engaging with specialist services, a section discusses this separately. In accordance with the terms of reference, further sections of the report consider other potential roles for FLPNs, governance issues and roles, inter-network relations, use of communication technology, and funding arrangements.



## 1 ENGAGING MEMBERS IN THE FLPNs

Engaging professionals to participate in the networks is an essential first step to achieving the objectives of the program. Networks are required to *‘establish and maintain strong links with locally based providers’*<sup>5</sup> with membership to include a broad range of legal and family relationship services, and related services such as family violence and child protection services.

Given the primary aim of networking widely, ‘membership’ is a fluid concept for most of the FLPNs, and varies between networks:

- for some, a person or agency ‘signs-up’ to be a member
- a number have tiers of membership, in that two or more contact/email lists are maintained, eg, *‘when we are promoting activities we use a much broader mailing list as we try to engage new members’*
- ‘members’ may be anyone interested to be contacted with network news, irrespective of the recipient’s active participation
- some networks maintain separate mailing lists based on geographic areas or different interest groups.

Taking this variation into account, it is meaningless to attempt to report specific or comparable numbers of ‘members’ for each network. Table 1 provides a very broad overview of the levels of membership, variously defined, as reported by project officers.

Table 1: *Number of members (organisational contacts and individuals), by size of network (n=34)*

Network category	Lowest	Highest	Average
Small (n=21)	20	300	159
Medium (n=8)	60	280	167
Large (n=5)	300	1200	675

While a variety of means is used to form linkages, the review noted that an active community development role on the part of the project officer works best. Active networks reflect the level and health of interpersonal relationships, so time and effort focussed upon engaging with existing and potential members is crucial.

*You can’t run a network sitting in your office. You have to get out and contact people. Bring people together – over lunch is good – eat and chat, short sharp information, and time to network.* (Regional project officer)

Membership engagement strategies noted during the consultations included:

- targeted face-to-face and telephone contacts with inactive or potential membership groups, or key sectors
- targeted meetings with key organisational partners, eg, state law councils, family law practitioner associations, medical practitioner associations, statutory child protection agencies
- attending other interagency network meetings
- attracting potential members through conferences, training or ‘expo’ events

<sup>5</sup> Attorney-General’s Department (2011), p.1.

- being strategic about attracting private legal practitioners through, for example, drawcard judicial speakers, and capacity to earn CPD points.

Project officers (n=35) were asked to assess the breadth of their network membership in terms of coverage of the local family law system:

- most (26) reported that it is 'about right' with most agencies or individuals being part of the network in their geographic area
- 9 referred to reaching out to other groups not currently connected to their network (eg, private legal practitioners, health, education department, psychologists, police and doctors).

Respondents to the general survey for the review represented a spread across both government and community sectors and from metropolitan, regional and (to a far lesser extent) remote areas, with the highest percentage being community-based workers in regional areas (see Table 2). Just over 80% of respondents reported being associated with their local network for at least 12 months, with 49.5% for more than 2 years.

*Table 2: Survey respondents, by sector, by geographic locations (%s) (n=951)*

Sector	metropolitan	regional	remote	state-wide	national	total %
private	6.8	10.5	0.4	0.5	0.3	18.5
community	13.1	<b>35.8</b>	2.3	2.4	0.1	<b>53.7</b>
government	7.0	13.2	0.3	1.4	0.6	22.5
across sectors	1.5	3.5	0.1	0.2	0.0	5.3
totals %	28.4	<b>63.0</b>	3.1	4.5	1.0	100

The profession or agency type of respondents to the general survey is summarised in Table 3 (page 8), and shows a diverse spread. It is not possible to be certain that this spread is representative of FLPN membership, but the relatively large number of respondents (951) suggests it is likely to be. The largest grouping, not surprisingly, was workers in various services funded as 'family law services' and/or 'family and relationship services' and Family Relationship Centres (at least 36% if combined).

Of the total number of survey respondents, 22% were legal practitioners. However, for five of the 36 networks, no legal practitioner responded to the general survey. While this does not mean none are involved, it is consistent with reports that some networks, particularly in smaller regional centres, struggle to engage the (largely private) legal sector in their area. For Western Australia, a relatively high 35% of respondents were legal practitioners.

Table 3: Survey respondents, by area of professional activity (n=951)

Professional activity	No.	%
legal practitioner	208	21.8
Family Law Services	203	21.3
family support	97	10.2
Family Relationship Centre	90	9.4
domestic and family violence	80	8.4
other Family and Relationship services	48	5.0
child protection	29	3.0
counsellor/Family Consultant	27	2.8
other government service	24	2.5
other court official	23	2.4
community health	19	1.9
tertiary education	15	1.5
community development	15	1.5
adult mental health	14	1.4
early childhood services	11	1.1
child and youth mental health	7	0.7
school-based services	7	0.7
drug and alcohol	6	0.6
service users	6	0.6
Family Relationships Advice Line	5	0.5
magistrate/judge	4	0.4
disability services	4	0.4
police	4	0.4
other	5	0.5
	<b>951</b>	

## Summary

There is an active ‘membership’ of the FLPNs, with the networks directly reaching an estimated seven to eight thousand individuals and agencies across the nation, representing a good range of professionals from across the family law system. Indirect information-flow through the further distribution of e-bulletins, etc., would add considerably to this number.

Overall, there is a reasonable balance of legal and human services practitioners involved. However there are some small regional networks where private family law practitioners are not engaged other than attendance at training events. At the same time, significant contributions to networks by some individual private practitioners were reported.

There are clearly still gaps in the spread of FLPN membership, with agencies that may not perceive themselves as involved with ‘family law’, eg, drug and alcohol services, and adult mental health services, being less well represented. This issue is discussed further in section 5.

## 2 TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All networks are expected to keep members informed about products, services and training opportunities<sup>6</sup>. Professional development is important in two ways: developing practitioners' knowledge and understanding about client need, and, through cross-sector training, helping build working relationships to facilitate appropriate referrals (see Figure 1, page 5). Training is not an end in itself, but should purposively seek to deliver on these objectives.

### Information dissemination

All networks undertake regular formal and ad hoc information sharing with members. The ways in which various networks discharge this task include:

- e-newsletters (general or themed, eg, family violence and child protection) and/or emails
- information sharing through network meetings and activities, eg, short workshops
- distributing video-recordings of activities to those unable to attend
- posting information on wiki sites, Facebook, other websites (eg, the auspice's website) and/or on the network's Family Relationships Online webpage
- project officers' attendance at other local or regional network meetings
- steering committee members wearing many hats within the 'family law system' to spread relevant information.

Examples of information dissemination include alerting members to recent research or evaluation findings, proposed or impending legislative changes and family law case decisions.

Most survey respondents stated that they receive information directly through the FLPN, such as emails and/or e-bulletins, and that they usually find this information useful and relevant. The high quality of most of the e-newsletters or e-bulletins produced by FLPNs is recognised and these products are reportedly widely used. Most also include updated referral information and agency contacts, designed to facilitate referrals. Some of the FLPNs also produce and maintain useful web-based information resources.

### Training and professional development activities

All the networks facilitate training and professional development, with variations in the focus, size, number and nature of activities. Overall however approaches are largely consistent. Activities are localised to the extent that the approach, direction and opportunities are tailored to local circumstances, topical issues and needs, access to local 'experts' or touring speakers, and take account of the availability of other opportunities across the service system. Geography is a determinant of how networks facilitate professional development across their area, with some networks (where practicable) increasingly utilising information and communication technology to involve distant members.

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<sup>6</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2011), p.6.

Broadly, training and professional development activities include:

- cross-sector professional development with associated activities to help build stronger working relationships and knowledge across the family law system
- specific-topic training (eg, AVERT family violence, child development, delivering culturally competent services)
- training / development targeted to particular sector members (eg, for legal professionals or family dispute resolution practitioners)
- presentations from a mix of high profile intra-state, national or international speakers and local 'experts'
- sub-groups or prototype groups that focus on a particular area to build knowledge in a collaborative way (eg, child protection, housing and homelessness).

#### **Annual conferences**

Some of the FLPNs hold annual conferences which draw together practitioners from across the sectors and provide the opportunity to hear high quality presentations from local and (in some cases) international speakers, across the legal and human service spheres. Most also feature panels discussions, which use local expertise and promote inter-agency discourse. Conference activities (eg, lunches) are designed to encourage networking. Examples include:

- Greater Sydney FLPN's annual 'Main Event'
- WA FPN's 2012 'Through the Looking Glass – working together in the Family Law system'
- SA FLPN's annual 2-day family law conference
- Albany/Wodonga FLPN's 2012 'Family law and mental health - Coming together' conference
- Newcastle FLPN's annual 'Gateway Conference'

#### **Cross-sector training and professional development**

'Cross-sector' activities draw on the premise that exposure to the theoretical and practice frameworks used by practitioners from the same or other disciplines raises awareness, fosters an informed understanding of others' beliefs and views, and engenders respect and trust in working relationships.

The core outcome of FLPNs – a locally coordinated family law system across legal and human service sectors – intrinsically demands cross-sector training and development. All FLPNs organise, promote and/or co-host cross-sector events that fit with this imperative. To one extent or another, the following are undertaken to deliver across-sector benefits:

- panel members specifically presenting on the same topic from different perspectives (eg, family dispute resolution approaches with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families)
- annual or periodic jurisdiction-based or whole-of-network conferences (ie, many sessions on one or more topics)
- activities on specific topics to allow in depth exploration of needs and service provision to, for example, teenagers, immigrants and refugees, children with aspergers, same sex couples, young parents, people with borderline personality disorders

- subsidising particular sectors (eg, regional members, law students, child protection workers) to attend an event, for example with travel, accommodation and/or registration costs
- quarantining event registrations to ensure a mix and balance of professional backgrounds
- action learning projects around, for example, referral pathways, collaborative law case management practice
- backing training/events onto other activities, eg, during a court circuit to attract lawyers and judicial officers.

Bridging the 'legal and non-legal divide' to deliver cross-sector training remains an issue. Members' participation is related to their perception of the relevance to their profession. Project officers and others reported that some lawyers are still of the view that the most relevant activities are those with a strictly 'legal' focus. To attract participants (especially those who are time-poor) across all sectors to examine an issue from different disciplinary perspectives, its relevance has to be clear to the intended participants.

*They (training events) are not really targeted towards lawyers. (Legal practitioner, regional city, explaining why he/she attended few events)*

#### **Greater Sydney FLPN Roadshows**

The roadshows were developed as a result of a request from a local branch of the NSW Law Society. FM Tom Altobelli is the keynote speaker and facilitator with Glenn Thompson (Chair of GSFLPN and private legal practitioner) as MC. There is a panel of local representatives which can be from Legal Aid, private lawyers, community based organisations, police, Family Relationship Centres, FaCS, etc. This gives an opportunity for local issues to be discussed as well as bringing together the lawyers and the non-legal sector to discuss and gain a better understanding of each other's roles. Greater Sydney took the roadshow to Dubbo and the Central Coast NSW. Central Coast have been able to use the roadshow as a platform and to continue the momentum that was gained as a result of it being held on the Central Coast. After the Dubbo roadshow, Greater Sydney has received requests to take the roadshow to the Bathurst/Orange region to help bring together the legal and non-legal sectors. A request has also been received for the roadshow as well as the Aboriginal Family Law workshop to be presented in the Gunnedah/ Tamworth region.

#### **Impacts for members**

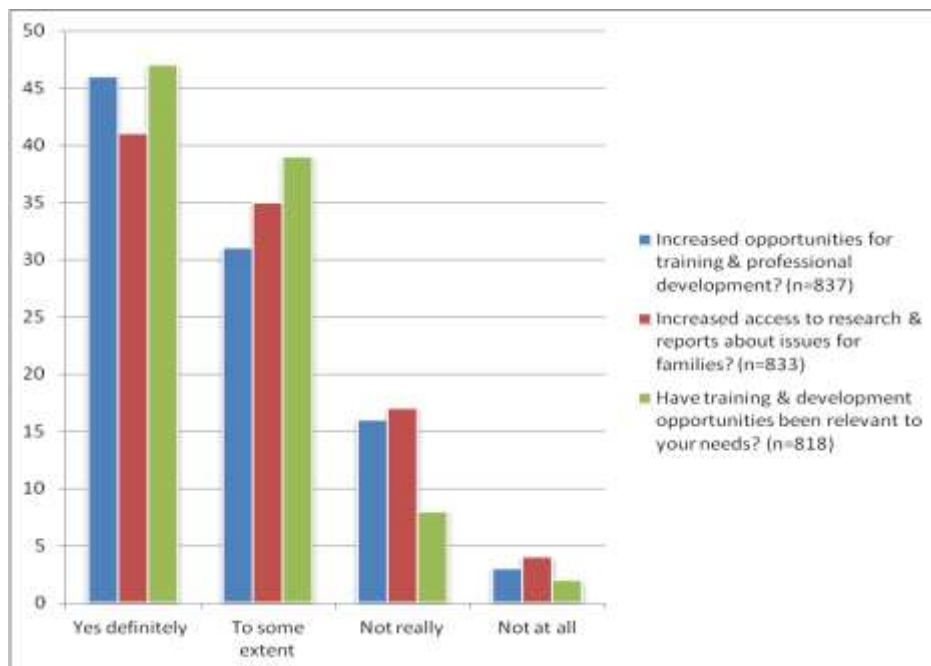
A majority of surveyed FLPN members believed they had benefitted professionally from participating in joint training opportunities with professionals from legal and human service backgrounds. Similarly, most agreed that FLPN membership had improved their access to relevant professional information (see Figure 2, page 12).

The general survey yielded numerous insightful comments from members testifying to the benefits for practitioners, and ultimately for clients, of cross-sector professional development:

*The AVERT training was a wonderful opportunity to speak with legal professionals and hear their perspectives, processes etc. This opened my eyes to the difficulties that we all face in our work. (PSCP worker, capital city)*

*It has given me a clearer understanding of the difficulties faced by legal practitioners and I believe it has given some legal practitioners a clearer view of our guidelines. This has opened up discussions and work on a joint protocols paper to assist us to work together more productively for families. (FDR provider, regional)*

Figure 2: Have network training and professional development activities improved members' access to information relevant to families and children?  
(n= see response numbers in table, which exclude n/a responses)



As shown in Figure 2, a minority of respondents to the general survey felt that they had not really benefitted from network training and professional development activities. Comments reflected local issues around the functioning of the network and decision-making about the training offered. These offer learnings – feedback in these cases concerned perceptions that the training was:

- not cross-sectoral and/or few training opportunities were provided:

*Due to the legal profession not actively participating in the network it is hard to gain a benefit since they are not in attendance. (FRC worker)*

- not well-pitched to meet needs, and of questionable quality:

*Time spent on some activities has been frustrating, eg, rhythmic hand clapping sessions, twisting our bodies into the shape of furniture etc. Legal practitioners tend to have extreme time pressures at work... I have found time spent at some 'feel good' workshops an insult on the use of my work time. (Legal practitioner)*

*The range of overseas 'experts' speaking at seminars has not been particularly helpful – they tend to hold views around child abuse within Family Court cases which are contentious at best and disproven at worst (eg PAS) and the Network has not provided speakers with counter-arguments. (Child protection worker)*



- devoid of the context of networking with a view to improved client outcomes:

*Mega events with big-name speakers let FLPNs report high numbers of participation but where's the evidence that they are talking to each other about real cases?* (Family support agency manager)

*It would be good to focus some attention in education sessions on having practitioners introduce themselves and their agencies, or interact, eg, in pairs or small group discussions, or an initial icebreaker activity.* (FDR practitioner)

The need for cross-sector training to be evidence-based was reinforced by a capital city child protection practitioner:

*This (a cross-sector training event) has been essential in realising how much work is yet to be done in bringing legal and social sciences professionals to some shared understandings. The next stage needs to be about challenging each other's practice and decision-making and having robust discussions. So many serious decisions are made on value judgements and assumptions instead of sound evidence from research.*

### Training needs

In developing their annual work plan, networks use a range of strategies to identify the topics to be covered over the period. Member-identified training needs are a key input – most steering committees reported that the project officer's role includes liaising with and canvassing network members about their needs. Many reported using sub-committees, working groups, prototype groups or reference groups. Less than 20% of respondent steering committees however indicated they have planning days which all members are welcome to attend.

Respondents to the general survey who felt they had unmet learning needs (about 30%) cited a range of topics from which they felt they would benefit. These included (in order of frequency of mention):

- legal issues, family law and families
- child development, attachment and impacts on children
- domestic and family violence
- meeting parent's needs and working with parents
- cultural training (related to both Indigenous and CALD issues)
- mental health and drug and alcohol training
- service-specific training needs.

*Would appreciate more training in CALD clients and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ... if we were more proficient in this area we may have more clients from these groups 'willing to give us a go'.* (FDR worker)

*I would like to know more about mediation between separating parents, and how to go about helping these people lessen the impact on their children.* (Child and youth mental health worker)

When respondents were asked their views about the unmet training needs of other practitioners in the family law system, a similar list was generated, with an emphasis on child inclusive matters. As a legal practitioner stated:

*Most lawyers only have a basic understanding about CIP (child inclusive practice) principles and processes. Some (many?) non-legal professionals have only a basic*

*understanding of the role of the law in determining parenting disputes when such matters proceed through the Court and come to the point of judicial determination.*

Some networks clearly plan the year's schedule drawing largely on member-identified interests and needs, while others described a more ad hoc approach based on the ideas of steering committee members or the availability of well-known speakers. In an area as complex as family law, networks need to balance responsiveness to locally identified issues with asking the 'hard questions' and including topics that *should* be delivered, for example, cross-cultural awareness.

Similarly, relying on active network members' views about training needs does not capture the training needs or interests of non-attending, alienated or potential members.

#### **Top End FLPN Family dispute resolution workshops**

In 2007, Top End FLPN showcased family dispute resolution services and/or Indigenous specific mediation models developed in 3 Indigenous communities and 4 non-Indigenous communities. An objective was to consider best practice principles for family dispute resolution with Indigenous peoples. Discussion identified the importance of ritual and ceremony in the models developed in Indigenous communities. For all models, because mediators are part of the community, their impartiality is gained through the process being perceived by participants as fair. It is important for participants to have the opportunity to be heard and for dialogue to be respectful. All models offered an alternative to court and conflict resolution. Three of the many recommendations identified that models need to be flexible, and to use existing community structures, and that non-Indigenous service providers need cross-cultural training specific to the region.

## **Summary**

There is no doubt that all networks meet the objective of 'developing and maintaining cross-sector training'. A range of small and large scale events, sometimes across the network's geographic area, are held each year. This objective is also meant to '*help build stronger working relationships across the family law system*'. It is less clear that the training and professional development activities always address this aim, and it is recommended that this aspect of the objective is strengthened in the Policy Guidelines.

Attendance at training and professional development events does not necessarily mean changes in behaviour in relation to practitioners working with other services and professions – this needs to be facilitated. Nevertheless a small number of networks is engaged primarily in organising training events and professional development workshops, without much evidence of leverage to build strong linkages across the wider family law system.

*Although the network provides a lot of seminars and workshop opportunities, as a network it provides little information sharing between its members, which reduces, I think, its overall effectiveness in this regard. (FRS worker, capital city)*

Where concerted efforts are made to bring legal and human services practitioners together in small group discussion (at the same table, in the same learning group,

etc), observations are that 'barriers are broken down' and information is readily exchanged about each others' perspectives.

The survey responses and review consultation provided clear examples of increased practitioner knowledge and understanding, leading to appropriate referrals which would otherwise not have happened. There was also self-reported evidence of increased capacity by practitioners, primarily as a result of training and professional development, to recognise client need which would not otherwise have been recognised (thereby precipitating referral). This included examples of increased capacity to identify the particular needs of children.

There is anecdotal evidence of the benefits of experiential learning where participants work through real-life scenarios in respect to clients' needs and what local services can offer parents, children and other family members. While very useful, these are as yet introductory and hypothetical, with few networks describing reflective inter-agency case-analysis to improve collaborative practice around real cases.

The experience of a number of FLPNs suggests that legal practitioners are attracted to events with respected judicial speakers, particularly held later in the day (ie, not during court sittings). An effective format used by many FLPNs is to combine key-note speakers with cross-sector, and often local, panels.

In what is consistently reported as a time-poor and over-stretched sector for both legal and human service practitioners, FLPNs need to maximise the take-up of training and professional development opportunities by ensuring the time of day and focus meet members' needs, and that 'joint' training meets the perceived learning needs of the different sectors.

#### **Recommendation 1**

*That the FLPN Policy Guidelines specify that training and professional development opportunities provided substantially by a FLPN should meet all the following criteria – be cross-sectoral (ie, relevant to legal and human service practitioners), be relevant to the development of the family law system, be responsive to the identified learning needs of local practitioners, and include specific opportunities for cross-sectoral networking to help build stronger working relationships across the family law system.*

#### **Coffs Harbour FLPN Court Ordered PSP Program workshops**

This workshop was initiated by a family lawyer who wanted to better understand what her clients were experiencing in the program. The FLPN worked with Interrelate and the FRC to facilitate an experiential session on Parenting Programs. The aim was to increase solicitors' knowledge of the program and hopefully help them see the benefits for separating parents of attending the program. The two sessions were fully booked with a wait list. The discussions that took place after the sessions were invaluable. One solicitor commented 'I've just realised that we are doing things that work against what you are trying to achieve with parents'; another stated 'the Centre is clearly making a positive difference with family law matters'.

### 3 NETWORKING

Networking means to come together, to share information and ideas, to make contact and alliances, and to develop a mutual understanding of each other's roles. The logic is that if there are active links between individuals and agencies, knowledge and understanding of the services available is improved, which in turn leads to better (ie, more appropriate and timely) referrals.

#### Networking activities

FLPNs undertake a range of general networking activities, including:

- coming together as the steering committee, as sub-committees/prototype groups, or as meetings where any member is welcome to attend
- project officer and steering committee members attending other interagency networks
- specific networking opportunities for members, eg, breakfasts or networking seminars
- 'virtual' networking and electronic information sharing
- showcasing local agencies and local system linkages, during other activities
- general educational and professional development events, which bring sectors together.

While most networks do all of these things to a greater or lesser extent, the emphasis on particular strategies differs between networks, and reflects local service system attributes, populations, geography and network priorities at the time. Networks with coordinating roles under their funding agreement may also establish links with regional or state-wide bodies or organisations, such as, for example, the relevant Family Law Practitioners' Associations, state-wide units of the relevant state or territory child protection departments, and the Council of Grandparents.

#### **Top End FLPN Mega Training Days**

After hearing about the idea at a national meeting, Top End FLPN, like other FLPNs, holds 'Mega Training Days'. The events are particularly relevant in the Top End because of the constantly changing and diverse population. Groups of frontline practitioners who work with families are given a scenario that reflects local issues and the changing population (eg, family in the defence force or detention centre). Practitioners work through the 15 or so information stalls to find out about available services and options. Participants de-brief about gaps and what they have learnt. The events are always very well attended.

Active facilitation of networking opportunities by the project officer underscores active participation of members. Project officers reported the following most significant actions in relation to networking:

- developing relationships with stakeholders, connecting face-to-face
- having a 'community presence' through interagency meetings, community/legal networks
- cross-sectoral collaboration in organising initiatives and events
- creating sub-committees with good cross sector representation

*The establishment of a subset of the steering committee for <a particular region> ensures greater representation for members based in <those areas> and that the regular meetings are relevant and of interest to those areas. (Regional project officer)*

- showcasing the roles of network member agencies
- polling the local stakeholders to ascertain local needs
- providing professional development opportunities in regional areas where workers would otherwise not have such access
- promoting informal discussion groups and forums
- distributing a regular e-bulletin
- using a community development approach.

*We have broadened the scope of activities from an event-based model to a deeper community development model. (Metropolitan project officer)*

## Participation levels

Around 46% of 908 respondents to the member survey stated that they had attended one or two FLPN activities or events in the past twelve months. A further 39% had attended three or more activities in the same period. Table 4 shows the comparative responses of some specific professional groups targeted for involvement in FLPNs, indicating reasonable participation rates of respondents across the sectors.

*Table 4: No. of FLPN events attended in last 12 months, by specific professions (n=380)*

Profession	3 or more events	1 or 2 events	0 events
Legal practitioner (n=192)	76 (59%)	84 (44%)	32 (17%)
FRC worker (n=83)	36 (43%)	30 (36%)	17 (21%)
Domestic and family violence (n=77)	27 (35%)	42 (55%)	8 (10%)
Child protection (n=28)	8 (29%)	14 (50%)	6 (21%)
Total (n=380)	147 (39%)	170 (45%)	63 (16%)

However 29% of all respondents claimed not to have attended any *training* events or not to have been aware of any being offered; similarly 31% claimed not to have attended any other type of *networking* event and/or being unaware of any being offered. When filtered by network, the number of respondents claiming not to have been aware of any *networking* opportunities was 20 to 25% for each of the capital city networks, with the exception of Brisbane where it was a low 6% despite a similar number of survey respondents. Some dissatisfaction was expressed by South Australian members outside Adelaide about lack of access to opportunities to participate in network activities.

## Barriers to participating in networking

Effective networking requires the participation of all sectors (legal and a range of human services providers). As noted above, in some FLPNs, the involvement of legal practitioners is reported to be very low.

*Lawyers remain lawyers, and I have been disappointed at their lack of ability to integrate with other services. The other aspect of the FLPN is that they come for the*

*free breakfasts etc but don't show willingness to continue to work together. (FDR practitioner in a Family Relationships Centre)*

Another issue relates to ensuring a network's presence across the geographic area. As members commented:

*Benefits to clients ceased when the network ceased to meet in our area (worker in a centre some distance from the auspice of the single FLPN for their state)*

*When the network held meetings we would keep up to date with changes to services and procedures. The network has not met in this region for 12 months. (Legal practitioner, regional area)*

A minority of networks are perceived by members to not be as active or collaborative in ensuring proportional representation across all relevant agencies and across all inter-sectoral issues:

*The pathways in <capital city> does not focus on the link between the community sector and the family law sector at all – it is now a FDV network and ignores the needs of the funded family law services and the FRC. (Family law services manager)*

Respondents were asked about barriers to their attendance at networking activities or events. Of the 951 respondents, 38% did not nominate any barriers. The remaining 62% (n=588) nominated a range of reasons (see Table 5), primarily related to the pressures of workloads, particularly for legal practitioners and FRC, child protection, domestic and family violence, and drug and alcohol workers. Over 35% of regional respondents identified geographic distance and travel time to events as barriers, compared with about 18% of metropolitan respondents.

Table 5: Barriers to participation in network activities / events (n=588)

Reason – barriers to participating	No. who gave this reason	%
difficulty being released from usual duties	341	58.0
time of day activities are scheduled	161	27.3
geographic distance to events	115	19.5
cost of attending	92	15.6
travel time to events	91	15.4
other work priorities	30	5.0
time of event clash	15	2.0
personal reasons (eg, family commitments)	11	1.5
lack of relevance	9	1.5
part time employment	9	1.0

The reasons most often stated for not attending events when this was a choice, (ie, when attendance would have been possible) was that the event was not well enough targeted to respondents' professional needs or lacked relevance to their field of practice (see Table 6, page 19). When filtered by profession, legal practitioners, domestic and family violence workers, child protection workers, and, surprisingly FRC workers most often reported this reason.

Table 6: Reasons for choosing not to participate in network activities / events (n=349)

Reasons for choosing not to attend	No. who gave this reason	%
not well enough targeted to my professional needs	119	34.1%
lack of relevance to my client group	66	18.9%
lack of relevance to my field of practice	72	20.6%
lack of cultural safety <sup>7</sup>	8	2.3%
lack of philosophical agreement	4	1.1%

*I prioritise other activities that are culturally appropriate. (Community sector worker, regional city)*

*... the network activities are not specific to the needs of practitioners in this part of the state. (FDR worker, regional city)*

*The focus of roles differ. Whilst it is useful to have networking opportunities I need to target the time so that I am really engaging with other professionals within my area of (my capital city) – not from all over the place. The Network does not really enable this. The education event that I attended was excellent however really big ... I am attracted by the info I receive from (a smaller network) which seems to be regular, local and targeted at the service delivery level. In (the capital city network) the focus seems on mega events rather than networking. (FDR worker, capital city)*

*As a face to face crisis domestic violence worker I struggle with what the laws and best practice state and the reality of what solicitors and magistrates actually do... it is very hard to sit through some of these meetings when what is talked about is not practised. (Family and domestic violence service worker).*

These findings are consistent with a study on local area collaborations by Family and Relationship Services Australia<sup>8</sup> (FRSA) which found that workforce constraints and poor internal culture are barriers to collaboration. It concluded that:

- successful networks often have dedicated network coordination or support which ensures content is meaningful
- practitioners are not always sure that management value participation in collaborative networks
- the size and complexity of the service sector and local community can constrain collaboration activities
- other constraints relate to workload, workforce constraints and poor internal culture.

### Impacts for members

About 85% of respondents (n=897) agreed that being part of the network had improved their understanding of the roles of others with whom they were previously unfamiliar – over 50% were unequivocal that this had ‘definitely’ been the case (see Figure 3, page 20).

<sup>7</sup> See definition, page 36.

<sup>8</sup> Family Relationship Services Australia (2010) *What Helps and Hinders: A Consultation Project Exploring Collaboration between Community Services working with Families, Children and Young People in 5 Communities*. FRSA, Canberra.

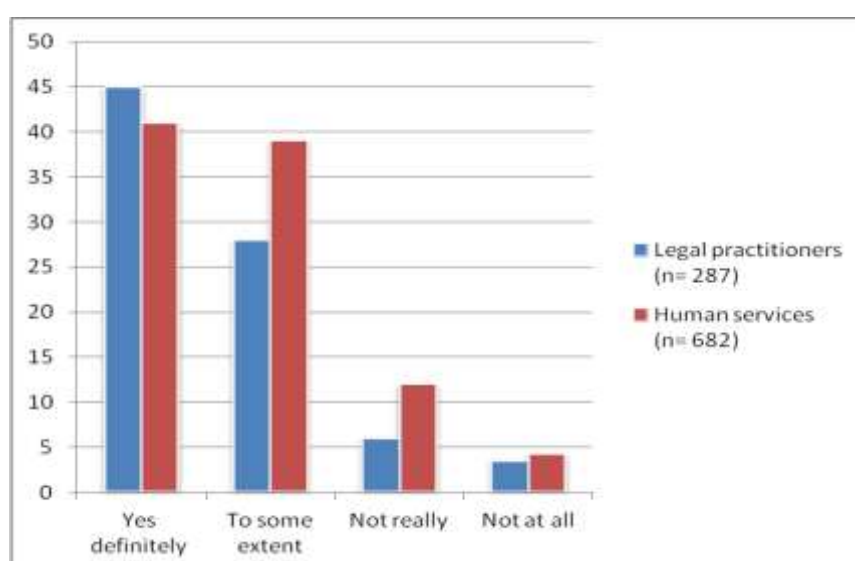


*Yes definitely, and the better I understand referral services, the better I have been able to explain the worth of these services to my clients and they have been more willing to engage. (Legal practitioner)*

*Greater awareness of DV services and legal services (developed through discussions with network members) has meant that the ability to refer the client is 'right at my fingertips', so to speak. (FRC worker)*

*Practitioners from non-legal backgrounds can provide insight, knowledge and experience which legal practitioners do not consider .. through activities involving legal and non-legal practitioners working together, with this knowledge we can provide a more complete service to our clients. (Legal practitioner, regional city)*

Figure 3: Has being part of the network improved your understanding of (the other sector)? (% of respondents).



A senior judicial officer from the Family Court of Australia provided strong support for the FLPN program, reported hearing about their value, and appreciates that there is a network of services around the Courts. Other senior judicial officers expressed similar views.

## Summary

All FLPNs engage in activities designed to bring agencies and practitioners together and share information to promote understanding of roles. This broad objective is clearly being achieved for the majority of the FLPNs. There is very strong feedback about the positive impacts within the family law system.

The main barrier to participation in network activities generally is, not surprisingly, the pressure of workloads, pointing to the importance of ensuring FLPN activities are targeted to members' needs and interests, and their capacity to attend.

Geographic distance was confirmed as a barrier to participation, underscoring the need for cost and time effective strategies to overcome distance.



Key learnings are that effective networking takes considerable project officer time and commitment by both the steering committee and project officer to forging and maintaining local linkages through a community development approach. The review indicated that networks are more effective where:

- there is significant investment in paid worker time, commensurate with the population and geographic area to be covered
- the project worker has a high profile and takes an energetic developmental approach
- 'networking' per se is valued (not simply incidental to training events)
- the project officer role is independently 'visible', and not seen as under the direction of a particular agency – this can be more difficult to achieve when a person in the project officer role simultaneously holds a senior position with the auspice.

All FLPNs are encouraged to place priority, when budgeting, on apportioning sufficient funds to engage one or more project officers for enough hours to develop and maintain an effective network, taking into account the value of a community development approach and taking account of the particular features of the area covered by the FLPN.

A further key learning is that effective networking requires a steering committee that is balanced (as discussed in section 8), and has credibility with private legal practitioners, either as members or linked through their professional association.

## 4 IMPROVING REFERRAL PROCESSES

Good referral processes are a means to the end of improved outcomes for families. Streamlined referral processes are facilitated by:

- networking, which builds awareness of roles and the personal relationships on which interagency cooperation often relies (discussed in section 3)
- access to current details about 'how to', 'where to', 'when to' and 'how much' in relation to services and programs, to enable FLPN members to make timely and appropriate referrals.

### Referral activities

Networking activities which introduce various agency staff and services were reported as invaluable when considering referral options. For example:

*It has allowed me to make warm referrals where appropriate and get clients prompt help. It has also provided me with a better understanding of the breadth of services available. By developing contacts through the FLPN I have been able to identify the best service for particular clients at particular stages of their matters, rather than simply referring to a generic service which may not meet their individual needs. (Legal practitioner, regional area)*

Referral 'tools' developed by FLPNs include service listings in e-bulletins, service directories, referral protocols or processes, and advice about wait times for post separation services. Table 7 summarises the use by networks of common information-provision activities which support referrals.

Table 7: Activities related to information-provision and referral processes, by no. of networks and whether provided

Activity	Yes or intended	Not across full geographic area	No
Regular e-bulletin (n=27)	23	0	4
Service directory (n=28)	22	2	4
Referral protocols or processes (n=27)	25	1	1

Bulletins and targeted emails distributed by FLPNs typically include information about services, program profiles and contact details. FLPNs also circulate descriptions of local programs (eg, parenting skills, anger management, counselling services) to service providers and the courts to support referrals.

Some FLPNs have taken steps to develop common or shared local referral tools and mechanisms to support referrals. These include:

- shared forms for facilitating referrals between practitioners
- use of a 'fax-back' referral process (whereby clients agree that their details can be faxed to a specified service, which will contact them directly)
- collaboratively trialling local referral processes and pathways.

*The information I received at the Pathways expo last year gave me a better idea of the waiting times, inclusion/exclusion criteria etc. This was really beneficial so that I could give clients accurate information so that they were supported (not falling through*

*cracks) and didn't waste their time speaking with services that may not be appropriate for their need. (PSCP worker)*

In addition, as part of professional development, many FLPNs offer experiential activities where participants work in small groups to navigate a family's pathway, thereby gaining an understanding about services and referral options and mechanisms applicable to a topical or local case scenario. Other professional development related to referrals has included, for example, workshops about confidentiality and information sharing, mandatory reporting obligations and the needs of children during or after separation.

*I presented POP at the showcase event and subsequently many referrals were received from solicitors to the parenting orders program. (POP worker, regional area)*

## **Service directories**

Most FLPNs utilise one or more service directories to support referrals. To be useful, the information must be comprehensive, user friendly and current. Networks have therefore mainly used web-enabled directories which are typically searchable by target group (eg, women, men, children) or by type of service (eg, family violence, legal services) and contain contact details. Supplementary information may include eligibility, cost, transport, and wait times which are often up-dated by the project officer prior to regional court circuits.

### **Victoria FLPN Network on A Stick**

As one part of providing access to referral information across Victoria, Victoria FLPN developed NoAS ('Network on A Stick'), a web-enabled searchable directory which can be used interactively, and can be downloaded to a USB stick for ease of access and transportability. Each service, by type, is located on a map of Victoria to display the location and contact details.

### **Northern Rivers FLPN E-service directory**

Northern Rivers FLPN developed an 'E-service directory' to cover the six shires within their area. It was inexpensive to develop, and is a cost-effective method of making current information readily accessible through a web link. A small number of administrative hours are allocated to keeping it current, through use of a template.

In some areas, rather than the FLPN producing a directory, the steering committee has decided to leverage off existing directories and ensure these include details about services in the family law system. In Victoria, service information is complemented by '1800 FAM PATH', a free telephone information service for family law practitioners about post separation parenting programs and services in Victoria.

While web-enabled service directories are becoming necessary, some FLPNs have combined promoting the network with using different hard-copy formats to provide service contact details. These include themed 'referral sheets' (Cairns), wallet-sized referral cards (Launceston and Hobart), bi-fold (Central West NSW) and tri-fold (Albury/Wodonga) referral cards, desk plates (Illawarra) and the novelty of scrolls encased in pens (Greater Brisbane).

*Development of desk calendars with referral numbers and info about the network really helped to facilitate new interest and relationships. (Regional auspice representative)*

Directories are essential to facilitating referrals. One of the reasons given by surveyed members who reported no improvement in their capacity to make referrals (11% of 159), was that they had not been provided with relevant information such as a directory. Many others provided similar comment incidental to other questions:

*... they should provide all attendees with an index of all associated services, grouped eg legal, counselling, mediation, housing, substance abuse, whether indigenous/non-indigenous provider etc. All attendees would then have a comprehensive list for future use. (FDR worker, in an area where no directory is available)*

*A book of who is who would make it easier for us to refer to the correct agency / professional. (Legal practitioner, regional area)*

*Provide a comprehensive list for distribution amongst all other providers of their roles and contact details, how referrals can be made and by whom, and the costs involved. (Legal practitioner, regional city)*

Where no directory of service-providers exists, project officers and others in networks asserted a range of reasons. These included their views that:

- current inter-agency arrangements are adequate, eg, 'already existing effective arrangements are in place for referrals to community organisations'
- insufficient time is available within available resources, for the project officer to maintain the currency of a directory
- the project officer personally delivers this service when members contact them for details.

It was of note that surveyed general members in some of these particular networks mentioned the lack of a service directory as problematic. The time required to maintain currency of a directory differs, dependent upon the size of the service system in different locations. However many FLPNs are providing access to directories, with regular up-dating, and consider the time involved to be cost-effective in supporting inter-agency referrals.

## **Court kiosks**

The Federal Magistrates Court has primary locations in the capital cities and in Dandenong, Cairns, Launceston, Newcastle, Parramatta and Townsville<sup>9</sup>. In 2010-11, the court also circuited to 33 rural and regional locations, as well as hearing urgent or procedural matters by video-link<sup>10</sup>. The Family Court of Australia has registries in the capital cities and 13 other centres<sup>11</sup>. The Family Court of Western Australia sits in Perth, but circuits to specified regional centres<sup>12</sup>.

The 2010-11 annual report on the Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court refers to registries engaging locally, including with FLPNs, to improve services and approaches with clients, in addition to enabling the court to

<sup>9</sup> Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court of Australia (2012) *2010-2011 Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court of Australia: Chief Executive Officer's Report*. Family Law Courts, Canberra, p.20.

<sup>10</sup> Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court of Australia (2012), p.35.

<sup>11</sup> Family Court of Australia (2012) *Family law registries*  
<<http://www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/FCOA/home/about/Locations/Locations/>>  
accessed on 18 June 2012

<sup>12</sup> Family Court of Western Australia (2012) *About the Family Court*  
<[http://www.familycourt.wa.gov.au/A/about\\_the\\_family\\_court.aspx?uid=0585-2574-5706-9153](http://www.familycourt.wa.gov.au/A/about_the_family_court.aspx?uid=0585-2574-5706-9153)>  
accessed on 18 June 2012

make informed referrals for ongoing community-based service provision<sup>13</sup>. The importance of having referral information available at the court, for example through referral kiosks, is also the subject of a recommendation in a recent report of the Family Law Council about improving services to CALD clients<sup>14</sup>.

A number of FLPNs and/or related family law system services provide direct information to the court about services available. This is done either through current information about services being compiled for the advice of the Federal Magistrate or Judge, or through the presence in court of a worker (eg, from the FRC) who can directly provide information about available services. This approach reportedly works well in some circuit courts where the service system is small and collegial working relationships can be developed between the various consistent personnel involved, including the Federal Magistrate. This approach facilitates well-targeted court-ordered referrals. However there is also a need for mechanisms such as the kiosks which can provide information directly to litigants and legal practitioners.

Twenty of the 36 FLPNs are involved in coordinating or operating a 'court kiosk'. In some cases, the 'kiosk' is literally a display stand of brochures about various local services and programs for separating and separated families. Other kiosks are staffed by the project officer and/or rostered service providers (eg, FRC workers) on days the court is sitting. Using a space which allows privacy, and drawing on service directories and wait lists, information is provided to parents, self-represented litigants, family members and legal practitioners about available services and programs, eligibility criteria and wait times. At some courts, kiosk workers are able to contact service providers immediately to make appointments for clients, including while the court adjourns.

Network representatives asserted during the review that kiosks must be staffed by practitioners who have credibility, are non-partisan and able to give timely and accurate information from the kiosk. It is also clear that the role of the kiosk workers must be understood and accepted by all parties, including court personnel, to maximise use of the service. Ideally, information about services which may assist them should be available to separating families at 'early intervention' stages, eg, when applications are filed, and not only as part of court proceedings.

#### **SA FLPN Pathways Court Based Information and Referral Service**

The Pathways Court Based Information and Referral Service establishes a kiosk at the Commonwealth Law Courts in Adelaide. The kiosk, a collaboration between the SA FLPN, Family Law Courts and family law service providers, is documented in a MOU. Located in the Commonwealth Law Courts building, the kiosk operates 3 mornings per week and as arranged between the network and the Family Law Courts. It provides a 'walk in' information and referral service to separated parties and their legal representatives. The presiding judge or Federal Magistrate can also direct separated parties to attend the kiosk to find out about services and make appointments while their matter is temporarily stood down. That an appointment has been made is conveyed to the judicial officer to assist them to fashion their orders and decide upon the length of an adjournment.

<sup>13</sup> Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court of Australia (2012), p.36.

<sup>14</sup> Family Law Council (2012a) *Improving the Family Law System for Clients from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds: A report to the Attorney-General by the Family Law Council*. Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, p.86.

There are some courts where no kiosk or alternative arrangement is available. Reasons provided in such cases by the relevant FLPN representatives included:

- the local court-house does not offer a private setting
- providing a kiosk is still subject to collaborative discussion (eg, where the network is relatively new)
- as courts in the capital cities sit most days, the task of rostering staff at a kiosk at these courts (where no alternative service exists), is significantly challenging.

A perceived tension was also raised about the value of utilising FLPN or member resources to assist what might only be a small number of family court users, given practitioners are time-poor, and in the context of cuts to funding for other related services. Others, however, defended the value of assisting even one parent or child. For example:

*The kiosk is the most positive experience for this FLPN, yet the most challenging. If one family is assisted and can be diverted to a non-adversarial setting, that's enough.*  
(Auspice, metropolitan network)

*[Re helping a particular man] ...shows that if we weren't there that day, he wouldn't have been linked in to services, or known he could provide info to the independent children's lawyer, or been supported on the day to get and complete paperwork.*  
(Steering committee member, small network)

Kiosks are resource-intensive, particularly in areas where the court sits frequently, and require logistical and practical support around organising the roster and arranging back-filling. A regional project officer for a medium network that does not provide a kiosk reported, *'The level of funding is unlikely to support additional tasks being taken on by the project officer'*. The Greater Melbourne FLPN, which supports the kiosk at the Dandenong Registry, has established a working party to consider the business model of providing kiosks at registries and the means by which this resource-demanding function can be continued.

#### **ACT and Region FLPN Community Referral and Information Service (CRIS)**

The ACT and Region FLPN implemented the Community Referral and Information Service (CRIS) for the Canberra Registry of the Federal Magistrates Court for a twelve month period to early 2012. The FLPN funded an experienced practitioner to provide the service for six hours a week. A review of CRIS by the FLPN has recently been completed (Winkworth 2012). While specific to CRIS, the review highlighted issues which are potentially relevant to all FLPNs considering or providing kiosk-type services. These included the importance of all parties being clear about the purpose of the service and of ensuring shared commitment and understanding by all prior to commencement. The review also noted that referral and information available at the 'front-end', ie, earlier in the court process, would benefit families, "particularly vulnerable families who seek an exemption from formal dispute resolution", and that other means of early referral, eg, potentially from the court registrar, may facilitate this. Other issues noted were the need for attention to timing (around when best to try to engage persons in considering available services) and the location at the court (the need for privacy).

The Chief Magistrate of the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia, consulted for this review, spoke highly of the benefits of court kiosks, and of their potential role in assisting with case management by federal magistrates. The evaluation of the Dandenong Family Law Courts Registry case management trial found, in regards to the kiosk, that the kiosk delivered benefits which the Court was unable to offer.

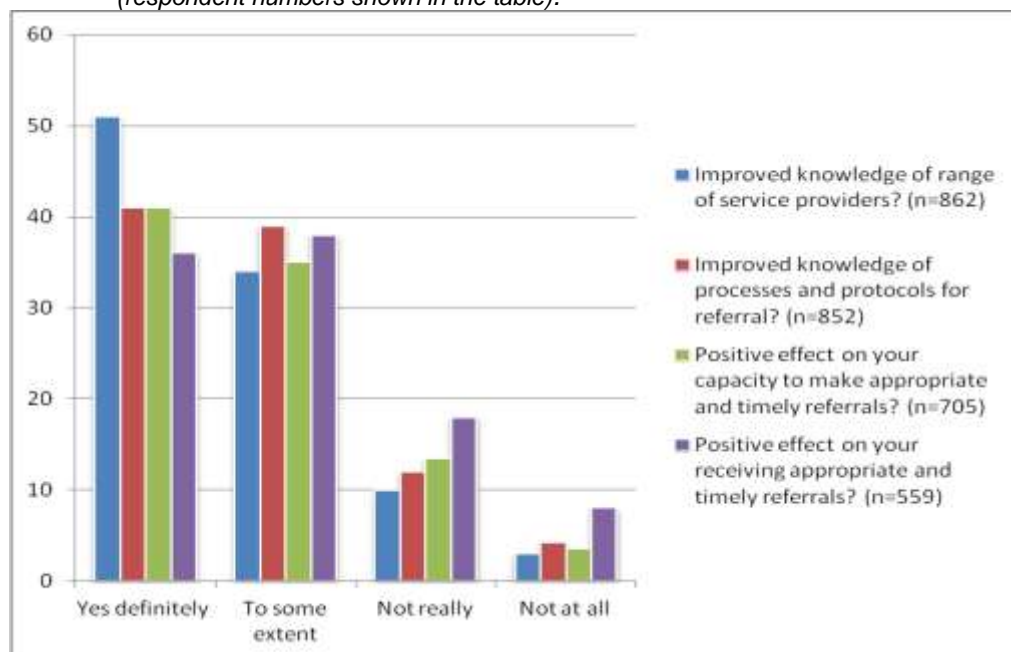
Its role in awareness raising and increasing access to community-based services, as well as improving links across the family law system, was commended<sup>15</sup>.

The FLPNs have a legitimate role in facilitating a 'kiosk' or similar information-provision unless this role is being undertaken by other means (such as by the FRC or by suitably-informed registry staff). It is important however, given the considerable outlay of time and effort in providing a kiosk, that the role of the kiosk and the objectives of the initiative are clear and that evaluation occurs about the extent to which these are being met.

### Impacts for members

The review found clear indications that FLPN referral-related activities do improve interagency and inter-sectoral knowledge, and processes for referrals of clients, within the family law system (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Impact of network activities on referral knowledge and practice ( %s)  
(respondent numbers shown in the table).



A majority of surveyed general members reported positive effects on their capacity to make timely and appropriate referrals. A majority of those receiving referrals also reported positive impacts. These findings were evident across regional and metropolitan areas and across sectors, and were supported by numerous anecdotal examples:

*The FLPN is a crucial referral network into our Legal Aid programs. They are also critical for us forming referral networks in regional areas. I could not imagine doing my job without them.* (Legal practitioner, capital city)

*It has given me more clarity about what process my client is likely to be going through and subsequently increased confidence in making appropriate referrals.* (Community health worker)

<sup>15</sup> Federal Magistrates Court of Australia (2012) *Review of the Dandenong Project*. Family Law Courts, Canberra.



*Currently working in a very low socioeconomic area of the state. Therefore clients have high needs, and to effectively refer and know they will get the most prompt attention possible has been extremely supportive for the children involved. (FDR worker)*

Respondents who receive referrals reported increased knowledge and confidence, resulting in more appropriate referrals:

*Other network members feel confident that their clients will receive appropriate service as they know people in our agency now. Referral problems are more readily resolved due to improved relationships between service providers. (FRC, regional area)*

Comments from a few of the surveyed members who reported not seeing improvements in referral processes related to perceptions about competition for clients between different providers of the same services, reinforcing the observation that silos still exist in some localities:

*Pathways has informed our opposition of our products and they have targeted where we are targeting. We have had to work a lot harder to get our numbers. (FDR provider, regional area)*

*Most community agencies/FRCs still do not understand that others are not in competition with them for business but rather to assist clients in the most appropriate referrals for them. A lot of FRCs and community groups believe that to share is to lose control over process. (Legal practitioner providing mediation services, capital city)*

Of respondents whose capacity to make referrals had reportedly not improved (n=311), 49% felt they already had the relevant knowledge and capacity. The remaining 51% or 159 respondents gave a range of reasons predominantly related to systems issues (see Table 8), including:

- lack of specialist services in regional areas – FLPNs can only work with the range and type of services available
- difficulties where system partners do not see themselves as part of the ‘family law system’, eg, drug and alcohol or child protection services
- wait-lists and eligibility issues undermine timely and responsive referrals:

*You can make referrals, but many organisations (including ours) have long waiting lists. (Children’s Contact Service worker)*

*Some services such as Brighter Futures are so busy they are not even taking referrals for a waiting list. (Legal practitioner, regional area)*

*Most of the services are not well targeted to litigants’ needs. They will not provide reportable services. Groupwork is limited. Supervised time has waitlists around 3 to 6 months. They commonly reject cases as unsuitable, even if there are consent orders for people to attend. (Magistrate, metropolitan area)*

**Table 8: Reasons given for network participation not improving capacity to make ‘timely and appropriate’ referrals, where improvement was required (n=159)**

Reason	No.	%
waiting times	88	55.3%
required services not available	48	30.0%
eligibility criteria issues	45	28.0%
information not provided by the FLPN	17	10.6%
other (eg, client costs)	3	1.8%



## Impacts for families and children

The desired outcome of more streamlined and better targeted referral processes is that children and families will receive more timely, appropriate services and that, where possible, suitable mediated outcomes will be achieved. This review has not included direct evaluation of client outcomes. However it is reasonable to assume that the improvements noted by professionals do have flow-on effects for clients.

*Too many to mention! [examples of specific benefits to clients]. I have an improved awareness of available services to make better, more relevant referrals. The service providers know me and we discuss referrals and they tailor specific services / programmes for my clients and their families. (Legal practitioner, regional city)*

Figure 5 (page 31) lists some of the examples given by respondents who stated that participation in FLPN activities had improved their capacity to work cooperatively to meet their clients' needs. While the survey respondents are a small proportion of the overall FLPN membership, it is reasonable to assume that these types of examples are not isolated.

The Chief Justice of the Family Court, consulted for this review, stated that she consistently receives positive feedback about the FLPNs as they bring together different areas: *'Nothing like that ever happened before; it was just silos'*. She stated the view that families are benefitting from the coming-together of the range of organisations and capacities involved.

The review noted that some networks still struggle with siloed thinking, such that sharing of information does not necessarily lead to supported referrals or successful outcomes. The concept of 'referrals' can be limiting when families may actually need interagency collaborative problem-solving or integrated responses involving a number of agencies. Referral without case collaboration puts families in touch with services but does not necessarily provide the framework for addressing families' and children's needs in a way which effectively involves all of the required agencies.

While some longer-established networks have initiated pilots and trials of collaborative case management, other networks have not progressed beyond the 'information about available services' stage. For a range of reasons, including resources, still working to consolidate the network, and being more focussed on training and professional development, they have not yet turned their attention to how to facilitate more streamlined and integrated referral processes and pathways.

### **Sunshine Coast FLPN Keeping Children Safe prototype group**

*The Keeping Children Safe in Separating Families prototype group is in the process of developing a pilot project to test a collaborative response to protecting children in 6 separated families. The statutory child protection agency, mediators, school-based counselling and behaviour support staff, sexual assault services, POP, court child consultants and others are involved. The project sits at the nexus of statutory child protection powers, family dispute resolution processes envisaged by the Family Law Act and family violence legislation. Its aim is to keep the child/ren safe while working with the parents to resolve conflict, reduce substance abuse, obtain support for themselves, and enter into voluntary arrangements for their child's protection and safe parenting. Referrals will be made by the child protection agency, school or another agency in contact with the child/ren. Parents will be provided with information, mediation and therapeutic supports. Children will be supported by a specialised child counsellor who presents and represents the child's interests in the family dispute resolution process.*

## Summary

The review highlighted considerable anecdotal evidence of families and children benefitting from the streamlining of appropriate referrals between professionals (legal and human services) as a result of FLPN networking. Figure 5 (page 31) provides a small sample of the many such stories. While outcomes for these families are unknown, processes appear to have been positive.

Enabling timely and appropriate referrals requires networks to put in place structures or processes that facilitate referrals. Personal contacts between practitioners engender understanding of roles. Smooth referral processes reflect the level and health of these relationships, so directing time and effort to developing *and* maintaining good professional relationships is crucial, particularly in geographic areas and sectors with high worker turnover.

Good professional relationships do not however obviate the need for up-to-date, comprehensive information to facilitate referrals, for example, service directories. FLPNs are encouraged to share learnings about different options for directories and strategies for efficient updating of contact details.

Effective referrals are impacted by system issues, including in particular the availability of appropriate services, waiting times and costs to clients. There are also difficulties where associated or related service providers do not readily see their intersection with, or role in, working with families and children in the 'family law system'. Difficulties also arise when service providers compete for clients.

Court based 'information kiosks' were viewed favourably by steering committee members and judicial officers consulted during the review, although there is variation in what is provided and little formal evaluation as yet of their role. Anecdotal information suggests they provide a valuable service to circuit courts in many regional areas. FLPNs are encouraged to share learnings about effective strategies in providing 'court kiosks'.

Court kiosks are resource-intensive, particularly in the larger population centres, and the feasibility of kiosks in the those metropolitan regions without a current arrangement is still to be fully investigated.

### **Recommendation 2**

*That it is identified in the FLPN Policy Guidelines that, where FLPN members do not have access to a local directory or directories relevant to the family law system, it is an appropriate FLPN role to develop and maintain this resource.*

### **Recommendation 3**

*That FLPNs which haven't already done so are encouraged to consider their role in facilitating 'information kiosks' at the Family Law Courts, in association with the court registries and others within the service system, to facilitate access by the Court and by other users (eg, parents, family members, legal practitioners, self-represented litigants) to information about local family law services and supported referral processes. This may entail liaising with the courts to overcome structural and practical issues. Any implementation plans for 'court kiosks' should incorporate a clear role statement and objectives, and action research to evaluate achievement of objectives.*

Figure 5. Client benefits: case examples provided by survey respondents

*By receiving regular information from the FLPN project officer I have been aware of appropriate courses available in the local area and have been able to refer to those courses rather than generic courses. For example, I had a matter which was before the Court, and the father was experiencing difficulties with the teenage child running away to the mother (who was unable to provide a safe environment for the child). The Federal Magistrate wanted the father to participate in a course to assist him to deal with the child. Rather than a generic parenting course I was able to ask the court to make an order that he participate in a course run locally by Relationships Australia which focussed particularly on raising teenagers, and I was able to easily access the information about when the course was next running and availabilities within it. Both the father and the child benefitted from this. (Legal practitioner)*

*A new service has opened recently for men and we were able to refer the father to this service for further support. We heard about this and had met the person who started this service at one of the networking events organised by the Family Pathways. (Children's Contact Centre worker)*

*I was able (on more than one occasion) to give advice to a parent about use of the contact centre for their specific needs - in terms of what the service offers and what it cannot offer, after speaking to the contact centre co-ordinator and fully understanding their operational limits and features. (FDR provider)*

*Two parents who undertook information sessions in Family Law made greater effort to agree about what was best for their children. The legal practitioner was very supportive and focussed and subtly worked towards a good outcome for the family. (FDR provider)*

*I have grandparent clients and have been able to provide them with some material from other persons in our network and suggest a support group they may wish to attend. They have advised me this was very beneficial. (Legal practitioner)*

*A client (4yr old) was able to access counselling immediately through referral and avoid waiting the three months on our waiting list. (Child mental health worker)*

*After warm referral, mother participated in mediation when the father, me and everyone else thought she wouldn't. (Legal practitioner)*

*After referral for counselling, a child felt empowered to start a relationship with a parent who had been previously demonised by the other parent and the offending parent can finally see that that parent may have been in error. (Legal practitioner)*

*In many cases my clients have resolved minor and in some cases major disputes through the intervention of FRC professionals, contact centre staff and domestic violence professionals. (Legal practitioner)*

*Parent A attended FRC and as part of story reported that parent B had a mental illness. On assessment of parent B this was confirmed. Due to the creation of the network relationship with a local mental health service provider we were able to refer Parent A and children to that service for counselling support. This assisted greatly in helping them agree to a workable parenting plan. (FRC)*

*Male client facing legal challenge in regard to residence of daughter was referred to suitable Family Law solicitor. The non-adversarial, collaborative approach of the legal representative facilitated a suitable, child-focussed outcome for both parents and child. (Counsellor)*

*An extreme FV matter where mother and three children were being constantly exposed to the father's violence. He had her accepting verbal, physical, financial and emotional abuse for six years before her attendance at the FRC. The matter was given a 'not suitable for FDR' certificate and warm referrals were made to the local Women's Refuge and CLS who accessed Legal Aid for the mother. The two services supported this woman and her children and kept them safe for the 18 months it took to get the matter resolved in Court. It is a credit to both the services and the FRC for believing her FV claims when many other services had not assisted her. (FDR provider)*

## 5 LINKAGES WITH SPECIALIST SERVICES

The Policy Guidelines state that networks should be inclusive of individuals and agencies that work with families and children affected by family violence, child protection needs, drugs and alcohol, and mental health concerns<sup>16</sup>. It is the very complexity and challenging nature of the issues facing these families that means they require tailored, timely and specialist services to navigate the system and address often entrenched patterns and circumstances. The challenges faced by families and children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and CALD backgrounds also require specific and culturally competent responses.

### **Family violence, child protection, mental health, drug & alcohol services**

*Many separated families are affected by family violence, safety concerns, mental health problems and issues linked to the misuse of addictive substances. These families are the predominant users of post-separation services and the legal sector. Resolution of post-separation issues for such families presents a challenge for the family law system.*<sup>17</sup>

In 2010-11, 44% of applications for final orders in the FCoA involved children, as did 65% of applications for final orders heard in the Federal Magistrates Court<sup>18</sup>. Where cases involve serious allegations of sexual or physical abuse of children, a dedicated case management system, Magellan, is used. In 2009, around 2% of total filings in children's matters across the two courts were Magellan matters<sup>19</sup>.

In 2010-11, multiple risk factors identified for families in the Family Court of Western Australia included family violence (44.8% of cases), substance misuse (34%), child abuse issues (29.5%), and mental health issues (28.5%)<sup>20</sup>. For families with complex issues, 'responses involve identifying the relevant issues and assisting family members to use the services, advice, and dispute resolution and decision-making processes that best fit their circumstances.'<sup>21</sup>

The need for legal practitioners and family law services to understand these complex issues and work collaboratively with service providers supporting children and families affected by drugs and alcohol, family violence, mental health and child protection issues is well established. It has been confirmed through multiple reports and reviews by the Courts and the Family Law Council since the implementation of the 2006 reforms.

The 2009 internal review of the FLPN program found that links with child protection and domestic and family violence agencies were in place. The current independent review confirmed the involvement of domestic and family violence agencies. At the level of 'linkage' (ie, receiving information about network activities), this is still the case (see Table 3, page 8).

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<sup>16</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2011), p.6.

<sup>17</sup> Kaspiw, R., Gray, M., Weston, R., Moloney, L., Hand, K., Qu, L. & the Family Law Evaluation Team (2009) *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms*. Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, p.E4.

<sup>18</sup> Family Court of Australia and Federal Magistrates Court of Australia (2012), p.11 and p.26.

<sup>19</sup> Kaspiw et. al. (2009), p.303.

<sup>20</sup> Family Court of Western Australia (2011) *Annual Review 2010/11*. The Author, Perth, p.17.

<sup>21</sup> Kaspiw et. al. (2009), p.E4.

*Expansion of membership to include more agencies that are not traditionally seen as part of family law, ie mental health, drug & alcohol, has been an achievement. These agencies expand knowledge and awareness for other members and bring new perspectives. (Project officer, regional area)*

Some of the 33 FLPNs which responded to a question about difficulty recruiting or retaining steering committee members noted these sectors as 'difficult':

- child protection (mentioned by 13 of 33 steering committees)
- mental health services (7 steering committees)
- drug and alcohol (6 steering committees)
- domestic and family violence (2 steering committees).

The low number of FLPNs reporting specific difficulties suggests that most steering committees do *not* experience difficulties recruiting committee members from these sectors. Anecdotally, however, there is considerable variation at the local level, influenced by factors such as the size of the service sector, turn-over of sector workers, and whether recruitment efforts have as yet been made for representatives from each of these sectors.

### Child protection

Three percent of 951 respondents to the general survey identified their area of professional activity as 'child protection', with variation from area to area – for 16 FLPNs, no child protection workers responded. Almost 40% of steering committees identified they have difficulties recruiting or retaining representatives from the child protection sector. Reasons proffered related to workers being 'too busy' and surprisingly to some child protection workers querying the relevance of family law to their (state-based) responsibilities.

*Getting anyone from child protection at any level to respond to the opportunity to be a committee member and work collaboratively within the pathways network has been impossible. (Regional steering committee)*

However most steering committees do list child protection as represented:

*Historically we have had difficulty recruiting and retaining representation from child protection, but in the past 12 months we have had stable/consistent representation. (Capital city steering committee)*

Networks across Australia have consistently offered training and professional development opportunities to increase understanding of the interface of the child protection system with the family law system, as well as many seminars, workshops and conference key-note addresses that relate directly to the needs of children, especially where abuse/neglect issues are a concern. Topics such as child development, attachment and separation, and child inclusive practice are relevant to child protection workers irrespective of the family law interface.

### Domestic and family violence

From all reports, networks experience little difficulty in attracting the active participation of the domestic and family violence (DFV) sector. Over 8% of survey respondents identified this as their area of professional activity, with this figure boosted by a large response by DFV workers associated with Central Queensland FLPN. Only 8 FLPNs had no DFV workers respond.

Given the prominence of violence in family breakdowns and the attention of Family Law Courts across Australia to this issue, networks generally seek to increase understanding about the impact of violence on clients' capacity to engage in mediation, dispute resolution, court appearances etc, particularly for women and children. This is indeed an area demanding cross-sector (ie, legal and human services) training to raise awareness and engender shared understandings of the issues.

Many networks facilitated or delivered the AVERT Family Violence training in 2011-12. Examples of the topics of the many other DFV related professional development activities include:

- domestic violence and international child abduction (ACT and Region)
- supporting women after domestic violence (Central Coast NSW)
- intergenerational trauma and Indigenous women (WA FPN).

The consultations showed evidence of awareness raising between the legal sector and family violence sector, as well as some continued tensions:

*The opportunity to 'network' with other practitioners has increased awareness of our service which has led to us receiving more referrals. (DFV service worker, regional area)*

*I thought referring to a legal practitioner that attended FLPN would give my clients a better chance of having legal representation that was DV pro-active and assist with form 4's etc, but that hasn't been my experience. (DFV service worker, regional area)*

### Mental health

Only a small percentage (2.2%) of general survey respondents identified as working in adult or child mental health services, though only 7 steering committees reporting difficulties recruiting or retaining representatives from this sector.

Some networks have focused on general or specific mental health issues and the interface with the family law system. Examples include mental health and family law as the theme of Albury/Wodonga's 2012 annual conference, WA FPN's 2011 conference on 'Joining the Dots - bringing together mental health and family law', and other networks offering training around, for example, working with parents with borderline personality disorder. Given the contribution of mental health issues to the challenges faced by separating and separated families, all networks must ensure that the issues are considered and that linkages are fostered with both adult and child mental health services.

#### **Newcastle FLPN Focus on mental health**

*The project officer attends the local Mental Health Interagency Meetings, and the FLPN has formed a working relationship with ARAFMI (Association of Relatives And Friends of the Mentally Ill). The network reported that different sectors (lawyers and others) were saying they wanted to know more about Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and its impacts when working with affected clients. A workshop was held, jointly funded by the FLPN and Legal Aid NSW's Cooperative Legal Services Delivery program, with a speaker from ARAFMI. The first collaborative workshop was booked out, so another was held in May 2012. A seminar in September 2011 in the Upper Hunter region focused on 'Recognising and responding to Mental Health issues in the family law'.*

### Alcohol and drug services

Similar to the mental health sector, there were few respondents from drug and alcohol services to the general survey, though only 6 steering committees identified representation of alcohol and drug services as an issue. However, others noted that 'no difficulty' had been experienced, because as yet no efforts had actually been made to recruit from this sector.

A review of the FLPN's 2010-11 Final Reports and 2011-12 Work Plans identified less than five networks naming activities focused on alcohol and drugs. This includes activities targeted to the interface with mental health and with DFV.

As with mental health services, networks must ensure that current information about alcohol and drug services, the issues and their impact are considered.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services**

*The networks are now well-established – it is well and truly time to widen involvement to get the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD services on board as main players. (Chief Magistrate of the Federal Magistrates Court)*

This independent review confirms the findings of the 2009 internal review that relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and agencies continues to be a challenge for the networks. Seventeen FLPNs reported difficulty in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. On a positive note, half the networks did not report this as an issue.

### Achievements

The review identified concerted efforts on the part of non-Indigenous project officers and steering committee members to engage with workers within relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, and to build personal contacts within the Indigenous communities. Numerous examples were noted of professional development aimed at raising the awareness of non-Indigenous workers within the broader family law system, including, for example, 'FDR and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' (Top End FLPN), 'Child protection and a focus on children within separating Aboriginal families' (South Coast NSW), and 'The legal sector and Aboriginal people' (Central West NSW), and cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous legal and human service practitioners arranged by several networks. An *Aboriginal Cultural Guide*<sup>22</sup> for family law practitioners, recently updated, was commissioned by the ACT and Region FLPN. A version of the guide specific to the South Coast FLPN has also been produced with funding by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW.

Some networks spoke of the flow-on effects of communication between workers in Aboriginal communities and community legal services:

*Families that are experiencing domestic and family violence in remote Aboriginal communities in our area have found that they feel more supported and understand better the legal system. (Family support worker, remote area)*

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<sup>22</sup> Sharon Payne & Associates (2011) *Aboriginal Cultural Guide for ACT Family Law Pathways Network*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn. The Author, Canberra.



The small number of respondents to the general survey associated with Indigenous services noted 'definite' benefits of their involvement in the network. The survey also gave case examples of good communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous services which presumably brought positive outcomes for clients:

*An Indigenous client involved in a child protection case with mental health issues was referred to an intensive support service that was introduced to our service at a FLPN event. Client was able to be linked with treatment, support and also housing which greatly improved client's circumstances and also improved her prospects of securing better time with the children. (Legal practitioner, Aboriginal Legal Service)*

*By being able to easily access the lawyer for an NGO I had met at these meetings I was able to get my Indigenous client to just have a brief conversation with him and that just stopped a whole lot of misconceptions and fears for my client. My client subsequently went to see the lawyer and went through the process of DVOs and residency with a very positive outcome. (Counsellor, Indigenous domestic and family violence service)*

In general, the input to the review was a mix of progress having been made in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives, while, in some cases, still contemplating how to ensure the relevance of FLPN activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

#### **Greater Sydney FLPN Aboriginal Family Law Conference**

This conference came about as a result of persistence in making connections and gradually finding out what the Aboriginal community needed in regards to the Family Law system. Partnerships were formed, relationships were developed, and respect and trust were also developed throughout the planning processes. Despite the fact that the conference numbers were relatively low, it was evident that a number of attendees left with a sense of purpose about 'spreading the word.' These participants are 'connectors' – Aunties, Uncles and service providers who took information back to their families and communities. Resources not utilised at the conference were taken back to community – notably Casino, Illawarra, Mt Druitt and Redfern. Although it is not possible to quantify the outcomes of these 'connectors', it is felt that the influence of community must never be underestimated. GSFLPN has planted a strong seed.....

An Aboriginal Family Law Network sub-committee has been formed with the full support of GSFLPN Steering Committee members. Recommendations for similar workshops to be presented in the geographical regions of Greater Sydney will be discussed at GSFLPN Planning Day.

#### **Addressing barriers**

Seven respondents to the member survey ticked 'lack of cultural safety' as a reason for choosing not to attend network activities or events. While it was not clear that all represented Indigenous services, some clearly did. A recent Family Law Council report refers to cultural safety as encompassing "...the idea of services operating in a way that supports and affirms Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural identity<sup>23</sup>". Co-occurring with this response, respondents raised 'lack of relevance' of training to their client group and professional needs, and called for increased cultural training. The issue of a lack of cultural safety in

<sup>23</sup> Family Law Council (2012b) *Improving the Family Law System for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Clients: A report to the Attorney-General by the Family Law Council*. Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, p.91.



some network steering committee activities was also raised by a small number of Aboriginal agency representatives during consultations.

Some networks commented they had 'issued invitations' but had not received responses from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency representatives. Less than 10% of the 951 survey respondents identified being in a professional role specifically targeted to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Most of these were from generic services in regional locations.

In general, many networks are still in the early stages of working towards successfully engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and 'demonstrating how (they are) culturally competent and willing to work together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people<sup>24</sup>'. SNAICC notes that '...to establish trust, allow ideas and plans to emerge and develop, and for organisations to consult with their boards, community leaders and Elders... Don't be surprised if it takes some time before staff in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations take your interest seriously..... The key is to take the time and continue to develop the relationship over the long term<sup>25</sup>'. This requires persistence and ongoing commitment to relationship-building, which has been a recent learning for some networks that have relied on invitations to Indigenous agencies to be involved.

*The Aboriginal agencies were invited (to be on the steering committee) but they never came to the meetings, and we gave up on that. We realise we haven't really put the time in yet to building the relationship, which will take some time and effort... We will try to involve them when the focus is on a particular issue. (Steering committee representative, capital city)*

Some of the consulted networks expressed learning that connecting with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities does not necessarily mean holding meetings, and must be relevant to community-identified needs:

*The Legal Sector and Indigenous People forum did not work. We had an Indigenous speaker from the NT, but only four Indigenous persons attended. We learned that to connect with Indigenous people, you have to go to them, take the information they want to them in their communities. (Project officer, regional area)*

*Representation from Aboriginal organisations and service providers could possibly be increased if we developed an education workshop with the Aboriginal community about Family Law issues. (Project officer, coastal city)*

As some of the networks noted during the review, there is significant diversity between Indigenous communities. When exploring reasons for Indigenous peoples' under-utilisation of family law system services, a recent Family Law Council report<sup>26</sup> identified two main factors – clients' lack of understanding about the system and, reflective of past practices, resistance and fear of engagement with services. In addition, a lack of cultural safety when accessing services was identified, along with the need for services such as family dispute resolution to be culturally appropriate.

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<sup>24</sup> SNAICC (2010) *Working and Walking Together: Supporting Family Relationship Services to Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Organisations*. SNAICC, Melbourne, p.99.

<sup>25</sup> SNAICC (2010), p.92.

<sup>26</sup> Family Law Council (2012b).

Equipping practitioners to address these barriers and deliver equitable access and culturally appropriate services to Indigenous families and children in the family law system is indeed within the scope of the FLPNs, as is considering their role in assisting with responding to the findings and recommendations of the recent Family Law Council report. This includes responding to the recommendation about Indigenous-specific services being supported to provide advisory and other support for family law system services (courts, legal assistance and family relationship services)<sup>27</sup>.

### Linkages with CALD services

That the needs of CALD clients should be addressed is not disputed but as with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, activities are not yet consistently targeted. Less than 10% of the 951 respondents identified as being in a professional role specifically targeted to CALD persons and again, most of these workers were from generic regional agencies. Only nine steering committees reported difficulties recruiting and retaining CALD organisational representatives; however some noted during consultations that this had not to date been a focus.

People from CALD backgrounds are of course represented in separating and separated families. Of the divorces in 2010, over 21% of men and over 22% of women were born in a non-English speaking country, and of the divorces involving children, around 16% of parents were born in non-English speaking countries<sup>28</sup>.

A recent Family Law Council<sup>29</sup> report notes that new and emerging communities in Australia experience both family relationship and family law issues which those communities would appreciate being addressed through legal, counselling and family dispute resolution services. As with Indigenous peoples, each community is different and there is a lack of knowledge about the law.

The Family Law Council<sup>30</sup> report also cites a number of recent reports that refer to the importance of cross-cultural competency training to develop skills and knowledge across sectors. The report stresses the centrality of cultural sensitivity and makes recommendations about ways to improve cultural competency through, for example, embedding culturally responsive practices across the family law sector.

*As a Spanish speaker worker I have a strong professional relationship with the services targeting Spanish speaking clients in the area of <suburb>. Through FLPN contacts, one legal firm has being very supportive towards their clients by referring them to the FRC, where clients who recently arrived to the country, or are not confident because of language and cultural barriers, can get help. (FRC worker in a capital city)*

Some networks spoke of concerted efforts to engage with workers within relevant CALD agencies and services within their area. Riverina FLPN, for example, has a representative of the Multicultural Council on the steering committee. A number referred to new and emerging populations in their geographic areas, including refugees and recent immigrants, where previously the area was considered largely 'mono-cultural'.

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<sup>27</sup> Family Law Council (2012b), p.9.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) *Marriages and Divorces in 2010*

<sup>29</sup> Family Law Council (2012a).

<sup>30</sup> Family Law Council (2012a), pp.82-85.

Some networks have facilitated targeted training and professional development, including, as examples, 'Cross cultural approaches to mediation' (Toowoomba & SWQ) and 'Special needs of refugees in the family law system' (Launceston FLPN).

#### **Hobart FLPN Cross Cultural Awareness Training**

In April 2011, Hobart FLPN offered Cross Cultural Awareness Training to all service providers, free of charge. The Migrant Resource Centre conducted the training which provided background details about new and emerging communities, their experiences prior to and of settling in Tasmania, issues for different cultural groups and barriers to using family law services. Examples of family breakdown following settlement were provided, and referral options were discussed as well as the effective use of interpreters.

## **Summary**

The active participation of representatives from the child protection, alcohol and drug, and mental health sectors varies from network to network. There is reportedly room for increased involvement and certainly for cross-sector training and professional development to ensure that practitioners whose clients experience one or more of those issues are aware of referral options and are well-equipped to take account of their impact.

Domestic and family violence workers are reportedly active as general members and on steering committees. This is positive, as the issues and impact for those who experience domestic and family violence need to be well understood and responded to by both legal and human services practitioners across the family law system, and, despite some evidence of continuing tensions between the legal and DFV sectors, there are also indicators of shifts in awareness and thinking on both sides.

In general, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD practitioners are not well engaged in steering committee activity. Even if not judged by active (eg, steering committee) membership, there remains a reportedly low level of engagement in network activities. While many steering committees have taken seriously the need to involve and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and to provide appropriate training to non-Indigenous members, there were numerous indications within the 2011 Final Reports of this need being left in the 'too hard' basket.

Engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies is more successful when the strategies used recognise and acknowledge the histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, do not rely on attendance, are respectful in consistently working to form relationships, and make networks and their activities relevant and culturally safe.

**Recommendation 4**

*That all FLPNs be required to develop and implement specific action plans to ensure the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and appropriate community members in the networks. These actions should focus on purposeful and appropriate engagement, through commitment to establishing respectful ongoing relationships, rather than the goal of steering committee attendance per se.*

**Recommendation 5**

*That all FLPNs be required to develop and implement specific action plans for the engagement of appropriate practitioners related to any prominent CALD communities within their area.*

## 6 OTHER POTENTIAL ROLES OF THE FLPNs

The review included exploring the views of stakeholders about ‘other potential roles’ for networks to deliver better outcomes for families, within the parameters of the Attorney-General’s Department advice that no additional funding is available.

When queried, stakeholders primarily reported that their network was already doing what it needed to, both in relation to the Policy Guidelines and in being responsive to the needs of practitioners (and therefore of separated and separating families). Suggestions largely related to individual FLPNs doing ‘more’ of activities already required under the guidelines. However some propositions were raised for activities beyond the current ambit of the FLPNs. These included:

- an active role in making information about the family law system and relevant services directly available to the public, in particularly to families within the system who are not necessarily clients of existing services
- in relation to the above point, specifically making information available to self-represented litigants
- a more direct role in the provision of policy advice about the operation of the family law system
- undertaking more research around relevant issues, through linkages with tertiary institutions
- taking an active advocacy role in relation to system issues or the needs of particular client groups
- actively including some nominated sectors not currently represented within the networks.

These are all areas where there has already been some action by some FLPNs.

### Provision of information to the public

Some of the FLPNs, in collaboration with other stakeholders, have compiled information resources for public access or helped fund such initiatives. These include, for example, the multi-media resource developed by Legal Aid WA, *When Separating: Family Law + Roads to Resolution*, a website resource containing information, including videos, about subjects important to adults and children involved in a separation. A different example is Cairns FLPN’s weekly radio segment ‘At Your Service’, on Cairns Community Radio, which profiles available locally based services in an interview format, with listeners having the opportunity to phone in with their questions.

Some FLPNs facilitating court kiosks are already involved, either directly or in liaison with court registries, in helping provide information to individuals who are separating. This aims to direct family members early in their ‘pathway’ to information that may assist. However making direct help available in this way on days when a circuit court is not sitting (and therefore a ‘kiosk’ is not staffed) is outside the capacity of FLPNs and member services at this stage.

Several of the senior judiciary and registry personnel consulted for this review mentioned the desirability of FLPNs assisting litigants representing themselves in proceedings. Again, this role is largely linked to the current court support processes, such as the kiosks and in-court provision of information. At least one

FLPN has provided training for members about responding to the needs of self-represented litigants and managing cases where one party is self-represented.

Some FLPNs have provided information-sessions specifically for particular client groups to be directly informed about family law matters relevant to them. For example, Greater Brisbane FLPN has provided on-going support and information to the Queensland Council of Grandparents (QCOG). Other FLPNs have similarly organised specific information-sessions for Aboriginal families, with resultant learnings about improved ways to offer such sessions in the future.

#### **Riverina FLPN 'Grandparents and the Law'**

These information-sessions were promoted for Law Week, May 2012. They were a joint initiative of the FLPN and the South West Slopes Law Society which supplied the solicitor who spoke at the sessions. Riverina FLPN liaised with the shire libraries to promote the sessions to the public and held them in four centres – Tumut, Young, Griffith and Wagga Wagga. Between 8 and 17 people (grandparents) attend each session and they also appreciated the opportunity for free one-on-one legal advice after the talk.

#### Policy advice

Other stakeholders mentioned that networks could report 'from the coal face up' to the Department about how the family law system is working at the local level to inform legislative, policy and program development.

This notion sees FLPNs as having an advisory role and including, for example in their Final Report or in other ways, 'on the ground' information about the family law system and how better to meet the needs of families and children.

Some subjects and forms of advice are clearly within the ambit of the FLPNs. For example, Alice Springs FLPN<sup>31</sup> made a submission to the recent Family Law Council report about improving Indigenous access to the family law system. The submission was produced as a result of a forum in October 2011 for service providers working with Aboriginal families.

#### Research/resource development

There is the potential for small research projects and/or discussion papers to be prepared for FLPNs on matters of topical interest. This should ideally be done in consultation with other FLPNs to avoid duplication and maximise relevance. A number of FLPNs have links with local tertiary institutions, in particular with law faculties and other academics interested in relevant areas such as family violence, children's participation and child development.

Greater Sydney FLPN commissioned a survey and report on solicitors' understanding of legally assisted Family Dispute Resolution processes (on how solicitors can best use these processes) during 2011-12. A discussion paper on Confidentiality is soon to be completed, and the research project on information flow from the community sector to the Family Court about interim, final and consent orders from the court (to identify and address barriers to stream-lining

<sup>31</sup> Alice Springs Family Law Pathways Network (2011) *Submission to the Family Law Council: Improving Indigenous access to the family law system*. Author, Alice Springs.

referrals) is in progress.

An auspice proposed that funding from the FLPN program (rather than by individual FLPNs) be set aside for further research '*consistent with the goal of developing effective long-term solutions to complex problems*'.

*Given that the 2001 'Out Of The Maze' report plus the 2009 Towards a National Blueprint report identified systemic, highly complex problems, a national auspice with a secure, 5-10 year funding agreement should take the role of facilitating partner to fund 2-3 year projects across Australia.*

### Advocacy

A number of respondents raised suggestions related to FLPNs undertaking advocacy at the system or local level, around components of the family law system, for example, about the way family law courts deal with family violence against women or 'really hearing children's voices'.

*There is a lack of support for vulnerable women in attending Family Law Court matters in <name of regional city>. It would be good to see the local network advocate for additional resources to respond to this need. The lack of support has significant flow-on effects for children. (Member, regional city)*

*There is a need to advocate to fill a current gap in service provision, ie court support for women who have experienced DV and are going through the Family Court process. (Member, coastal city)*

Given that the ascribed role of FLPNs is, at a local level, to support the development of a coordinated family law system that assists separated and separating families to seamlessly access the legal and human services they need, 'advocacy' to improve local services can perhaps better be conceptualised as 'action'. Local reform has been appropriately undertaken by FLPNs, such as developing and/or supporting submissions for funding for improved local services, or working collaboratively at the local level to encourage larger service providers to help fill service gaps.

### Targeting additional sectors

Some survey respondents suggested FLPNs should purposefully seek to include additional sectors in local networks given the extent to which they may interface with the family law system: housing and homelessness, sexual assault services, schools and, as relevant, defence forces were mentioned.

It is important to note that FLPNs in different areas, for a range of reasons, focus upon fostering some roles and relationships more than others. Reasons include existing contacts, the people involved and their skills and interests, the historical development of the different sectors and service providers in the area, access to universities and possibilities for joint research, etc. Therefore some FLPNs are already engaging with some of these 'additional' sectors.

While most types of potential 'additional' services have been identified for inclusion by one or another FLPN, with local relevance being the key, it is important that FLPNs maintain the core focus of developing the family law system.

**Albury / Wodonga FLPN Separated parenting and education project**

This project was developed in collaboration with the Department of Education Early Childhood Development, Hume Riverina Community Legal Service, two private legal firms and the Wodonga FRC. The project acknowledged that schools play an integral part in children's lives and that schools often 'find out first' that parents have separated. Information was provided to schools about the law and legal processes, parental and shared responsibilities, locally available services and what role schools should and should not play.

**Summary**

Few persons consulted had views about additional roles (ie, not specifically covered in the Policy Guidelines) which FLPNs might undertake. Some FLPNs are already responding to perceived needs in areas not specifically required under funding agreements. In particular, some FLPNs are making information directly available to the public and, for example, providing information to self-represented litigants through court kiosks or seminars. The potential for research alliances has been explored (and in some cases acted upon), particularly by the larger FLPNs.

It is not recommended that any 'additional requirements' be formalised across the board, given the limited capacity of many of the FLPNs, but there is leeway for these types of initiatives to be included as options in the Policy Guidelines, for take-up on an individual basis where indicated and agreed.



## 7 NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND ROLES

The FLPN Policy Guidelines set out the roles and relationships for the auspice, steering committee and project officer.

### Auspicing the networks

The auspice holds responsibility for the funding agreement and working with the steering committee to develop, implement and report upon the work plan for the FLPN. While the auspice has responsibility for financial accountability, it must not act unilaterally about expenditure decisions. There is preferably transparency of the whole FLPN budget, including any amount which the auspice might retain as an administrative fee. Lack of transparency was raised as an issue by some steering committee members, and is a potential source of tension.

The auspice has responsibility for employment or contracting of the project officer, and for providing support, but does not direct the project officer's work. This is a difficult balance to get right, if the person employed is not self-motivated and/or the auspice assumes a direct supervisory role.

Many of the auspices are an organisation funded to operate a local Family Relationship Centre (FRC). These include Relationships Australia, Interrelate and Centacare, all of which auspice more than one FLPN. Legal Aid Commissions auspice the FLPNs for ACT and Region, Monaro, and Top End. The auspicings agency for each network is shown in Appendix A.

Thus for most networks the same organisation auspices the FLPN, employs the FLPN project officer, and operates a FRC for the region.

The extent to which the auspice has a 'hands on' or 'hands off' approach to overseeing the FLPN varies across the networks. In all cases, the auspice is represented on the steering committee. In some cases, the auspice chairs the steering committee and has a significant role in promoting the network and directing the work of the project officer. However for many of the networks, the auspice rightly views the steering committee as largely autonomous and limits the auspice role to one of financial accountability and work plan reporting. For example:

*We try to be careful that the network doesn't look as if it is a <name of auspice agency> or a FRC activity. Obviously we take a lead in managing the program but we have a number of strategies that we hope contribute to member ownership. (Auspice, regional area)*

The auspice should not refer to the FLPN as a program administered by the auspice, or imply that this is the case in the public documents of the auspice. The guidelines are clear about this, but they are not consistently adhered to (this 'brand-creep' has the potential to engender ill-will between member agencies).

With some exceptions, when asked about satisfaction with current auspicings arrangements, most steering committees and project officers agreed that it works well. Positive aspects include:

- the auspice is able to provide substantial in-kind support to the FLPN, including hosting steering committee meetings and other events on behalf of the network

- the auspice offers a stable organisational backdrop against, in some cases, a less satisfactory prior history of changing auspices and personnel
- in most cases, the size of the auspice organisation offers a range of practitioners and programs with whom the project officer can consult and get support
- where the auspice also operates the FRC, this provides synergy between the roles of the FLPN and the FRC which can be complementary.

In a minority of instances, there were some misgivings about the existing auspicing arrangements, for reasons related to issues of control. These are discussed further below, but examples relate to:

- perceptions (of members and project officers) about auspice control and dominance of the FLPN
- a divergence between a community development approach and a bureaucratic management approach by the auspice.

*The issue is one of control. <The FLPN> may be seen by some as a project of our auspice body...there is a clear steering of direction by the auspice body. I have also been directed by the auspice CEO in certain matters which I believe reduces my ability to function. (Project officer)*

*The auspice takes a more therapeutic framework and offers a top down somewhat formal approach that doesn't always fit with the region...(the auspice) doesn't always understand processes of a community development approach. (Project officer)*

Conversely, there was also some feedback about lack of support for the project officer by the auspice body, in particular where the auspice representative has multiple roles within a busy organisation.

The issue is more complex in some smaller population centres where the FLPN would be unlikely to exist if it was not driven by the auspice. There are instances where forming and managing the network appears accepted by other stakeholders as the role of the auspice, which is seen as employing the project officer for this purpose. The steering committee view themselves as participants and as a 'reference' group rather than 'steering' group. As one project officer stated: 'The network is directed by the auspice, but the steering committee can have their say'. While not the ideal of a well-functioning FLPN, this arrangement is better than no FLPN. It is however compounded when:

- all the key family relationship and funded family law services are provided by the same organisation
- the pool of people available for part-time employment as project officer is limited and does not include anyone with community development skills.

In such cases (in particular) the nominated contact persons (for funding agreement purposes and liaison with the Department) should include the auspice representative and a steering committee representative who is employed by another agency other than the auspice (ie, if the chair of the steering committee is from the auspice, a representative of a different agency should also be nominated as a contact for communication purposes).

### Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) as auspices

In general, widespread satisfaction was expressed with the current arrangement, whereby most of the FLPNs are auspiced by an organisation that also operates a

FRC. Respondents argued a range of advantages of the FLPN being auspiced in conjunction with a FRC:

- for the project officer (eg, leveraging off existing established linkages, access to FRC staff and practice knowledge)
- for the FRC (eg, improving communication with other network members)
- for the network (eg, better synergy with the network, incentive for the FRC to participate).

Having contacts within large auspicing organisations, both ‘in the same office’ and across the state, were cited as reasons why current arrangements work well.

*The FRC can be a central focus in pulling people together, particularly in the beginning, although this is probably less important over time as the network becomes more established. (Steering committee representative)*

Other organisational auspices (which do not operate a FRC) similarly advocated the advantages of their arrangements, such as being an established, continuously operating service provider in the family law system, or a leader in collaborative service delivery and training in relation to family breakdown. Comments included:

*It is positive that a non FRC organisation is auspicing as it promotes non FRC services as well.*

*I think this is a good arrangement as it provides greater ‘buy in’ from ours and other member organisations and ensures that all the information/action is not held just with the FRC.*

## **Steering the networks – steering committees**

### **Recruitment and participation of steering committee members**

The review found that the composition of steering committees broadly complies with the FLPN Policy Guidelines in that representatives are generally sought from across relevant legal and human services providers (not always with success).

Nearly half the networks (17) reported that they seek personnel at high levels within these organisations to be steering committee members.

The number of steering committee positions varies across the networks. Some (2) reported an upper limit to the number of positions, most (22) relate the number of positions to the range of family law system providers in the area, and 11 indicated that steering committee membership and meetings are ‘open’.

Many steering committees represent a large geographical area, and 19 stated they seek representatives from across the different geographic areas. Means used to include distant members in meetings include teleconferencing and (less often) videoconferencing with electronic input to pre-circulated agenda items. In one case, a remotely located member flies in for each meeting.

The role of steering committee chair is filled variously, including by a representative of the auspice body or other key agency representative, and in at least three networks, the project officer is the chair.

Specific issues reported as impacting on recruitment and participation of steering committee members include:

- difficulties in recruiting from certain sectors (as discussed in section 5)
- certain key service providers not being present in the population centre where the network meets (eg, Centrelink, Child Support Agency)
- travel time for agency representatives to get to meetings
- senior agency representatives in large geographical areas often being 'on the road' and unavailable for meetings at the same time
- agency workers being part-time
- difficulties in recruiting private legal practitioners (about one-fifth of steering committees specifically noted this issue).

*We have difficulty in engaging some legal practitioners (private) who have yet to see the worth of the network and how it could benefit their clients. (Regional steering committee)*

The practical means most used by networks to encourage steering committee participation, in the order most reported, are:

- using a consistent venue
- arranging for food or refreshments
- adjusting the time and day of meetings
- adjusting the frequency and/or length of meetings
- using teleconference or video options
- geographically rotating the venue
- using a web-based meeting tool (eg, Doodle.com) to determine the most suitable meeting time
- encouraging the use of proxies.

Despite these efforts, 15 steering committees agreed they still experience significant difficulties with consistent participation. The predominant reasons are representatives not being able to get away from their usual duties, and the geographic distance across regional and remote areas. Five networks noted the issue of low level commitment by some members:

*The only way that (a consistent attendance) can be achieved is when SC members feel they cannot afford to miss meetings because cross sectoral decisions taken at network meetings are of such significance to their own service. (Capital city steering committee representative)*

Issues included that committee members are 'volunteers' in relation to the FLPN, and the high workload expected of some steering committee members is exacerbated when there are not enough members to spread the load.

Some steering committees have re-structured the committee and/or the focus of meetings to encourage participation. These approaches include:

- using a 'two-tier' approach, with a broader 'advisory committee' for planning activities
- using a web-based 'doodle poll' to request input or feedback on the agenda
- combining meetings with a progressive learning environment
- having different members host the meeting and showcase their agency
- using an external facilitator to help work through interagency discord where necessary
- for FLPNs in smaller cities, ensuring an open and inclusive approach by, for example, welcoming any member to meetings and/or circulating meeting minutes to all members.

The extent to which various approaches are suitable depends on the size of the potential steering committee membership, the agencies locally available, and the geographic spread of population centres covered by the network. Some have 'satellite' sub-networks in separate population centres within the network area. Nineteen steering committees stated that they are supported by sub-committees of various types, all or some of the time.

*The various sub-committees of our FLPN work hard in their chosen areas....having local leaders in their professions leads to innovative and rewarding work. The use of sub-committees means wider network members can become involved in projects that they have some special skill or interest in, without having to commit the time to be involved in the general running of steering committee business. (Regional steering committee)*

Figure 6: Attributes of a well-functioning FLPN steering committee

There is high level of commitment to the committee and to working collaboratively
Clear terms of reference exist and are adhered to
Good open communication exists within the committee and between agency members
Cross-sector representation is consistently maintained
Representation is equitable in relation to organisational size and spread
An inclusive and culturally safe environment is maintained
Senior agency representatives make themselves available
Attendance by organisational representatives is consistent
For larger FLPNs, sub-committees are used to harness and drive particular special interests
The project officer is viewed as taking direction from the steering committee
Committee members model collaborative behaviour

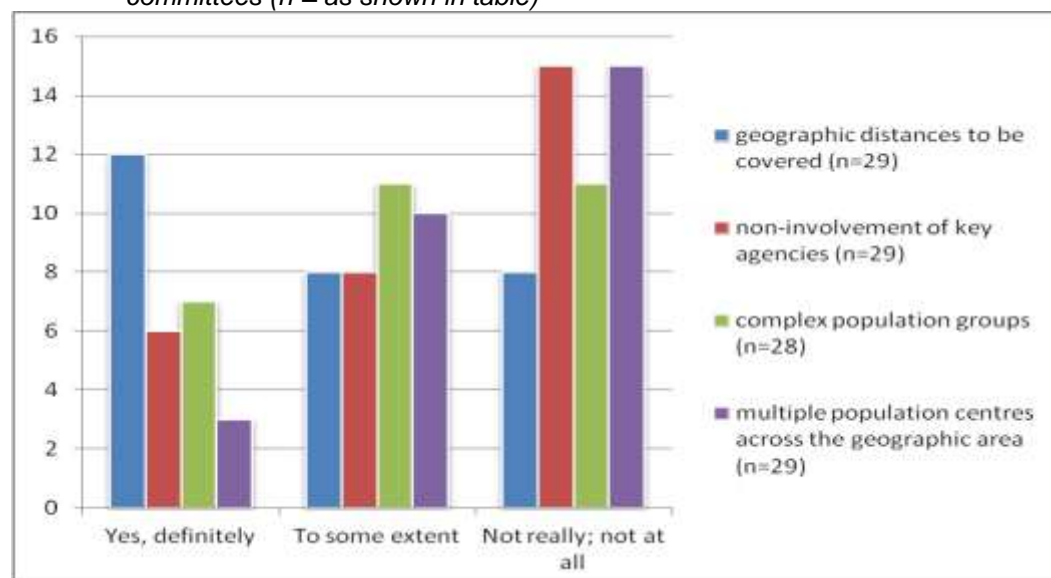
*The FLPN here is largely 'owned' and driven by the broader member base. The Steering Committee works as a team providing strategic oversight, ensuring accountability, contributing knowledge and experience to the smooth running of the network and providing support for the project officer. (Steering committee, regional city)*

### External challenges to effective functioning

Surprisingly few issues were identified as challenges or difficulties impacting on networks' efficiency and effectiveness (see Figure 7). Those identified largely stem from geographic distance – having multiple population centres across the area was not reported by many steering committees as a challenge of the same

magnitude as 'distance', although maintaining 'sub-networks' in each centre was cited as resource-intensive.

Figure 7: Potential challenges to effective steering committee functioning, by extent to which steering committees agreed these were a challenge, by no. of steering committees (n = as shown in table)



Other problems canvassed, and rating little mention, were: staff turnover, insufficient funding, and lack of local services:

*All these problems are there, however there are ways of mitigating their impact (indicative comment by one steering committee).*

The question however is whether steering committees are rising to the challenge where these issues do exist. Some clearly are, with reported strategies including:

- supporting the establishment of sub-regional networks, for example, 'allowing <geographic region> to run separate events to meet the needs and information appropriate for their services and practitioners while remaining part of the overall network'
- use of social media and information technology
- 'road-shows' to and across regional areas by the project officer, sometimes accompanied by practitioners from the main population centre
- forming partnerships with other organisations to co-host or co-brand events, which saves time and money
- collaborating with other, especially neighbouring, FLPNs.

#### The two models of jurisdictional coverage

Steering committees were also asked about the advantages or otherwise of the two existing models for coverage across each state or territory. These are:

- multiple, separate FLPNs funded within the jurisdiction (NSW, Qld, Tas, NT, Vic)
- a single FLPN funded to cover the whole jurisdiction (WA, SA).

The ACT model stands alone in being the one network for the (comparatively small) territory, but with the ACT and Region FLPN having a developmental role in relation to the Monaro FLPN and the emerging Goulburn network.

In general, steering committees supported the current model in place in their state or territory.

Arguments in favour of retaining multiple networks across jurisdictions referred to:

- the need to ensure the resourcing of local areas
- the challenge for a single network to respond to local needs by 'remote control' across large geographic areas
- the different demographics and issues in regional and remote areas which require local responses
- that information requirements differ within local areas
- the danger of FLPN management being isolated to a 'few select big organisations' if centralised
- a potential that regional members would no longer receive as many opportunities for up-skilling and shared learning.

*FLPNs need to retain our independence because this is our strength and purpose. We respond to local issues at a local level. Especially in rural and remote areas where cultural factors have a huge impact.* (Regional city steering committee representative)

The following comment however queried the current multiple network model in one jurisdiction:

*Multiple auspices and lack of transparency of work plans, plus the way funding is used, result in duplication of effort and extra costs to present a state-wide approach.* (Capital city steering committee representative)

A minority argument was also presented for national cohesion and less emphasis on individual jurisdictions, given that family law is a national issue with many Commonwealth government agencies working in the area.

Western Australia, which currently has a 'one state-wide FLPN' model reported having locally based regional representatives who are also part of the central steering committee, following a scoping study this network commissioned in 2010. The study resulted in recommendations that 'the WA Family Pathways Network be a single integrated network with the North and South regional structures used as a mechanism to ensure regional involvement and activity, not establish independent networks<sup>32</sup>'.

Having a single network across a jurisdiction (eg, SA, WA) carries risks of non-inclusion of the regions and limited networking activity in regional and remote centres. This needs to be guarded against by:

- steering committee representation reflecting inclusion of the larger regional population centres
- practical means used to enable real involvement by regional representatives (including funded travel for regional representatives and for the project officer/s)

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<sup>32</sup> Watkins, L. (2010) *Pathways into the Regions – Recommendations for the Regional Family Pathways Network of WA*, (unpublished; available through the WA FPN).

- ensuring regional representatives are actively involved in decision-making by the steering committee, including about work-planning and expenditure to support local networking
- accounting for how regional *networking* is achieved (in addition to any training or information sharing).

### Coordinating and facilitating the networks – project officer roles

It was clear that there must be resourcing of the project officer position for a FLPN to be functional. A FLPN cannot be effective without a project officer. However the FLPN Policy Guidelines<sup>33</sup> state that it is up to each auspice in consultation with the steering committee to determine whether to have a designed project officer and how much of the available funding is used for this purpose. The following comment was made about the apparent leniency afforded by these guidelines:

*It was very disappointing when the Policy Guidelines were introduced to see what little regard the Department had for the work that Project Officers do for the Networks. This was evident in that Networks could choose whether they had a PO or not. (Project officer)*

Nevertheless the vast majority of FLPNs do employ at least one project officer, although vacancies for these almost exclusively part-time positions can be difficult to fill in some regional areas.

The usual number of paid hours for project officers varies from 5 hours per week to 4 or more days a week. The majority of the five 'large' networks have the equivalent of between 1 and 1.5 FTEs, with two or more workers. One 'large' network splits the project officer position across three persons with different skill sets, and considers this a 'best practice' approach for large FLPNs. Table 9 shows the range of paid days per week for project officers employed for the 'small' and 'medium' networks. Many project officers noted that their hours of work are flexible when required, for example, to facilitate evening functions or to visit centres across the wider region.

Table 9: Usual no. of days per week of employment for project officers, by number of 'small' networks (n=21) and 'medium' networks (n=9)

Usual weekly PO days	< 1 day	1 day	>1 to < 2 days	2 days	> 2 to <3 days	3 days	4 days
Small networks	1	2	2	8	2	5	1
Medium networks		1	4	2	1	1	

Project officers must be employed for enough hours per week to develop and maintain a well-functioning network – this varies depending on the population size, diversity of needs, local service system, and geographic factors. Because of this variation, a suggestion by some respondents that a minimum financial commitment to the role should be mandatory (eg, 40% for staffing and overheads), is not supported. However it is clear that relying upon expenditure on 'activities' or events to create linkages, rather than on project officer time, is unlikely to achieve all the objectives of a FLPN.

<sup>33</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2011), p.4.



*At only 15 hrs a week, it is hard to develop all the geographic locations simultaneously. What has been clear is the need to do the groundwork – meeting with the other inter-agencies and with people personally. You can give up a whole day travelling, just to spend 10 minutes briefing the police to get them to the AVERT training. (Regional project officer)*

Several project officers are engaged as contractors by the auspice, while most are employees. Contracting can increase the independence of the role and reduce the administrative tasks of the auspice. Depending on whether the auspice provides office space, contracting can also bring potential isolation, and lack of infrastructure back-up. Cost in particular must be justified, if engaging a project officer as a contractor reduces the number of hours able to be paid for.

Over a third of the project officers reported also being employed in another position within the auspice agency, to increase their working hours to near or full-time employment. It was noted that, in some small regional localities, it would be unlikely that the project officer position could be filled if the worker was not able to take on an additional role with the auspice. Some project officers employed in an additional role by the auspice or another relevant agency cited the benefits, including greater flexibility with being 'on-hand' to complete project officer tasks as they arise, synergy between inter-related roles which value-adds to both positions, and greater opportunities for combining resources across the roles (eg, travel costs to outlying areas).

On the other hand, if a project officer is also engaged in another paid position, by the auspice or by another agency represented on the steering committee, this can raise issues of perceived lack of independence. This is particularly the case if the additional position is a managerial one. The project officer must be seen as independent of the auspice (ie, working to the steering committee). The greater the convergence of roles, the more danger there is that the designated FLPN project officer role will not be visible and/or that the FLPN will be viewed as a project of the auspice.

#### Length of time in position

The 34 project officers who responded to the survey had been in their position for:

- less than 6 months – 6 project officers
- 6 to 12 months – 6 project officers
- > 1 to 2 years – 14 project officers
- more than 2 years – 8 project officers.

Contributing factors to the predominantly shorter periods were that some networks have not been long established, the capacity to recruit and retain workers is limited by annual contracts, and positions are difficult to fill in some regional areas. It is noted that at least four of the positions were in transition or vacant during the course of the review. In all cases, auspice representatives and steering committee members had been undertaking the project officer tasks.

*I think one of the most difficult things is the high turnover of project officers. Once a project officer is established for a while and relationships are made and processes are put in place...magic happens! (Regional project officer)*

Where a project officer position is unfilled, auspices should ensure that fill-in arrangements (usually by auspice staff) are interim only and not for extended periods, with a designated person as the 'advertised' contact.

### Importance of the project officer role

The role of the project officer is widely viewed (by project officers themselves, auspice agencies and steering committee members) as critical to the effectiveness of the FLPNs. Project officers asserted that '*The networks wouldn't come together without the role of the project officers*' and '*If there was no project officer there would be no network*'. This point was well supported during consultations and through member feedback.

*The FLPN is the glue that binds the system and the PO is the 'go-to' person for that. I'm often contacted for a whole range of referral and info purposes because of the central role I have as PO. Without that role, there would be no conduit for people to obtain or share key info and especially across sectors where no other interagency exists, eg drug & alcohol or private legal sector. (Project officer)*

Some project officers stressed the priority of sector and community development within the family law system with a focus on collaborating to meet the needs of children and families. Examples cited included:

*Sector development – long term development of referral pathways and collaboration with regional partners – is very hard to quantify via reporting methods, but has always been our key focus.*

*Progressing priority family law related projects using a community development approach as identified by the sector, eg integrated/collaborative responses to DV, children's contact centre.*

*Creating a learning environment that transcends event management and is community driven.*

Asked about the implications if there were no project officers in the FLPN program, typical responses of project officers were:

- ways of working together would disappear, with people reverting to silos, becoming again dislocated and fragmented
- families would be adversely affected, not have access to justice as promised by Attorney-General's, or to the right service (eg, appropriate referral) at the right time
- the family law system would continue to act in an adversarial way without challenge. Relationships and networking may still exist but not transcend organisational boundaries.

*The role of the Project Officer is to create an environment that enables the FL system at the local level to operate at maximum efficiency, reduce cases getting to court and support clients at whatever stage they are in. It is the vital oil for the cogs of an effective FL system.*

Project officers should be selected on the basis of attributes and qualifications, noting that the most effective project officers are self-motivated, energetic, good communicators, have an inclusive approach, can apply the principles of community development in bringing people together, and have the capacity to energise others. It is clearly desirable that project officers have appropriate community development and project management skills, rather than relying on 'administrative' experience.

## Interface between auspice / steering committees / project officers

Survey responses and consultations for the review reveal that the relationship between the auspice, steering committee and project officer works well where:

- the auspice assumes considerable responsibility for the FLPN but is not a dominant force, working collegially as one member of the steering committee without the power of veto
- the steering committee has active balanced representation from both sectors (ie, legal and human services), is the driving body of the FLPN, and is recognised as the entity directing the FLPN, ie, the decision-making body
- the project officer accepts direction from the steering committee but is also allowed and expected to use their own initiative in making contacts, implementing plans and bringing ideas and member views to the committee.

This 'balanced triangle' is illustrated in Figure 8. Problems can arise when there is an imbalance with any of the three components of this 'triangle'.

Some of the survey respondents and persons consulted for the review raised issues related to this imbalance. These included perceptions about:

- a lack of transparency, and issues of trust

*..where auspices are not transparent to their committees about how funding is spent and about the proportion taken in staffing and overheads v. that available to do the work of the network, it diminishes the credibility of the network. (Steering committee member)*

- the issue of dominance by the auspice and/or by one sector within in the steering committee, or lack of proportional representation for service providers on the steering committee

*Some auspices rule, whereas others support; some auspices keep POs in the dark (re finances and agreement); some committees have little or no say as the auspice has all the say; competition amongst agencies is still alive and well. (Project officer)*

*The project officer needs to be seen as independent of auspice direction, so that the steering committee is assured that their decisions can be implemented directly without having to be 'vetted' by the auspice. (Steering committee member)*

- the appointment of project officers not necessarily suited to the role, or not sufficiently well qualified

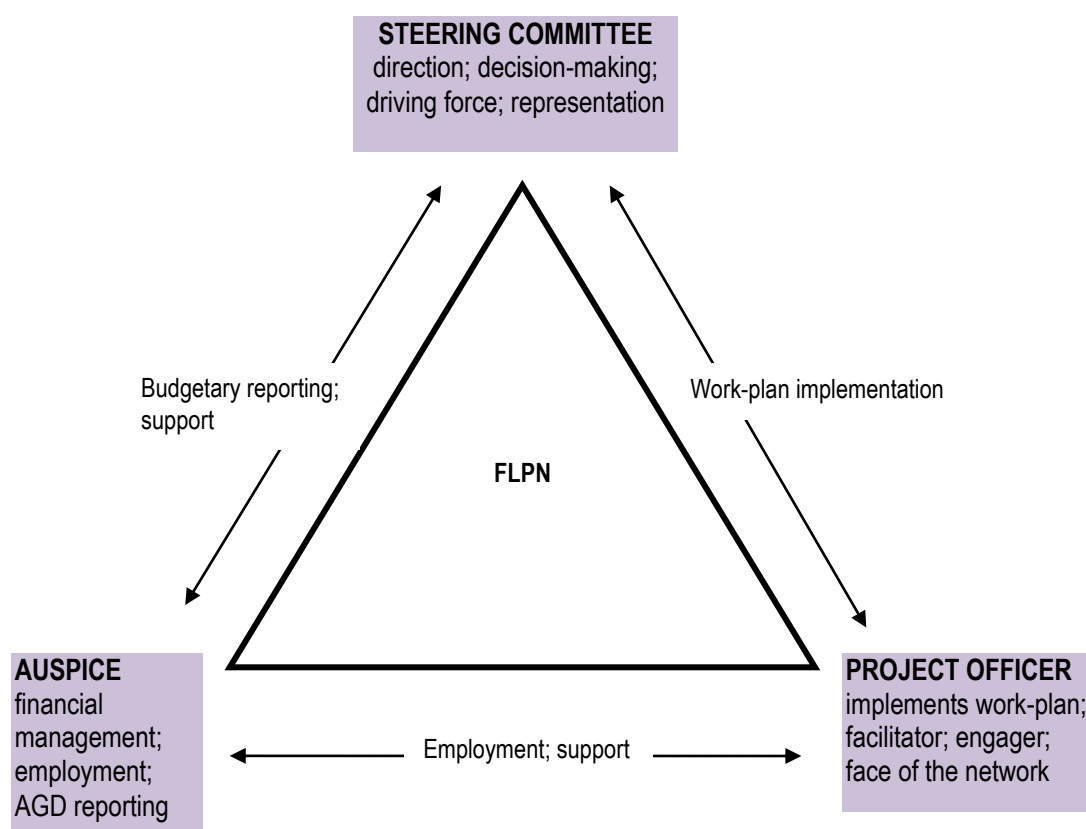
*Some auspices don't appoint project officers with the necessary networking skills. (Project officer)*

While project officers are engaged by auspices, steering committee should (and it seems usually do) have a role in selecting the most appropriate person, through actively participating in the selection process.

A prohibition against any one auspice being responsible for multiple FLPNs, to ensure less 'distance' between auspice and committee, was suggested by a small group of contributors to the review. This suggestion related to perceived undue influence and control in the activities of steering committees where a single auspice was responsible for multiple networks. However this perception was not supported by the feedback of the vast majority of steering committee representatives or project officers where this auspicing arrangement is in place.

An issue raised during the consultations, reflecting the wording of the Policy Guidelines, was the ‘option’ for auspice agencies to share service agreement and budget information with steering committees, and similarly the ‘option’ for coordinating networks to share relevant budget information with those networks receiving coordination or support. Several respondents argued for more openness and transparency around this to be stipulated in the Policy Guidelines.

*Figure 8: The balanced components of a well-functioning FLPN*



## Summary

A well-functioning FLPN has a balance between the roles of auspice, steering committee, and project officer; all are essential, and have specific roles which should be distinct (see Figure 8). An imbalance between auspice, steering committee and project officer (too much overlap of roles, or uneven influence) leads to dysfunction in a FLPN.

The steering committee has responsibility for drawing up the work-plan and ensuring it is implemented. It is the steering committee role to direct the project officer in relation to the work-plan.

This ‘balanced triangle’ reflects how most of the FLPNs function, judging by feedback from people in all three roles (auspice, steering committee and project

officer) for many of the networks during the review. Mutual satisfaction and respect, underpinning positive and effective working relations, were evident.

There were also a few instances observed during the review where some 'imbalance' is occurring, to the detriment of the FLPN being as effective as possible. Steering committees aware of such internal issues are encouraged to undertake a facilitated in-depth local review of the network and its governance.

Indicators that a FLPN may not be fully functional should trigger a review of that FLPN by the auspice or steering committee as relevant, supported by AGs. These indicators may include:

- complaints by member agencies that a network is non-active and/or about a contrived imbalance in steering committee membership
- large amounts of unexpended funds (where not deliberately planned for future expenditure)
- membership in regional population centres, or other core sectors of the membership, not engaging in FLPN activities (or reporting they are not being offered such opportunities)
- the project officer position being vacant or 'temporary' for extended periods
- the FLPN clearly not achieving the objectives in relation to some core sectors and/or within some regional areas.

#### ***Recommendation 6***

That the respective roles of the auspice and steering committee are further clarified within the FLPN Policy Guidelines, including an expectation that the full FLPN budget is transparently shared with the steering committee for work-planning purposes.

#### ***Recommendation 7***

That the expectation that FLPNs will engage a person or persons in the designated role of project officer/s is made clear and unambiguous in the FLPN Policy Guidelines.

## 8 INTER-NETWORK SUPPORT AND COORDINATION

### **‘Coordination/support’ and ‘mentoring’ as additional objectives**

Some networks are tasked in their funding agreement with the additional objective of providing support and/or coordination to smaller networks, usually within the same jurisdiction. Similarly, under the agreement, some networks may be tasked with providing mentoring support to assist a newly established network in their first year of operation. The coordination and support role, and the mentoring role, are not clearly differentiated from each other, and each also occurs informally. The review found considerable confusion about these roles and the expectations around them.

Nine steering committees identified they had been tasked with providing coordination in the 2011 financial year. Activities undertaken in this role included:

- information sharing (the main activity)
- regular tele-links and contact, particularly with project officers but also auspice representatives
- sharing resources, including service directories
- providing court services information
- sharing advice about meeting administrative reporting processes
- providing information on training/speakers and offering to link with them
- in some cases, financial support to assist with delivering events
- sharing information about ‘what works’.

Two steering committees identified having provided mentoring in the 2011 financial year, while 9 steering committees reported having been the recipients of mentoring. Activities undertaken by mentors in this role included:

- operational support and advice during ‘start-up’ of the mentored network
- face-to-face, telephone, electronic or video communication
- providing access to professional development and resource sharing
- mentoring participation in the mentored network’s steering committee
- sharing resources, templates, ideas and experiences
- providing free-of-charge access to training and professional development activities.

Those reporting receiving support and coordination (15 FLPNs) mainly viewed it as beneficial (54%), citing as useful the exchange of ideas and experiences (‘having a sounding board’), professional and practical support, and access to expertise and a knowledge base. Similarly, most who were aware of having been mentored noted that this had definitely been beneficial.

However some networks providing ‘support’ or ‘mentoring’ noted barriers to achieving these objectives, including:

- lack of clarity about what was expected
- cost to the mentor, with no additional funds under the funding agreement for the task
- geographic distance making face-to-face contact difficult
- the ‘receiver’ of the support expressing that they did not want or need it.

A capital city steering committee tasked with the support role commented:

*Some auspices, and therefore POs and others involved from the auspice, need careful handling as they are competitive and suspicious. Such relationship management is very time consuming and iterative.*

Some negative responses on the part of intended recipients of support were also noted, particularly where the recipient steering committee was critical or suspicious of the arrangement, or felt that the support had not been sufficient. Stated issues included:

- not receiving any support or communication from the FLPN charged with providing support
- the needs of networks in rural or regional settings not being understood by metropolitan networks in mentoring roles
- the print resources provided by the supporting FLPN were perceived as unsuitable for the supported network as they were not sufficiently 'local'
- three intended recipients of mentoring felt that it had not really been of benefit because, for example, '*the need has passed*'; '*we are established and do not need mentoring*'.

There was the perception in at least one case that the Attorney-General's Department had included the role in a funding agreement without prior consultation with the affected parties.

There was recognition of the need for inter-network support, including meeting the needs of new project officers. However, as one steering committee commented: '*A strong collaboration among various networks would be more useful (than formal mentoring)*'.

A surprisingly large number of steering committee representatives completing the surveys did not know whether they had provided mentoring (n=7) or received it (n=5) in the past year. This is indicative of a definitional issue, and reflects the unclear boundaries between formal and informal support.

An assumption underlying the additional objective of coordination or support is that the support will reflect negotiations between affected parties and be responsive to local or regional needs, although the FLPN Policy Guidelines state that there need not be a formal agreement, being purposefully broad about the types of activities which might be undertaken. However, in the absence of a MOU or agreed protocols, this leeway has led to dissatisfaction and confusion on both sides in some cases. As one capital city steering committee stated:

*If one network is charged and funded to perform a support role, the purpose and key tasks of that should be explained to both networks*

#### **Gold Coast FLPN Experience of being mentored**

The mentoring provided by Toowoomba & SW FLPN was very valuable. It involved the T&SW FLPN project officer sharing time and resources, providing early networking operational support, being present at early meetings of the Gold Coast FLPN, and providing ongoing connection between meetings. This all occurred due to the level of commitment from the Toowoomba Project Officer. She continued support until we were firmly established in the role within the community. A truly collaborative experience, I believe, for both Pathways.

A further comment – this has continued by way of Toowoomba and Gold Coast organising a full day of training with four key speakers of high calibre and inviting both Sunshine Coast and Greater Brisbane to partner. So it seems to have a rippling effect across other Pathways.

## State-wide coordination role

The state-wide and regional coordinating role presents opportunities for formal and ad hoc intra-jurisdictional support, information sharing, resource sharing and collaboration, and occasionally financial support. In Queensland, NSW and Victoria, the auspice of the 'large' (capital city) network is funded to provide state-wide 'coordination and support' as an additional objective.

The role has mainly been delivered through:

- state-wide meetings/forums of project officers and a limited number of auspice or steering committee representatives to share information about activities and achievements, network and problem solve, with the costs of attendance (excluding paid time) met by the coordinating network
- regular tele-links of project officers and auspice representatives to share information and plan cross-network activities
- providing content for network newsletters and other communications
- developing and providing hard copy and electronic stationery and templates for network activities, consistent with FLPN policy guidelines
- making available other resources, eg, FLPN banners for local events
- facilitating the development of the shell for a state-wide wiki in Victoria
- ad hoc formal and informal support to local project officers, particularly those in newer networks or new to the position
- facilitating and subsidising the state-wide roll-out of training and professional development activities, eg, AVERT training.

There remains however some confusion about the role, on both sides:

*It has at times been quite difficult to accommodate the requests of regional FLPNs. This is partly due to unclear guidelines from the AGD around the state auspicing role and also some unrealistic expectations of some regions. Our understanding is that we are to support the regional FLPNs to achieve their network objectives, not support their membership. A lot of relationships building has been required and this has for the main part been successful in our state. ('Coordinating' auspice representative)*

Issues identified with the state-wide coordination role include:

- it is a fairly new role and shared or agreed expectations about the role are still being developed and tested, for example, around the parameters of support for a network or a project officer
- tensions about the extent to which the role encompasses resource sharing or financial support for regional networks
- when the same worker has undertaken both roles, a perceived tension about the extent to which the auspice has financially supported the normal 'project officer' role versus the state-wide 'coordination' role
- some project officers who feel isolated in their role want a higher level of contact and support specifically with like-positions
- tensions about a perceived lack of transparency about the portion of the coordinating network's funds allocated for 'state-wide' coordination.

When questioned about the value of the state-wide coordination activities, most networks expressed that they were useful and of considerable benefit.

*The recent state-wide gathering of all the project officers was excellent, really helpful. Lots of good sharing of ideas occurred. The opportunities to link by phone have been useful too. (Regional project officer)*



*The state-wide meeting helped hugely. It's a huge benefit. They are the only others who really know what you do. (Project officer, coastal city)*

A small number of networks perceived that the state-wide coordination role was not providing benefits relevant to their geographic location and small size, or simply not to be working in their interests:

*I have attended two meetings hosted by the auspice agency of <name of coordinating network>. In the first year we communicated intensely around ideas we had .... None of the potential projects were progressed. The only outcome was ... an agreement to organise some projects that have never eventuated. We have been in conflict with <name of coordinating auspice> for about a year over their interpretation of their obligations. (Regional steering committee representative)*

In addition to clarifying the nature and boundaries of the role in the FLPN Policy Guidelines, a number of other suggestions were made about how the state-wide coordination role could be improved. While respecting the disparate nature of networks and geographical issues, these include:

- providing assistance with keeping on top of developments in the family law system to get the information 'out there' to members (ie, information that is relevant regardless of location)
- moving the benefits of 'big' cities (eg, speakers) out to the regions
- localised agreements setting out agreed arrangements, eg, '*Obligations of both could be more clearly stated and acknowledged, work plans of all should be inclusive of supported activities/events/resources etc*' (Steering committee representative)
- establishing and maintaining jurisdictional websites (discussed below).

One network strongly argued that the state-wide role should be abandoned:

*Dissolve it at the earliest opportunity...FLPNs are professional organisations and don't need to be mentored. We learn from FLPNs of similar size and demographics, not larger ones. Larger FLPNs function differently to smaller ones and vice versa by nature of our size, organisation structure, and location etc. (Regional project officer)*

This was a minority view which was not supported by the positive feedback from most networks. It should be noted that the state-wide role supports networks in the three jurisdictions where it exists, enabling seven or more networks to come together once or twice a year. This type of large-group opportunity for project officers to meet together with a number of others is not available to the networks in the other five jurisdictions with only one or two networks. This raises an inequity for these eight networks, albeit one arising from structural differences.

### **National inter-network communication**

Numerous references were made by longer-standing network representatives to the national meetings which the Attorney-General's Department convened in the past. Program changes made in 2010 were reportedly a watershed for the networks and the program overall:

*Since the AGs contract of 2010-11 there has been a disintegration of national coherency of the FLPN Program. Prior to this contract POs met yearly and there was a contact point in the funding department for coordination information/ activities etc. These and other contract changes have contributed to...the decline of national coherency. (Capital city network)*

The national meeting of project officers and other network representatives which backed onto the 2011 Family and Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) conference was also remembered as a valuable opportunity for information sharing. The review identified that there is a strong desire for ongoing opportunities for inter-network communication across Australia.

*Mechanisms are needed whereby project officers are able to share information, meet at least annually and to encourage 'network to network' ... No doubt there are many ideas and initiatives out there that we can learn from each other and share rather than reinvent the wheel. (Regional project officer)*

For project officers, responses reflected feelings of isolation with no day-to-day access to other people undertaking the same tasks. As a newer project officer stated: *'I feel isolated, an island, in but not in (the auspice). I need to email and talk with like-kind'*. Auspice representatives similarly reflected on the benefits of information exchange with other auspicing agencies.

The primary purposes of a proposed means for national inter-network communication would be the exchange of information about activities and ideas about 'what works'. As one project officer stated, *'currently there's no way to tap into others' experiences in a real way.'* Project officers readily described the uniqueness of their network, while at the same time being cognisant they are fundamentally doing the same things.

*With a national forum, we will have access to many FLPNs like our own, not just the closest city model with whom we may have nothing in common. (Project officer, regional area)*

The argument for formal national inter-network communication is strong. It would be likely to engender more efficient and effective network development as ideas are shared, and local cost-savings would be possible through a central information-sharing hub. It is not the responsibility of the Attorney-General's Department to fulfil this role; however, implementing any form of national communication requires 'someone' taking responsibility at a national level.

It is recommended that the role of a 'national network facilitator' be developed for this purpose. This might be a tendered part-time position, with the opportunity for FRSA, or one of the existing FLPN auspices, or any organisation associated with provision of family relationship and/or family law services, to tender to auspice the service. It is suggested that funding for such a position would be sourced pro-rata from existing FLPN allocations. Apart from the Attorney-General's Department advice that no additional funds are available, it is difficult to argue that extra funding be made available when unexpended funds, or difficulty spending the allocation, has been frequently noted among the FLPNs. A levy of perhaps 3-4% might be put towards the funding of a national network facilitator on the understanding that cost-benefits would flow back to each network.

A national network facilitator would facilitate the exchange of information between the networks across Australia through:

- facilitating an annual or biennial national meeting or conference
- organising regular national tele-links, webinars, etc
- maintaining a national email group
- being a national source of compiled information relevant to all networks, and conduit for timely dissemination of information to and between the networks
- coordinating national and international speaker tours.

While the proposed national network facilitator might organise an annual national meeting, the hosting of such a meeting might be through:

- FRSA being requested to host it as an adjunct to their conference, with networks self-funding travel and associated costs
- the large FLPNs taking turns to host a national gathering, with networks self-funding travel and associated costs
- skimming from the 'state-wide coordination and support' budgets to fund a national annual or biennial meeting (replacing one of the existing state-wide gatherings where these are twice-yearly).

Appropriate levy exemption or financial support in relation to self-funding by FLPNs to attend a national gathering would need to be considered for small networks where travel costs to the major cities are prohibitive, eg, Alice Springs FLPN.

It has been argued by some that funds currently allocated to support state-wide 'coordination and support' activities should be entirely reallocated to national coordination. This idea does not have support among most of the networks which currently participate in state-wide opportunities and see these as beneficial.

## **Summary**

There is considerable confusion about the 'additional objectives' of coordination and mentoring. Considerable informal inter-network support and collaboration occurs. However FLPN steering committee members were not necessarily aware of whether they have provided or received formal coordination or mentoring. The concept of 'coordination' is particularly confusing in this context.

FLPNs in receipt of what they perceived as 'support' (coordination and mentoring) did find this useful, in the main. In some cases, however, it was viewed as unsolicited, unnecessary and imposed.

The value of the state-wide coordination role was affirmed by most (though not all) of the FLPNs in the states where 7 or more FLPNs are able to come together annually and share ideas as a result of this coordination (NSW, Vic, Qld). Greater transparency is required about the funding for state-wide coordination, its purpose and parameters, with a formal process of collaborative decision-making between all involved FLPNs about how these funds will be used.

Many of the project officers consulted, and some steering committee members, raised the need for opportunities for formal inter-network communication at a national level. The concept of an annual conference of project officers was often raised. It was perceived that opportunities for the exchange of ideas and learnings would benefit the FLPN program overall, as well as support project officers in what was described as a fairly isolated role.

A 'national network facilitator' role is a potential means to facilitate the various methods by which inter-network communication might occur, as well as being a distribution point for up-to-date information relevant to all networks. This would be dependent upon networks reaching agreement about how such a position might be funded and auspiced.

**Recommendation 8**

That, within the FLPN Policy Guidelines, the concept of 'coordination' be replaced with the concept of 'support' when referring to the assistance to be given by one FLPN to another (other than state-wide). Further, that when it is proposed that a FLPN will receive funds to 'support' another, the FLPN Policy Guidelines specify that both FLPNs will be consulted and a mutual written agreement will be entered into to clarify the purpose and the actions which will be taken.

**Recommendation 9**

That in relation to the existing state-wide coordination role as outlined in the FLPN Policy Guidelines, the concept of 'coordination' be replaced with the concept of 'inter-network communication', with increased clarity about the purpose and the activities which will be undertaken.

**Recommendation 10**

That in jurisdictions where funding is available for state-wide 'inter-network communication', all the FLPNs within the state should collaboratively develop a single work-plan detailing the agreed state-wide activities. The funding for state-wide 'inter-network communication' should be itemised separately from other FLPN funds within the responsible FLPN's budget.

**Recommendation 11**

That a means to fund/enable project officers (and steering committee representatives) to come together nationally every one or two years to share information and learnings is considered, given the low number of FLPN project officers (with therefore limited opportunity for face-to-face sharing of learnings with people in like positions) and the value of their facilitation role to the overall family law system.

**Recommendation 12**

That a 'national network facilitator' role be developed, as a means to facilitate national inter-network communication on an ongoing basis between the FLPNs across the nation. It is recommended that the responsibilities of the proposed national role, how it might be funded (possibly through a 3-4% levy from within existing budgets), and potential tendering arrangements for auspicing, be drafted for specific consultation with the FLPNs.

## 9 COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The 2011 FLPN Policy Guidelines refer to the use of the Family Relationships Online website to promote activities<sup>34</sup>. The guidelines do not allow the use of other network-specific websites, but support the responsible and ethical use of wikis, blogs and other social networking tools, as well as the use of technology to conduct network activities, especially to deal with geographic distance and to encourage participation.

Networks' use of communication technology and social media varies considerably across Australia. All referred to extensive use of email as the primary means of maintaining contact with members – to provide them with topical information, to promote events, and to seek feedback. The emphasis is on *maintaining* contact, as many assert a preference for establishing initial contact through purposeful face-to-face meetings or network activities. It should also be noted that many networks also view face-to-face communication as feasible because of the size and/or nature of their communities, for example, a project officer explained:

*Our network is very relationship based - people like coming together and the value of the network is in the relationship (that is not easily facilitated electronically!). We're lucky enough to have a geographic region that is manageable and people are willing to travel to events / forums as they are only ever a maximum of 1 hour away.*

Some networks have harnessed more cutting edge means of communication that help redress the challenges of geographic distance and facilitate participation in network activities and professional development. Some of these means have the potential to be interactive and support participation in decision-making processes. Table 10 shows the current use of communication technologies.

Table 10: 'Modern' communication technologies, by whether or not networks use them, by no. of networks

	Yes	Not yet, but planned	No
Teleconferences (n=35)	22	1	12
Creating DVDs of network events (n=32)	7	6	19
Webinars (n=30)	5	3	22
Wiki spaces (n=31)	4	6	21
Video-conferencing (n=31)	3	7	21
Skype video (n=30)	2	3	25
Facebook (n=32)	2	2	28
Blogs (n=31)	2	0	29

Apart from emailing, the most utilised interactive communication means is teleconferences, with almost 70% of respondent networks having used them. Project officers referred to benefits such as:

*Allows isolated groups to stay in touch, to be kept informed and to actively participate in decision making.*

*As I cover a large geographical network the teleconferences work well to keep engagement.*

<sup>34</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2011), p.9.

However some networks reported dissatisfaction with teleconferences as a means of linking regional members into steering committee meetings.

The majority of networks have not used and have no plans to use video-conferencing, webinars, Skype video, wiki spaces, Facebook or blogs. Six respondent networks reported not using any of the above 'modern' means of communication at all. Reasons include those listed below, and that a few networks operate within small geographical areas where distance is not an issue.

Three networks reported use of technological means of communication other than those surveyed. These were Twitter, reported to be used by a few networks in New South Wales, and *WebEx* conferencing. Another network, Greater Melbourne, has made high level use of various web-based applications such as *Prezi* for presentations, *TryBooking.com* to capture registrations for activities, Google email groups, Google maps to show the location of relevant family law services, and *Doodle.com* to determine and agree meeting times and/or gather input to discussion.

### Issues with using communication technologies

Use of communication technologies was generally believed advantageous, especially to encourage participation by time-poor or geographically-distant steering committee or general members. Using it to entice the participation of private legal practitioners, to connect with 'the younger demographic', and to 'model progressive, innovative, collaborative behaviours' were mentioned.

However a number of issues were raised by project officers and others about their experiences to date with communication technologies. Views about potential advantages were understandably tempered by experiences of glitches, drop-outs, poor or no sound or picture, and so on. Other issues identified related to:

- a lack of access to equipment, such as video-recorders or video-conferencing equipment, indicated by 23 of the networks
- the degree of technical proficiency required at 'both ends' to use the technology successfully, indicated by 20 respondents
- reluctance and non-interest by members in using the technology (ie, 'not a 'tech-savvy' sector')
- that set-up, use and trouble-shooting have to be both easy and economic and not at the expense of time spent on other work
- firewalls and other organisational security barriers that prevent project officers' or members' access to Gmail, social media sites, etc - *'I am unable to access Facebook etc in my workplace, as many members cannot, which limits what we have done.'*

Poor information technology infrastructure means some geographic spots and areas do not receive a large enough stable bandwidth or even mobile phone coverage – *'Our area is one of the 'darkest' regions in Australia, ie least receptive if you look at a map of broadband coverage'*. However others noted the effectiveness of connecting with rural and remote members, for example *'Using technology has enabled us to access remote locations and practitioners who often work in isolation.'*

The perceived cost of using communication technologies was a factor for some respondents, while others considered it cost effective.

## Website options

### *FLPN-specific websites*

The June 2011 Policy Guidelines state that FLPNs are to use their individual webpage on the government Family Relationships Online (FRO) website to promote their network and activities<sup>35</sup>. Amendments and updates to network pages are processed through Attorney-General's. There was widespread feedback that the site is difficult to use, 'clunky', time consuming and ineffectual as a website to promote activities or use as a repository for resources. These views are reflected by its use:

- only 11 networks have items posted on their FRO webpage, some of which are months out-of-date
- although they have a page, 19 networks did not have any items posted (as at early May 2012)
- 6 networks do not have a designated page and therefore contact details for these networks are not available from the program page.

One project officer noted their inability to even access the FRO website page for their FLPN from their place of work, requiring their auspice to upload materials.

The review identified strong and wide-spread support for establishing network-specific websites which could, for example, provide up-to-date news, information about resources and professional development opportunities, links to video-recorded events, e-directories of services, and membership forums if desired, as well as directing users to other relevant sites.

An argument against individual websites has been the cost of establishing and maintaining a website. These counter points were raised:

- setting up a website need not be expensive (well under \$10,000 depending on expenditure for site design, graphics and functionality)
- on-going annual costs, such as web hosting, are minimal
- there is potential for cost-sharing if networks collaborate through engaging the same website developer and using similar design and functionality
- the staff time required to maintain a site and up-date content may be commensurate with that required to compile, distribute and up-date the content in other ways
- the decision about whether or not it was considered cost-effective to communicate with members via a website should be the decision of each network, along with deciding about the types of functions to be included
- many networks already have access to IT support and to existing potential ISP hosting via their auspice (while recognising the need for any website to be publicly independent to that of the auspice).

The point was made by many that networks are in the business of communicating and, as such, cannot afford not to have a website as one of the major means of modern communication. It was generally accepted that guidelines around branding and content would be required.

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<sup>35</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2011), p.9.

## Wikis

Wikis are text dense web pages to which members can readily add or update content. Non-members can view content in 'public' areas. Wikis are very suitable for text-based information which is categorised and regularly up-dated, such as directories and lists of events.

Wikis have been considered by FLPNs as an alternative to websites, given that the current Policy Guidelines prohibit websites but allow approved use of wikis. The outcome is essentially the same (a website specific to the FLPN) but the flexible functionality of a 'normal' website is less readily available from a wiki site. Wikis do however enable easier member access for updating their information.

### **Victoria FLPN Wiki: *No door is the wrong door...the key is networking***

The wiki will be launched in mid-2012. It was developed largely in response to member feedback about the criticality of current information to support referrals and for increased use of electronic means of communication. The wiki framework was developed to specifications drawn up by the Victoria FLPN, to include the seven networks in Victoria. The wiki will be available to all members in the family law system to support information exchange and collaboration, to swap ideas and information on areas of common interest, provide news and links to event details, and to communicate using the blog. The framework supports NoAS, a platform for video or podcasts for those who miss events, a central repository for information about collaborations, member registration, e-bulletins, and the option for networks to communicate locally or state-wide. Initial development of the Victoria FLPN wiki framework cost around \$10,000, and annual maintenance is estimated at 'next to nothing' because of the shared responsibility for keeping the wiki current. Enhancements flagged for development early in 2012-13 and at a further cost of \$3,000, reflect member feedback about Apple compliance enabling the wiki to be used from iPhone and/or iPad.

Coffs Harbour FLPN trialled the use of a wiki, initiated by court staff and the Federal Magistrate, which enabled key agencies to up-date their information. The trial was discontinued when it was found that use of a well-networked case manager to provide advice and referral information directly to court staff and solicitors offered more current information and was more effective, targeted and time efficient than the wiki. This observation is relevant to smaller networks with a local service system of a limited number of agencies and professionals.

Three other surveyed networks reported their intention to establish a wiki. The Greater Melbourne FLPN has offered to 'share' their wiki with other networks outside Victoria but point out that a re-design would be required to tailor the framework to the specific needs of interested networks, for which a fee would be required by the contractor who developed the original framework.

## Facebook

Facebook's strength is the ease with which it can be used to share photos (eg, of events) and other graphics, share videos, enable members to have rolling conversations, and to announce and share news. Organisations and businesses use Facebook for promotion, advertising and seeking feedback from consumers. However, to be most effective, Facebook communication requires that members are joined up to Facebook themselves and (if they are to receive feeds from the site) have 'liked' the network's Facebook page. It also requires that members are



permitted to access Facebook from their workplace – some organisations restrict this.

At least two networks (Riverina FLPN and South Coast (NSW) FLPN) have Facebook sites, and two others report plans to do so. Facebook is not a substitute for a web-site but can be a useful additional way of communicating, particularly with younger professionals. As it potentially enables ease of commentary by a wide range of members, security issues need to be considered in this sensitive area (family law) to avoid site sabotage.

## **Conferencing options**

### *Video-conferencing*

Video-conferencing utilises simultaneous transmission of video and audio streams, and can involve two or more participants at different sites in an interactive manner. Video-conferencing can happen from a tablet or properly equipped desktop computer with a high speed internet connection or through use of more large scale equipment, often in settings that accommodate larger audiences. Video-conferencing can also include sharing documents or electronic information during the conference.

Many of the surveyed networks reported that access to video-conferencing facilities for groups is a barrier. While some auspices reported having such equipment to conduct core business, this was not always available for network activities. Central West NSW FLPN provides an example of successful use of video-conferencing for steering committee meetings.

#### **Central West FLPN Use of video-conferencing for steering committee meetings**

Central West has used video-conferencing very successfully for twelve months now. For the bi-monthly meetings, we have about 20 members linked in. We use the facilities at Centacare Bathurst (the FLPN auspice) and in Dubbo the Family Law Court videoconferencing facility is used. The meeting goes for about 2 hours, with the general meeting first and the steering committee members staying on after that. Members at each location share lunch and network after the meeting. Any documents to be tabled are sent through ahead of the meeting, and everyone observes the protocol of speaking one at a time. The Chair (in Dubbo) keeps everything on track. We wouldn't get good attendance without video-conferencing as Dubbo and Bathurst are about 3 hours apart by road.

### *Webinars and on-line meetings*

On-line meetings enable interactive real-time collaboration on documents and other functions not available with traditional video-conferencing, with participants logging in from their own computers, laptops or (where possible) smart-phones.

Webinars are suitable for larger meetings and for presentations or seminars and similarly offer real-time interaction between participants. When one way, such as live streaming of an event, it is more accurately referred to as a webcast.

There are many companies providing on-line meeting and conferencing services and it is relatively simple for prospective users to research which of these may

meet their needs. From a brief internet search, they include, as examples<sup>36</sup>, *WebEx* and *GoToMeeting*, with costs currently of about \$70 per month for unlimited meetings of up to 25 participants. *Ventrilo* enables visually interactive small group meetings for very low cost and is suitable in locations with low band width. For presentations, provider options include *GoToWebinar*, with costs currently of about \$150 per month for unlimited webinars for up to 100 people. Webcasting costs of larger events are higher and depend upon the services required.

Greater Brisbane FLPN recently hosted a webinar that attracted 288 registered attendees from across Queensland on the amendments to the *Family Law Act*, and are planning to deliver more on a variety of topics in the future. One participant however reported a negative experience of the first webinar related to the technology – ‘*we had a connection where the sound did not work*’. Another project officer reported that, following the webinar:

*...we have been researching this and intend to get it happening at our local level. The \$ is always a problem as this technology costs, but it is a must now with the diversity of people in network and geographical coverage; also people are busy so physically attending is a problem – technology is the answer.*

## Summary

There is considerable variation between the networks regarding the current and projected use of modern communication technologies. Some have set up, or are planning to trial, wikis and Facebook pages. As yet it has been too early to evaluate how well these initiatives have worked.

There was widespread feedback that the FRO website does not meet the needs of FLPNs as it is difficult for project officers and members to access and to keep up-to-date. The prohibition against FLPNs being able to set up a network-specific website was largely viewed negatively and not understood as to why it exists. FLPNs argue that the costs of establishing and maintaining a website would be an effective use of funds, streamlining the dissemination of information to members.

FLPNs have been slow to make use of on-line options for meetings and conferences, despite the advantages given the geographic distances across some network areas. In part this relates to lack of reliable broadband coverage, and possibly misconceptions about cost and technological complexity. However some networks have started to explore some of the many available options.

All FLPNs who are trialling use of new communication technology are encouraged to share learnings with others.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the Attorney-General's Department considers the issue of approval for the establishment of individual FLPN websites, within specified parameters and guidelines. These guidelines, to be considered in consultation with the FLPNs, may include: branding, consistency, FLPN websites being independent of auspice sites, appropriate inclusions and linkages, and a review role for AGD.

<sup>36</sup> The authors do not endorse any of these products/services. They are included only as examples mentioned during the consultation. Others are available, and networks are advised to do their own research.

## 10 FUNDING ADMINISTRATION

The Policy Guidelines released in 2011 provide the primary description of the intent, objectives, roles and responsibilities, and accountability requirements of the FLPN initiative. Each auspice organisation currently signs an annual funding agreement with the Department. The core content of each agreement is the same, with the particulars for each network specified in Schedule 1 to reflect the categorisation of the network as 'small', 'medium' or 'large' and any additional objectives with which the Department has tasked that network.

Supporting documents are the annual work plan and final report. The work plan is due to the Department by the end of July, so that the Department is aware of planned activities to meet objectives over the coming year. Submitting the work plan triggers the payment of funds.

This section discusses the impacts of the current annual funding term, perceptions about the categorisation of the networks, and the nature and level of in-kind contributions.

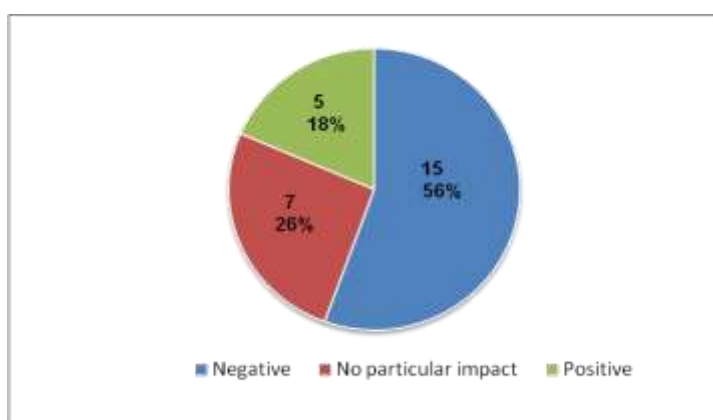
### Funding term

The funding term is currently annual. As one auspice stated:

*We have operated from a view that the next year's funding will eventuate - not really a good business model!*

While the 2009 internal program review considered two-year contracts and that these would offer networks 'more stability, security and ability to plan their activities'<sup>37</sup>, this change was not adopted. A majority of auspice representatives expressed negative views about the impact of the current one-year funding term (see Figure 9). This included auspices which, despite ticking 'no particular impact', all made equivocal comment and stated a preference for a longer term. Auspices which ticked 'positive' made comment indicating that what they considered positive was that, each year, some funding was being made available.

Figure 9: Auspice views about the impact of the one-year funding term on organisational planning, by no. of auspices (n = 27)



<sup>37</sup> Attorney-General's Department (2009) *Evaluation of the Pathways Networks - Main Points*, provided to the reviewers by the Department for the specific purpose of providing background for this independent review.

Similarly Table 11 shows the responses by steering committees about the extent to which annual funding affects forward planning or continuity.

*Table 11: Does the annual funding affect forward planning or continuity? Responses of FLPN steering committees, by number and category (n=31)*

	Yes, definitely	Yes, to some extent	No, not really	No, not at all	Don't know
Small (n=20)	6	7	6	0	1
Medium (n=7)	2	2	2	0	1
Large (n=4)	2	2	0	0	0

Impacts were located with five inter-related aspects:

- lack of job security for individual workers

*It's hard for a Project Officer to feel comfortable and grow in the role when it is a year by year proposition. (Auspice)*

- worker turnover or difficulties with recruiting a worker, undermining network momentum and continuity of activities

*Continuity of project officers goes a long way toward ensuring the success of the network as it takes time for relationships to be established. (Auspice)*

- impacts across the auspice agency and on steering committee members when a project officer cannot be recruited, which in turn undermines the network's 'public face' and network continuity
- members questioning whether it is worth being involved in something with a one-year life

*The steering committee and the network have a sense of uncertainty about the future of the project which affects their sense of commitment to the project. (Auspice)*

- undermining of networks' capacity to forward plan, particularly in respect of activities requiring higher expenditure, involving multiple stakeholders or strategic partnerships, longer lead-up time or longer term projects, for example, securing interstate or international speakers, or planning research initiatives

*Yearly work-plans are also limited as often projects take longer than 12 months to initiate, eg research partnerships with uni. (Project officer)*

Almost all auspice and steering committee responses to the surveys supported three year funding terms, which were noted as consistent with the operational and strategic planning cycles of most of the auspicing agencies, and funding through Attorney-General's and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. A multi-year funding term also fits with perceived advantages of advertising a calendar year of events, rather than by financial year.

*It is easier to plan over a longer term of funding - particularly as it is difficult to secure speakers and dates for activities that fit within the year timetable. For example, this year we have endeavoured to secure Aboriginal presenters for our final workshop of*

*the year - but found it was difficult to pin down dates and times with people from those communities - so we are unable to produce the planned event this year - leaving a surplus of funds which we will ask to be rolled over for the purpose. (Auspice, regional area)*

*Short-term funding generates uncertainty, inhibits innovation, makes it difficult to retain staff, renders longer term planning and proper investment extremely difficult, and stops us from pursuing more holistic strategic goals with longer time frames. (Auspice, capital city)*

## Categorisation and funding levels

There are currently three categories of networks, which, according to the funding guidelines, reflect population numbers, geographic coverage and different funded objectives. The categorisation of each network determines the level of funding. Inclusive of GST, small networks receive \$55,000/annum, medium networks receive \$85,000/ annum, and most large networks receive \$170,000/annum excepting Western Australia, which receives \$280,000/annum.

A problem with the language of the current categorisations is that some networks categorised as 'small' feel this does not reflect the large geographic areas they cover (ie, not 'small' areas) and the challenges faced in networking sparse populations across multiple service centres.

Networks (regardless of categorisation) also raised the view that the level of funding is insufficient for the geographic area to be covered and the associated costs. Networks of all sizes made comment about costs in their area. Capital city networks raised, for example, that their venue hire and 'welcome to country' costs are higher, compared with regional areas. A small network raised the following:

*As a designated 'small' network, the current funding...does not work for us. We have a vast geographical area, from the <state> border right through to <areas>. Travel and accommodation costs are limited with the current level of funding.*

As categorisation determines the level of funding, steering committees were also asked about whether their current categorisation reflects the needs in their area (see Table 12).

*Table 12: Steering committee responses as to whether the current category reflects local need, by network category (n=29)*

	Yes	No	Don't know
Small (n=19)	5	11	3
Medium (n=6)	3	1	2
Large (n=4)	3	1	0

The responses by 'small' networks in part reflect the perceived mismatch between funding and the level of locally identified needs, particularly across large geographic areas. As a regional steering committee reported:

*Because we have a large geographic area that is expensive to travel in we are limited in what we can do with the limited resources allocated to us as a 'small' network.*

It was also asserted that small networks are prohibited from undertaking some types of activities, for example, *‘Small networks can’t afford big cost speakers’*. Regional steering committees argued that with more funding, network activity could be expanded, for example, *‘Sub committees could be established in different geographical areas to provide better coverage’*.

Issues were also raised in respect to linking network categorisation to a prescribed funding level per se, with some steering committees asserting that funding should be tied to the real costs of running the network or the level of activity and membership participation. That is, those that are more active and have more members should be rewarded with more funding than they currently receive:

*Funding should reward, be relative to activity and the numbers participating in events, the diversity across the area and cost of addressing issues of geographic distance.*

*The real costs of providing a network need to be used as part of the criteria for the terminology used.*

It was also asserted that insufficient funding forces in-kind contributions in order for the network to be able to function. This issue is discussed below.

Lastly, it was argued that there is a disconnect between an onerous level of reporting required and the level of funding to ‘small’ networks.

### **In-kind contributions and support**

Auspice agencies estimated the level of in-kind contributions to the operations of the FLPNs by steering committee members (excluding the auspice) as generally fairly high (see Table 13). Examples of the types of contributions include providing stationery, providing venues for meetings and events, attending meetings and volunteering at events (eg, speaking, setting-up, packing-up, staffing reception, leading discussions and small groups, emceeing).

*Table 13: Level of in-kind contributions per annum to networks by steering committees (excluding the auspice), by the category of network (n=31)*

	Very high	Fairly high	Not very high	Low	None	Don't know
Small (n=20)	4	8	1	3	3	1
Medium (n=7)	2	3	1	0	1	0
Large (n=4)	1	2	0	0	0	1
Total	7	13	2	3	3	2

The vast majority of auspice agencies (25 of 29 FLPNs) agreed they are happy to provide in-kind support and acknowledge that other agencies do the same; 2 ticked that they are ‘not happy’ to provide the support. The auspice for a ‘small’ regional network stated:

*The funding level is not enough for this program - the Agency provides staffing resources and support to the program, it relies on assistance and resources of other programs and staff in other agencies, for little gain.*



In-kind contributions include access to auspice facilities and infrastructure (eg, office space, office consumables, meeting rooms, vehicles), developing and producing network collateral, providing strategic planning and risk management, and access to specialised facilities such as video-conferencing. Typical comments about the contribution of senior staff time were that the project officer's direct line manager expended '*very high level manager's time and effort (eg, auspice manager)*' and that '*the time spent by the...auspice representative on the steering committee is significant (although we see our involvement as well worthwhile)*'.

Other steering committee agency staff also provide support, attending events and assisting with reception, leading workshops and making presentations. Expertise is provided for specific or ongoing projects. Project officers benefit from access to program staff and, for some, access to the auspice's ongoing professional development program.

Some auspices and steering committees reported that it is difficult to quantify, in monetary terms, the level of in-kind contribution. A small steering committee reported:

*It is not possible to estimate the value of in-kind contributions as they are beyond the scope of any monetary value. The time and effort of the steering committee alone is enormous considering the hourly rate of private practitioners in the law sector and the in-kind contributions from speakers and facilitators.*

Other steering committees provided broad per annum estimates of costs and/or hours of work contributed:

*In the vicinity of \$5000 to \$6000 in cost which includes travel, admin, wage cost (in kind) and research and planning as well as ongoing social and professional networking. (Small regional steering committee)*

*A steering committee member would provide at the minimum about 30 hrs. However on average the committee members would probably provide 90 hrs to 120 hrs each through attending sub-committee meetings, readings, research, teleconferences, etc. (Capital city steering committee)*

One auspice viewed their in-kind contribution (eg, administration, management time, staff supervision) as being balanced with the benefits that accrued to their organisation from auspicings the network – 'a return on the investment':

*It is valued - and as Director of this organisation I am committed to continuing to provide our resources and support as it has facilitated additional and wider networking that we would have found it difficult to establish. The benefits for clients outweigh any impost on us. (Regional small network)*

Table 14: Estimated financial value of in-kind contribution, by category of auspice, per annum (n=14)

	Small (n=8)	Medium (n=4)	Large (n=2)
Estimated financial value of in-kind contribution by auspice per annum	\$5,000 - \$20,000/annum 0.2 – 0.3 FTE/week	\$7,500 - \$25,000/annum 9 hours/week	\$16,000 - \$30,000/annum (note: the \$30K is on behalf of all FLPNs in that state)

## Summary

There is widespread agreement that an annual funding term leads to instability, particularly in employment security and retention of project officers, and therefore network continuity and momentum.

The estimated financial value of in-kind contributions by auspice agencies ranged from \$5,000 to \$25,000 per annum for individual networks. It is clear that the networks attract considerable valuing-adding on top of the funds outlaid. Some steering committee representatives commented that the costs of stakeholder involvement in supporting network activities were 'beyond monetary value' and were two-way in that agencies received considerable benefit from their participation.

There is widespread confusion about the 'medium' and 'small' tags for categorising networks for funding purposes. Some such networks perceive these terms to be at odds with their geographic size and/or other factors. While there is also dissatisfaction among some 'small' networks about their funding allocation, this issue is about the terms.

### **Recommendation 14**

That the Attorney-General's Department considers a change to a three-year funding term for FLPNs, with annual allocation and reporting, to provide greater security and certainty for employment of project officers and to better enable forward planning.

### **Recommendation 15**

That the funding categories for FLPNs be re-labelled to replace the current 'large', 'medium' and 'small' wording with neutral terms such as Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3.



## GLOSSARY and ACRONYMS

Activity/ies	term used to refer to the many resources, workshops, seminars, other events, networking activities, court-based information kiosks, communications with members and others, that are organised by a network to meet the objectives set out in the Funding Agreement between the auspice and the Department
AGD	Commonwealth Attorney General's Department
DFV	domestic and family violence
Family Law Services	refers to Children's Contact Services, Counselling, Family Dispute Resolution, Parenting Orders Program, Post Separation Cooperative Parenting and Supporting Children after Separation program
Family law system	the breadth of professionals and agencies involved in assisting parents and/or children where parents are separating or have separated. This is not confined to court-related processes and is not intended to exclude anyone
FLPN	Family Law Pathways Network
FRC	Family Relationship Centre
Legal	refers to government, private and community legal services
Local	refers to the common meaning relating to the geographic area/s or professional system/s within which family law professionals work or practice
Non-legal	refers to the broad range of community-based, government and private human services providers in the areas of family relationships, family support, child protection, domestic violence, drug and alcohol, mental health, etc, experienced by mothers, fathers and/or children in separating or separated families
Project officer	term used to refer to the person/s employed or contracted by the auspice agency to undertake network activities. Networks variously use the titles of 'project officer', 'project worker', 'facilitator'
Network	term used to refer to Family Law Pathways Networks and the various names used across Australia
Steering Committee	term used to refer to the people charged with oversight responsibilities, acknowledging that some networks use other names to describe this group, for example, Core Group
The Department	refers to the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department

## APPENDIX A NETWORKS, AUSPICE AGENCIES AND CATEGORIES

<b>NEW SOUTH WALES</b>		
Greater Sydney	Interrelate Family Centres	Large
Central Coast NSW	Centacare Broken Bay	Small
Central West NSW	Centacare Bathurst	Small
Coffs Harbour	Interrelate Family Centres	Small
Newcastle	Interrelate Family Centres	Medium
Northern Rivers	Interrelate Family Centres	Small
Tamworth	Centacare New England	Small
Lower Mid North Coast	Interrelate Family Centres	Small
Riverina	Relationships Australia Canberra and Region	Small
Illawarra	Anglican Diocese of Sydney	Medium
South Coast	Anglican Diocese of Sydney	Small
Southern Highlands	Anglican Diocese of Sydney	Medium
<b>VICTORIA</b>		
Greater Melbourne	Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne	Large
Albury / Wodonga	Upper Murray Family Care Inc	Medium
Ballarat	Centacare Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Inc	Small
Barwon South West	Community Connections (Victoria) Ltd	Small
Gippsland	FMC Relationship Services	Small
Shepparton/Bendigo	Centacare Diocese of Sandhurst	Small
Mildura	Mallee Family Care Inc	Small
<b>QUEENSLAND</b>		
Greater Brisbane	Relationships Australia Queensland	Large
Gold Coast	Centacare Brisbane	Small
Mackay/Whitsunday	Centacare Rockhampton	Small
Sunshine Coast	Uniting Care Community	Small
Toowoomba and South West Queensland	Lifeline Darling Downs	Small
North Queensland	Centacare Townsville	Medium
Central Queensland	Centacare Rockhampton	Medium
Bundaberg	Uniting Care Community	Small
Cairns	Relationships Australia Qld	Small
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</b>		
South Australia	Relationships Australia SA	Large
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b>		
Western Australia	Relationships Australia WA	Large
<b>TASMANIA</b>		
Hobart	Relationships Australia Tasmania	Medium
Launceston and Northern Tasmania	Relationships Australia Tasmania	Medium
<b>NORTHERN TERRITORY</b>		
Top End	Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission	Medium
Alice Springs	Relationships Australia NT	Small
<b>AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY</b>		
ACT and Region	Legal Aid Commission ACT	Medium
Monaro	Legal Aid Commission ACT	Small

## APPENDIX B LIST OF NETWORKS / PERSONS CONSULTED

### Face-to-face consultations with FLPN representatives (n=12)

Western Australia	Large	7 May 2012
South Australia	Large	9 May 2012
Greater Brisbane / State-wide Pathways Network	Large	15 May 2012
Greater Melbourne	Large	16 May 2012
Ballarat	Small	16 May 2012
Greater Hobart	Medium	17 May 2012
Launceston and Northern Tasmania	Medium	17 May 2012
Greater Sydney	Large	22 May 2012
Illawarra Region	Medium	24 May 2012
Top End	Medium	23 May 2012
ACT and Region	Medium	30 May 2012
Monaro	Small	30 May 2012

### Telephone consultations with FLPN representatives (n=18)

Gold Coast	Small	24 May 2012
Toowoomba and South West Queensland	Small	29 May 2012
Albury / Wodonga	Medium	29 May 2012
Townsville	Medium	29 May 2012
Mildura	Small	30 May 2012
Sunshine Coast	Small	30 May 2012
Mackay/Whitsunday	Small	5 June 2012
Gippsland	Small	12 June 2012
Tamworth	Small	June 2012
Central West NSW	Small	June 2012
Southern Highlands	Medium	June 2012
Newcastle	Medium	June 2012
Lower Mid North Coast	Small	June 2012
Coffs Harbour	Small	June 2012
Western Australia Southern Region (Bunbury)		June 2012
Central Coast NSW	Small	June 2012
Northern Rivers	Small	June 2012
Riverina	Small	June 2012

### Face-to-face or telephone consultations with other stakeholders and / network members (n=12)

Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia	16 May 2012
Chief Magistrate of the Federal Magistrates Court	23 May 2012
Chief Judge of the Family Court of Western Australia	June 2012
Acting Deputy CEO, Federal Magistrates Court	7 June 2012
Principal, Child Dispute Services, Family Law Courts of Australia	28 May 2012
Principal Registrar, Family Court of Australia	7 June 2012
Regional Coordinating Registrar (Qld/Northern NSW) FCoA	7 June 2012
Regional Coordinating Registrar (Vic/Tas/SA) FCoA	7 June 2012
A/Regional Coordinating Registrar (NSW/ACT) FCoA	7 June 2012
Director and Deputy Director, Family and Relationship Services Australia	30 May 2012
Director, Family Law Section, Law Council of Australia	28 May 2012
Women's Legal Service Brisbane	29 May 2012

## APPENDIX C FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEW OF OUTCOMES

Question/s to be addressed	Potential key indicators / evidence (examples)
To what extent is funding the networks achieving the objectives of the FLPN initiative?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>activities are aligned with the objectives</li> <li>networks are well-subscribed and active</li> <li>evidence assessed against each of the six Core Objectives below – eg, linkages between family law professionals are improved as a result of the networks</li> </ul> <p><i>Establish and maintain strong links with locally based providers</i>  <i>Develop and maintain appropriate referral mechanisms</i>  <i>Develop and maintain shared understanding of the roles of network members</i>  <i>Develop and maintain awareness of products, services and training available</i>  <i>Develop and maintain cross-sector training</i>  <i>Develop and maintain ways to share information within the Network</i></p> <p>Plus additional objectives:  <i>Coordinating; providing court-related information; supporting; mentoring</i></p>
To what extent do family law system professionals find the networks of value?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>surveyed professionals find the networks valuable and can describe the value to clients</li> </ul>
What, if any, other potential roles could networks take to deliver better outcomes to families?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gaps within existing pathways which could potentially be filled by networks are identified</li> <li>roles of networks in helping meet the needs of families with complex issues (eg, family violence) are identified</li> </ul>
How applicable are the current categories of networks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>categories are considered for consistency and program logic/purpose</li> <li>the 'fit' of current categories, existing parameters, suggested changes and reasons, are identified</li> </ul>
What, if any, further consideration is required of the term of funding agreements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>impacts of the current funding terms are identified</li> <li>alternative options and their likely impacts are identified</li> </ul>
To what extent are current governance models adequate (including the range)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the range of current governance models is identified, with considerations of benefits and disadvantages of various models</li> <li>governance models are assessed for adequacy in terms of program logic/ purpose</li> </ul>
What constraints and challenges exist for the networks (and options for response)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>constraints are identified across relevant categories (eg, geographic issues, resources, local service systems, program related)</li> <li>existing learnings/initiatives to address challenges are identified</li> </ul>
What achievements and benefits can be identified?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>case study examples of benefits to children and families are identified</li> <li>achievements related to the Core Objectives, and ancillary benefits, are identified</li> </ul>
What further opportunities may exist for use of communication technology (and costs)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>networks make use of communication technology options to efficiently communicate with members</li> <li>opportunities and barriers for use of social networking and other communication options are identified</li> <li>networks make use of technology to effectively disseminate training and professional development</li> </ul>

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