

# Key themes in Family Services over the past 40 years

Setting the Family Services Agenda:  
Reflecting on the past 40 years



**VACCA**  
Connected by culture

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL  
CHILD CARE AGENCY

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# Acknowledgement of Country

# What has Impacted on Family Services over the past 40 years

- Policy Context
  - Broader Public Policy at State and Federal level
  - De Institutionalization of services: Childrens and Justice Services, Disability services
  - NDIS
- Women's Rights Movement
  - Professionalization of the workforce
  - Increase in women in senior positions
  - Equal Pay
- Demand management-its impact on length of inventions
- Purpose of family Services
  - Professionalization of the service
  - Value add
- Target Cohort
- Aboriginal Self Determination
- Cultural relevance
- Inclusive practice
- The role of Child protection
- Use of Knowledge and evidence
  - Outcomes
- Practice Approaches
  - Risk management
  - Theoretical constructs
  - Rights based Practice
  - Differential approach to clients
- Workforce
  - Lived experience
  - Diverse workforces
  - Multiple disciplinary teams
  - Core skill sets

# Impacts on Family Services over the past 40 years

- Policy Context-
- At the Federal level, for example, in 2004 Peter Costello's baby bonus of \$3000 lump sum on the birth of a baby resulted in a direct increase on demand for Child Protection and Family Services

De-Institutionalization resulted in, for example:

- increased demand for Family Services-more children were staying at home
- Eventually an understanding that one size fits all practice approach wasn't going to be successful-we need to tailor responses to meet the specific needs of different clients such as those with Disability

# Demand Management

- 40 years ago demand management was mostly about having waiting lists.
- Invention time limits were open ended.
- In the 1980s, short periods of interventions were introduced

# The Purpose of Family Services

- Helping and Support
- Professionalization- Structure of services, streamlined referral processes, goal setting
- Shift to safety and risk
- Keeping children at home
- Keeping children out of care
- Accountability



# Target Cohort: Who is the client and who receives interventions?

- In the 1980s all family members received services
- Worked with families with children under 12
- Today? We are clearer that the child is the primary client.
- Interventions continue to be largely directed at the primary caregiver usually female.
- We direct more interventions towards children, but they are not the primary focus for interventions.
- We are clear we work with families with adolescents

# Aboriginal Self Determination

- When I started to practice, I wouldn't have understood what Aboriginal self determination meant- especially in terms of service delivery.
- Concepts of power, understanding the power that comes from being part of a dominant culture, white privilege, were not really understood
- It's been a very difficult road for Aboriginal agencies to have their voice heard and listened to. It simply was not seen as important.
- Over the 2000s , a major impact on Family Services has been the importance of Aboriginal Self-determination to achieving outcomes of the Aboriginal community being increasingly understood

BUT ... we have a long way to go





# The role of Child Protection

- In the 1980s, Childrens Protection Society no longer received child abuse and neglect repots or undertook investigations and issued Protection Applications if required.
- The Department assumed these responsibilities.
- Previously the Department were only responsible for children once a final Children's Court order was made.
- Child Protection workers saw themselves as statutory family services workers
- The role of CP has evolved over the years

# The use of Knowledge and Evidence

- What knowledge ?
- Growth of Research and Evidence Based programs
- Evidence informed
- Outcomes and cost avoidance



# Practice approaches

In the 1980s, we were very short on helpful theoretical constructs. Today? Just think of how The Best Interests Principle, child development, trauma informed practice, ecological thinking to name a few, guide the work we do. Rights based Practice is coming to the fore in 2020s

- We know we need to have tailored responses to different client groups,
- We know family violence is of central concern and that we need to be knowledgeable about it but also about mental health, disability and other issues so families are informed by our knowledge of these services
- Home visiting
- Use of technology



# Workforce

One of the areas of most development has been in understanding the workforce we need. When I started the concept of what we needed in our workforce was very underdeveloped

Today, we understand:

- the value of having people with lived experiences
- that a diverse workforce enables us to more effectively assist clients from diverse backgrounds.
- the Importance of having skills and knowledge
- worker safety and rights including the right to supervision

# Where does this lead us today?

- We are much clearer that we should actively work to ensure all families in need receive services
- We have a better understanding of the families and that a tailored approach works best
- We rightly understand that we should be accountable
- We understand the importance of Aboriginal Self Determination
- We better understand what we need in our workforce
- We are better at seeing interventions as purposeful with clear goals and outcomes
- We see the importance of having evidence behind what we do so we can be more effective practitioners
- We have access to many useful theoretical concepts that can guide practice

# What can we do to enhance Family Services?

Areas I think we could do better at:

- Improve our client contact
- Ensure our staff are equipped to assist with the complexity of issues that confront them in their work.
- Increase our workforce reflects diversity
- Continue to examine our new knowledges and theoretical frameworks that they are helping us to assist our clients.
- Be clearer about the connection between clients and compliance and continue to advocate for compliance requirements that directly keep children and workers safe
- We need to demonstrated more clearly how wellbeing and safety intertwine and that Family Services is in the business of joint risk management with CP.
- Relationships with other services be reimagined.

# Aboriginal Self Determination

Of greatest priority is to action Aboriginal self determination and have Aboriginal agencies resourced so they can provide services to their people. This includes a transfer of resources to Aboriginal agencies.

Aboriginal families have the right to receive services from their own agencies. In my experience this has yet to be really embraced by the sector who still seek to deliver services to Aboriginal families as a first option.



# Conclusion

There is much that I didn't have time to discuss that I would have liked to and many nuances that I skipped over but one final thought:

Family Services has an incredible wealth of knowledge and needs to structure itself to drive public policy, and be the key influence on what Family Services should look like into the future.