

Plan for Communicating with Parents and Carers 2006 - 2009

Families First Northern Sydney, South East Sydney and South West Sydney



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Executive Summary

This document outlines a proposed Families First Plan for Communicating with Parents and Carers 2006 – 2009 in Northern Sydney, South East Sydney and South West Sydney. It results from the work of the Families First Communication Strategy for Parents and Carers Project across these three regions which began in February 2006.

The Communication Plan aims to raise awareness about how children best grow and develop, to increase parents' confidence in their parenting and to resource services to provide consistent, evidence-based key messages about parenting.

The Plan was developed from consultation with stakeholders across these three regions and from the information gained from a literature review, resource review and service consultation in the three regions.

It proposes a comprehensive communication approach with three separate multifaceted strategies both universal and targeted, as outlined below:

Services Strategy

Increases the capacity of services to provide information to parents and carers by resourcing them with the evidence-based Key Message Resource Kit

Parents Strategy

Delivers information directly to primary caregivers at transition times

Community Strategy

Provides information to the community using a range of media with services as contact points for further information and support

The information that will be provided to parents and carers in this plan covers the social, emotional and educational development of children, aged 0-8 years, especially focussing on developments in the 0-3 years. Information will also include parenting and coping skills. This information will be presented as evidence-based key messages.

A Key Message Resource Kit will be developed which includes comprehensive information presented in plain English. This Key Message Resource Kit will form the basis for consistent messages across the three strategies. It is planned that the Key Message Resource Kit will be produced at the end of 2006 and the three Strategies that follow will run from February 2007- February 2009.

The Families First Communication Strategy for Parents and Carers Project will be the driving force for implementing the Plan with existing funding until June 2007.

The Communication Plan builds on the existing service network and assumes the support and collaboration of services to incorporate the provision of these key messages to parents and carers into their core business on an ongoing basis.

Suggested Strategies for Families First and its partners to undertake are included with each Strategy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Families First

Families First is the NSW Government's prevention and early intervention strategy to help parents give their children a good start in life. Families First was introduced in NSW in 1998 and is jointly implemented by five NSW government departments: NSW Health and Area Health Services; Community Services; Education and Training; Housing; and Ageing, Disability and Home Care, in partnership with parents, community organisations and local government.

Families First is based on international research showing that the way we support families in the early years of their children's lives has a lasting effect on children's development and later education and economic outcomes.

1.2 Families First Outcomes

Families First aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Healthier children and parents and better functioning families
- Children better prepared to learn when they start school
- Reductions in conditions that lead to mental health problems in children
- Improved recognition and early intervention for post natal depression and other mental health issues in parents with new babies
- Greater parental participation in education and training
- Communities in which people interact and are friendly places to bring up children
- Reductions in conditions that lead to child abuse and neglect
- Reductions in juvenile and adult crime

1.3 Background

The three Families First Regions of Northern Sydney, South East Sydney and South West Sydney formed a consortium in 2005 to develop a joint Communication Strategy. Each region had included strategies to provide key messages to parents and carers of young children in their Area Plans and thought that more could be achieved by a combined approach.

The consortium drew on the National and local literature indicating that effective communication about parenting needs to be developed as a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy and is best delivered in a universal setting.

The Communication Strategy for Parents and Carers Project was jointly funded by Families First in these three regions as a 12 month project to develop a Communication Strategy and pilot some resources. It was conceived that the Communication Strategy would aim to raise awareness and educate parents and carers about how to promote and protect child learning, growth and development via key messages. Another identified aim was to maximise the use of resources that already exist and to find ways for more effective use and promotion of these resources.

A Project Officer was employed in February 2006. The Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick is the project auspice and the project is managed by the Co-Director of Community Paediatrics at Sydney South West Area Health Service.

A Management Group for the Project sets direction and oversees the project. A Consultative Committee, comprising a wide representation of government and non-government agencies from the three regions provides expertise, feedback and input to the project.

2. Project Processes February – July 2006

2.1 Literature Review

A Literature Review was undertaken to determine best practice for communicating with parents and carers and possible outcomes. Fortunately, comprehensive national literature reviews had already been undertaken with recommendations which this Communication Plan can implement.

Consultation results with parents, carers and services were also reviewed to understand their needs. Appendix 1 comprises a summary of this Literature Review.

2.2 Resource Review and Service Consultation

The Project Officer randomly consulted services in the three regions about how they currently communicate with parents and carers and their future plans for doing this. These consultations highlighted opportunities for collaboration between services as part of the Plan.

The Project Officer also sent a resource survey to services via the networks of the Families First Project Management Groups and the Project Officer visited services and attended relevant meetings. Service providers identified resources and processes that could be undertaken which have been incorporated into the Communication Plan. Agencies have shown great enthusiasm for the Communication Plan and have demonstrated a great amount of goodwill to working as partners to improve communication to parents and carers.

Appendix 2 summarises the findings from the Resource and Service Consultation.

2.3 Communication Plan Development Workshops

Two workshops were also held with wide service representation to gather input on the key messages and the strategies and processes to be used in the Communication Plan.

3. Communication Plan

Figure 1: Communication Plan Conceptual Model

This model shows the Communication Plan’s timeframes and processes. The first half year of the Plan establishes the resources and processes that will flow on to the three strategies to be implemented in the following years.

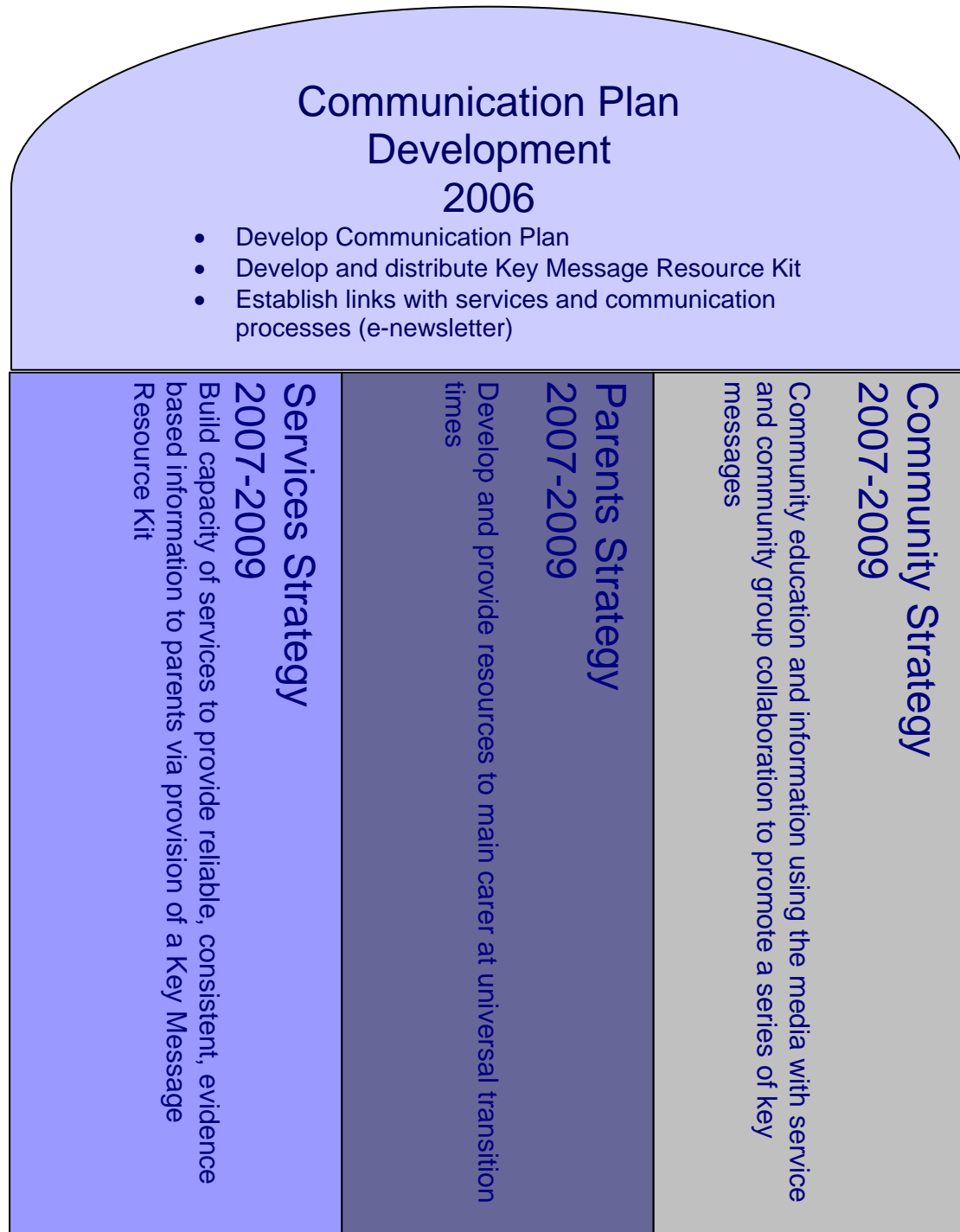
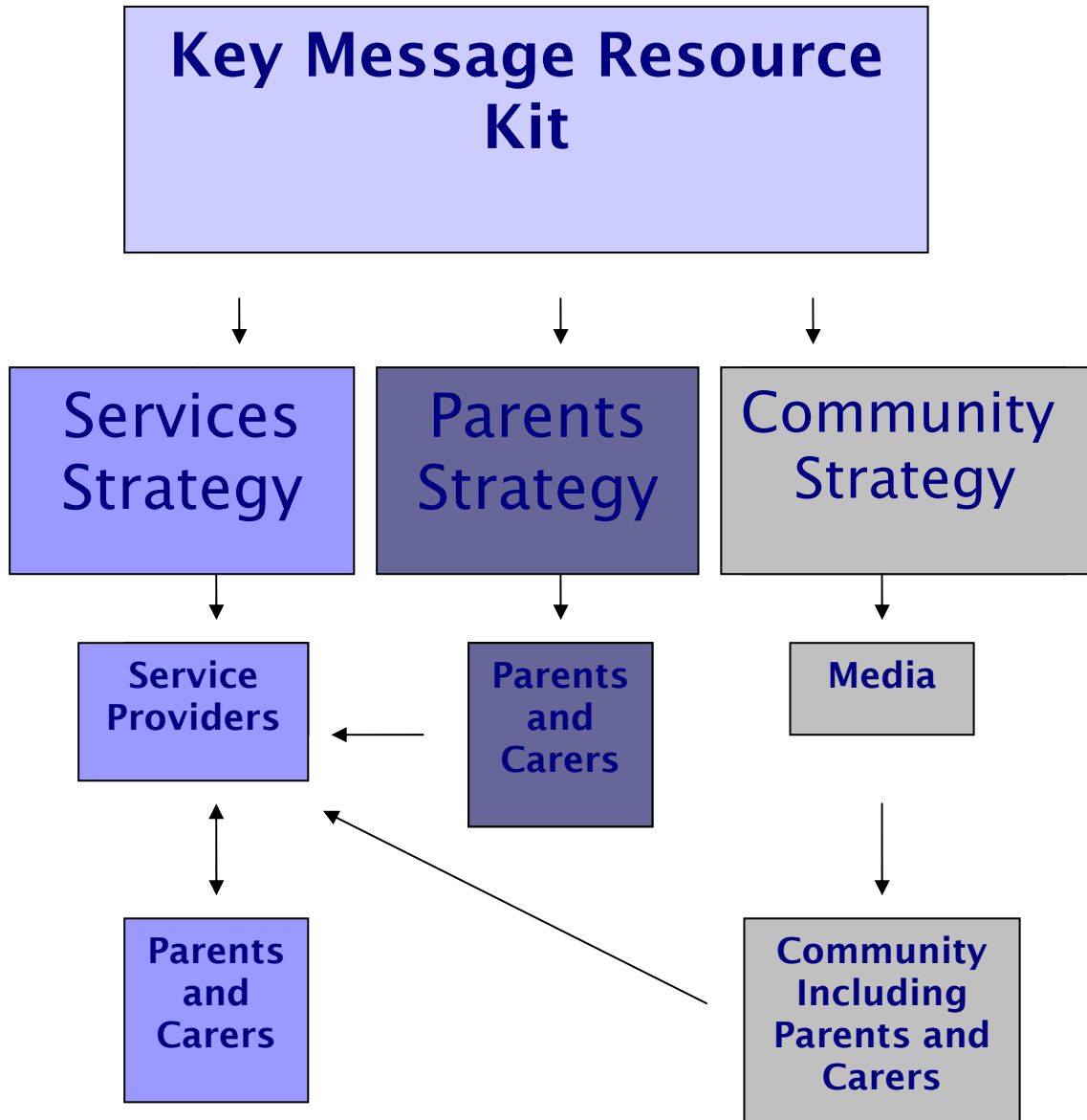


Figure 2: Communication Plan Information Flow

The diagram below shows the flow of information to reach parents and carers via different communication channels in each strategy. The Key Message Resource Kit will provide the consistent information base for all strategies. The Figure also shows that service providers are key contact points for all strategies and offer two-way communication.



3.1 Key Messages

The Communication Plan aims to communicate the following information:

- Developmental Information (0-8 years);
- The Importance of Play;
- Early Language and Literacy;
- Shaping Children's Behaviour;
- The Importance of the 0-3 years;
- A Child's Contribution;
- Coping Strategies for Parents and Carers.

3.2 Communication Plan Principles

The Communication Plan:

- Acknowledges, supports, promotes and works in partnership with the existing service network that assists and informs parents and carers;
- Uses a strengths-based, positive and reassuring approach to communicate information to families in order to encourage parents to feel confident in their parenting;
- Uses evidence-based, consistent messages;
- Provides information to empower families to make informed choices about how they raise their children and to know how and when to get help;
- Builds on existing communication opportunities;
- Uses universal and targeted communication approaches to ensure equal access to information and ensure that information reaches all involved in a child's care;
- Builds on existing communication opportunities;
- Uses existing resources and prevents wastage and replication of resources by planning the development of future resources within the context of each Strategy of the Plan;
- Encourages sustainability of the strategies within the Plan by encouraging Families First and its partners to incorporate the provision of these key messages into the ongoing core business of their work.

3.3 Services Strategy

3.3.1 Target Audience

Service providers, including management and personnel who provide direct services to parents and carers are targeted in the Strategy.

These services primarily use face-to-face communication in an individual, couple or group setting supported by written information, or videos/DVDs. Services are able to provide two-way communication. Parents and carers can ask questions and clarify any information received.

Broadly speaking, these services could include a range of health services, child care services, schools, playgroups, support services for families, disability services, aboriginal services and multicultural services.

The Services Strategy builds upon the existing work of Families First and its partners in developing a network of services that work in partnership with families using a strengths-based approach with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

3.3.2 Summary

A Key Message Resource Kit will be developed in 2006 and 5,000 are expected to be distributed to services across the three regions in early 2007. This resource aims to provide comprehensive, evidence-based information that is written in plain English for services to use with families as appropriate. A series of workshops are planned for each region to introduce services to the resource and a media launch is scheduled for 2007.

A regular e-newsletter will keep services informed of developments in the Plan and invite input from them.

The Services Strategy encourages

Families First and its State government departments and non-government agency partners to offer their websites as a place where services can access existing resources. The Strategy will also encourage agencies that produce evidence-based resources to place them on said websites so that they can be accessed and downloaded by other services.

3.3.3 Rationale

- Health and social service workers surveyed in the literature identified a lack of evidence-based resources and a lack of knowledge of where to get resources
- Resources are developed in an ad-hoc way, often as short-term, one-off funded projects in response to immediate local needs
- A plethora of resources with information for parents exists. There are not many appropriate and accessible resources that cover the social and emotional well-being of children and parents
- Existing resources often contain good information, but may not have been written or appropriately designed for the audience's capacity. These are often not audience-tested or evaluated
- Currently, these resources are not stored centrally nor easily accessible
- Services wanted increased collaboration with other services in their work with families
- Workers identified difficulty knowing which resources were evidence-based
- Resources had inconsistent messages
- The Parenting Information Project (2004) recommended the development of a 'resource kit' for use by services and the wider community

3.3.3 Objectives

- To build the capacity of services to provide consistent, evidence-based information to parents and carers
- To create an evidence-based key message resource for services to use with families
- To make better use of existing resources
- To prevent wastage and duplication of resources by planning the development of future resources
- To make resources easily accessible to services
- To assist service providers to provide endorsed messages around parenting
- To assist service providers increase their support to parents around parenting issues

3.3.4 Suggested Strategies for Families First and its Partners

- The three regional Families First networks and regional partners follow a planned approach for future resource development and dissemination
- Families First and its State government departments and non-government agency partners offer their websites as a location where evidence-based resources can be accessed by service providers and downloaded as needed
- Agencies that develop evidence-based resources place these

resources on such websites to make them accessible to other services

- That suitable Families First communication resources that have been developed in one of the three regions in the Plan be made available for broader distribution as part of the Communication Plan
- Service providers offer their expertise in the development of the information for the Key Message Resource Kit
- Service providers stay informed of the progress of the Communication Plan via e-newsletters sent from the Communications Strategy Project and attend relevant workshops and information sessions.
- Service managers support their staff in implementing the Services Strategy
- Families First within the three regions and its regional partners distribute information about the Strategy using its networks
- Service providers assist in the evaluation of the Services Strategy by completing surveys about the Key Message Resource Kit when requested
- Service providers incorporate the delivery of the key messages to parents and carers into their core work on an ongoing basis and service managers support this

3.4 Parents Strategy

3.4.1 Target Audience

The primary carer of the child/children is the intended recipient of the information in the Parents Strategy. The majority of times this will be the mother and information will be targeted as such.

It is planned that fathers will be specifically targeted with information developed and designed for them from pregnancy and at the time of the birth, shown as the first two communication opportunities in Figure 3 below.

Such a targeted approach could make the provision of information in appropriate languages possible.

3.4.2 Summary

The Strategy will begin by establishing a baseline of information parents know and information that parents need or want and distributing this information across the opportunities outlined in Figure 3 below. Other information opportunities to communicate with carers that are not universal may also be pursued in this Strategy.

Existing resources will be reviewed and new resources could be developed from information in the Key Message Resource Kit if necessary and distributed at these opportunities

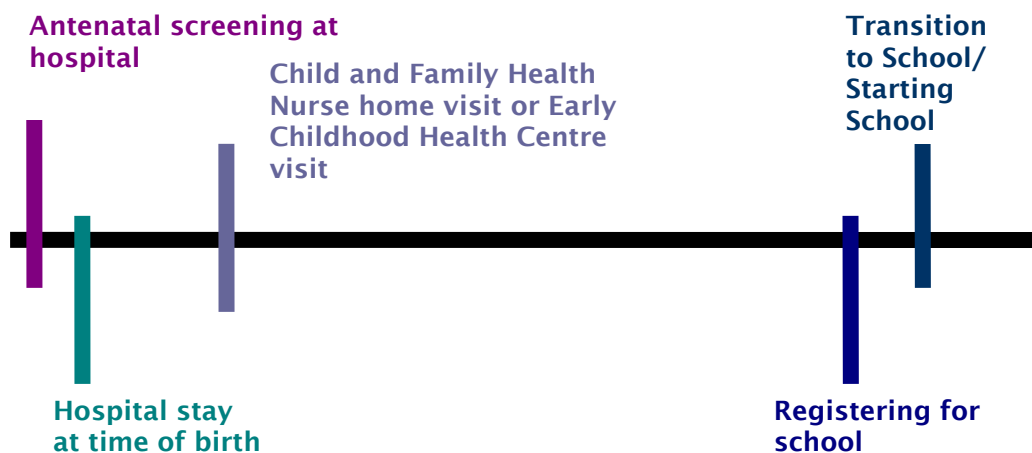
This Strategy will build on the existing Families First funded projects that have piloted resources aimed to caregivers, such as the Multicultural Families First Communication Project, Dads for Dads Project, Fathers Scoping Project, Parenting Support Guide z-card and Early Words and make use of these resources where possible and as appropriate.

Support from Families First regional partners including the relevant Area Health Services and School Regions is crucial to the success of this strategy. Hospitals, early childhood health centres and schools would be encouraged to store resources and staff would be encouraged to incorporate the provision of these resources to all parents/carers as part of their practice at these key times.

Process and impact evaluation of this strategy will be undertaken from 2007-2009.

Figure 3: Universal Transition Times as Communication Opportunities in the Parents Strategy

The continuum below indicates the universal transition times that can be used as opportunities in this Strategy to provide information directly to parents and carers.



3.4.3 Rationale

- Parents said they need information at key transition times
- Parents said they could not find all the information they needed when they looked for it or asked for it
- The primary care-giver was seen as the gatekeeper of information
- Fathers want information specifically written and designed for them
- Research suggests that providing information about development at various stages helps parents to have realistic expectations of their children which can help to prevent child abuse
- Information and knowledge can have the effect of enhancing flexibility which is an element of adaptability by expanding the range of possible parenting responses. Literature showed that information alone can do this when it is matched to the learning needs of parents
- Many existing universal transition points present opportunities for information provision that are not fully utilised. For example, the provision of information in the Baby's Health Record (Blue Book) currently does not contain information about the key messages
- To provide parents with evidence-based information so that they can make informed decisions about how they raise their children. In other words, to improve their health literacy or social/emotional literacy.
- To empower parents and carers to know where to get information, support and help and to access services as needed
- To increase parents' confidence in their parenting
- To increase parents' awareness about how children best learn, grow and develop

3.4.5 Suggested Strategies for Families First and its Partners

3.4.4 Objectives

- Some midwives and Child and Family Health Nurses can assist in surveying parents and carers to establish a baseline of information at the start of the Strategy in order to evaluate its success
- Relevant schools, hospitals and early childhood health centres in the three regions store the resources provided and ensure provision of information to each parent at these times into work processes
- Families First partners that currently have contact with parents and carers at key transition points incorporate provision of these key messages into their existing information provision
- Investigate the feasibility of providing information directly to parents and carers at the times represented by the gap in the communication continuum in Figure 3. The provision of immunization and childcare present opportunities here, although they may not be universal.
- To provide information directly to primary caregivers at universal transition times
- To provide fathers with information that is appropriate for them
- To provide a consistent, comprehensive range of information to every primary caregiver concerning children's social, emotional and physical development as well as when and where to get help
- To integrate social/emotional development information with physical development information currently provided to parents, so that a holistic approach to meeting children's needs is promoted

3.5 Community Strategy

3.5.1 Target Audience

This Strategy aims to communicate key messages to the general community (not just parents and carers) using a variety of media. Fathers, grandparents, CALD communities and Aboriginal communities could be effectively targeted through relevant media, resource development and service collaboration in this Strategy.

3.5.2 Summary

This Strategy aims to raise community awareness of the key messages using a public relations approach with a variety of media, a small amount of local media advertising and existing community events. It then directs people to the existing services for follow-up information, resourcing or support.

It is a collaborative approach that encourages services that currently provide information to parents and carers to be involved in each stage of the campaign and will be resourced as contact points for enquiries following media coverage.

A media launch is planned for June 2007. This would begin the Community Strategy and publicly launch the Communication Plan, the Key Message Resource Kit and the resources developed for the Parents Strategy. This would aim to raise community awareness about the Plan and specifically the Communication Strategy.

After the media launch a series of key messages will be promoted using a range of media. Each communication activity after that would take approximately four months including preparation, resource development and media plan.

Service partners would be involved in the planning and promotion of the key messages for the media and can choose to be the follow-up community contacts.

In the planning stage, existing resources for parents and carers about each key message would be identified and if there were gaps in resources, some could be purchased, printed or developed to provide information to those contacting services following the media campaign.

Service partners in the planning stage would also consider the most appropriate media involvement and target audiences, and specific resource development for groups who are specifically targeted in this strategy, such as parents and carers from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, fathers, grandparents and indigenous parents and carers.

Media releases will be created using the information in the Key Message Resource Kit and sent to local and regional newspapers, radio stations, magazines and television stations. A small amount of advertising will also be trialled for some key messages.

Services that help families and specialise in that particular key message area could be promoted as part of the media campaign in order to increase access. These services would reinforce the messages in the media with their clients. These services' websites could feature consistent information for the time of the campaign, such as a uniform photo essay promoting and demonstrating the key messages.

Newsletter articles would be written that could be run in newsletters published by schools, religious organisations, pre-schools, child-care centres and workplaces at the same time with consistent information provided in the media.

Key messages could also be promoted at significant community events, that draw families, shopping centres and at services.

The strategic use of existing and future hotlines would be follow up contact points for the community to find further information or services.

Similar hotline follow-up can occur from an ethnic radio campaign, where workers from the South Western Sydney Families First Multicultural Communication Project, NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service and other relevant bilingual workers could receive phone enquiries and direct people to relevant services.

3.5.2 Rationale

- Parenting exists in a broader ecological context. Using the media to promote positive approaches to parenting normalises parenting experiences and engages community stakeholders
- People other than parents are involved in the care of children
- The research showed that family and friends - not services - are the primary sources of information for parents
- Information in the media can reach people that do not access services and do not actively search for this information
- Parents and carers do not necessarily know what it is they don't know. If information is only available in leaflets and on websites, then parents would need to know what it is they don't know and then know where to get it. A community strategy can offer that information in a variety of places and settings
- Research showed that fathers, grandparents, CALD parents and carers and indigenous parents and carers are poorly informed by current communication approaches, but these groups can be informed via appropriate media
- Promoting positive parenting and reducing coercive, inconsistent parenting can improve mental health outcomes in children. Social marketing campaigns using the media to promote positive parenting messages have achieved this in a cost-effective manner
- Families function best in supportive communities. A Community Strategy can provide consistent messages to individual parents and other members of the community that support parents in their choices

3.5.3 Objectives

- To use a media strategy to raise

awareness about the key messages

- To provide consistent messages going to families from all information sources
- To provide community-wide awareness so that parents can be supported in their choices
- To involve services as follow-up contact points for a media campaign, thereby promoting collaboration and planning between services to meet agreed upon goals
- To empower parents to make informed choices about how they raise their children
- To promote self-help seeking behaviour and knowledge of services
- To promote services that offer support to families
- To increase access to services by informing the community about these services
- To mentor services in communication and media skills development
- To raise the profile and importance of parenting and social emotional development of children

3.5.4 Suggested Strategies for Families First and its Partners

- Ensure involvement by responding to information distributed to services through e-newsletters
- Collaborate in the planning, implementation and follow-up of the media campaigns as relevant
- Collaborate by providing resources such as expertise, information and other resources as appropriate
- Offer their agency websites, newsletters and existing community events for families as places where the information resources created in this strategy can be accessed by parents and carers

Appendix 1 Literature Review

Process

This literature review draws from previous literature reviews conducted since 1998 that examine information provision to parents and carers. These include: *The Inquiry into Parent Education and Support Programs, Parliament of NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues* (1998); *The Parenting Information Project* conducted for Family and Community Services (2004) and the *Families First Communication Strategy – Stage One: Literature Review* prepared for the Commission for Children and Young People (2001).

Health promotion journal articles covering mental health promotion, social marketing, and health literacy were consulted and the findings from various consultations with parents and carers and service providers are also included.

Summary of Findings

Possible outcomes

The literature review identified that providing information to parents and carers could improve parental adaptability, parenting skills, promote positive mental health in children and improve health/social/emotional literacy of parents and carers.

Increased Use of Supportive Parenting Skills

The results of the Western Australian Child Health Survey (1996) indicate that parenting practices impact on the mental health of children. The authors wrote: *There is clearly a need to ensure that parents are made more aware of the protective value of positive methods of parenting and the potentially adverse consequences of harsh or inconsistent discipline interventions.* (Silburn, et al, 1996, p.43).

NSW Health identifies that 10% to 15 % of pre-school aged children have mild to moderate behavioural problems, and a

similar proportion experience moderate to severe problems. (NSW Parenting Program for Mental Health 2003).

There is great potential for individual change in parenting styles and consequent social change because research shows that parents with an inconsistent or coercive parenting style are more likely to seek help than those with an encouraging or neutral style and are prepared to take steps to change their behaviour. (Moorhead 1998 cited in Urbis Young Keys 2001, p. 35).

The success of the Western Australian Department of Family and Community Services' positive parenting campaign, *Accentuate the Positive*, indicates that a social marketing campaign that uses mass media advertising in radio, television and press aimed at promoting positive parenting techniques can be extremely successful and cost effective. (Urbis Keys Young 2001).

This campaign used positive message framing to promote behaviour change. In doing this it also emphasised the positive effects of good parenting styles rather than focussing on lack of skills or the consequences of poor parenting styles, such as child abuse. (Urbis Keys Young 2001).

Improved Adaptability

The review of the literature conducted in the Parenting Information Project (2004) identified that information and knowledge can have the effect of enhancing flexibility (and therefore adaptability) by expanding the range of possible parenting responses. There is a wealth of research that suggests that written information alone can achieve this outcome when the delivery of information is matched to the learning needs of the parent.

Parents can adapt their behaviour through learning and experience. Perceptiveness, responsiveness, and flexibility are considered to be components of

adaptability. Flexibility it is argued can be modified by providing information.

The qualities in flexibility appear to be problem solving, self-regulation: the capacity to be goal orientated and the ability to modify behaviour patterns in response to feedback. A belief in personal effectiveness and confidence to implement strategies is also needed. A parent with a high level of flexibility has a range of responses they can choose from.

Interventions that improve an individual's coping and problem-solving ability are likely to enhance personal effectiveness and provide greater protection against the effects of future adverse factors.

The research also suggests that providing information about children's development can help parents to have realistic expectations of their children's abilities. Distorted beliefs about child development, in particular unrealistic expectations, have been implicated in stultifying child-rearing practices. For instance, parents who overestimate young children's capabilities and demand performance (e.g. toilet training, obedience, and responsibility) in excess of the child's developmental level are more likely to abuse their children. These children are also at greater risk for developmental delays and emotional disorders. (*MacPhee & Fabio 1992 cited in Quinn Consultancy 2002 p.19*)

Strengthened Community Capacity to support parents

Parenting occurs within and is maintained by a social context. (Bronfenbrenner 1986, in Families First Outcomes Framework 2004). Interventions aimed at parents which isolate them from their social context are unlikely to be successful.

Sanders et al. (2003) include a media-based parent information campaign in their Triple P model of Parenting and Family Support on the basis that a population health perspective has to recognise the role of the broader ecological context of families. Triple P's media and promotional strategy is part of a larger system of

intervention that aims to change the broader ecological context of parenting. It does this by normalising parenting experiences and actively seeking community involvement and support through the engagement of key stakeholders (such as business, schools, etc).

The Parent Information Project (2004) recommends strategies that provide information at a community level. It argues that a broader awareness of parenting information and effective ways to support parents could play an important role in making communities more parent-friendly.

Findings from the reports consistently show that parents seek parenting information and support from their family and friends. Providing information at a community level would reach the family and friends that support these parents.

The literature also shows that many groups of parents and carers are not well serviced with appropriate parenting information. These groups are fathers, grandparents, young parents, indigenous parents, and parents and carers from diverse cultures and language backgrounds. These groups may be better serviced by the provision of information in a community context.

The Literature Review prepared for the Commission for Children and Young People (2001) states that:

Research tends to support the notion that public education campaigns are capable of changing levels of awareness, attitudes and behaviours of the target audience so long as the conditions are right. (Urbis Keys Young, 2001, p. 9)

The Parenting Information Project (2004) recommends a media campaign that promotes the following:

- information for fathers, suggestions about activities they could do with their children;
- promotion of the role of grandparents and ideas for where they can seek further information and assistance if needed;

- general information on child development and managing children's behaviour;
- information about the importance of the early years;
- the role of children in our community.

Consultations with parents and other carers

The following summary of findings comes from the Parenting Information Project (2004) consultation with 1,913 parents of children aged 0–5 years across Australia using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Parents suggested the following needs:

- a range of information about children's age and developmental stages (physical, intellectual, emotional and social);
- information to help cope with becoming a parent; for example, the difficulties of balancing work and family life, physical impact of becoming a parent, and changes in family relationships after having a child;
- information about parental well being including what to expect after the birth of your child; information on changes that occur in relationships, an understanding of how people react differently in their new roles and information about how to identify post natal depression;
- a consolidated and credible source of information;
- most parents indicated that they were coping well with parenting, however, most also recognised the value in obtaining information to assist them to be more effective parents.

In addition, the Families First Inner West report (2003) showed that parents' need for information was linked to transitions in their child's development. The most urgent need for information was when their children were very young. Parents wanted

factual information as well as reassurance that they were managing their child appropriately.

Parents initially want information regarding feeding, establishing routines, settling and preventative health. These needs were greatest for first time parents. Sleep, settling and managing children's behaviour were the greatest information needs in the toddler years. One of the reasons these issues are challenging is that parents experience conflicting expectations about what is regarded as normal and conflicting ideas about how they should manage their child. School readiness and understanding how to support children at school were also concerns for some parents.

The Australian Childhood Foundation surveyed 501 parents in April 2005 and found that parents were anxious and feel under pressure about their parenting. A summary of the results show:

- 70% of these parents believe there is a lot of community pressure on them to get parenting right;
- 80% are worried about their children's future;
- 75% of parents feel that balancing work and family is a serious issue for them;
- 78% of parents wanted information about how to improve their relationship with their children;
- 66% of parents indicated the way they were parented by their parents is very influential in how they now parent their own children;
- Only 38% of parents agreed parenting comes naturally to them.

A different consultation with 150 parents and carers conducted in the Northern Sydney Families First Region as part of the Families First Sub-regional Project found that "all [parents] mentioned that very soon after the birth of their child they felt hopeless and helpless." (Warillow 2006, p. 11). Most mentioned that they did not feel adequately equipped for their transition to parenthood.

These participants suggested improvements could be made by information dissemination in ethnic and mainstream media to raise public awareness of services and a community awareness campaign on the importance of prevention and early intervention. (Warillow 2006)

Parent focus groups run by The Raising Children Network in 2005 to help determine information provision to parents found that they had to pitch their website, www.raisingchildren.net.au to cater for analytical information seekers searching for explanations and also those with less time looking for short, direct messages. This shows that parents want both types of information. (Raising Children Newsletter Oct 2005)

Groups with additional information needs

All reports were consistent in pulling out for attention the needs of fathers, indigenous parents, parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, parents who have a child with a disability and grandparents. These groups of parents and carers are currently poorly serviced with information appropriate to their needs.

Fathers

The participation of fathers within the family is important in determining the emotional wellbeing of the family. (NSW Parenting Partnerships 2003). Fathers in the consultations identified that they would like to increase their knowledge and skills about parenting, but that they feel that information was directed at mothers and not towards them. The Parenting Information Project (2004) the Nepean Families First Consultations (2002) and the Families First Inner West (2003) consultations showed consistent results in relation to the information fathers receive.

They identified that fathers:

- saw mothers as the gatekeepers of information determining what information they could access;

- reported a lack of confidence in handling babies and behaviour management;
- thought information was not presented in an accessible way for them;
- prefer hands-on, experiential approaches to learning about child development and how to best interact with their children;
- reported a desire to increase their confidence with handling babies, to learn more about behaviour management techniques and to understand how their relationships change when they become parents.

Indigenous Families

The Indigenous Parenting Project (2004) identified the following as significant:

- The parenting role is tied to the cultural norm of extended family, kin and community child rearing responsibility.
- Individual empowerment, increasing self-esteem and confidence are important as these have been eroded by factors such as the Stolen Generations.
- When delivering information, it should be considered that indigenous child rearing practices can be different from non indigenous practices in areas such as, sleeping, feeding, learning, discipline, playing, care and mobility.
- Information about children comes mainly from other family and community members.

Parents and Carers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

All consultations highlighted significant gaps and barriers in the provision of information to parents from non-English speaking backgrounds and these surveys found that these families were not well serviced by mainstream parenting services. The printed material that is

available often relies on bilingual staff and interpreters to transfer knowledge and may not reflect a culturally acceptable approach to parenting. Some parents felt that their traditional discipline practices were criticised.

The consultations identified that CALD families made regular use of television, radio and newspapers in languages other than English, and in some instances these provided information on parenting.

Parents and carers who have a child with a disability

The consultations with parents of children with a disability identified the following:

- a need for information about their child's condition that took into account their needs as parents, rather than just the medical facts;
- a need for information about early intervention, family support and education services;
- mothers reported added stress that they were expected to explain their child's condition and needs to other family members;
- there was a lack of understanding in the medical field and the community about the impact of having a child with a disability;
- the timing and manner in which parents receive information about their child's disability affects how they undertake their parenting role;
- these parents identified the internet as a good source of information which was not readily available elsewhere and it allowed parents to share experiences.

Grandparents

Evidence indicates that more grandparents than ever are responsible for the primary care of grandchildren. Grandparents play a variety of roles in the life of their grandchildren. Many seek up-to-date information about modern parenting techniques and information about child health and development, about what to do in an emergency, or about

accessing respite care in the event of personal health issues.

Grandparents caring for children require similar information to parents, as well as information on how to access support and resources. Possible different dissemination points for grandparents include Centrelink, senior citizens venues and newsletters.

Recommendations from the Literature Review

The literature review recommended strategies are summarised as follows:

- conducting a social marketing campaign using the mass media, supported by a mix of focussed community activities;
- implementing a long-term approach with multiple, targeted strategies;
- supporting a positive approach to parenting and supporting parent's strengths;
- information provision to parents about coping strategies and children's development;
- providing information at transition points;
- providing reliable, credible, evidence-based resources to services supporting parent;
- providing resources at a community level for use in settings, such as workplaces, local media and ethnic radio to promote a family supportive community.

Consultations with Services that Support Parents

Consultations with professionals and policy makers in the Parenting Information Project (2004), said that they could better support parents if they had access to up-to-date and consistent parenting information, and the opportunity and skills to work in greater partnership with each other.

They stressed the importance of developing positive relationships with

parents and that reinforcement of issues can be provided via other media.. They said there was a range of material available, but that selecting information that is reliable, valid and evidence-based was difficult.

Appendix 2 Resource and Service Consultation

Summary of Findings

- Good resources exist that could be used as templates for future resource development or used as they are. Some of these would be available for free and could be incorporated into the Strategy, some may need to be purchased
- Services in the regions that provide information to families found useful resources on government department websites and professional associations websites
- Individual workers in services often developed their own resources in an ad-hoc way to meet the needs of clients if no other resources were available. These resources were informative, but often written at a very high literacy level.
- Services were not aware of the range of information available
- Services were unable to access some information due to lack of resources. For example, many Child and Family Health Nurses do not have access to computers.
- Service providers do not necessarily have budgets that allow for downloading and printing of resources for parents
- Standard resources every parent receives, such as the Child Health Book (Blue Book) at the birth of their child, do not contain information about the social and emotional development of children, or information about the emotional health of parents.
- Services showed great support for the project and a great amount of willingness to be involved in its development and to benefit from the outcomes of the Communication Plan.
- Other interest groups, such as private corporations provide

parents with information or sponsor information resources in some non-government agencies

- Service providers want to develop links with other services as part of the process
- Agencies are keen to be involved in strategies that are sustainable

Opportunities

- UNICEF and its partners developed *Facts for Life* as a resource for health workers to deliver key messages to families regarding children's health and development. Over 15 million copies have been used in 200 countries, translated into 215 different languages. This resource presents authoritative information in a simple way. *Facts for Life* can be used as a template of a key message resource kit for services to use with parents

Use of websites

- The Families First website provides a great opportunity for disseminating information about the Communication Plan to services. The Families First website currently provides research and information related to the key messages available for service providers to access.
- Families First partners' websites, including NSW government departments and non-government agencies offer opportunities to be used by the project, including sites that provide information in many languages, such as the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
- The development of a national, evidence-based parenting website, www.raisingchildren.net.au for parents provides a great potential resource and referral point for the Communication Plan.

Families First funded resources in the three regions

- Many agencies have developed resources for parents and carers with funding from Families First. The resources produced in these pilots, such as the South West Sydney Dads for Dads project, South East Sydney Parenting Support Guide z-card, Northern Sydney Fathers Scoping Project and the South West Sydney Multicultural Communications Project could be modified and incorporated into the strategy as appropriate.
- The Northern Sydney Families First funded Professional Development and Interagency Orientation Project have created DVDs for services that have potential to be incorporated into the Key Message Resource Kit.
- A number of large non-government agencies in the regions covered by the project have marketing personnel involved in resource development and media work that would like to work collaboratively to forward the Community Plan.

Additional Resources

- The Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy, managed through Families First is developing communication resources for indigenous families
- The Australian Childhood Foundation has developed a series of resources that are available for free. *A Child's Contribution* resources include "talking books" with parenting information in twelve languages.
- Healthy Start is an Australia-wide strategy to support parents with learning difficulties to promote a healthy start to life for their young children. It has established a series of learning hubs and resources for parents with an intellectual disability.
- NSW Parenting Partnerships is a framework for mental health service involvement in promotion, prevention and early intervention through parenting initiatives. This Partnership initiated by NSW Health works collaboratively with agencies to implement parenting initiatives that aim to reduce the prevalence of behavioural and emotional difficulties in children.
- The Centre for Community Child Health provides comprehensive information on some of the key messages for services working with children which this project could draw upon for the Key Message Resource Kit.
- Providing information to high needs, low literacy communities will be a challenge for the project. A number of projects in the South West Sydney region provide possibilities for direct information provision in centres based in central locations. These projects consist of four parenting resource centres and other projects federally funded through Communities for Children. Also, a new shopping development in Macarthur Shopping Centre (Campbelltown) will have a large room established for parents where two staff members from Good Beginnings will be focusing on information and support to families on a drop-in basis.
- A number of DVD resources exist that address the social and emotional development of children and parent s– child interaction, such as "Getting to Know You" (Northern Beaches Child and Family Health Service and the New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry) and "Hello Dad, Infant Communication for Father" (Good Beginnings Australia and The New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry), which may be purchased for use within the Parents Strategy.

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