Child and Family Services Alliance

Strengthening Partnerships Strategy

Reference Guide and Template

March 2012

Department of Human Services
Children, Youth and Families Division
INTRODUCTION

The Strengthening Partnerships strategy (the strategy) aims to strengthen and sustain collaborative and respectful relationships between child protection and integrated family services. The strategy was provided to Child and Family Services Alliances (alliances) in January 2012 for implementation.

Stage 1 of the strategy (January – June 2012) supports a strong foundation and enables alliances to identify the partnership arrangements that require further attention or greater investment. The alliance executive membership is responsible for leading this work.

In Stage 2 of the strategy (July – December 2012) alliances will prioritise those actions that will strengthen the partnership and can be achieved through to the end of December 2012. Each alliance must identify a minimum of one priority to be progressed through this period.

This guide and template has been developed (modelled on the catchment planning template) to enable alliances to document the actions to be undertaken through stages 1 and 2 of the strategy - see Appendix A.

Next Steps: The more medium and long term priorities and actions (referred to as Stage 3) will be informed the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children’s Inquiry Report 2012 and the government’s response. Further advice regarding the requirements for the next catchment plan and how the more medium and long term strategy priorities and actions can be embedded, will be provided when determined.

ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP

This section will confirm that the necessary structures are in place to support the interface between child protection and integrated family services. It will further affirm the people who will represent child protection and integrated family services within the alliance structures.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

This section is to record the needs of the partnership based on an exploration of what is required to strengthen and enhance the relationships between child protection and integrated family services. It requires alliances to jointly undertake a partnership analysis and discuss the key themes.

The VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool and Checklist is provided for the purpose of this exercise. Drawing upon the outcomes of the partnership analysis activities, the needs analysis will consider areas that may require further attention and/or that present opportunities for strategic enhancement across the catchment.

PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Priorities will directly support the overall aim of strengthening partnerships between child protection and integrated family services.

ACTION PLAN

Actions that will be implemented between July and December 2012 are to be recorded in the action plan. Examples of actions that directly support the overall aim of strengthening partnerships between child protection and integrated family services are listed in Appendix B. .
Appendix A:

Strengthening Partnerships Strategy 2012

ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP

Stage 1 Action 1 - Map the points of interface at each level of the alliance partnership, identifying the core meetings and activities across executive, operational management, service delivery coordination, and other local arrangements. For each point of interface determine the membership and level of commitment required.

Stage 1 Action 2 – Confirm representation across child protection and integrated family services in the alliance executive, operational management and service delivery coordination membership and coordination meetings.

Upon the completion of stage 1 – actions 1 and 2, record the outcomes of your partnership's discussion in the section below.

**Alliance Membership**

- What alliance structures are in place to support the interface between child protection and integrated family services?
- Who are the people who will represent child protection and integrated family services within each of the alliance structures and what are their roles?

The North Central Victoria Family Services Alliance (NCVFSA) structure that supports the interface between child protection and integrated family services has been a priority for the NCVFSA Executive and Operations Groups. Consequently this structure development has been influenced by the identification of areas for improvement for the NCVFSA as revealed by a partnership health check that was undertaken using the *Vic Health partnership analysis tool*. Surveys were sent to 3 cohorts – the NCVFSA Executive, its Operations Group members and representatives from Child Protection.

Stage 1 of the strategy (January – June 2012) supported a strong foundation and enabled the NCVFSA to identify the partnership arrangements that require further attention or greater investment. The alliance Executive membership has been responsible for leading this work. The learning’s from this process have been significant in defining the work of NCVFSA Executive and Operations Group to further develop, and consolidate, the structure that supports the interface between child protection and integrated family services. This structure has seen the strengthening of the partnership at both levels (executive and operations) plus also working to ensure that executive and operations are clearly working in unison to enhance the critical relationship between child protection and integrated family services.

Structural inclusions have been:
- An agreed purpose by all partners in NCVFS Executive to lead the process for improving this relationship between child protections and integrated family service in the NCV region, i.e.: including referral, communication and improved service delivery for vulnerable families
- Formal opportunities to discuss specific child protection/integrated family services issues at both Executive and Operation Group meetings
- The *Strengthening Integration between Child Protection and Integrated Family Services* project was established to respond to the OV recommendations, with the aim of building and sustaining collaborative relationships between child protection and integrated family services. A Strengthening Integration reference group was established in 2010, comprising of representatives from child protection and integrated Family services, both regionally and centrally. Feedback was also sought from alliances
about how community service organisations may be better supported to present their professional assessments, actively contribute to decision making and raise matters without reservation. This feedback has informed the development of the NCVFSA strategy.

In Stage 2 of the strategy (July – December 2012) alliances will prioritise those actions that will strengthen the partnership and can be achieved through to the end of December 2012. Each alliance must identify a minimum of one priority to be progressed through this period.

Findings from this partnership health check have been presented at a joint planning forum with Operations Group members and members of the Executive in June 2012 that informed the identification of strategies to improve the Child Protection & integrated Family Services’ partnership:

- Shared understanding between Family Services and Child Protection – have common goals
- Have opportunities of shared work experiences i.e.: secondment of child protection (CP) staff in Integrated Family Services settings and (IFS) staff in CP settings
- Having the structure to be clear who should have the lead responsibility for cases – IFS or CP.
- Establish & maintain a regular forum for analysing data relating to children and families moving between CP & IFS thus strengthening responses to vulnerable children & their families
- Create an environment for experienced practitioners with supervisory roles across CP and IFS to network and consider shared opportunities
- Build on a formal communication structure for providing feedback to NCVFSA alliance members and the broader CP & FS workforce on outcomes of decision made by Alliance
- Deliver joint (IFS & CP) place based training on client information sharing guidelines
- Develop a communication structure that sets out requirements and processes for sharing information, including compliance and accountability measures, at practitioners and or case specific level
- Establish and maintain a network of leaders to regularly educate CP & IFS practitioners regarding respective roles and responsibilities

Those people who will represent child protection and integrated family services within the NCVFSA structure and their roles:

- TBA – BDAC
- Shane Wilson – Manager - Child Protection - Loddon Mallee Region
- Sue McConnachie – Chair, Executive
- Alison Carson – Child First
- Garry Steadman – Deputy Chair, NCVFSA Executive
- Merrin Pricter - NCVFSA Executive

NEEDS ANALYSIS
Stage 1 Action 3 – Undertake a ‘health check’ of the partnership, identifying the areas that need further work and developing a plan for future action.

Upon the completion of stage 1 - action 3, record the outcomes of your partnership’s discussion in the section below. Please specify areas of need and/or strategic enhancements identified through the partnership analysis and elaborate as required.

Needs Analysis

- What are the key issues facing the alliance? How do these issues impact on the alliance and on its ability to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families?
- What does the alliance need to do differently/better/more of/less of in order to strengthen and sustain collaborative and respectful relationships within the partnership?
The key issues facing the alliance - How do these issues impact on the alliance and on its ability to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families?

The key issues facing the NCVFSA have been identified as being related to resourcing, particularly the smaller agencies; the need to increase membership; clear delineation of roles, responsibility and accountability; consolidating the single entry point to accessing IFS; strengthening the indicators to gauge performance; clarifying the Alliance vision and plan for the next 12 months; having a shared understanding and common goal between CP & IFS; and improve the collaborative practice model between all partners and other agencies involved with the Alliances client base. These issues, when present, clearly have the potential to impact adversely across the full contact journey of vulnerable children, young people and families with IFS agencies and as such need to be given significant, and timely, attention.

What does the alliance need to do differently/better/more of/less of in order to strengthen and sustain collaborative and respectful relationships within the partnership?

The NCVFSA is committed to pursuing the following aims:

- Collectively develop a clear, purposeful agenda for Alliance Executive & Operational Management meetings
- Establish & maintain a regular forum for analysing data relating to children and families moving between Child Protection & Integrated Family services thus strengthening service responses for vulnerable children & their families
- Review current governance structures & introduce measures that will strengthen capacity of Aboriginal community organisations to more fully participate at both Executive and Operational levels
- Establish & implement a formal process of induction for new executive and operations members
- Develop a client/family flowchart that maps the significant decision-making points across the continuum of service delivery
- Devise a process for engaging CP, mainstream IFS and ACCOs
- Establish and convene an expert panel (or complex case panel) to review specific cases
- Create an environment for experienced practitioners with supervisory roles across CP and IFS to network and consider shared opportunities, such as staff professional development and professional support
- Engage in joint projects or initiatives that would be based on shared issues or a common area of work
- Introduce, or build upon, the formal communication structure for providing feedback to alliance members and the broader CP & FS workforce on outcomes of decision made by alliance
- Deliver joint, place based, training related to client information sharing guidelines
- Strengthen the communication structure that sets out requirements and processes for sharing information, including compliance and accountability measures, at practitioners and or case specific level
- Establish and maintain a network of leaders to regularly educate CP & IFS practitioners regarding respective roles and responsibilities
- Engage in joint knowledge exchange sessions with related universal, secondary or specialist
services
  o Promote and maximise the use of best interests case practice model and specialist practice resources as an evidence base for decision making processes and facilitated reflective practice
  o Engage in joint knowledge exchange sessions with related universal, secondary or specialist services

PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Please identify the key priorities that will support the overall aim of strengthening partnerships, noting the priority areas that can be achieved over the next 6 months. For this priority, identify the objective/s, particular need/s this will address and link with relevant plans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Objective/s</th>
<th>Needs Addressed by Priority</th>
<th>Link to other plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the desired outcome?</td>
<td>What is required for this to be achieved?</td>
<td>What identified need will the priority address? Refer to findings as documented in the needs analysis.</td>
<td>What links does this have with existing regional and state-wide priorities and plans?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. A well-developed knowledge base | 1.1 Determine a minimum level of service across the catchment to manage Alliance resources
- minimum data set, benchmarking indicators - compare to state wide data and use client feedback loops, outcome not output focussed
- resource allocation
- streamlined and purposeful data collection
- demand management strategy review
- data mapping what is collected and other potential data sources
- optimal resource use and development
- client pathways mapping

1.2 Identify data sources and types that will inform and strengthen practice

1.3 Develop a shared definition for ‘increasing complexity’ | This priority will address the identified need to build capacity of staff to respond to complex needs of vulnerable children and families and improve co-ordination and integration of the FS system |
| 2. A revitalised commitment | 2.1 Strengthen governance and structure by clarifying role of Executive and Operations Group – review key documents: MoU, terms of reference, communications strategy  
- Clear structures and delegations  
- Change management – network to an alliance (governance model)  
- Quality decision making  
2.2 Confirm Executive’s direction and improve communication between Exec and Operations Group  
- Transparency – sharing of information and data  
- Clear purpose of meetings (terms of reference)  
2.3 Promote and strengthen the Aboriginal Liaison role in Child FIRST and create culturally ‘safe’ environments for ACCO staff to participate | This priority will address the needs to: clarify the roles and responsibilities of Alliance members; strengthen the partnerships arrangements within the Alliance, and will also assist with improving the co-ordination and integration of the FS system |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 3. A capable and competent workforce | 3.1 Identify any gaps in core competencies across the workforce and develop joint skills development  
3.2 Develop a formal induction for new members of the Alliance and develop joint staff training and secondment opportunities  
3.3 Develop a series of forums that provide capacity building as indicated in recent member feedback about staff skill development and relationship management | This priority links closely with the other priority areas and will augment the process for addressing the needs as mentioned above. |

**ACTIONS PLAN**

Please record the priority, objective/s and action/s, the outcomes and measures, noting when and by whom these actions will be undertaken, that will be prioritised for the 6 months between July and December 2012.

**Priority: A well-developed knowledge base for the NCVFS Alliance**

**Objective/s:** Determine the minimum level of service resources required (across the catchment) to adequately manage Alliance service demand; identify data sources and types that will inform and strengthen practice; and develop a shared definition clients ‘increasing
### More in-depth knowledge of demand

**Actions**

What actions are required to meet objective?

**Roles/Responsibilities**

Who will be involved? What are their roles? Who will co-ordinate the action?

**Timeline**

What date will actions be complete d?

**Outcome**

What is the outcome to be achieved?

**Outcome Measures**

How will the outcome be measured?

**Evaluation/Progress**

Have actions been completed? Have outcomes been achieved?

- A review of the NCVFSA Demand model - DHS and all partners will be involved to discern the intake process, level of complexity and numbers that influences the demand profile

  - Septembe r 2012
  - Improved demand process - that is supportive of all agencies and more accurate in acknowledging and resolving demand pressures
  - Feedback form Alliance members at both Executive and Operations levels – to be included on agenda of each meeting on an on-going basis

- DHS and all partners will be involved to discern the intake process, staffing issues, level of complexity and numbers that influences the demand profile and partnership capacity

  - October 2012
  - Alliance partners to be clear of Alliance capacity and that of each partner agency
  - Regular updates provided by all members at both Executive and Operations levels – to be included at Operations meeting to explore/clarify this on a regular basis

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**Priority:** A revitalised commitment across the NCVFS Alliance

**Objective/s:** Strengthen governance and structure by clarifying the role of the Executive and
### Operations Groups – review key documents – MoU; TOR; and Communication strategy.

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<td>What actions are required to meet objective?</td>
<td>Executive Group lead with Executive Officer co-ordinating support. Members of executive and operations will be allocated document/s to review and report back to executive group</td>
<td>December, 2012</td>
<td>All documents will be updated and more current to Alliance partnership model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review all documents as identified in priority</td>
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### Priority: A capable and competent workforce

**Objective/s:** Identify any gaps in core competencies across the workforce and provide joint skills development; develop a formal induction for new members of the NCVFSA and develop joint staff training and secondment opportunities; Confirm the NCVFSA Executive strategic directions enhanced by improved communication between Executive and Operations Group and, Promote and strengthen the Aboriginal Liaison role in Child First creating a culturally safe environment for ACCO staff to participate.

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<td>Post induction survey –</td>
</tr>
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<td>Induction process for all new Executive Alliance members</td>
<td>Officer co-ordinating support.</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
<td>Members better equipped for leadership role</td>
<td>3 months after induction</td>
<td>Evidence of increased input in decision making i.e.: increased input formally recorded in meeting minutes or other forms of communication as decided in this process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve conditions for ACCO members – Executive &amp; Child First</td>
<td>Executive Group lead with Executive Officer co-ordinating support – ensuring NCVFSA ACCO members involvement.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase participation in Alliance decision making</td>
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Once completed, this plan is be endorsed by the alliance and copies provided to alliance members.

**Endorsed by Alliance:**

Signature: Sue McConnachie

Name: [Signature]

Date: 25 June 2012