



## **FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION** **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

# **Aboriginal Family Planning Circle**

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on behalf of the Aboriginal Family Planning Circle*

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# **Aboriginal Family Planning Circle Follow-Up Evaluation**

Upon consultation, WESTIR Limited agreed to undertake a follow-up evaluation of the Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) in 2017. The Circle's activities were initially evaluated by WESTIR Limited in 2015, with the final evaluation provided in January 2016. The AFPC program aims to assist local Aboriginal individuals and families in addressing their complex service needs and reduce the risk of having their children assumed into out-of-home care.

In carrying out the research, researchers from WESTIR Limited were assisted by a number of people:

- The Aboriginal Family Worker Support Group, active in the Blacktown/Mount Druitt area since 2006 and who were key in co-designing the Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC) program with many other Aboriginal workers and community members.
- Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services (AIFBS) staff at Rooty Hill, particularly Cheryl Jackson (Manager Casework), Jackie Stewart (AFPC Project Officer) and Ashleigh Webster (Administration Support).
- Maria Losurdo from Losurdo Consulting who undertook interviews with current clients of the AFPC program for this follow-up evaluation.
- The clients (current and former) and service providers of the AFPC program who took the time to participate in the follow-up interview process.

WESTIR Limited is making the executive summary of the Follow-Up Evaluation Report available online, however the full report will not be released publicly, except by special request. Individuals and organisations interested in reading the full report are advised to contact Marrin Weejali on (02) 9628 3031.

## Evaluation Summary

Upon consultation, WESTIR Limited (Western Sydney Information and Research Service Limited) agreed to undertake a follow-up evaluation of the Aboriginal Family Planning Circle (AFPC). The Circle's activities were initially evaluated by WESTIR Limited in 2015, with the final evaluation provided in January 2016.

The AFPC program was established in 2006 by a group of determined Aboriginal women working in the Blacktown/Mount Druitt area. The program works with Aboriginal parents and families whose children are at risk of being assumed into out-of-home care (OOHC) by addressing the complex social issues/needs they are experiencing. The AFPC program began as a volunteer-run, community-based initiative but it quickly outgrew its volunteer capacity and an AFPC Project Officer was appointed by NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) in late 2015. The appointment of the Project Officer has allowed the AFPC program to increase the number of families and service providers participating and expand the service delivery area within Greater Western Sydney (GWS).

A number of recent reports and reviews have indicated that the child protection system in NSW, particularly OOHC, is broken. Despite numerous legal and policy frameworks designed to advance the agenda of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC over time, recent data shows that in 2015/16, Aboriginal children in NSW were still ten (10) times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be in OOHC, with 40% of all Aboriginal children in OOHC residing in NSW. There is a clear need to pursue culturally-appropriate, evidence-based service models, such as the AFPC program, that are shaped and driven by local Aboriginal communities as they have been strongly linked to successfully addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC.

The aim of this follow-up evaluation was to examine whether the AFPC program has continued to meet its objectives and address some knowledge gaps identified by funding bodies in the interim, particularly the estimated savings and return on investment (ROI) that the program has created for the OOHC system in New South Wales (NSW).

This follow-up evaluation involved both quantitative and qualitative components. Quantitative data was sourced from the Productivity Commission for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision's (SCRGSP) *Report on Government Services 2017* to calculate the average annual cost of keeping a child in OOHC in NSW in 2015/16. This was then used with AFPC program outcomes and funding data to undertake basic calculations on the estimated savings and ROI created by the AFPC program for the NSW Government in 2015/16. In addition, quantitative data was also collected and analysed from program records on the types of social issues experienced by AFPC individuals/families and whether they experienced improvement to these issues as a result of participating in the AFPC program. Quantitative data from an entry survey filled out by service providers at the beginning of their involvement with the AFPC program was also collated and analysed.

A number of semi-structured interviews were also undertaken between March and July 2017 to add to the interviews undertaken in the first evaluation report. A total of four (4) service provider interviews, one (1) interview with the AFPC Project Officer, two (2) former client

interviews and four (4) current client interviews were undertaken. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically coded/analysed from a client and service provider perspective. Overall, results and analysis of quantitative/qualitative data collected were then used to formulate recommendations for the AFPC program.

The results of the quantitative data analysis showed:

- *Financial costings:* In 2015/16, the real recurrent expenditure for all OOHC services in NSW was **\$1.028 billion**. There were **17,800 children** in OOHC at 30 June, including **6,652 persons** who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Based on these figures, the average annual cost of keeping a child in OOHC in NSW in 2015/16 was **\$57,799.83 per child**.
- *Estimated savings:* Program outcomes data showed that in 2015/16, seven (7) families and ten (10) service providers were participating in the AFPC program, with two (2) children restored back into their family unit and five (5) children who remained at home due to Circle involvement. Through prevention and restoration activities, it is calculated that the AFPC program (with the support of the AFPC Project Officer position) saved the NSW Government approximately **\$404,600** in 2015/16. Time series datasets infer that since the appointment of the AFPC Project Officer, there has been an increase in the program's capacity and outcomes.
- *Return on investment (ROI):* The only funding currently received for the AFPC program is the salary for the AFPC Project Officer, which is **\$95,039 per financial year**. Given the amount the AFPC program has saved the NSW Government (\$404,600) and the median funding received for the AFPC program (\$95,039), this equated to approximately **326% ROI** for the NSW Government in 2015/16. This high ROI suggests that the NSW Government should continue funding the AFPC Project Officer position and consider putting more financial resources into the overall program to increase its impact in the future.
- *AFPC family outcomes:* Data collected about seventeen (17) AFPC individuals/families showed that the majority deal with a number of complex social issues including housing, financial/employment issues, alcohol/drug misuse and mental health. Program records suggest that participation in the AFPC program improved these issues, but as a whole it could not definitively be said that it was enough to avoid OOHC.
- *Service provider entry survey:* Data from six (6) service providers at the beginning of their involvement with the AFPC program showed that most felt the Circle process was explained clearly to them, rated their understanding of culturally safety as good or excellent and were very or extremely confident in working with Aboriginal clients. No data from the exit survey had been collected during the time of the evaluation, therefore reporting on the rest of the AFPC experience of service providers could not be examined.

The results of the qualitative analysis showed:

- *Former clients:* The AFPC program helped empower former clients to address a range of complex issues/needs with the support of participating service providers. Long term support, including opting back into the program, was crucial in helping clients maintain their achievements over the long term.
- *Current clients:* The AFPC program is also currently helping clients with a range of complex issues/needs, with the support of the AFPC Project Officer noted. Clients suggested several possible improvements, including more feedback from Circle staff and continuous funding for the program.
- *Service providers:* Service providers appreciated the strengths-based, client centred approach of the AFPC program, which brought stakeholders together and kept them all accountable. There were challenges, however, particularly around mandatory/voluntary requirements, unacceptable behaviour at Circle meetings and uncertainty surrounding the funding of the AFPC Project Officer. Service providers highlighted that the AFPC Project Officer had provided more structure and formality to an expanding process and recommended increasing program resources in the future.

Based on the findings of this follow-up evaluation, this report makes the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** That the Circle continues retaining key program aspects.
- **Recommendation 2:** That FACS continues funding the AFPC Project Officer position.
- **Recommendation 3:** That FACS provides more support funding and resources to the AFPC program.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the Circle establishes a data collection system for the AFPC program.
- **Recommendation 5:** That the Circle continues developing pre- and post-program structures.
- **Recommendation 6:** That the Circle develops clearer communication and behaviour requirements at Circle meetings.
- **Recommendation 7:** That the Circle develops clearer communication of mandatory and voluntary requirements.

