



Articles

A snapshot of the Family Law Pathways Network program: Working at the local community level

Pauline Collins, India Bryce† and Timothy Nugent‡*

Since 2003, the Australian Attorney-General's Department has funded Family Law Pathways Network ('FLPN') to provide professional assistance for separating families when navigating the legal and human support network maze. The FLPN serve in providing an assured access to information and necessary services in the family justice system. Thirty-three FLPN now operate across Australia. FLPN funding relies on annual government funding approval creating a fragile funding basis for their continued work. In response the FLPN has sought evidence to determine just how important their role is in the family domain. This article reports on an evidence-based research project that provides a snapshot of FLPN activities and their value to the local community across FLPN communities in Australia.

Introduction

The Australian Attorney-General's Department has since 2003, funded Family Law Pathways Network ('FLPN') to 'support practitioners to work collaboratively, maintain strong working relationships and develop appropriate referral mechanisms, across the broader Family Law system.'¹ This in turn provides professional assistance for separating families when navigating the legal and human support network maze.² Thirty-three FLPN now operate across Australia to assist with the delivery of family law related services.³ FLPNs exist in local geographically limited spaces that nevertheless provide national coverage of regions. As such, they differ in size and population density with some covering populated urban areas and others

* Professor School of Law and Justice USQ; Pauline.Collins@usq.edu.au.

† Deputy Chair FLPN Toowoomba SW Region, Lecturer School of Education USQ; India.Bryce@usq.edu.au.

‡ PhD USQ; timothy.nugent@usq.edu.au. The authors acknowledge Gail Sanderson, Previous Program Coordinator FLPN Toowoomba SW Region for her encouragement in initiating this research.

1 Family Law Pathways Network: <<https://www.familylawpathways.com.au/about-us.php>>.

2 Ibid.

3 At the time of publishing there are 33 Networks. See National Networks listing 33 — ACT and Region; NSW: Albury/Wodonga, Central Coast, Central West, Coffs Harbour, Greater Newcastle, Greater Sydney, Illawarra and Southern Highlands, Lower mid North Coast, Northern Rivers, Riverina, South Coast, Tamworth; Victoria: Ballarat, Barwon South West, Gippsland, Greater Melbourne, Shepparton; NT: Alice Springs, Top End; Queensland: Bundaberg, Central Queensland, Far North Queensland, Gold Coast, Greater Brisbane, Mackay-Whitsunday Region, North Queensland, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba; South Australia; Tasmania: Greater Hobart, Launceston and Northern Tasmania; Western Australia <<https://www.familylawpathways.com.au/services-directory.php#>>.

reaching across significant geographical territory. Each therefore faces unique experiences and challenges. They bring together local practitioners from varied disciplines working in legal and human service areas that provide services benefiting families. These include services related to drug and alcohol, mental health, domestic and family violence, child support and protection, and minority cultures including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and linguistically diverse families. They each have six core overarching objectives to develop and maintain:

1. strong links with locally based providers;
2. assistance with appropriate referral mechanisms;
3. shared understanding of the roles of network members;
4. awareness of services and training available;
5. promotion of cross-sector training, and ways to share information; and
6. inter-network coordination and support.⁴

In 2009, the first internal review was conducted and in 2012, a further external report⁵ confirmed that FLPNs are instrumental in fostering collaborative practice among local service providers for families⁶ and in assisting families to navigate the family law system.⁷ FLPNs have a role to promote a collaborative approach that brings the many available services into a holistic effective and efficient operation assisting families. A significant aspect of FLPNs role is to provide for cross-sector training. These professional development opportunities promote dialogue across disciplines, ensure more collaborative practice and improve knowledge and skills. For regional areas this is vital to reducing the barriers of distance and to increase access to services, but also urban centres experience a constant change in workers in the industry and the shifting nature of those in this domain mean new relationships require developing trust and confidence. These are constantly being brokered. By raising awareness of the diverse services available, including alternatives to the well-trod litigation path, it is reasoned that families will choose a separation pathway, which reduces harm to all family members.

In 2018, FLPN coordinators were advised that funding for the FLPN program was not guaranteed past June 2019.⁸ The annual cycle in funding is insecure and last-minute reprieves in the funding arrangements occur creating a fragile funding basis. This is an issue for FLPNs requiring ways to support ongoing funding. One way is to do independent research on the operation of FLPNs and determine how FLPNs are fulfilling program requirements. This

4 See Encompass Family and Community Pty Ltd, *Independent Review of the Family Law Pathways Network* (prepared for the Attorney General's Department, Canberra, August 2012) i.

5 Ibid 2.

6 Ibid 20.

7 Ibid 30.

8 See eg Albury Wodonga Family Law Pathways Network Steering Committee, Response to Australian Law Reform Commission: 'Review of the Family Law System' — Submission on behalf of Albury Wodonga Family Law Pathways Network, 3 <https://www.alrc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/family-law_-17._albury_wodonga_family_law_pathways_network._submission.pdf>.

article reports on an evidence-based research project that provides a snapshot of FLPN activities and their value to the local community across FLPN communities in Australia.

In 2019, the Steering Committee of the regional FLPN Toowoomba and South West Queensland supported the Toowoomba Project Officer, to initiate research at the University of Southern Queensland, to undertake a national research project inviting all FLPNs to participate.

The desire to evaluate the work of FLPNs was evident as the last independent review was in 2012. While the 2012 Encompass Family and Community review produced a very thorough study resulting in a 94-page report and 15 recommendations this was over 8 years ago.⁹ The findings in the 2012 research largely confirmed the internal 2009 report. Both reports supported the need for the continued service provided by FLPNs through key activities of training, professional development, and networking among the various services as vital to assisting families negotiate the family law system. The number of FLPNs has changed since that time reducing to 33.¹⁰ The independent review presented an overarching picture considering the value of FLPNs against the achievement of their objectives. The terms of reference also required investigation of funding terms, technology usage and other areas to which the FLPN could usefully contribute.¹¹ This study utilised similar methodology to the 2012 study (survey and semi-structured interviews). However, that study also did a desktop review and targeted a broader group including, court officials and auspicing agencies specifically.¹² The research reported in this article does not replicate the 2012 research, but rather provides an updated snapshot of the FLPN activities and operation that assesses users views regarding the two key performance indicators ('KPIs') of FLPNs. A quantitative and qualitative research approach sought to determine if the work of FLPN is relevant, timely and responsive to local needs and where more can be done or done differently.¹³ The research provides an opportunity for FLPNs to monitor and refine their current and future work priorities. It can also assist the funding providers in assessing the value of FLPNs.

Methodology

The research project aim was to test FLPNs ability to fulfil two of their KPIs and to elicit the satisfaction, or otherwise, of those working in and with FLPN across Australia in order to establish whether provision of the service is satisfying the auspice requirements. The two central KPIs are:

1. to promote awareness of services; and
2. conduct cross-sectoral training.

This was tested through a survey instrument with follow up interviews inviting all FLPN members nationally to participate. Ethics clearance for the

9 *Independent Review of Family Law Pathways Network* (n 4) i. Fifteen Recommendations were made, 10 of which concerned clarification and updating of the policy guidelines.

10 *National Networks* (n 3).

11 *Ibid*, executive summary.

12 *Ibid*, executive summary i.

13 See Research instruments in Appendices 1 and 2.

research was provided by the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Committee and all conducting of the research and reporting is within the terms of this approval.

The research methodology involved three phases. Phase 1 occurred from September 2018 to January 2019. An anonymous exploratory survey was made available via an online platform hosted by University of Southern Queensland. Access to the survey¹⁴ was through the LIME platform via a link that was distributed to all FLPNs for circulation among their local members. Membership of FLPNs comprises a broad range of human service practitioners and legal professionals. A range of quantitative and qualitative data was drawn from the responses. Demographic information was included with the option for participants to voluntarily self-identify geographic location, down to postcode detail. For survey participants, consent was implied by returning the survey when activating the submit button. All FLPN coordinators were urged to encourage members of their local networks to participate and they were asked to provide monthly prompts during October, November and December 2018, to constituents. The survey was responded to by 333 participants.

Phase 2 took place from January to March 2019 and involved a follow up semi-structured interview.¹⁵ Once participants completed the online survey, they were asked if they wished to participate in personalised interviews. These interviews were conducted via Skype, Zoom or similar online audio-visual technology. If this technology was not available to the participant, the interview was conducted via phone. Sixteen participants volunteered to be interviewed. This represents a 5% uptake from the survey participants. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit richer information not generally available through the survey responses alone.

The final phase involved analysis and synthesis of the research data collected. Quantitative data was imported, tabulated, interpreted and graphically represented using Excel. Data analysis was also applied to the qualitative survey data and any qualitative information provided by the open questions in the survey was subjected to thematic analysis. The research team explored thematic information using NVIVO and by mining manually the transcribed interviews. The results are reported in this article.

The structure of FLPN under the government funding model

The funding for the FLPN is annual,¹⁶ commencing at the start of a financial year. Grants are subject to parliamentary appropriation and made through the

¹⁴ See Appendix 1 for Survey questions.

¹⁵ See Appendix 2 for Interview questions.

¹⁶ Attorney-General's Department, *Family Law Pathways Networks Project Officer's Guide Book* (Guide, 2019) 4 ('*Project Officers Guidebook*'). Some funding agreements are based on a multi-year grant agreement, that in exceptional circumstances allows a Network that hasn't used all their funding in one financial year, to seek the approval from the Attorney-General's Department, through the Annual Activity Report, to rollover these funds to the next financial year.

Family Relationship Services Program ('FRSP'). The criteria used to assess the funding is contained in the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines 2017 ('CGRGs') along with the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (Cth),¹⁷ and the Family Law Pathways Networks Program Guidelines.¹⁸ The Australian Attorney-General's Department envisages that a local Steering Committee will nurture and maintain each local FLPN, as well as research and respond to local need. Thus, while the primary goal of the program nationally is to improve collaboration and cooperation, the tasks, processes, and activities in each local FLPN might operate very differently. There is no advertising process in selecting FLPNs to fund. They arise locally and are initiated by a well-established local provider approaching the Attorney-General's Department for funding and auspicing the establishment of a FLPN. The auspicing agency varies in each FLPN situation. The decision to fund a FLPN is made by the Attorney-General and is based on the availability of funds and the business case proposed. This also extends to ongoing funding support for existing FLPNs. The funding can vary between FLPNs as it comes out of a pool allocation.¹⁹ This convoluted, precarious and uncertain process does not provide for long-term planning, keeping FLPN in an eternal funding cycle loop. Much energy is directed towards maintaining funding when it could otherwise be put into improving service outcomes.

Role of the auspice

The funding is provided to the auspicing agency under individual funding agreements. According to the guidance from the Attorney-General's Department Guidelines,²⁰ the auspice agency gives strategic oversight by managing the funding according to its contractual arrangement with the Department and to ensure the objectives are met, it is a member of the FLPN and a member of the network's independent local steering committee.

The agreements make clear in each case that it is the FLPN and not the auspice agency that promotes the network and its activities. This means any activity of the FLPN is identified as an activity associated with the network, not the auspice agency. However, communication upward to the Department

17 Australian Government: Department of Finance, *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines* (Guidelines, 2017) <<https://www.finance.gov.au/government/commonwealth-grants/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines>>.

18 *Project Officers Guidebook* (n 16) 4.

19 Ibid. 'The department currently provides grants of \$49,500, \$72,000, \$98,500 or \$197,500 (GST exclusive) to each Auspice Organisation to run the Network and assist with costs associated with Network ... the grant provided per Network is determined by the department and depends on the size of the Network and the geographic area the Network is required to cover.' See further, for previous funding arrangements: Australian Attorney-General's Department, *Family Law Pathways Networks Program Guidelines* (Guidelines, 2013) 3: 'Based on the 2013-14 allocation of \$2 million, Level 1 networks can expect to be offered a minimum grant of just under \$100,000 and a Level 2 network a minimum grant of just under \$50,000'.

20 *Project Officers Guidebook* (n 16) 4.

in relation to the grant funding must be through the auspice agency. A CEO or senior executive of the auspice agency is the contact person for the Department.²¹

Structure of the FLPN

Each FLPN has its own independent steering committee and a Coordinator or Project Officer. As noted, a member of the auspicing agency sits on this committee. The steering committee's independence is assured through a broad and representative membership, which the grant agreement stipulates, has at least six people, five of whom must be independent from the auspicing agency. Membership is free. The steering committee must work in partnership with the auspicing agent to create a twelve-month work plan, within the budget, which identifies activities to drive the FLPN objectives. The steering committee approves an annual activity report. Much of this work is delegated to the steering committee's chair and deputy. These persons often cover a legal and a social science background to bring representative balance.²²

Most significant is the Committee and auspicing agent working closely to recruit a Coordinator or Project Officer (this work will use the later term). This importantly requires agreement as to who is the Project Officers' employer for the purposes of meeting employment liabilities including management of the Project Officer.

Role of the FLPN Project Officer

Information derived from the qualitative interviews indicates the Project Officer is the public face of the FLPN and is a vital 'hub' person driving the success of the network. Their role requires taking a lead in developing, supporting, and maintaining a healthy relationship between the steering committee's membership, the auspicing agency and the wider community. The Project Officer helps steer achievement of the objectives having considerable input into development and overseeing the work plan. They must network and consult broadly with all relevant agencies within the FLPN region. They also provide key administrative support to the caps or no given in above section and deputy chair of the steering committee. This can include setting up the meetings, establishing agendas, taking minutes, circulating the minutes, and carrying out actions arising. The Project Officer generates the provision of information between agencies often acting as the clearing house for relevant information.²³

The rather complicated arrangement relies on individual relationships of key figures working in harmony. These provide points of vulnerability. Each level requires relationships of openness and trust. The grant agreement detail is required for the steering committee and Project Officer if they are to understand their limits and the factors driving the limits of their work plan.

²¹ Ibid. 2.

²² Ibid 2–3.

²³ Ibid. 3.

Relevant literature

This research was undertaken with an awareness of the backdrop that covers the theory and literature on community action, Communities of Practice ('CoP') and community leadership. It is apparent that the FLPN are heavily reliant on a key figure, the Project Officer, for each region. The role of 'bottom up' community action and Communities of Practice adds to an understanding of the operation of FLPN.

Communities of Practice

CoPs are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour and can be actively orchestrated or emerge organically. According to Wenger, a CoP has an identity which is defined by a shared domain of interest.²⁴ This, in combination with joint activities and engagements, and the cooperative development of shared resources and practices, are the elements, which constitute a CoP and cultivates a community. CoPs seek to develop the capabilities of members and build and exchange knowledge.²⁵ Lave and Wenger²⁶ argued that learning does not rest solely with an individual, rather it is a social process positioned within a cultural and historical context. According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder,²⁷ cultivating communities of practice in strategic areas is a practical way of managing knowledge as an asset, and without communities focused on the critical areas of knowledge acquisition, it is difficult to manage the rate of change and growth. Communities committed to the dissemination and sharing of knowledge and best practice contribute to the development of an informed workforce. This ably fits the goals of FLPN providing a structure that supports the growth of the community to sustain the knowledge and the members.

Often referred to as a network, CoPs enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the necessary knowledge in their discipline, bridging the gap between knowledge and service delivery, addressing gaps in learning and building interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary connections.²⁸ CoPs are not limited by formal structures and so can be effective in fostering collaborative practice across a broad range of related disciplines, organisations and agencies much as operates in FLPN. CoPs contribute to community actions through transfer of best practice, collaborative problem solving, and professional development.²⁹ The FLPN ably fits the concept of a CoP, as evidenced by program objectives, such as to foster strong links with

24 Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction* (National Science Foundation (US), 2011).

25 EC Wenger and WM Snyder, 'Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier' (2000) 78(1) *Harvard Business Review* 139.

26 Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

27 Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

28 Wenger (n 24).

29 Wenger and Snyder (n 25).

locally-based providers, which operate as part of, or alongside the family law system. Networks often acknowledge their identity as family law focused CoPs.

Community-led approaches and a bottom-up approach to community action

Community-led action is an imperative element in nurturing and agitating for social change, especially in responding to the needs of the disempowered, alienated, disadvantaged, with inequality often perpetuated by the very nature of the family law system. FLPNs adopt this community action through capacity building in areas of identified need to provide a locally adapted and innovative service. Dailly and Barr stated, 'Community-led development is an approach to social change that is based on the premise that changing situations of disadvantage and social injustice cannot be achieved by top-down solutions alone.'³⁰ Community-led action draws together the collective experience of those affected by and at the coalface of social injustice to cooperatively define issues, recognise need, identify solutions, and act for and influence change.³¹ A community-led approach to family law then is an example of the application of this approach in the context of professional development improvement and addressing systemic inequalities. The FLPN program and associated networks are considered a community, with a shared goal of improving outcomes for separated families. Each is responsive at the local level taking account of regional variances.

One criticism often espoused regarding a top-down approach to community development is that those responsible for driving change are removed and so disconnected from the needs of the community at the heart of an issue. It differentiates between expert knowledge and local knowledge and argues the need to value local knowledge, which is held by community members and community-based practitioners.³² With local knowledge:

The outsider is not the expert: the outsider must listen and learn from the local people, who clearly have far more relevant local knowledge and expertise ... A good community worker therefore will seek to value and validate that local knowledge, will listen and learn, and will not assume that their external expertise can provide all (or even some) of the answers.³³

Generally, it takes both the top-down and bottom-up models to work in an integrated and complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, manner. Whilst top-down approaches are necessary, especially in establishing overarching frameworks for best practice, the bottom-up approach is essential for establishing sustainable solutions for local issues at a grass roots level. It builds an environment of prevention for welfare issues, such as are relevant in

³⁰ J Dailly and A Barr, *Meeting the Shared Challenge: Understanding a Community-led Approach to Health Improvement* (2008) 5.

³¹ Ibid.

³² James William Ife *Community Development in an Uncertain World: Vision, Analysis and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³³ Ibid 140.

the family law domain.³⁴ Community-led, bottom-up approaches, like those adopted by the FLPNs, foster both a vertical and horizontal chain of community engagement necessary for social change. This approach draws from community and community-based practitioners, and forms a reciprocal cycle of communication between community, agency and government. Conn asserts that considering vertical-horizontal interactions between the complex systems that exist in the context of social human welfare, especially relevant in the family law system, is necessary for collaborative practice and improved service delivery.³⁵ The understanding of the theories underpinning the workings of FLPNs provide a context from which the results of this research can now be assessed.

Data findings

Survey results

Basic demographic characteristics of the study sample (n=437) are shown in Figure 1 and 2, including geographic location (Figure 1) and professional context (Figure 2). The number of FLPN operating in each State and Territory varies and the participation rates reflect this variation.³⁶ Many participants were based in Queensland (31%) and New South Wales (34%) where the greatest number of FLPN exist, with the remaining participants spread across other states (35%), with no responses recorded from the one FLPN operating in South Australia.

Figure 2 illustrates the broad range of professional contexts engaged with in the FLPN, with the greatest percentage identifying as legal service providers (29%). The second largest cohort of participants were domestic or family violence service providers (15%). This was closely followed by local service providers (14%) and therapeutic service providers (14%). Human services and welfare form most of the remaining professions, together with education or research professionals they were 44% of participants collectively. Participants indicated other professions not mentioned (23%) and a small number declined to identify their context (2%). Although the dominant cohort were legal professionals, the remainder of respondents are all considered human service practitioners, although their roles vary, which indicates a balance of responses were from members who work in a human service, non-legal context.

34 Child Resilience Alliance, *Supporting Community-Led Child Protection: An Online Guide and Toolkit* (Guide, 2018) <www.communityledcp.org>.

35 E Conn, 'Community engagement in the social eco-system dance' (Third Sector Research Centre Discussion Paper, July 2011).

36 See (n 3) noting ACT, SA and WA only have one FLPN each.

Figure 1: Participant Workplace Location

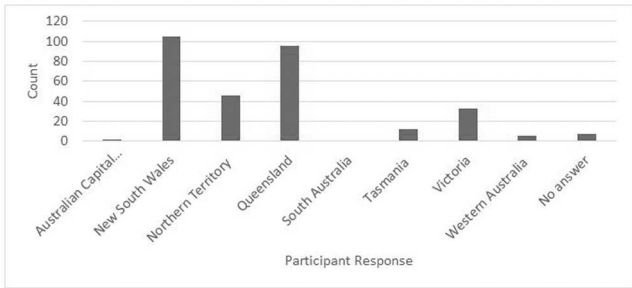
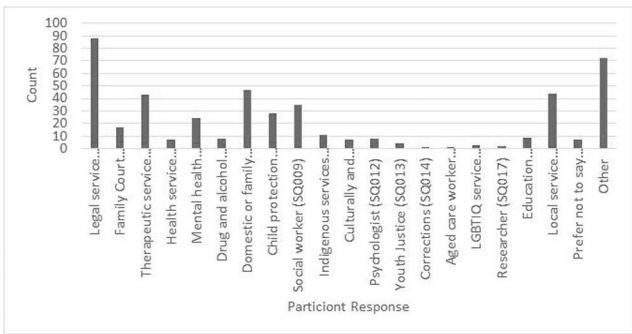
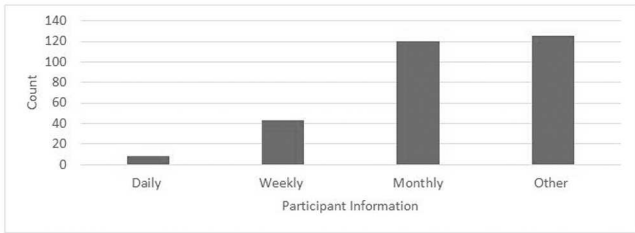


Figure 2: Work Context



89% of participants had engaged with FLPN in some capacity and the frequency of their engagement is illustrated in Figure 3. A majority of participants selected ‘other’ (42%) and the responses indicated many participants engaged on an ‘as needed basis’, quarterly or biannually.

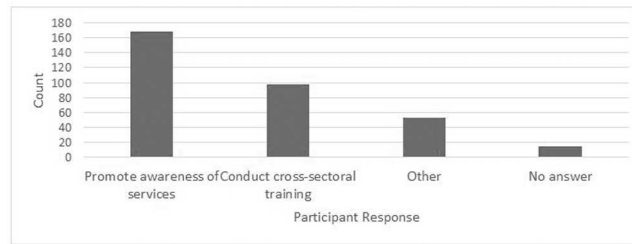
Figure 3: Frequency of Engagement with FLPN



As shown in Figure 4, just over half the participants (50%) felt the role of FLPN was to promote awareness of services and 29% identified the conducting of cross-sectoral training as the key function of FLPNs. A majority indicated that both awareness and training were important functions of the

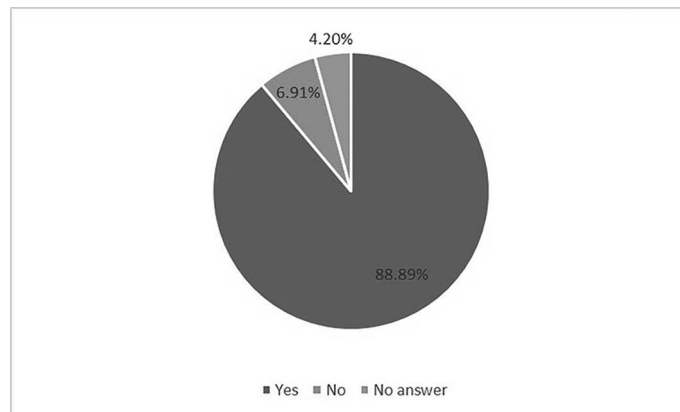
FLPN, which is in alignment with the essential KPIs of the FLPN. Sixty-six per cent of participants selected 'other'. The findings may reflect features and behaviours most strongly in QLD and NSW as communities of practice and views of and experiences with FLPNs may vary significantly between states.

Figure 4: Understanding of Role of FLPN

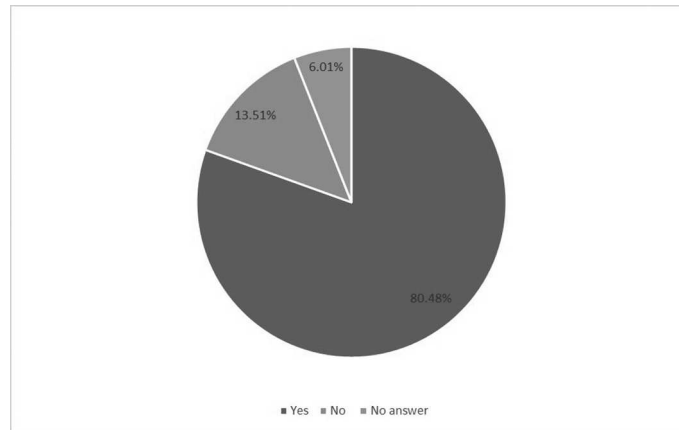


Information regarding the respondent's views on the relevance and value of the FLPN are given in Pie graphs 1, 2, and 3. A majority of participants found FLPN both relevant and valuable to their work. 89% of participants found FLPN relevant to their work with families, 80% felt the information and referral function was valuable in their work with clients, and 90% found the resources provided by FLPN improved their service delivery.

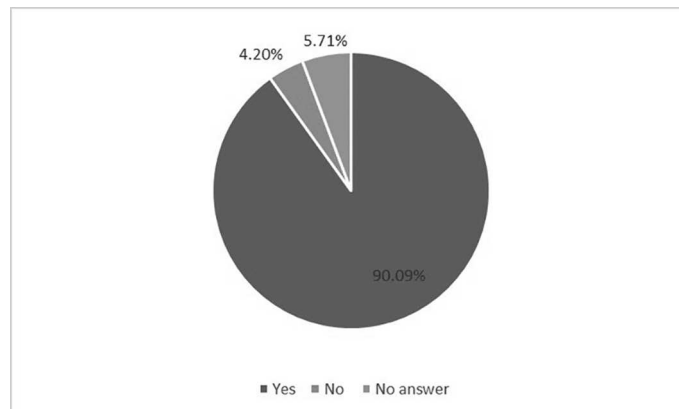
Pie graph 1: Is the Family Law Pathways Network relevant to your everyday work with families?



Pie graph 2: Has the Family Law Pathways Network's Information and Referral Service made a difference to your work with clients?



Pie graph 3: Does the Family Law Pathways Network provide relevant and useful resources to improve your work with clients?



When asked specifically about the value of certain aspects of the FLPN functions, a majority of participants indicated information sharing, promotion of collaboration, cross sectoral training and professional development were valuable and relevant to their work with clients. Again, this supports the achievement of KPI 1 and 2.

Information sharing

Regarding the provision of information on new local services, 86% either agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (41%) as shown in Figure 5. Additionally, participants also agreed (71%) that FLPN provides information about little known community resources, with a majority of participants either agreeing (47%) or strongly agreeing (23%), as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 5: FLPN shares information about new local services

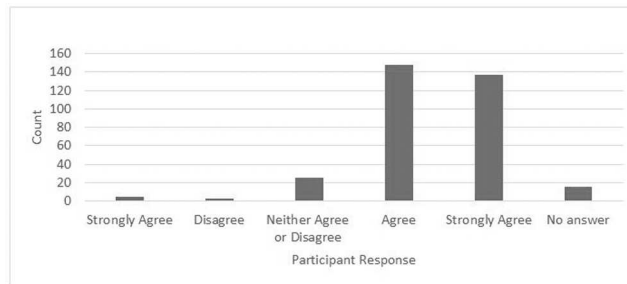
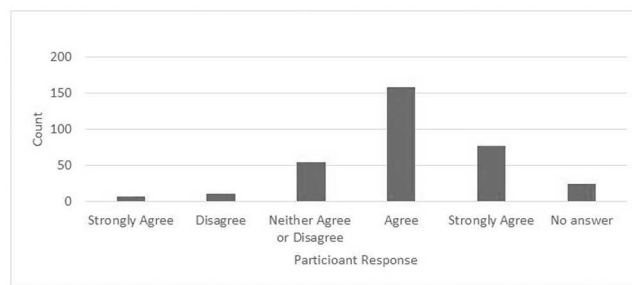


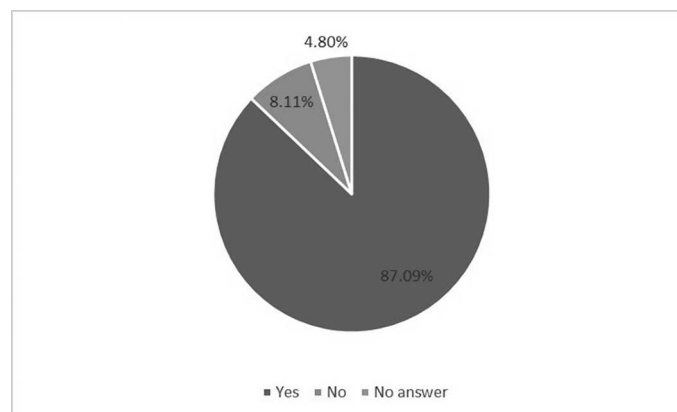
Figure 6: FLPN provides information about little known but valuable community resources



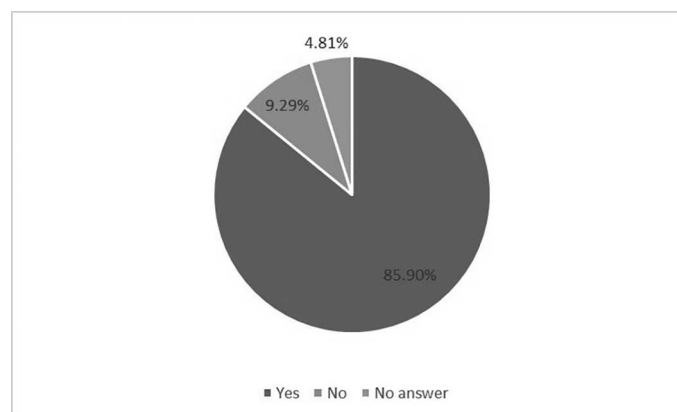
Collaborative practice

Another valuable function recognised in the study was the FLPN contribution to collaborative practice and multiagency cooperation. Pie graphs 4 and 5 reflect participants affirmative views that FLPN assists in sustaining a multidisciplinary approach to service delivery in the community (87%) and that the FLPN fosters collaborative practice (86%).

Pie graph 4: Does the Family Law Pathways Network help to sustain a multidisciplinary approach in your community?



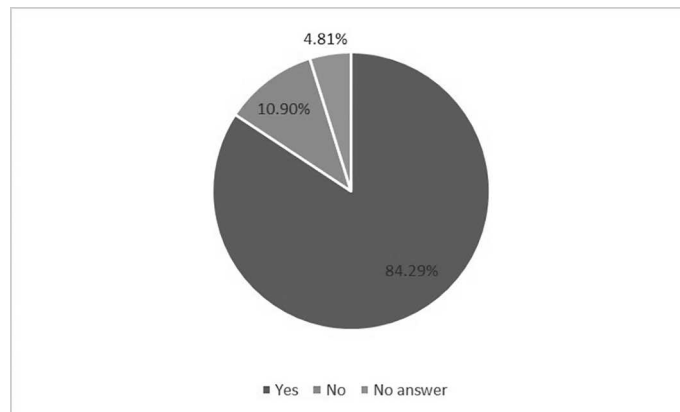
Pie graph 5: Does the Family Law Pathways Network help break down barriers to collaborative work?



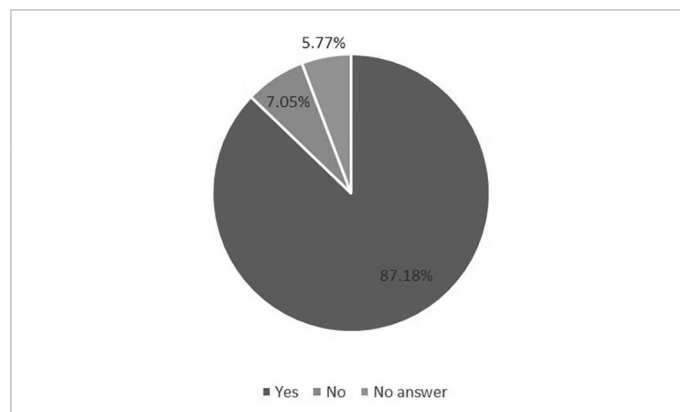
Training and PD

Reflecting KPI 2, as an imperative for the success of the network, FLPNs seek to deliver relevant and timely professional development and training opportunities to the multidisciplinary community it serves. The achievement of this function is outlined in Pie graphs 6 and 7. As shown in Pie graph 6, a significant majority of participants benefited in some way from the cross-sectoral training offered by FLPN. In Pie graph 7, it is illustrated that 87% of participants felt the professional development opportunities provided by the network were relevant and useful in their service delivery.

Pie graph 6: Have you benefited from Family Law Pathways Network cross sectoral training?



Pie graph 7: Does the Family Law Pathways Network provide relevant and useful professional development opportunities?



Finally, when survey participants were asked to respond to an open question: *If the FLPN didn't exist, what would happen to collaborative work locally?* A significant number of participants indicated that their service delivery and collaborative practice would be adversely affected. Two key themes emerged from the free text comment in this section, the impact on referral pathways and links to services and the collaborative multidisciplinary practice fostered by FLPN. These themes address promoting awareness of services and cross-sectoral training in line with the 2 KPIs of the FLPN. Although interview participants expanded on answering this question in the interviews, survey participants also provided the following qualitative comments in their survey data:

It would evaporate and we would have no one to inform us about new services or

provide assistance to our clients to link them with services to assist them.

— S4

If left without a funded position to facilitate this, I believe it would simply fall apart and collaborative practice would suffer, and hence, so would delivery of service to clients.

— S39

No longer would there be a forum for counsellors, lawyers, Legal Aid, Court workers, psychologists etc to come together and benefit from training, networking and information. It would be a huge loss for the ... Family Law Sector.

— S48

I feel like I would not know who to refer my clients to most of the time. I think the client experience would be very different as clients would just be on the referral round about.

— S62

... updates about services and referral pathways would be difficult to access, it would be more time consuming to network with services, because there would not be an opportunity to meet.

— S70

This would leave a huge gap in relationship building, capacity building and partnership/collaboration opportunities. Particularly in the areas of bringing together the legal profession with community service providers.

— S92

The survey data establishes the varied range of professions and service providers using FLPN and working together in a multidisciplinary approach that enhances and benefits from local collaboration. In the networks represented in the survey data, the FLPN would appear to punch above its weight in providing services at a low cost to government that improve the operation of family law services in the provision of essential support to families and workers within this field. The comments in response to the potential absence of FLPN make this clear. The survey data supports the achievement of KPI 1 and 2. To drill down further into the data follow up interviews were undertaken. The next section addresses this data.

Interview results

The survey prompted 16 follow up interviews.³⁷ These were from participants representing private and government providers across family services areas and included perspectives from both urban and regional settings drawn from those FLPNs participating in the survey. Some had lengthy involvement with FLPN, including in auspice and steering committee capacity and others were user participants in FLPNs.³⁸

³⁷ See Appendix 2 for interview questions.

³⁸ Relationships Australia; Communities for Children; legal practice; male counsellor and life coach in private practice; Family Relationship Centre; Children's Contact Service;

All participants found FLPN to be a vital and unique service. It was acknowledged that it provides a pivotal function for improving services related to family matters in the broadest possible way relevant to local community needs. FLPNs were reported as vital in preventing barriers developing between service providers by facilitating face-to-face contact and getting to know others to build trust and ensure clients' needs are met. A regular observation was the importance of bridging a perceived gap between the legal and non-legal service providers through the networking function of FLPNs:

... it broadened particularly the legal fraternity's view around what constitutes the service system for Family Law consumers ... it makes a richer arrangement.

— I1

... we've had what started off sort of like a distant relationship between lawyers, also a defensive type between lawyer and our service to now a really relaxed good positive relationship ...

— I6

Solicitors have their annual law dinners ... but because we're not part of that, we don't get to go along to those things or get that chance to network that way. We ... recently had a talk with the Family Law Judge and there were solicitors, family law practitioners, everybody that's involved in that one way or another that would never have that opportunity to actually talk to each other and see what everybody else does.

— I12

Networking

Participants found the Network helpful because of its focus on bringing a mix of disciplines together. This is because the Networks are well suited to organise interagency networking and it is not seen as the busy professionals' core business to act as inter agent facilitators. As noted, the engagement between service providers and the legal profession has been improved by FLPN providing activities working with the courts and judges in their local area. In the context of changing family law legislation and the operation of Family Law Courts the FLPN at the coal face of the family law system has implemented important closer connection and engagement with Judges and the courts:

... it is that conduit between the Court and the organisations that can service the clients of the court that we work with.

— I8

We ... host meet and greets at times with the Federal Circuit Judge.

Government Agency responsible for statutory child protection and youth justice; Family Relationships Centre; Catholic Care Children's Contact Services; Department of Social Services; Youth and Family Intervention Service; Family Dispute Resolution practitioner; FDR section at Legal Aid; Family Law private mediator; Director of the Post-Separation Services for Relationships Australia; Catholic Care Melbourne.

— I15

We work really quite closely with ... our local judicial officer ... and we found that ever since we connected with him, our events have drawn a greater commitment from the legal fraternity ...

— I3

... there has been really good links between lawyers, the Courts, and with all Pathways, particularly with the Circuit Court ... there have also been the kiosks at the ... Registries ... the project worker in that role has some good traction with engaging Federal Magistrates and our Judges, coming to events and really using that as leverage to get lawyers and other people to attend.

— I16

Some of the most marginalised and vulnerable families with a clear cultural gap between established judicial processes and the needs of local families are being met by initiatives of the FLPN:

One of the improvements ... is a special list where aboriginal clients ... can sit in a more informal arrangement to sort through their family problems ... the comment made from the Judge ... was that the only reason that worked ... is that the Family Pathways person had rallied round the local services and had them outside court to be able to immediately take the referrals and help people, so they're trying to bring in reforms that help link up people with the services and make sure there's no delays ... if Pathways is not there to do the linking up, then those other reforms will fall flat.

— I13

What I've noticed has changed with lawyers over the years, we're catching families at the beginning when they start to engage with their lawyer as opposed to near the end or when they get to court. So rather than there being a large time frame where Mum hasn't seen the kids until they go to court, instead lawyers are catching them at the beginning and saying, well, let's set up supervised visits now and so we're seeing I think a better result in that relationships aren't being as harmed or we're keeping the contact while that court process is happening.

— I6

Aspects beyond improving relations between the legal and non-legal practitioners is the facilitation of a communication network. This can be in different forms. There may be an up-to-date online directory of local services, an email list, or newsletter providing regular relevant information to service providers, through to face-to-face events. An electronic directory of services helps connect all through a website available in a public domain. Often a combination of these outlets are used:

... our program coordinator keeps the directory updated and again through the emails and the monthly newsletters we can get to see who is doing what programs and their relevance to the family law.

— I8

We find the newsletter extremely helpful because it gives us ideas of upcoming events, professional development opportunities ... We find the inter-agency network

meetings very helpful in terms of hearing from other services and also promoting our own service.

— I5

So they're the go to if we want to pass on information to each other and they send stuff out ...

— I10

These connections mean services can work together to ensure the correct referrals are made and clients can be quickly placed within the areas of their greatest need:

... a couple of really crucial services that they provide ... in more remote and regional areas ... is the opportunity to network through affiliated services. So it's a great place to get more information about the services that we refer clients to.

— I15

The ease of facilitating networking, as a focused purpose of FLPN, in a constantly changing environment improves the relations between staff and in turn gains better outcomes for their clientele. This activity was particularly relevant in FLPN operating across vast physical territory and remote regions on the one hand and on the other in dense metropolitan areas. It was described as a 'minefield' knowing who and what services are available for clients:

... services are so confusing and the funding changes and people changing their name ... It's a minefield. The Network doesn't work with clients. But what it does do is keep that communication between the particular services open.

— I8

Initially it broke down the barrier to distrust. Now what it does is continue to build the relationship as new people move in and out of different firms and different practices. So it keeps those relationships happening. It would not happen without the Network ...

— I12

We've got a really transient population, so we're forever having staff changes and it's the easiest way to hook up with new people, let them know names and faces, run the training calendar and also to bring up training ... that we would not be able to do without the umbrella of the network.

— I13

Promotion of services

FLPN is seen as vital in the promotion of the range of services available for families. This extends to such diverse services as Drug and Alcohol, Housing, Gambling, and Child and Family Services. Additionally, FLPN provides a cost benefit in avoiding the duplication of services being offered:

... the thing about promotion is that if you make it too complex, people don't take it on board because everyone is really busy. So information and the way things are promoted is done really well, so that you can pick up on it and it is frequent enough without being too frequent.

— I2

You're not having to find that information or hear it second hand that there was an update to the law somewhere. [FLPN] will send the updates, so we basically just switch out the old bit from the law info workbook and switch in the new bit that they send us it functions really well, very happy with it.

— I10

... promotion of services ... it's been aided most by some of the smaller events that we have ... I will sit back and watch the members talking during these times and seeing that people are meeting new people. Taking cards and exchanging cards ...

— I3

Correct promotion of local services is an issue for clients in many of the large regions serviced by FLPN. Awareness of available services remains a constant need. For instance, participants commented:

... it's hard to connect with clients that need our services ... because there's a lot of relationship building that needs to happen and there's a lot of mistrust of government organisations.

— I15

As a small service, we've got 11 staff members and we're not connected anywhere else in the state. We're stand-alone in the local community ... It's really important that we get our messages ... into the community about who we are and what we can do. Not so much to attract people, but to stem the tide of inappropriate referrals ... We have had really inappropriate referrals come from lawyers, court orders ... I think the Law Courts and lawyers could probably use the FLPN better actually. A simple phone call ... to the local Family Law Pathways here asking them who are the appropriate services ... [they] would have done a great job advocating where's best for people to go.

— I11

... tapping the local services and who are the relevant services you would refer to, would that be Children's Contact Centres or FRCs FDRP practitioners or certainly the biggest areas around a lot of the post-separation support programs ... like group programs around parenting after separation, those sorts of courses where once people have been to court and they might have got some agreement but they're referred on to attend some of these programs ... that's an ongoing issue.

— I16

Other things that participants indicated they would like to see included in networking:

... the electronic directory of services. I'm quite sure that is just us and maybe two or three other networks that have that directory, so that is perhaps something that others haven't tried.

— I3

I'd love it if there was even more organisations that would attend because I think the issue of separation just affects everybody.

— I6

... because I work for myself ... what I really like from the FLPN is the ability to network and also to keep up with what is happening. I have found in the past that there's just not enough seminars and information sessions to go to because the FLPN woman or man has ... been part time positions and I'd like to see a full-time position.

— I14

... some of the more culturally diverse communities may not hear about our services as much as we would like.

— I5

... develop wallet cards that ... tell [parents] of the services ... that are related to Family Law. Things like that do cost money and sometimes the budget of the FLPN may not stretch as much and other times it has and so some of those resources have been developed in that time.

— I1

Training

Training is a KPI for the FLPN. It is seen as important to be efficient and appropriate in matching the needs with the available resources. Being a local 'grass-roots' organisation makes the FLPN responsive to each local regions' specific needs. When asked how important the FLPN was for cross-sector training and the type of training that is useful, participants offered the following perspectives:

... extremely relevant training ... We always feel like we've gotten value for money ...

— I6

Because things change so often, we need to constantly have professional development on what the current laws are in regards to my specific service in ... credit and debt law. People, especially if you're getting school based apprentices or young workers, they need training on the mandatory reporting, all legislation ... it doesn't matter what sector you work in, everything is almost a constantly evolving change and we all need to keep up to date with it.

— I10

... when they are running the training calendar ... it means that we can all hook into local small training ... the little bits and pieces that services are putting on ... and avoid repetition or contribute to funding trainers outside of the Pathways training.

— I13

... because of the turnover of staff in a small remote location ... you need to come back to the same sorts of training every couple of years ... we have had continuity of funding to the one service provider and we have been lucky that we have had two or three different people in that network over a lengthy period of time, there is a good substantial continuity and recognition of what has worked and what has not worked ... what is the most proscribed training, what do people value the most ... I think it is working quite well ... it is really about catering to new practitioners in each organisation as they arrive in town and work for a year or two.

— I1

... we'll try and match the attendees to the training, so we always let the trainer know our unique needs here and then they will come in and give a little bit to all the different professions and again, that helps us understand what everyone else is doing and use it as a relationship building thing as well.

— I13

I've been here in this position ... for nearly 11 years [and] most of our training has come through Pathways.

— I8

As to the types of training needed it was noted that these were diverse but tailored to the service providers:

I guess anything that helps you work in a more culturally sensitive way, anything that helps you understand how the brain works, how people respond and how to work with people that have been traumatised, anything that increases your understanding about domestic violence or mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse, all of those things, they are all really big needs.

— I15

... some ... new Family Law practitioners ... are really isolated ... they have got to hit the ground running and know the whole cross-cultural context. There is a whole lot of learning that has to happen very quickly and I think the Network is really critical ... for them to understand the service system and what is on offer ... we only have a visiting Judge once every three months and that Judge recognises the value of it. He is willing to do PD when he is here ... that has actually had some great success in ... service systems [working] together and helping integrate them ... we have had examples of the Legal Aid Officer and the Aboriginal Cultural Advisor from Relationships Australia going out together on a community visit and ... that happened because of the relationship forming.

— I1

Particularly a lot of us were starting to feel burnt out but we didn't really want to say anything, but ... when we went to the training, it brought light to the fact that, hey ... it's okay, it's going to happen and you just need to know how to manage that and giving us some tools around that ...

— I12

Participants indicated an appreciation for the FLPN in taking a holistic approach to families and furthering some of the available education to the legal sector to encourage a holistic family approach:

The main factor now is ... about ... children whereas in the legal profession it was let's sort out property and let's make you win, not really thinking about the kids ... but that's just the way that they're trained and that's the way that we're taught, whereas ... now, the big focus is on the children, how can we help them, how can we help families as a whole, not just winning for our client.

— I12

The cost savings for remote area training was appreciated:

The other really crucial thing they provide is training opportunities for our staff. Because [of distance] if we want to attend two days training, we've got these

exorbitant air fares and accommodation and travel allowance that we have to add on to any training. Whereas the FLPN has been able to bring up really quality trainers and provide training for very, very, reasonable costs which is wonderful because it means that then all of my staff can go to it.

— I15

Other comments regarding training opportunities included suggestions for

... a workshop with the Commonwealth, [and] the networks ... focuses ... and ... help forecast what does the Commonwealth want ... They could use the FLPN to help champion some of those changes that they are hoping to institute.

— I1

... property ... That's one area that I think we ... don't give enough time.

— I3

... some PD [professional development] on legally assisted mediation, and property mediation support.

— I5

A participant noted that if there was more funding this could be used in training to

... have a general part of the training and then branch off into the service-specific part. Make it a longer, more expensive training. Whereas at the moment, we try and contain it and do a more general training but from our service point of view, because we are lawyers and we are family, we would like part of every training to directly hit our issues and I'm sure the social services attendees also feel the same that they would like to delve deeper into specific things for them. So it would be good if there was a general overarching training for everyone with the general skills and the general topical concerns and then some very specific stuff for each part of the sector ... it's just a question of the money and the time ... we're then all sitting down as different sectors, learning together and sharing how it might work differently for all of us.

— I13

One interesting observation, given the large number of workers with children employed in the family services sector, as well as clientele in need, was the usefulness in having childcare facilities so more can attend training sessions

... something that is stopping some of those really good parenting courses happening because there isn't the ability to provide some sort of child minding for the period of time that the training is on. And that is a bit of a concern.

— I2

Efficiencies

The interviewees overwhelmingly supported the work done by the FLPN providing a sense that they're operating effectively and efficiently as they are without any gap unfilled. The streamlining by the FLPN reduces inefficiencies, saving time and duplication by filtering all the information so that service providers get accurate and needed information. They are

recognised as a resource that produces value for money on a tight resource budget. A resource that with further funding could always provide even greater outcomes:

... we had an international speaker ... if we had more funding we would be able to offer our services or activities and events to a larger number of people and not be in a position where we are turning people away ... We have a limited budget that we offer 3 to 4 events a year. They are always really well received ... I don't think that I would change much other than being able to reach more people, [a] lot of the feedback on the forms was we needed more time, we wanted a full day event — we just couldn't afford to hold a full day event with our budget.

— I3

There is a need for some amount of resourcing to ensure coordination and connection and integration of services ... the Commonwealth should take a good look at that and recognise that it is a piece of work they have funded for quite a few years to good effect.

— I1

It appears the FLPN provides an efficient bottom-up grass roots approach to what is needed. Support for FLPN was emphasised as important to continue the significant aspect of their networking role in bringing the different disciplines together.

Organisations noted that FLPN have saved them in costs for staffing hours, creating a broader efficiency in community services. All the services benefit rather than having a separate training or separately funded presenters. This ability to combine saves money overall:

There is not a lot of researching has to be done in regards to what's out there and for professional development or networking opportunities. Because the Pathway emails are so regular — they've got their finger on the pulse and therefore the rest of us have also ...

— I10

In summary, it is fair to say that FLPN has already got the infrastructure in place providing the essential building blocks for any innovations, including substantial changes in legislation, new rules, service delivery and client engagement models because it's grounded, local and responsive. It is a body that more than satisfies its KPIs and delivers value for money for Government.

Other issues raised

Gender

It was noted during this research that the social service sector and family services is dominated by women. There are opportunities for male involvement and a need for this could be a focus for improvement in providing gender balance. One male private service provider felt that having a more inclusive aspect would benefit FLPN. Others countered that the gender representation in their network was fairly equal. Some justified imbalance based on the pay rates, suggesting women are prepared to fill lower paid roles. For male clients, as opposed to the service workers, it was suggested that some

more could be offered for men such as those exiting jail, to direct them to the services they can use. Given the gendered issues specific to family services, this is an aspect that could receive further attention in future research on FLPN.

Hub people

The interviewees made it clear the key figure in an FLPN is the Project Officer. As a central person, they are ensuring that the FLPN operate effectively by connecting all the services, ensuring they are communicating and understanding if they are duplicating or if they can work together to fill gaps. The networking ensures that all services are dedicated to a common purpose. The Project Officers act like the spoke in the wheel, the hub, that coordinates everything else and everyone relies on the Project Officer to create a sense of community of workers across all the sectors:

... the Pathways is basically the hub where everyone goes in, everyone shares information and everyone receives information.

— I10

... you kind of need one person to be the glue that holds everything together otherwise ... there is no consistency ... to have one person in that role coordinating everything. They are the person that you go to if you are not sure what is happening or if you need an update on something or just to know that there is that one person there rather than thinking – Oh, who do I go to and not end up doing anything.

— I9

... the last two people that have been here ... have been real movers and shakers in the whole community and excellent networkers and that's really been a strength to all of the service networks ... There's often not very many community development workers or people that specifically have funding to do networking ... and particularly in regional areas, it comes down to an individual and that individual being quite vital.

— I11

It all just comes together really nicely because a person is on the ground and does have the relationships. Everyone knows who they are, they know who everyone is and they've got that trusted role, the local relationships and the ability to be quickly called upon.

— I13

The nature of the organisation of FLPN makes the Project Officer role essential. They must have certain leadership skills and communication abilities. Supporting this person is fundamental to ensuring FLPNs can produce the desired outcomes.

Life without FLPN?

Participants were asked for an overall response if FLPN were to cease what would it mean for their community and for their service. One description was it would 'be like cutting off your nose to spite your face' L1, and others 'a great loss' — I5; 'devastating' — I14; 'a catastrophe' — I15.

Absolutely devastating ... the Pathways is vital ... for the networking and finding out what's happening ... it really helps for the social interaction and also getting out of the office ... That's my only way that I get to talk to people is through the FLPN.

— I14

Acknowledging the complex web of services and clients' needs in the domain of families, the following comments express the loss that would occur to the community if there was no FLPN. Some participants predicted the disconnection of network connections between services and professions:

... there would be disconnect for sure between the legal services and the family mediation services and the social services associated with supporting families. There is a complex service system that is working with a very complex client base ... and so there would certainly be a breakdown in what people know about each other. There would ... be a lack of support to new practitioners. And I think ultimately families end up caught up in that. They do not know where to go. They do not have the referrals to other agencies, ... the importance of having child-focussed intervention and activity is ... lost. ... parents need the support of a service system that is more than just a legal intervention.

— I1

... a lot of the networking and the partnerships would break down ... it really does need ... someone to bring everyone together and to organise and everyone would have the best intentions in separate organisations but just wouldn't have the time ... We would see a lack of information provision in terms of the legal services guide and the newsletters so you would lose a lot of that information that you then give to clients ... I think the professional development opportunities ... would also see a ... loss of the relationship with the Court system because ... FLPN is a great conduit between the Court system and our type of services.

— I5

The potential for damage that fragmentation could cause was felt to be particularly important to avoid in order to maintain the connections between legal and the social services:

... there would be some further fragmentation in the service system. There's a lot of work that's been running for a while that's taken for granted that Pathways does. So I think from our perspective we wouldn't have an opportunity to connect with the Courts and the legal system as much, whereas currently that is the window for us to do that ... And ... we certainly wouldn't be getting other information updates about what's happening apart from what we can find out ourselves, so I think, in terms of some of the newsletters that Pathways Network seem to pull together around training and latest updates around service development in this space and links with Legal Aid and the other services ... there is something around service coordination at the local level ... the kiosks wouldn't function ... I think it would be a huge loss when you look at the very minimal investment that's made ... nationally.

— I16

... the relationships that we have ... I can see them disintegrate pretty quickly. There is the high turnover particularly in the different lawyer practices ... I see that as having a big impact for clients we have been able to build that trust with solicitors ... and they also trusting around the mediation process and working really

non-adversarial with the client, trying to get a good outcome for the family. I can just see that dying.

— I8

Other participants discussed the loss of opportunities for training. It was noted that without the FLPN, there could be no cost-effective method to train staff with the skills they require to provide effective services for families:

Definitely it would have a big impact on the services and the clients that use those services if it was to no longer receive funding Pathways is an integral part of keeping all the services up to date and providing the training and ... the knowledge ... we would just be fumbling round in the dark without it.

— I9

... it is a vital service. A lot of us are working with the same client but in different aspects of our funding and our expertise ... and I think it's important for the outcome of that client that we all stay connected ...

— I10

... if we didn't have the FLPN, I honestly don't know how we would receive the training ... I don't think that would be funded under what we do ... We just wouldn't have the networking ... opportunity to talk to other people, and network ourselves.

— I12

The cost to be able to train my staff as well as I've able to up to this point, without the FLPN would be exorbitant, because I can't just send them to a workshop for a day ... I started my career in this sector as a placement student and I think I attended a FLPN on my very first day. Now I'm the director of the program and it's given me an opportunity to build connections with other managers in the field. I wouldn't get those opportunities — this is the only place I have it that might appear unimportant because they are not actually doing a lot of stuff, in terms of servicing clients ... but I think that the strength that they bring to the Family Law sector, particularly those that are trying to keep clients out of court and save the cost associated with that, I think the work they do in that space is invaluable and I think if the government is looking at increasing alternatives to resolution opportunities, the only way we can work is to have really good connections ... in small communities, you've already got established trusted organisations and the best way to work is to have good connections between them.

— I15

... it really is very good value for money. It's not a huge amount of money compared to what is being achieved ... they may bring in the Information Pack for Family Law and they may bring in the family hubs because they're all talking about joined up services, here's an example where that is already happening in a grass roots way and if you take that away, none of the other reforms will be able to succeed.

— I13

The participants' responses demonstrate an almost palpable emotional connection to their FLPN in expressing the loss they would experience without such an organisation in their midst. Ultimately, this would appear to have consequences underpinned by the literature. From the service providers' perspective, the loss of their community of practice that maintains knowledge

and service delivery by filling the gaps and keeping the providers nurtured, trained and connected. From the perspective of clients, a further disempowering of those often already disadvantaged would occur.

Discussion

Adopting the two overarching KPIs the findings under the broad headings of networking, promotion of services and training indicate in both the survey and interview data that FLPN are fulfilling, if not exceeding, their KPIs. They are shown to be both relevant and valuable and that the absence of the FLPN would be detrimental to service delivery across a range of sectors. FLPN have a unique remit in local communities to link and facilitate services by responding to complex family and community needs. There is a political permission to respond locally rather than providing a one size fits all national service. This is important in such a vast geographical continent like Australia where communities have different needs, cultural mixes and diversity in their approach to developing communities of practice.

Notwithstanding, there is always room for further streamlining to assist individuals in trying to navigate the complexity of services. FLPN could provide a frontline gatekeeping navigation service to direct clients to the services most needed at the time. Certainly, facilitating a case management multidisciplinary approach in meeting a client's needs would enable everyone to have the same picture, not only the service providers assisting the client but the client themselves. The importance of the coordinators as hub people could benefit from further research to enable greater support for these important people. Other minor improvement opportunities were suggested as reported in this article. However, the overwhelming indication is FLPNs not only meet their KPIs but provide supports that many could not see their service continuing to offer without FLPNs grass roots local coordination.

The essential factors that FLPN facilitate relate to information sharing, collaborative, multidisciplinary practice, and professional development training. The endgame is improving outcomes for Australians. Technology has enabled the work of FLPN in many instances and in times such as the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, has proved vital in facilitating the continuation of the work of family services.³⁹ There is demonstrable efficiency in maintaining FLPN. To conclude the research data indicates that if FLPN didn't exist, many would find it near impossible to work collaboratively in their local community, to build relationships across disciplines and to deliver high-quality professional skills development. It became clear that in the absence of it being FLPNs business it becomes nobody's business. The Commonwealth would do well to consider the efficiencies offered by FLPNs when considering any reforms in the family and community sector.

This research enabled an opportunity to undertake a comprehensive snapshot of the work of FLPN. It gathered survey data open to all FLPN regions, within the limitations noted in the methodology section and

³⁹ Since the COVID-19 pandemic, webinars have been successfully introduced by FLPNs with thousands often participating. At the time of the survey and interviews these were not being utilised. See eg FLPN Greater Sydney, Recorded Webinars <<https://greatersydney.flpn.com.au/previous-national-family-law-pathways-webinars/>>.

conducted follow-up interviews across the range of FLPN participating in the research. This data was then analysed and synthesised. The article reports the research and findings that conclude FLPN offer an essentially vital service for families and communities fulfilling their KPIs. The importance of the Attorney-General's Department continuing support for these bodies cannot be overstated.

Limitations

The unequal distribution of responses from States and Territories across Australia may be seen as a limitation on generalisability in this study. Sixty-five per cent of respondents were geographically located in Queensland (31%) and NSW (34%). The remainder of respondents were from NT (15%), Victoria (11%), Tasmania (4%), WA (2%), ACT (1%). No responses were received from South Australia where there is only one FLPN and 2% of respondents did not identify their location at the State or Territory level. The dominant coverage of the responses was from QLD and NSW (NSW n=12, QLD n=9). It is therefore important to acknowledge that the findings reflect the behaviours, experiences, and views of FLPN members in some geographical regions more than others. While the experiences of members in the underrepresented States and Territories may vary from those reflected in the data set used in this study the data reflects participation from approximately 21 of the total 33 FLPN in operation. Any further research conducted should broaden the results of these findings to capture those geographical locations not represented in this research.

Appendix 1

Survey Questions

KPI 1 PROMOTE AWARENESS OF SERVICES

What do you understand is the overall role of the FLPN

KPI 1 Promote awareness of services

KPI 2 Conduct cross-sectoral training

Other _____

1.0 How long have you been aware of FLPN?

Never

0-6 months

6-12 months

12+ months

1.1 Have you engaged with the FLPN'?

Yes/no

1.2 A Logic yes — daily weekly monthly bi-monthly, other

1.3 Is the FLPN relevant to your everyday work with families?

1.4 Has the FLPN's Information and Referral Service made a difference to your work with clients?

1.5 Does the FLPN provide relevant and useful resources to improve your work with clients?

Yes/no

1.6 Does the FLPN share important information? y/n

Questions on Information sharing

1.7 The FLPN shares important information regarding:

Array disagree — agree

Including:

- *New services locally available*
- *Locally based service providers*
- *Little-known, but valuable community resources*
- *Best referral pathways*
- *Attorney-General Department policies and initiatives*
- *Child protection matters*
- *Domestic and family violence*
- *Mental health issues*
- *Gender and sexuality*
- *Drug and alcohol services*
- *Culturally sensitive practice*
- *Legal service providers*

1.8 Does the FLPN sustain a multidisciplinary approach in your community?

y/n

1.9 Does the local FLPN consult with you on issues of importance?

y/n/ other _____

KPI 2 CONDUCT CROSS SECTORAL TRAINING

1.10 Have you benefitted from FLPN cross-sectoral training? y/n

1.11 Does the FLPN improve understanding of how other professions work?

y/n

1.12 Does the FLPN help break down barriers to collaborative work? y/n

1.13 Does the FLPN provide relevant and useful professional development opportunities? y/n

1.14 Does the FLPN help educate non-legal services in how the family law system works? y/n

1.15 Does the FLPN's personal development activity help you raise the knowledge and skill level of staff to the benefit of clients? y/n

1.16 Does the FLPN translate complex legal information into easy to understand language for non-legal service workers? y/n

1.17 If the FLPN did not exist, what would happen to collaborative work locally?

Open response

DEMOGRAPHICS

1.18 State / Territory

1.19 What is your professional context? MC

- Legal service provider
- Family court profession
- Therapeutic service provider
- Health SP
- Mental health SP
- Drug and alcohol SP
- DFV SP
- Child protection practitioner
- Social worker
- Indigenous services
- Culturally and linguistically diverse SP
- Psychologists
- Youth Justice
- Corrections
- Aged care workers
- LGBTIQ service providers
- Researcher
- Education professionals
- Local SP

Appendix 2

Interview questions

There are 5 overarching questions based on the following themed topics:

1. Your service and its involvement with FLPN.
2. Things you have found helpful/things that you would like to see.
3. Is promotion of services an issue for clients in your region. How can this be changed — what way can FLPN contribute?
4. Training — cross-sector in your region. Can you speak to the type of training? Is it useful? Is more needed and in what areas?
5. Are there specific activities that your local FLPN is trailing? Please describe.

References

- Albury Wodonga Family Law Pathways Network Steering Committee, Response to Australian Law Reform Commission: 'Review of the Family Law System' <https://www.alrc.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/family-law_-17._albury_wodonga_family_law_pathways_network._submission.pdf>
- Australian Attorney-General's Department, *Family Law Pathways Networks*

- Program Guidelines* (Guidelines, 2013)
- Australian Attorney-General's Department, *Family Law Pathways Networks Project Officer's Guide Book* (Guide, 2019)
- Australian Government: Department of Finance, *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines* (Guidelines, 2017) <<https://www.finance.gov.au/government/commonwealth-grants/commonwealth-grants-rules-and-guidelines>>
- Child Resilience Alliance *Supporting Community-Led Child Protection: An Online Guide and Toolkit* (Guide, 2018) <www.communityledcp.org>
- Conn, E, 'Community engagement in the social eco-system dance' (Third Sector Research Centre Discussion Paper, July 2011)
- Dailly, J and Barr, A, *Meeting the Shared Challenge: Understanding a Community-led Approach to Health Improvement* (2008) <<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5943c23a440243c1fa28585f/t/5bfd61e021c67c2cdd6a326d/1543332329487/Understanding+a+community-led+approach+to+health+improvement.pdf>>
- Encompass Family and Community Pty Ltd, *Independent Review of Family Law Pathways Network* (prepared for the Attorney-General's Department, Canberra, August 2012).
- Family Law Pathways Network <<https://www.familylawpathways.com.au/about-us.php>>
- FLPN Greater Sydney, Recorded Webinars <<https://greatersydney.flpn.com.au/previous-national-family-law-pathways-webinars/>>
- Ife, JW, *Community Development in an Uncertain World: Vision, Analysis and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Lave, J and Wenger, E *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- Wenger, E, *Communities of practice: A brief introduction* (National Science Foundation (US), 2011)
- Wenger, EC and Snyder, WM 'Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier' (2000) 78(1) *Harvard Business Review* 139
- Wenger, E, McDermott, RA, and Snyder, W, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002)