



Conversation Starters: Support for Early Childhood professionals in supporting families

Jesuits Social Services

Federal funding – REACh Initiative

Ian Potter Foundation - DVD



The main question:

- i Where do parents access parenting help and support at transitional stages of a child's life?

Birth first child

Entering early childhood services

Starting Primary School

Starting Secondary School



Project Description

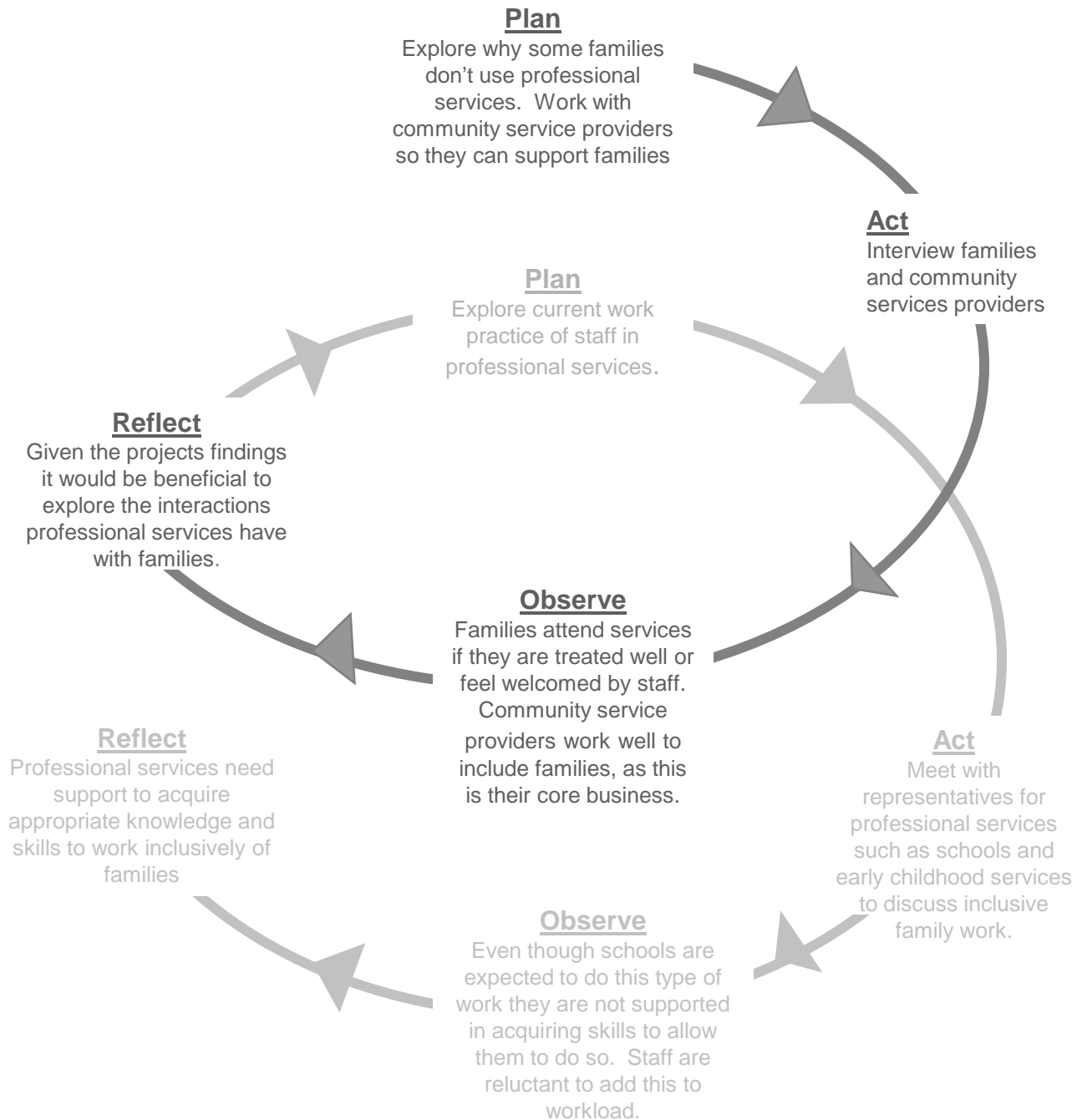
Target Groups and Scope

- i Whittlesea and Maryborough – Targeting new parents and parents whose children are entering the early childhood sector
- i Brimbank and Morwell – Targeting parents whose children are entering primary and secondary school.



Original steps of project

- i Listen to parents who do not use professional services about:
 - who supports their parenting role
 - why they do not use professional services for that support
- i Listen to community organisations such as leisure centres, sports groups, shopping centres etc about connection with families.





Results from phase 1

- i Community services were doing better than professional services in their engagement with families.
- i Parents said that ideally they only attend and seek support from services where they have formed good relationships with professionals through informal, positive, welcoming interactions.



Redirection of project

- i We went back to the early childhood services and said that parents had said they found their relationships with them unsatisfactory.
- i Early childhood staff said they also can struggle in their relationships with families.
- i Focus of project now working with early childhood professionals with their relationships with families

Focus groups – parents and early childhood professionals

Parents:

- i To be greeted in a friendly manner and for staff to know my name
- i For the staff to show an interest in me and my family
- i To be treated in a respectful friendly way
- i To be included in the program
- i To have a relationship with the staff caring for my children.

Focus groups – parents and early childhood professionals

Early childhood professionals:

- i Parents to read notices
- i Parents to come to centre with everything the child needs for the day
- i Parents to bring back paperwork needed on the day i.e signed permission forms
- i Parents to bring child on time



Masters of education

- Listening to both parents and early childhood professionals in 3 long day care centres for equitable relationships.
- i Appreciating and utilising knowledge each knows of the child
- i Role the parents in the early childhood service
- i Communication process



Training

- i Why should we try and form an equitable relationship with families?
- i Which families are the easiest to form an equitable relationship with?
- i With which families do you have the most difficulty in forming an equitable relationship?

Training continued:

i Do you involve parents in your centre?

Non_____Effective_____Parent
participation partnerships control

i What communication style do you use?

The "Expert" Model

Focuses on child's behaviour or problem

Holds all knowledge and control

Looks at child's behaviour from a particular point of view

The family's values, beliefs and knowledge are irrelevant to problem solving

The expert imposes the information on the family

The Impact of the *professionals* behaviour on the *parent*

- is not part of solution
- is not listened to
- does not have any decision making power
- is disempowered and becomes dependent on expert
- carries out experts instructions and not valued or appreciated

The *parent* then relates to the *child* in a similar way

- the child/parent relationship can be damaged
- the child is not listened to
- the solution does not consider the child as an individual
- the child is not valued or appreciated

The "Transplant" Model

Focuses on the parent as a conduit of professionals expertise

Imparts knowledge but holds all control

Looks at child in the context of what the professional thinks is best for the child

The family's values, beliefs and knowledge are irrelevant to problem solving

The professional chooses the direction of the conversation and the questions asked

The Impact of the *professionals* behaviour on the *parent*

- is still not part of solution
- is still not listened to and needs are not met
- feels that they have more power but still not a decision maker
- derive efficacy and self esteem but still not empowered
- carries out experts instructions and not valued or appreciated

The *parent* then relates to the *child* in a similar way

- the impact on the child/parent relationship is unpredictable
- the child is not listened to and their needs are not always met
- the solution does not consider the child
- the impact on the value of the child is unpredictable

The "Partnership" Model

Focuses on the relationship between parent and child

Views the parent as the expert

Looks at the child in context of the family

The family's values, belief and knowledge are valued and utilised

The family choose what information is used and the final outcome.

The impact of the *professionals* behaviour on the *parent*



- becomes the owner of the solution
- is listened to
- makes decisions that impact on their own child
- is empowered to parent independently in the future
- parent knowledge is valued

The *parent* then relates to the *child* in a similar way



- the child/parent relationship is enhanced
- the child is listened to
- the solution does consider the child as an individual
- the child is valued and appreciated



Best practice services

- i Rural primary school
- i Metropolitan early childhood service
- i Rural early childhood service



End of Project - Resources

- i DVD: REACH Conversation Starters: Supporting professionals to engage parents and families effectively
- i Conversation Starters Sheet
- i Training Manual
- i Final Report: Who supports families before the crisis



Website for resources

- i Jesuit Social Services:
www.jss.org.au
 - click programs on top bar
 - click parenting on left hand side
 - scroll to end of page and resources heading.



Further resource

- i East Outer Melbourne Inclusion Support Agency City of Knox Council
- i Building Relationships with families
 - responsive relationships and collaboration with parents promotes child and family wellbeing

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