

Reaching the “hard to reach”



Tuggeranong Child Aware Local Initiative
Action Plan Forum

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The experience of isolated people in Canberra

- OECD - most livable city in the world....(including access to services)
- Studies show challenges in reaching parents most in need even where services are in reasonably high supply.
- Most studies informed by service providers and people who use services, not those who don't
- Need to understand what isolated parents say about their lives and what they think about the services designed to assist them.

Why does this matter?

- [Those who services find] “hard to reach” - poor outcomes (education, health, employment, family relationships)
- Enormous public investment in early intervention and prevention to reduce entry into statutory systems
- Funded to deliver services to all children and families

What did we know?

- parents need to perceive that there is a reason to engage with a service,
- to engage with a service will be of help and
- need to be in a position where they actually can engage with the service (Katz et
- al, 2007)

A Canberra Study – Working across the Grey

- “Working Across the Grey” – ACU ICPS
- Department of Social Services, C4C
- Northside Community Services
- Parents in receipt of income support, raising children under five, on their own in North Canberra

Aims

- Research project to increase knowledge of the social networks and service use of vulnerable parents with children under five in Inner North Canberra whom formal services find 'hard to reach'
- Use knowledge to facilitate the development of more effective and collaborative ways of reaching isolated families with young children.

Research approach

- Invitation to participants through Centrelink
- Telephone Survey (55 parents of 96 children, 60% <2)
An adapted version of a questionnaire (Freiberg & Homel, 2007) based on a 'Family Empowerment Scale' (Koren, DeChillo, & Friesen, 1992) was used in the telephone interviews.
- In depth Interviews with 20 parents
- Focus groups with parents to check our findings
- Multiple forums with service providers

Findings

76% income <\$20,000 a year

Two thirds parents

- high parental efficacy
- well connected to formal and informal supports
- know where to get parenting information
- good use of resources

37% not at all well connected and feel judged by their families, their communities and formal services

Know anyone well enough to....

	Yes	No
Have child minded	49%	51%
Talk to when you are feeling down	51%	49%
Borrow money in an emergency	40%	60%

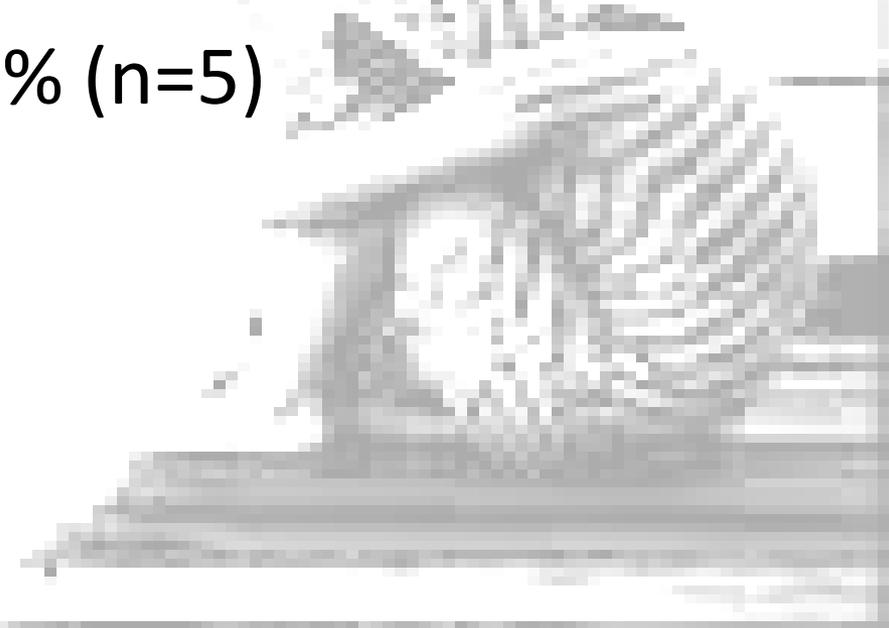


Services accessed last 12 months

	Yes	No
Early Childhood	78%	22%
Baby health /MACH	57%	43%
Services to support you	41%	59%
Local GP	91%	7%

Pie in the sky

- Child care (for study, work and illness) (34% n=14)
- Help managing/ caring for baby 17% (n=7)
- Financial assistance 12% (n=5)



- *I have a really good doctor...and when I go there he just says to me "how are you going ?" and I just ball my eyes out crying...I just cry and cry...and he just sits there and lets me cry ...and when I'm ready to talk he's great....*

*all I'm doing is stressing out about going home,
being at home and the effects its having on
[my baby]more than everything else which is
all I really care about if that hasn't been clear
enough...**I can't be the best mother I could be,
I can be...***

- *Mother aged 18, raising her two year old on her own, living in the Northbourne flats*



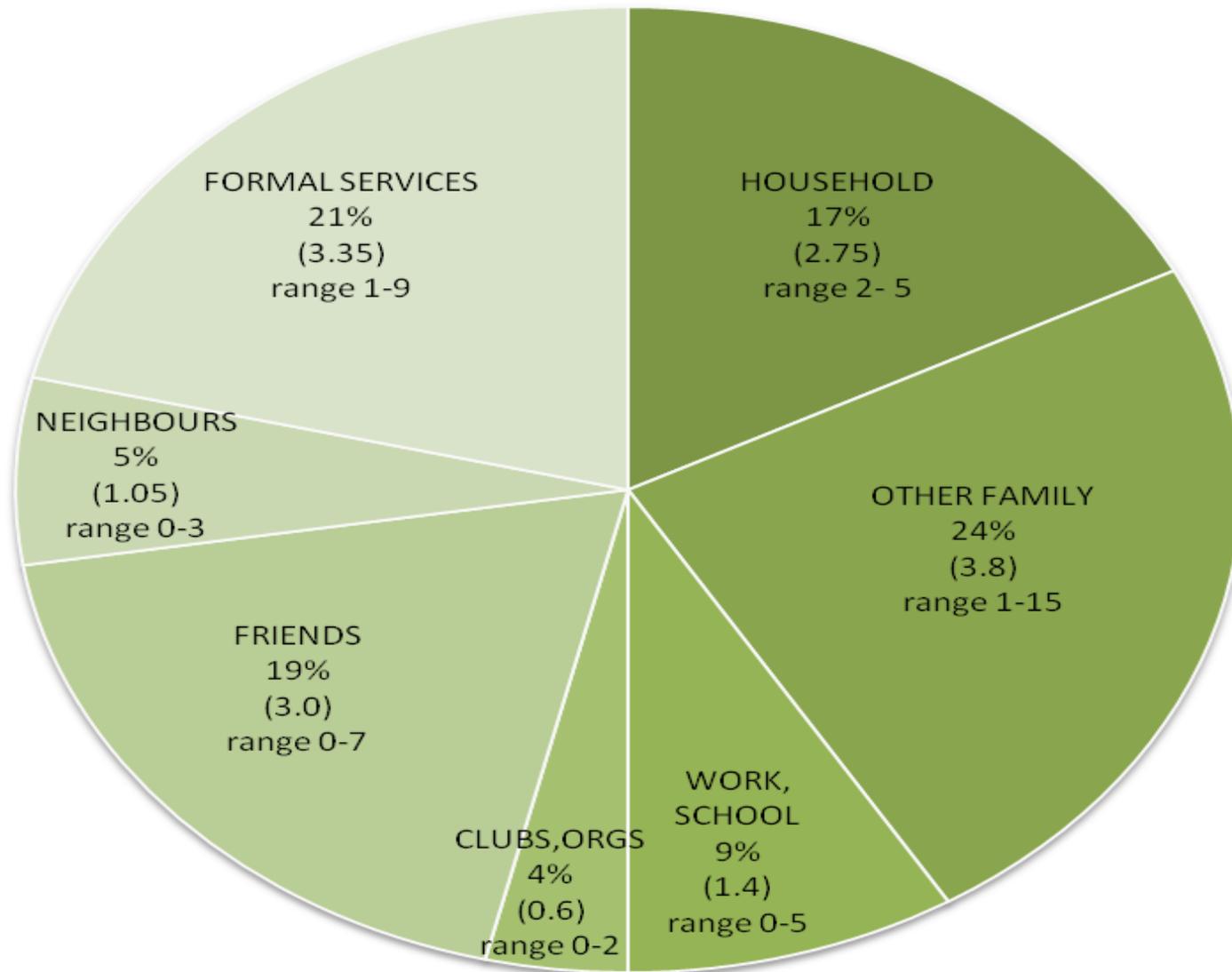
20 in-depth interviews to explore main themes

Presentation - complex issues	Number (of 20)
DV/Family Violence	6 (17%)
Mental health (PND, anxiety, PTSD)	9 (25%)
Live in unsafe environments	8 (7 in Northbourne flats) (22%)
Children with special needs (disabilities, serious behavioural?/emotional/ health issues)	8 (22%)
Care and protection involvement	4 (11%)
Corrective services / Youth Justice involvement	2 (5%)

Whittaker and Tracy's social network tool. (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990; Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983)

- The Social Network Map uses a simple grid and coloured cards for participants to list the people they have had contact with over the past three months, and categorises them under household, other family, friends, work/school, clubs/organizations, friends, neighbours, formal services. The interviewer then asks questions about:
 - types of support given, such as practical, emotional, advice/information
 - the availability of that support
 - the direction of support, and whether it is reciprocal or not
 - the quality of support, focusing particularly on to what degree the parent leaves interactions with each person in their social network feeling supported or feeling judged/criticized

Social Network Map Composition (n = 20)



Parents aspirations

- be a good parent
- obtain further skills and qualifications so that they could get better jobs in the future.
- find employment which would enable them to increase their financial means but also enable them to spend the right amount of time with their very young children

Barriers to service use

- Want to move forward but can't – practical barriers
- Fear and shame
- Just don't know what's out there
- Multiple service use but not connected

1. Want to move forward but can't

- Flexible affordable child care
- Help in the home
- Cant find others like me
- Even a few dollars too much



Flexible affordable child care

- *I'm finding it really difficult and I've been told I need to go on 15 waiting lists and you know I had the opportunity of starting a job and I can't get him into daycare so ...I can't work and then that creates sort of some depression and then more of the isolation stuff.(9)*

- *I've done it about 4 or 5 times now, I ring up and then go, oh waiting list, waiting list, waiting list...and to be honest its left me balling sometimes, like I have been balling, going, I'm never going to be out of my house, I'm always just going to be in my house until he goes to school...(9)*

Help at home – someone to check in on me

- *[any support I want] someone to just check in on me once a week (29)*
- *I think well, you've got no concept of what it's like to look after 3 kids...this age [under 5], by yourself, around the clock...you've got no idea (59)*
- *– just a few minutes every day – and not have to go out to do it...I just need someone to talk to every so often and I just don't have it (48)*

- *I thought I'd never get that weak to do those type of things um I thought of suicide several times, I even tried it, ...like those type of thoughts...I didn't want to be around my kids...I hated them, I rejected them...(5)*

I think more help with the parent groups...because the ones I got printed off I thought that's not me...(13)

I'd really like to meet people who I felt I had something in common with... I don't like to be somewhere and just be in need of help, I like to be somewhere where I can be a valuable contribution to the environment that I'm in (59)

Enough money

- *All the supports I had set up, all my little supports that were going to keep me, and I couldn't contact them and they didn't know what had happened to me, and ...it was a vulnerable period. I didn't get my phone on for ages and then my friend and family stuff started falling apart ...It wiped out the last quarter of the year... it was very stressful having a very active kid running around everywhere.(33)*

2. Barrier- Fear and Shame

- Stressful and unsafe neighbourhoods
- Fearful for children's safety and wellbeing
- Feel judged and ashamed
- Fear and ex-partners



- *If they really want to provide safe housing for mothers and children they should think about where they put them....I was desperate but I had to refuse the accommodation because it was so unsafe (46)*



- *When I go outside my door I don't feel safe at all...at all... I expect not to have a car seat there or I expect to have my window smashed...I don't want [my child] to grow up in a community that thinks that stuff is OK(13)*

3. Barrier – just don't know what's out there

- Don't need more – just need to know what they all are?
- Not sure who to trust
- Missed opportunities by universal service providers



..Would have been good to find out about the refuges earlier...because my life would have been so much simpler [not having to stay with ex](13)

- I didn't know about Therapy ACT. You'd think schools, the nurses, someone would have told me about them. ...there are so many services and it's hard to find out about them. (62)*

4. Multiple service use but feel 'not connected'

- The referral merry go round
- Traumatic lives
- Lack of trust in institutions
- Positive role of child care, schools and other normal universal services



Positive experiences of services

- Specific GPs
- Inanna Women's Refuge
- Centrelink,
- North Ainslie preschool
- Salvos.
- Academic Skills Centre UC
- Community Housing program Northside CC
- Health first
- Care and Protection
- Therapy ACT



Qualities parents appreciate

- Genuine relationships
- Assumption of Reciprocity
- Responsiveness
- Honesty
- Positive and optimistic



- *...she was my saving grace ...and was so nice about it...she was never condescending about it or anything...[she] seemed to enjoy her job and really enjoy seeing people get back on their own two feet (59)*

- *I've got a little circle at the moment when it comes to my daughter where Therapy ACT, daycare and Care and Protection all are intertwined and they all feed and share when it comes to information because they're trying to help [my child] as much as they can (5)*

Messages

- Formal services can be important sources of social support – respect, reciprocity, honesty
- Targeted services could link more effectively with ‘first to know’ agencies such as Housing, Centrelink and general practitioners
- “Surprise people where they are” - Normal, non stigmatising environments (schools, child care) are well placed to assist parents

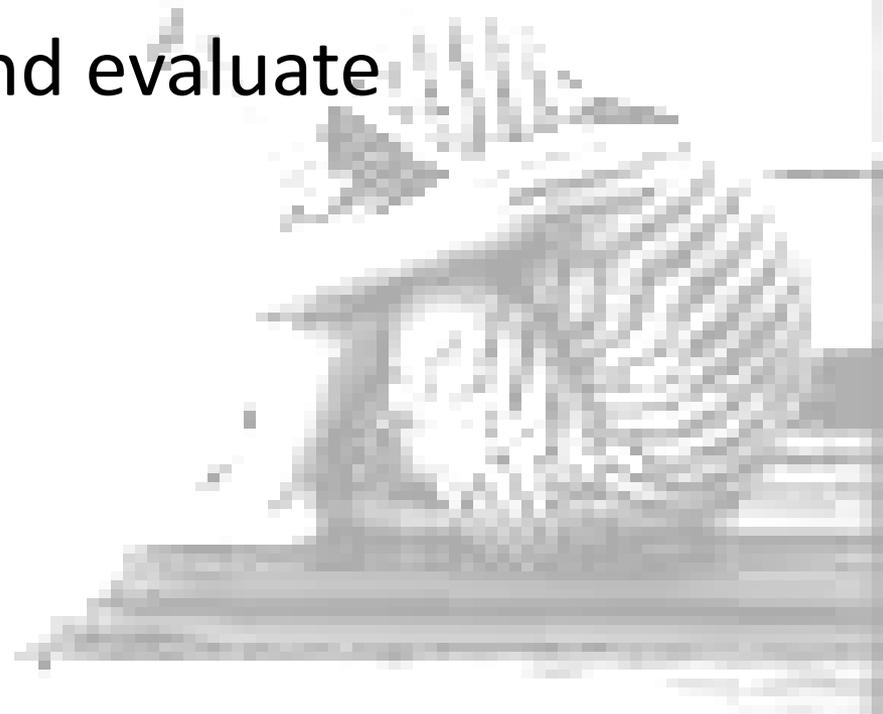
Collaboration

- assertive outreach – active strategies to reach out to and connect with parents
- supportive linking - active strategies which support parents to use another service

- Streamlined intake processes
- Facilitated referrals
- Co-locating a worker from one service in the offices of another (particularly at 'first to know' agencies such as the school, Housing, Centrelink, etc)
- 'Outservicing' clients in more accessible places (a refuge or shelter, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility)
- joint outreach visits and client review meetings

Enablers

- Values, skills practice framework
- Permission and support
- Commitment to plan and evaluate





Thanks

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- McArthur, M., & Winkworth, G. (2013). *Powerful Evidence: Changing Policy and Practice through Research. Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 35, 41-3
- Barker, J. & Thomson, L. (2014) *Helpful Relationships with Service Users: Linking Social Capital.* *Australian Social Work*, published online 29 April, 2014
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