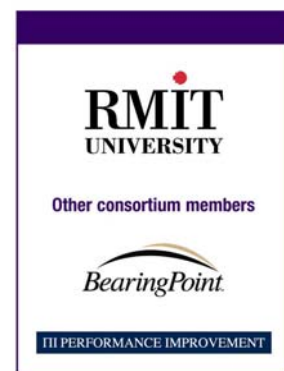


# Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004

Presentation to the SA Branch of the  
Australasian Evaluation Society

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# Presenter

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This presentation draws heavily on material presented at The Fourth Australian Family & Community Strengths Conference, University of Newcastle, December 2005, by Patricia Rogers (CIRCLE) and Sue Funnell (Performance Improvement)

# Content of this presentation

- Overview of the Strategy 2000-2004 and its evaluation
- Evaluation challenges and approach
- Summary of main findings

# Overview of the Strategy 2000-2004 and its evaluation

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# The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004

- Australian Government (Department of Family and Community Services) initiative to help build family and community capacity to deal with challenges and take advantage of opportunities
- Special focus on those at risk of social, economic and geographic isolation
- Seven community-based linked initiatives, providing funding and support for projects in the community (main focus of the evaluation)
- Six broader initiatives

# Scope of the evaluation

	Family focused initiatives	Community focused initiatives
Community based initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support</li> <li>• Stronger Families Fund</li> <li>• National Early Childhood Agenda Early Childhood Initiative (Strategy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential Leaders in Local Communities</li> <li>• Local Solutions to Local Problems</li> <li>• National Skills Development for Volunteers Program</li> <li>• Can Do Community</li> </ul>
<b>Scope of the evaluation</b>		
Broader initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Logitudinal Study of Australian Children</li> <li>• National Early Childhood Agenda initiatives</li> <li>• Greater Flexibility and Choice in Child Care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Skills Development for Volunteers (non-linked project component, including International Year of Volunteers activities in 2001)</li> <li>• Can Do Community (non linked project component, including Web page and awards)</li> <li>• Volunteer Small Equipment Grants</li> </ul>

# Projects funded under community-based linked initiatives - 1

- Application based project funding
  - application
  - review and proposal
  - review and approval
- State and Territory based
  - active involvement and management through FaCS offices
  - role of STAGs in review and approval processes
- Community development focus
  - STOs

# Projects funded under community-based linked initiatives - 2

Initiative	Projects	Funding	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Average
Potential Leaders in Local Communities	144	\$19.7m	\$1,000	\$980,000	\$90,929	\$136,923
Local Solutions to Local Problems	207	\$8.7m	\$1,000	\$496,440	\$25,000	\$41,979
National Skills Development for Volunteers	26	\$4.3m	\$2,500	\$1,600,000	\$69,706	\$167,044
Can Do Community	14	\$1.0m	\$820	\$169,000	\$60,000	\$68,624
Early Intervention, Parenting & Family Relationship Support	184	\$26.8m	\$3,180	\$322,910	\$121,173	\$145,825
Stronger Families Fund	49	\$18.2	\$45,165	\$1,447,987	\$306,443	\$370,569
Early Childhood Initiative (Strategy component)	11	\$1.2m	\$13,700	\$319,000	\$91,926	\$111,526
<i>Total</i>	<i>635</i>	<i>\$79.9m</i>	<i>\$820</i>	<i>\$1,600,000</i>	<i>\$76,888</i>	<i>\$125,869</i>

# Projects funded under community-based linked initiatives - 3

<b>Funding range</b>	<b>Total</b>
<\$5,000	17
\$5,000 to <\$20,000	100
\$20,000 to <\$50,000	137
\$50,000 to <\$100,000	118
\$100,000 to <\$250,000	170
\$250,000 to <\$500,000	74
\$500,000 to <\$1,000,000	16
\$1,000,000 plus	3
<i>Total</i>	635

# Projects funded under community-based linked initiatives - 4

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Not indigenous</b>	<b>Indigenous</b>	<b>Total</b>
ACT	12	1	13
National Office	36	14	50
NSW	122	47	169
NT	8	28	36
Qld	96	21	117
SA	61	12	73
Tas	11	-	11
Vic	83	7	90
WA	54	22	76
<i>Total</i>	<i>483</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>635</i>

# Strategy principles

- Working together in partnership
- Preventative and early intervention approach
- Supporting people through life transitions
- Coordinated approach
- Developing local solutions to local problems
- Building capacity
- Evidence based approach
- Making the investment count

# The evaluation

An Evaluation Framework was finalised and implemented between 2002-2005 by a consortium led by CIRCLE at RMIT University (Collaborative Institute for Research Consulting and Learning in Evaluation, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology). The other key members of the consortium were:

- Bearing Point (Australia)
- Performance Improvement (Sue Funnell)
- John Scougall

Other specialists and research assistants also contributed to the evaluation.

# Evaluation questions - 1

1. How is the Strategy contributing to family and community strength in the short term, medium term, and longer term?
2. To what extent has the Strategy produced unintended outcomes (positive and negative)?
3. In broad qualitative terms, what were the costs and benefits of the Strategy relative to similar national and international interventions?
4. What were the particular features of the Strategy that made a difference?

## Evaluation questions - 2

5. What is helping or hindering the initiatives to achieve their objectives? What explains why some initiatives work? In particular, does the interaction between different initiatives contribute to achieving better outcomes?
6. How does the Strategy contribute to the achievement of outcomes in conjunction with other initiatives, programs or services in the area?

# Evaluation questions - 3

7. What else is helping or hindering the Strategy to achieve its objectives and outcomes? What works best for whom, why and when?
8. How can the Strategy achieve better outcomes?

# Evaluation challenges and approach

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# Evaluation challenges - 1

## Diversity of projects

- activities
  - playgroups, mentoring, provider training, life skills' development, community infrastructure etc.
- duration
  - weeks (e.g., one time events)
  - months (e.g., building projects, training courses)
  - years (e.g., community outreach programs, intersectoral programs)
- target groups
  - parents, infants, children, youths, families, culturally specific groups etc.
- scale of projects
  - funding, geography, community numbers, service mix
- starting points for families, communities and organisations
- accessibility/remoteness

# Evaluation challenges - 2

## Evidence Base

- Late start for evaluation, relative to Strategy start
- Outcomes are mostly long-term but evaluation is relatively short-term
- Gaps in data
  - performance indicators delayed in implementation
- Varying start and completion dates
- Community strength and family strength indicators not available

# Evaluation challenges - 3

## Attributing impact

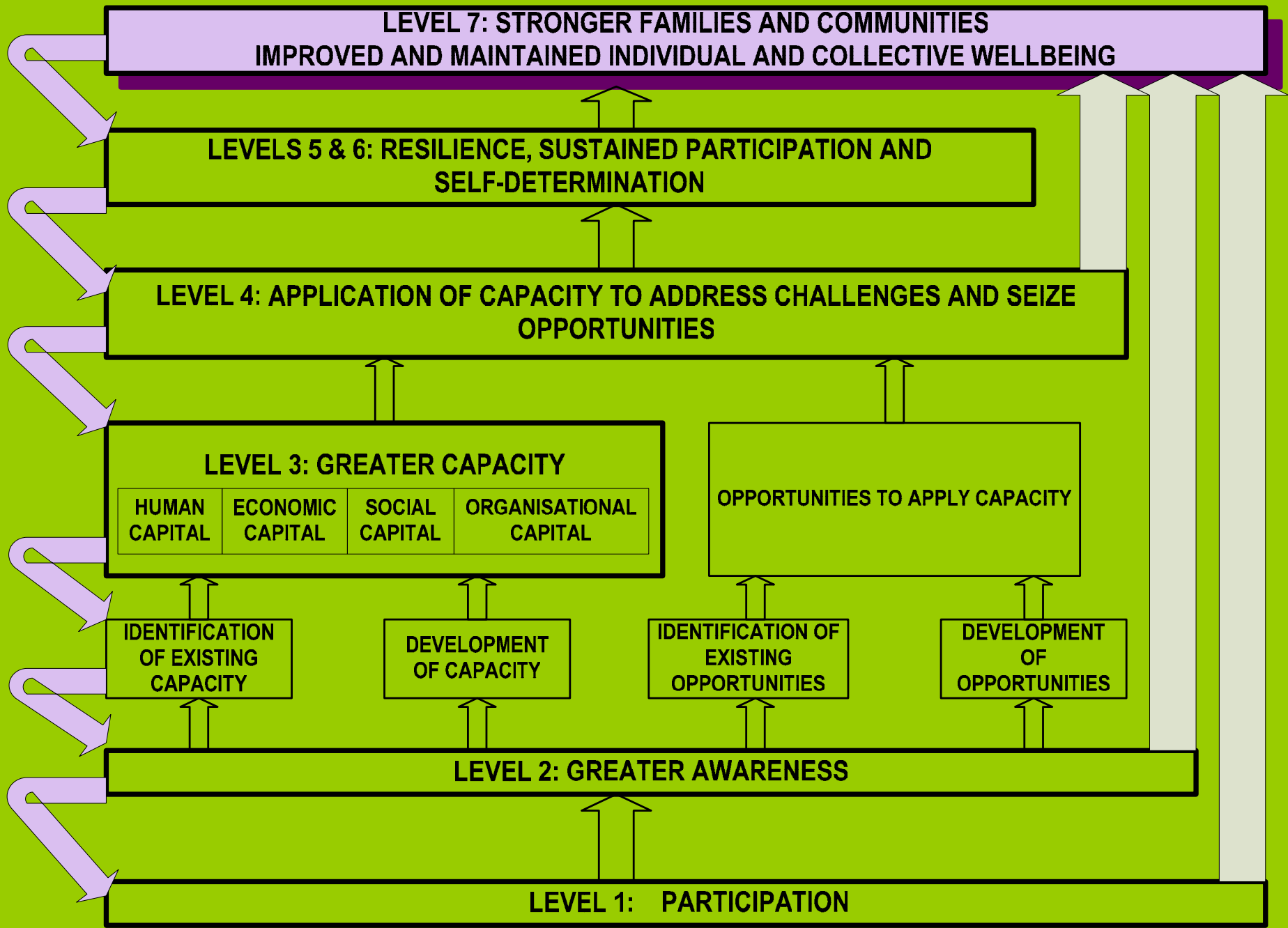
- Contextual differences – what works in one context may not translate to another(s)
  - relationship of Strategy funding to overall project
  - engagement and role of auspice
  - local politics or community factors
  - economic and environmental factors
- Disentangling impact from other simultaneous interventions
- Identifying interactive effects within the Strategy
  - variation in implementation approaches across States and Territories
  - role and effectiveness of project officers

# Evaluation approach

- i. Use of an 'outcomes hierarchy', or 'theory of change' across all projects
- ii. Levels of data collection and analysis
- iii. Emergent elements of evaluation design
- iv. Qualitative synthesis of diverse information about projects through individual coding of data

# Hierarchy of outcomes





# Levels of data collection and analysis

## Emergent elements of evaluation design

Level 1	Data potentially available for all projects
Level 2	Issue-focused papers that drew on research evidence and policy frameworks and illustrative data from a purposeful sample of Strategy projects
Level 3	Case studies of specific Strategy projects, communities and initiatives.
Level 4	Synthesis of all data sources

# Level 1 data

## Questionnaires

- Initial (soon after commencement) – project development processes
- Final (near completion) – activities, outcomes

## Performance indicators and performance information

- Progress reporting
- Final reporting

## Project report

- Progress reports
- Final reports

# Level 2 issue papers

- Networks and partnerships
- Community capacity building
- Early intervention, particularly in early childhood
- Sustainability and legacy
- Economic and social participation
- Service integration and co-ordination
- Evidence-based policy and practice

# Level 3 case studies

## Case studies

- Individual projects
  - Gilles Plains Community Garden
  - Indigenous capacity building project
  - Indigenous integrated family strengthening project
  - Indigenous community leadership development project
- Specific funding initiatives
  - Early Intervention Initiative
  - Stronger Families Fund initiative
  - Potential Leaders in Local Communities initiative
- Other case studies
  - Mandurah targeted region
  - Lessons Learnt about Strengthening Indigenous Families and Communities: What Works?
  - Sustainability and legacy of projects
  - Qualitative cost-benefit analysis
  - Implementation of the Strategy across States and Territories

# Qualitative synthesis of project data

Types of coding undertaken:

- Classifying types of outcomes achieved
- Assessing the quality of evidence provided
- Rating the global success of the project

# Operational challenges - 1

- Co-operation of key parties
  - projects and STOs
  - open communication of evaluation progress and findings (Web site and newsletters)
  - site visits, case studies
  - STO (evaluation) training
- Engaging and integrating other evaluation activities
  - AIFS
  - LSAC

# Operational challenges - 2

- Strategy implementation and evolution
  - changes in funding policy (e.g., child care)
  - extended project durations
  - extension to evaluation reporting time line

<b>End period</b>	<b>Projects</b>		<b>Funding</b>	
Before Jun- 2004	364	57.3%	\$27.9m	34.9%
Jun-Dec 2004	150	23.6%	\$22.7m	28.3%
Jan-Mar 2005	29	4.6%	\$6.2m	7.7%
After Mar-2005	90	14.2%	\$23.2m	29.0%
Unknown	2	0.3%	\$90,000	0.1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>635</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>\$79.9m</i>	<i>100%</i>

# Evaluation challenges - operational

- Managing the client relationship
  - Departmental structural changes
  - continuity of contact point
  - corporate memory
  - corporate and political sensitivity
- Launch of SFCS 2004-2009
  - change in Departmental perspective
  - reconsideration of need for and focus of evaluation of SFCS 2000-2004

# Summary of main findings

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# Main findings

## Contributions to strengthening families and communities

- Direct impacts on improved wellbeing
- Impacts in terms of increased capacity of families and communities
- Most projects had evidence of outcomes at lower levels of the outcomes hierarchy

# Legacy of the Strategy

- Increased capacity of community organisations
- Continuation of project activities after Strategy funding ended
- Production of a resource that could be used by another project
- Contributions to the evidence base
- Sustained positive outcomes for participating families and communities as a result of their participation

# Features of the Strategy that made a difference

- Targeting framework used to encourage the development of proposals and select projects
- Support provided during proposal development and project implementation
- Explicit focus on the underpinning principles

# Overall learnings

- **Project selection**
  - Selecting appropriate projects for short-term funding
  - Taking into account the different criteria for selection
  - Maintaining effective selection processes
- **Managing a funding program or cluster of projects**
  - Support for projects implementing projects
  - Project monitoring and management
- **Managing and implementing an individual project**
  - Resources
  - Processes and strategies
  - Processes for engaging the community

# Processes for engaging the community and participants

- There is a need for effective strategies for client control and involvement in projects.
- Time and skills are required to overcome distrust, create interest and engage participants.
- It is important to ensure an inclusive approach to engagement.
- The project needs to create a safe space for change for individuals and families.

# Factors that facilitate participation

- Effective engagement approaches and strategies for maintaining relationships with target groups and individuals.
- A service delivery model, location and processes that:
  - were non-threatening and non-stigmatising
  - take the needs of the participants into account— including any practical difficulties participants may have in accessing the project (time, venue, child care, transport).
- Cultural sensitivity.
- Effective management of interpersonal difficulties.
- Strong relationships with other agencies as sources of cross referrals.

# Factors that inhibit participation

- Distrust of the target group in short term projects and reluctance to work on establishing relationships that could not be maintained long term.
- Potential for stigmatisation.
- Pride and a sense of self-reliance; parental reluctance to acknowledge that they had a need or could benefit from early intervention activities.
- Competing priorities in the often crisis ridden lives of the target groups.
- Difficulties in getting parents and others to commit to longer term programs .

# What types of activities work best?

Projects rated as more successful were more likely to:

- Have adopted multifaceted approaches conducive to a holistic approach to working with participants.
- Have addressed the needs of the 'whole person' (health, education, welfare, spiritual etc);
- Be working with whole families (e.g. relationships between parents and children);
- Be working with whole communities around particular issues (e.g. cultural issues, social issues such as bullying).

# Conclusion

- FaCS displayed innovation and managed the risks in placing trust in a community-driven approach that was responsive to local needs.
- There are opportunities to draw on the findings of this evaluation to inform the future development of policy, as well as project planning, development, implementation and evaluation.

# Further information

- Department of Family and Community Services Website

<http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-sfcs2000-2004.htm>

- Evaluation Framework
- Evaluation Reports
- Evaluation Newsletter