Contribution Analysis: Evaluating the impact of intensive family services, applying theory in a real-world context

Jane Howard and Gina Mancuso

Department of Health and Human Services



Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of

the Eora Nation, who are the traditional

custodians of this land and pay my respects to

the Elders both past, present and emerging

What I'm going to talk about

- Our evaluation and its purpose
- Why we chose Contribution Analysis
- The 'steps' of Contribution Analysis
- Our experiences using Contribution Analysis
 - The value it brings
 - Its challenges and limitations

What you'll take away from today's session

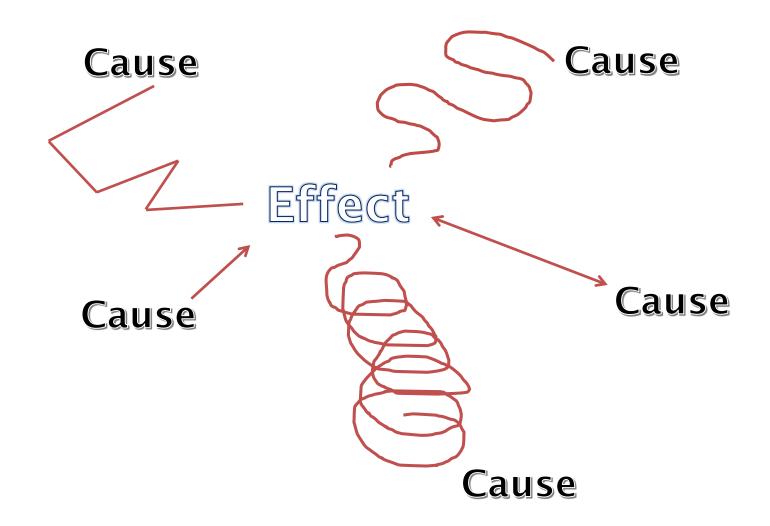
By using theory - we can *Strengthen* and *Guide* decisions about *what* data to collect and *when*

- Applying theory to real-world evaluations can be
 - Messy data collection and quality may vary
 - Iterative counterintuitively we may need to go backwards to move forward
 - Challenging assumptions may not be met or be wrong
- This is our first go at applying contribution analysis we are learning as we go ...

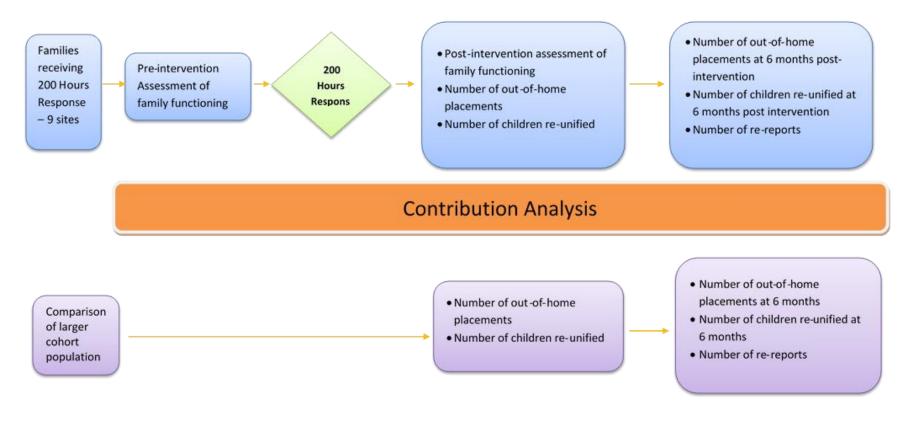
Purpose of the evaluation

To understand the impact of the 200 Hours Intensive
Family Support Program (as a whole) in terms of family
functioning and preventing children from entering the
statutory child protection system

Establishing causality for programs operating in complex systems



Evaluation design



- It was not ethical to use a RCT
- Chose a quasiexperimental design (using a non-random comparison group)
- Contribution analysis was selected to strengthen the robustness

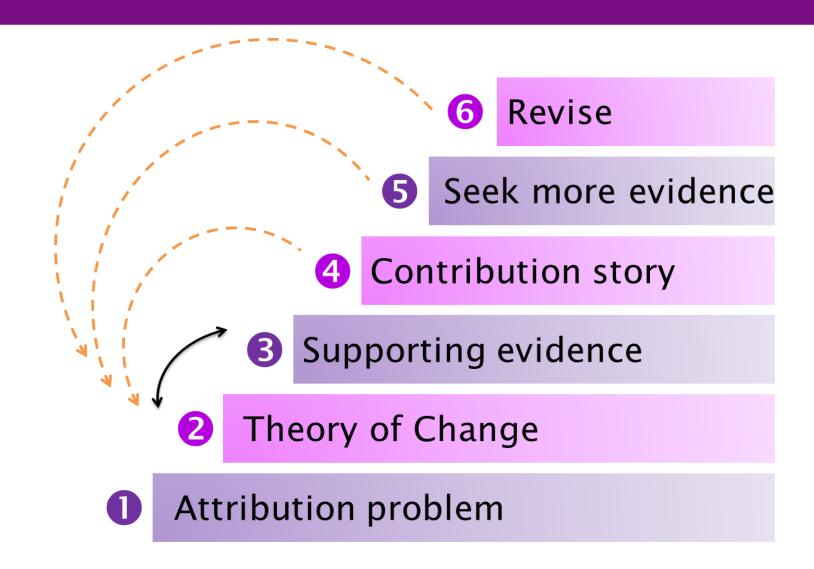
How does Contribution Analysis add value?

 A systematic framework (including an explicit Theory of Change) to conduct analysis by

Does not require a counterfactual

 Reduces uncertainty about how an program contributes towards observed results (evidence supporting the causal chain)

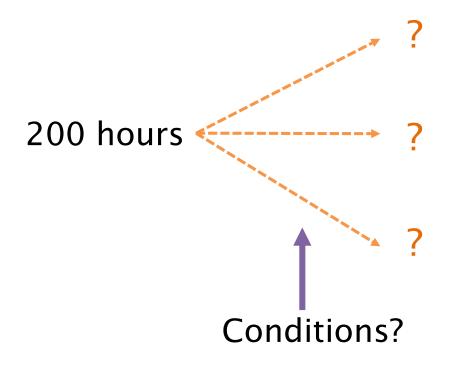
The Framework - Contribution Analysis's 6 steps



(Mayne 2008, 2011)

Step 1: The attribution problem ...

- Has 200 hours made a difference to or influenced the expected outcomes?
- Is it reasonable to conclude 200 hours has added value?



- Families been preserved (staying together)
- Reunification of children with their families

 (both of these keeping children out of outof-home-care)
- Family functioning improves

Steps 2 & 4: Develop & assess the Theory of Change

Our *first* rendition of the Theory of Change

Results chain

Final Outcomes

- Families remain preserved · Families remain reunified

Families are preserved

· Families are reunified

Intermediate outcomes (post 6 months)

Immediate outcomes

(post 200 hrs)

- Intensive support prevents children from entering the statutory protection system
- Increased services provided to support family preservation or
- · Improved parental wellbeing
- · Improved child wellbeing
- · Improved parent-child relationship
- · Improved family functioning
- Effective partnership between family services and child protection

Outputs

- · 200 hours of intensive family services for 300 families with a family preservation or reunification order
- Collaborative partnership between family services and child protection

Theory of change: assumptions and risks

200 hours of tailored family support will result in improved family functioning that will ultimately result in family

· Participant families apply new skills and behaviours over time and with consistency beyond the 200 Hours Intensive

- · Families will be open to the intensive support from family services to support preservation or reunification
- Family Services have the skills to deliver services that will build family functioning, capability and promote child safety/wellbeing and development
- · Participant families integrate knowledge and skills learned during the intensive support over the course of their
- · Family services and child protection have access to the appropriate systems that enable them to collaborate

- Intended target audience receives the intervention
- · Increased level of service intensity improves likelihood of family preservation or reunification
- Target participants are motivated
- Interventions are effective
- Interventions are tailored for individual families appropriately
- · Interventions are implemented to a high quality
- Increased level of service intensity (200 hours) improves family functioning
- · Child protection and family services staff are supported by the appropriate systems to collaborate

200 hours theory of change outline: through provision of intensive support vulnerable families functioning will improve resulting in families being preserved or reunified and children being kept out of the out-of-home-care system

Our *second* rendition of the Theory of Change

Results chain

Longer-term Outcomes (more than 12months post 200h)

Intermediate

(greater than

outcomes

6-months

200h)

- Families remain preserved Families remain reunified
- Families are able to use support structures (formal & informal) established for them, ongoing, as needed
- Participating families develop improved connection with their community

Theory of change: Assumptions

- · 200 hours of tailored family support contributes to improved family functioning and potentially preservation of
- Family services will work with all children in a family, irrespective of whether only one child on orders · Referral processes occur in a timely fashion

· Participant families learn new skills and behaviours or build upon existing strengths that they can apply

consistently over time, moving beyond the support period for 200h Hours

Risks

- · Children may still remain in the statutory system and families not be unified
- Referral processes not timely

- Families are preserved or reunified · The safety and well-being of children is maintained or It is appropriate and in the best interests of the child for them to remain with their family
- · Support structures set up around families, post the
- intensive 200h support ending

Proximal outcomes (up to 6months post 200h)

- Intensive support to families prevents children from remaining in or re-entering the statutory protection
- Family case plans may contain one or more therapeutic approaches targeting the below outcomes (dependent upon needs of families and their circumstances)
- o Increased services provided to support family preservation or reunification Improved parental wellbeing
- Improved child wellbeing
- o Improved parent-child relationship o Improved family functioning
- Effective partnership between organisations
- · Family's' formal & informal supports improve and
- connection with community

Assumptions:

- · Families are ready and open to receiving intensive support from Family Services to support preservation or
- · Family Services staff receive training to ensure they have the skills to deliver tailored support strategies that aim to build family functioning, capability and promote child safety/wellbeing and development

That 200h intensive family support will be sufficient for most families to change behaviours and apply new skills

- Program specific training for Family Services and Child Protection is ongoing to ensure staff can deliver 200h as
- 200h is sufficient time for participant families to integrate knowledge and skills learned across the period of their
- The environment of participating families is sufficiently non-chaotic for them to engage meaningfully with IFS
- Interventions employed by contracted agencies in delivering the intensive 200h are wholistic, in the best interests of the children and mostly effective, contributing towards intended outcomes
- There is a shared understanding of program goals and practice
- There are tools available or existing practices used by contracted agencies to capture changes in family functioning
- Contracted agencies have flexibility to tailor interventions in response to changes in family case plans/situations
- Program goals and outcomes are clearly articulated

· Families situation is chaotic and a barrier to

· Some families require more than 200h of

intensive support to reach point of

independence from support

· Children may be placed

- them engaging with Family Services Training and support for Family Services and Child Protection staff not delivered and impacts on their capacity to deliver the 200h model as intended
- There is poor shared understanding of program roles and responsibilities for 200h by Family Services and Child Protection, which results in inconsistent program delivery (practice)
- Capacity of Child Protection to meet their KPIs is restricted by systemic barriers outside their control, impacting upon Family Services and
- Families are not ready/willing to work with

- 200 hours of intensive family services for 300 families with a family preservation or reunification order
- Cross organisational partnership is encouraged
- Joint case planning meetings occur regularly Referrals are appropriate
- Eligible families are referred into 200h
- · Eligible families receive 200h intensive support from contracted agencies
- · Increased level of service intensity improves likelihood of family preservation or reunification Participant families are at a stage where they are receptive and wanting to engage with contracted agencies
- Participant families want to work with contracted agencies to move out of the statutory system · Interventions employed by contracted agencies are tailored appropriately for individual families
- · Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented using best practice principles
- Increased level of service intensity (200 hours) improves family functioning
- . There are sufficient structural support mechanisms in place at the system level which facilitate collaborative
- Contracted agencies able to focus usage of 200h in direct service delivery to support families
- · Intensive support given for 200h able to focus working with families to achieve desired outcomes

- 200h intensive support sometimes not suitable/good fit for eligible families Not all eligible families receive 200h
- Intensity of 200h support creates dependency of families upon services
- Organisations not able to work collaboratively,
- 200h used to undertake administrative tasks (e.g. meetings, emails, staff supervision & training) - not intended use
- Delivery of 200h support absorbed by crisis driven responses by Family Services

With critical input from Intensive Family Preservation Support workers

Step 3: Gathering the evidence

Challenges faced

- Mixed findings
- Variability of strength and quality of evidence
- Variation in how outcomes defined
- Model discussed in literature differs to that used in Victoria

Limitations of Contribution Analysis

You can only make a contribution claim when:

- You have a clearly articulated Theory of Change
- The program has been implemented as depicted in the Theory of Change

Contribution Analysis also:

- Cannot be used to uncover a new Theory of Change
- Does not provide definitive proof or quantitate the degree that a program contributes to observed changes

In summary...

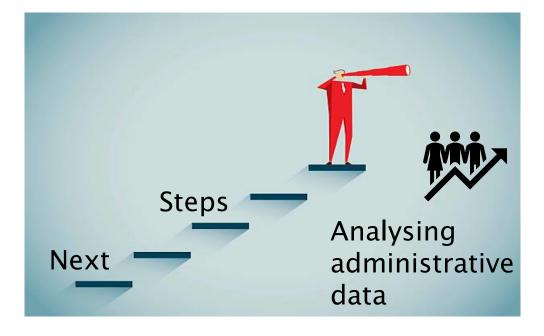
As long as there is a clearly articulated Theory of Change applying Contribution Analysis can help you to construct a reasoned argument supporting a conclusion that a program has plausibly contributed to observed results

Where are we now and next steps?



Generating our performance story

 Compiling client service journeys and ...



thank you

What are your experiences?

Has anyone used contribution analysis, other theory based approaches to evaluation?

What have you learnt?

Its key

- Strengths?
- Weaknesses?

Would you use it again? Why, why not?



Contact us

Jane Howard

Centre for Evaluation and Research

Department of Health and Human Services

Email: <u>jane.howard@dhhs.vic.gov.au</u>

Phone: 03 – 9096 – 3053



Useful references

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