What now for the Family and Community Development Program?

A discussion on the proposed $3m budget cuts
to the Family and Community Development Program,
as foreshadowed by the South Australian Government

SACOSS Consultation Paper
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Executive Summary

The Family and Community Development (F&CD) Program was established from a fund mandated by the *Family and Community Services Act 1972.* The program took its current form in the early 1990s and has a number of sub-programs which, for 2010-11, are funded at the following levels:

Families with Children	$3,586,961
Neighbourhood Development	$1,629,676
Services to Young People	$1,707,094
Industry Support and Development	$1,041,773
Low Income Support	$1,050,427
Total F&CD Funding	**$9,015,931**

The F&CD Program was designed to operate at all service delivery levels, with a main focus on early intervention and prevention. It is one of the few funded programs within government that specifically aims to embrace an early investment and community development approach to service delivery. Guidelines for the program were developed when the program was established in the early 1990s, but on the whole they have not been updated and there has been no consolidated review of the program since it began.

The 2010-11 South Australian State Budget contained substantial cuts to the F&CD Program, of some $2m per annum by 2013-14. This represents a cut of approximately 23% to program funding. An analysis of the long term funding of the program shows only a modest increase in the overall level of funding since its inception, and a real funding cut to some of the sub-programs. More than six years ago the Department for Families and Communities itself identified that the program was becoming unviable due to lack of funding. A cut to the F&CD Program of the size mandated in the September 2010 State Budget has again brought the issue into sharp relief.

The impact of these cuts will almost certainly be compounded by anticipated increased wage costs as a result of the national Equal Remuneration Case currently before Fair Work Australia, and also from parallel cuts to other state government programs (e.g. 44 FTE reductions in financial counsellors within Families SA), which will inevitably increase demand for service on the community services sector.

In response to the budget cuts, SACOSS commenced the process of consulting with the sector by undertaking an electronic survey of agencies currently in receipt of funding from the program. The survey revealed unanimous opposition to the cuts, and many agencies took the opportunity to stress that an actual increase in the fund is long overdue. The responses also identified other concerns and suggested major improvements to the program, which is widely seen as one of a few points of early investment in the lives of individuals and families at risk of experiencing major forms of financial and social disadvantage.

SACOSS believes that, given the significant impact of these cuts on many existing community services, and given that the cuts are proposed to be based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the various programs within the budget line, an open and transparent assessment of the program is urgently required.

SACOSS now seeks to initiate some of this assessment and discussion through this consultation paper. The paper aims to inform stakeholders in the sector about the historic work of the fund, and to provide background information and some key discussion questions so as to inform considered debate about the future of the program. Submissions responding to this paper will be welcomed by SACOSS during the consultation phase (up until 9 May 2011). In the next few months there will also be a range of sector workshops to discuss the future of the F&CD Program and the wider issues it raises.

Sector feedback, combined with research work conducted by SACOSS, will make up a final SACOSS position paper on the future of the F&CD Program.

SACOSS is aware that the Department for Families and Communities recognises that the F&CD program is long overdue for review is currently developing new information and assessment methodologies and undertaking a review in light of the proposed budget cuts. This consultation paper, and the eventual SACOSS position paper, will contribute to that review and will also be presented separately to the Minister for Families and Communities.

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Introduction

The proposed cuts

This consultation paper was developed by the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) to facilitate discussion with the community services sector on the future of the Family and Community Development (F&DC) Program.

The program is administered by the Community Connect Branch of the Department of Families and Communities (DFC) and paid for from funds mandated by the *Family and Community Services Act 1972* ("the Act"). Section 23 of the Act states that the Minister is required to maintain a fund for the Family and Community Development Program to be applied

> towards the cost incurred, or to be incurred in establishing, operating, maintaining, supporting, promoting, or extending any service, project or facility that will advance the welfare of children, youth or any other section of the community.

The Act does not mandate any particular sum to be either put into the fund or expended in any given year, so in effect the program is part of the normal state government budget cycle. In the 2011-12 State Budget major cuts were announced to the program, aimed at saving $3m over two years by "prioritising grant funding provided under the Family and Community Development Program to the most effective programs" (Treasury, 2010, p. 129).

The budget cut was submitted by DFC as a potential saving in response to requests for proposals from the government's Sustainable Budget Commission. The leaked version of a draft of the Commission's recommendations (SBC, 2010) reveals some of the thinking behind the proposed cuts and the further considerations required to put these measures in place:

> Further analysis is necessary and will be conducted.
>
> Represent [sic] roughly a 23 per cent reduction in the program, which is grants to NGOs and councils to provide a range of community based services.
>
> The proposal makes no assessment of which entities will be affected, nor the effectiveness of the services provided. (SBC, 2010, p 288)

This illustrates that no assessment of the impact of these cuts or the value of the program had taken place at the time the proposal was put forward and included in the budget. SACOSS understands that, within its Community Connect Branch, DFC had recognised the need to review the program but the review had not happened when the budget cuts were announced. DFC is now undertaking a major review (including the trialling of new data and assessment methodologies) in the light of the budget cuts and that during 2011 they will seek to engage funded agencies in this review.

While SACOSS welcomes any open and transparent discussion of the F&CD Program and its achievements to date, it is a cause of major concern to the community services sector that the decision on funding cuts was made prior to any such assessment, and that the needs assessment will now be predicated on the assumption of diminishing funding.

Survey on funding cuts

There is little doubt that cuts to the F&CD Program of the size announced will have major impacts on the ability of the community services sector to deliver important services. In response to the budget announcement, SACOSS initiated an e-survey with organisations that receive money under the program. A total of 124 representatives from agencies funded through the F&CD Program were invited to complete the e-survey.

There was a 45% response rate to the e-survey, with respondents providing comments from all five sub-program areas. Half of the respondents had been receiving funding from the program for more than 15 years.

Organisations were asked about their views on the proposed 23% cut to the F&CD Program. 100% of responses to this question can only be construed as extremely negative. The following comments are typical of the responses:

> "It is counter-productive to the State's Strategic Plan in engaging volunteers, wellbeing of the community, addressing the issues of an aging population and successfully integrating migrants"

> "We strongly oppose any cuts to LISP. The program is currently underfunded as has been highlighted ... for a number of years. Given an expected cut to financial counselling services through other areas of the state government budget a further reduction will dramatically reduce the sector's ability to meet demand."

> "We believe that this funding cut is a short-sighted move and that the preventative work undertaken by the community sector with this funding saves an exponentially greater amount than is spent through the fund. This effect combined with the way that all organisations add their own funds to the Families with Children funding ... means that the funds supplied to our organisation have far greater impact than the actual $ amount would indicate"

> "We are greatly concerned that the proposed reduction for funding will undermine the capacity for early intervention and that the result will be increasing families entering the child protection system."

Agencies were also specifically asked to indicate staff losses as a result of these cuts. Responses varied from one part-time position through to as many as 11 staff positions being put at risk. It is significant that this question was answered by almost every respondent completing the survey as it indicates an extremely high level of concern about potential job losses that might flow as a result of the cuts.

Many agencies pointed out that funding from the F&CD Program attracted a large amount of other funding support given its nature as a longer term long-term funding stream. This has apparently enabled many agencies to build significant service delivery around this 'core' funding. Agencies are also able to add value through their own fundraising, given the long-term commitment by DFC to this work. Almost all respondents could name significant funding that was attracted from other sources as a result of the F&CD Program. One agency listed as much as $500,000 p.a. leveraged off the back of these funds.

The survey will remain open until the completion of the consultation phase for those people who did not get the opportunity to complete the initial e-survey, and the results will continue to inform the sectors input into discussions around the F&CD Program.

SACOSS also notes that the impact of these proposed budget cuts may be significantly magnified if there is a major increase in sector wages resulting from a positive decision in the Equal Remuneration Case currently before Fair Work Australia, unless supplementary funding for these wage increases is made available.

When a 23% cut to the F&CD Program is combined with a potential 18-37% salary increase for community services workers (based on an earlier decision in the Queensland jurisdiction), there could be massive reductions in services—maybe even closures—and a diminishing of the value of this whole program to an extent which threatens it very viability.

Sector consultation

SACOSS believes that, given the significant impact of these cuts on many existing community services, and given that the cuts are proposed to be based on an evaluation of the effectiveness of the various programs within the budget line, an open and transparent assessment of the program is urgently required.

SACOSS now seeks to initiate some of this assessment and discussion through this consultation paper. The paper aims to

- Provide an overview of the history and objectives of the F&CD Program and its sub-programs
- Identify where the various programs have made a valuable contribution to meeting the needs of disadvantaged South Australians
- Consider, where possible, how similar programs and funding operate in other jurisdictions of Australia
- Consider the implications of reduced expenditure for organisations delivering services and people in receipt of these services
- Invite the community services sector to contemplate whether the original objectives of the program remain pertinent, and whether it is the most useful means to achieve those original objectives
- Invite the sector to reflect on and propose what a genuine and realistic vehicle and funding base might look like if the objectives originally envisioned for the program are to be achieved.

The paper begins by giving an overview of the history of the program, and then considers each of the five sub-programs:

- Families with Children
- Neighbourhood Development
- Youth
- Industry Support and Development
- Low Income Support Program.

The rationale, history, guidelines, funding and outcomes of each of the programs is discussed separately. The final sections of the document draw these together and discuss the program as a whole and the future possibilities for the program.

This consultation paper is primarily targeted at the non-government and local government organisations that currently deliver services funded under the F&CD Program. However, the paper will also have broader relevance for the wider community services sector and the South Australian Government.

Submissions responding to this paper will be welcomed by SACOSS during the consultation phase. These submissions, combined with research work conducted by SACOSS, will make up a final SACOSS Position Paper on the future of the F&CD Program. This will contribute to the DFC review of the program and will also be presented separately to the Minister for Families and Communities prior to the 2011-12 State Budget.

Overview of the F&CD Program

Program description

The Family and Community Development Program was established in 1989 with the amalgamation of the state-funded Community Welfare Grants program and the Family Support Program, which had been jointly funded by the Commonwealth and South Australian Governments until the Commonwealth withdrew in July 1989 (DFC, 1992a). The F&CD funds were allocated under a number of different categories:

- Services to Young People
- Services to Families and Children
- Anti-Poverty Services (now Low Income Support)
- Neighbourhood and Community Development
- Industry Support and Development.

The beginnings of the program were crucially influenced by the Community Service Sector Review (CSSR) that took place from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. This review was in part funded by the state government and aimed to tackle a number of strategic and structural changes impacting upon the South Australian community services sector. In a context not dissimilar to the one today provided by the new modern awards and the equal remuneration case, the CSSR review also coincided with efforts to establish an industrial award for the social and community services sector (SACS Award), which would provide stronger wages and conditions for workers in the community services sector.

The F&CD Program was designed to operate at all service delivery levels, with a main focus on early intervention and prevention. It is one of the few funded programs within government that aims to include a community development approach to service delivery, as opposed to the purely directly client-based work of many emerging community service government-funded programs. As such, many of the funded programs have a high volunteer component, and program funding has also been used by community service organisations to leverage other funds in order to build their service delivery capacity.

Moreover, the Industry Support sub-program specifically sought to enable government's broad engagement and consultation with the sector in highly efficient ways. It is one of only a few programs to recognise that ensuring highly developmental industry support is available to the sector generally, as well as to various sub-sectors, will promote a healthy, innovating sector.

Program guidelines

From 1992, the Family and Community Development Unit within DFC began a process of developing guidelines for each of the sub-programs. The guidelines outline the objectives of the program as follows:

> The aims of F&CD Program are consistent with the Department's broad mandate to promote the welfare of the community and include:
>
> - The amelioration of problems and conditions which prevent individuals and families from adequately meeting their social, material and other basic need; and
>
> - the prevention of conditions and structures in society which create inequity and which act to disadvantage and dis-empower community members.

In order to achieve these aims the following objectives have been established for the F&CD Program:

- to ensure that services which receive funding are effective in meeting identified needs, are relevant to those most in need, are delivered efficiently and are well managed;

- to ensure that funds are directed to services which can best cater for the needs of disadvantaged individuals and families;

- to develop a constructive and working relationship between the department and funding agencies and to ensure credible and effective management and administration of the F&CD Program;

- to ensure that an appropriate range of intervention strategies are supported through the distribution of funds to non-Government agencies and local Government; and

- to maximize the effective use of community resources and initiative in the meeting of individual and family needs.

(Community Connect DFC, 2003, p 3.)

To establish these original guidelines for the distribution of funds, DFC conducted wide-ranging discussions with the community services sector. Important principles that came out of these discussions and influenced various components of the guidelines were as follows:

- **Primary, Secondary and Tertiary intervention** Service delivery is expected at three distinct levels: Primary interventions seek to influence structural change to reduce disadvantage; Secondary interventions operate in a group or community setting as a service type; Tertiary interventions focus on direct client intervention. These intervention distinctions are a strong focus of the guidelines.
- **Local area planning** Service plans to be developed at a regional level in collaboration with NGO, state and local government—a concept developed through the 1991 South Australian Community Services Sector Review.
- **Principles of access and equity** to ensure the resources are distributed for maximum outcomes and minimum duplication.
- **Sector Support** Consistent with the objectives of efficient use of resources, the sector would be supported in program delivery.
- **Regular F&CD policy evaluation and review** in collaboration with the broader community sector.

Figure 1 overleaf, drawn from the program guidelines, illustrates the core intervention types of the F&CD Program. The large base of the pyramid, “Primary Interventions”, speaks to what is a crucial feature of the program—the early investment and prevention focus. The importance of this focus was reflected in SACOSS’ e-survey done for this process, and is best captured by this recipient commenting on the proposed cuts to the program:

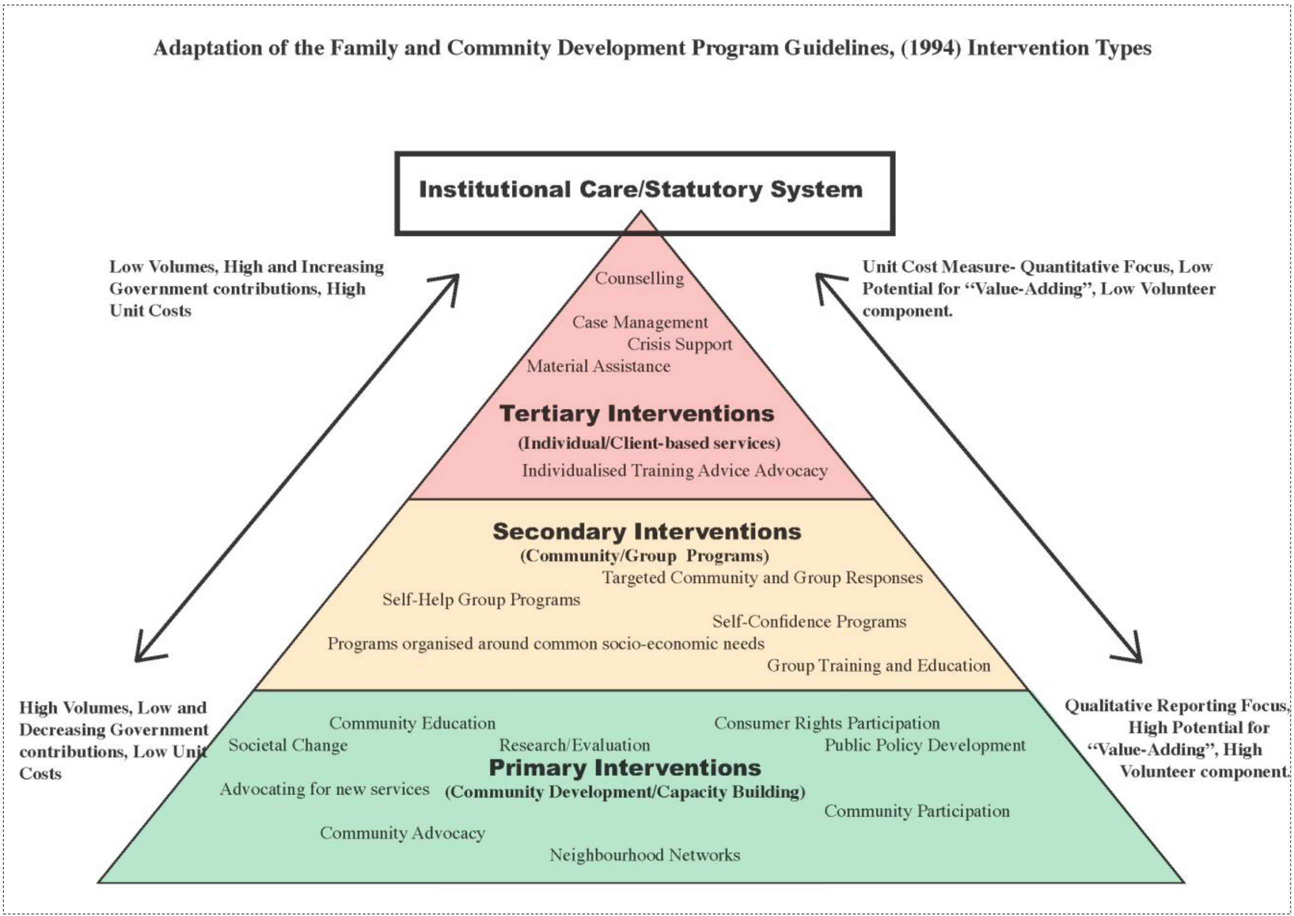
> Funding cuts to programs such as Families with Children and Low Income Support undervalue the effectiveness of early intervention when research strongly supports it.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies released a paper (2010) on issues for the safety and wellbeing of children in families with multiple and complex problems. This paper states that,

> "The greatest challenge therefore is to sufficiently resource flexible prevention and early intervention services to help reduce the number of children requiring state intervention. In an integrated service system, child protection services are a last-resort response and just one part of the child and family welfare service system where universal services form the foundation".

There is a clear understanding in the community services sector that the early investment and prevention strategies that are a hallmark of the F&CD Program make sense at both an economic and social level. In every sense, early intervention equates to making an early investment in vulnerable populations, with the 'dividend' being the future savings that flow from not requiring more expensive interventions at a later time.

Figure 1: Intervention Types



Funding

As noted above, the legislation establishing a fund to provide for the F&CD Program did not mandate any particular funding level. Table 1 shows both current funding levels and those from 1992 when the program took on its current shape.

Table 1: F&CD Program funding

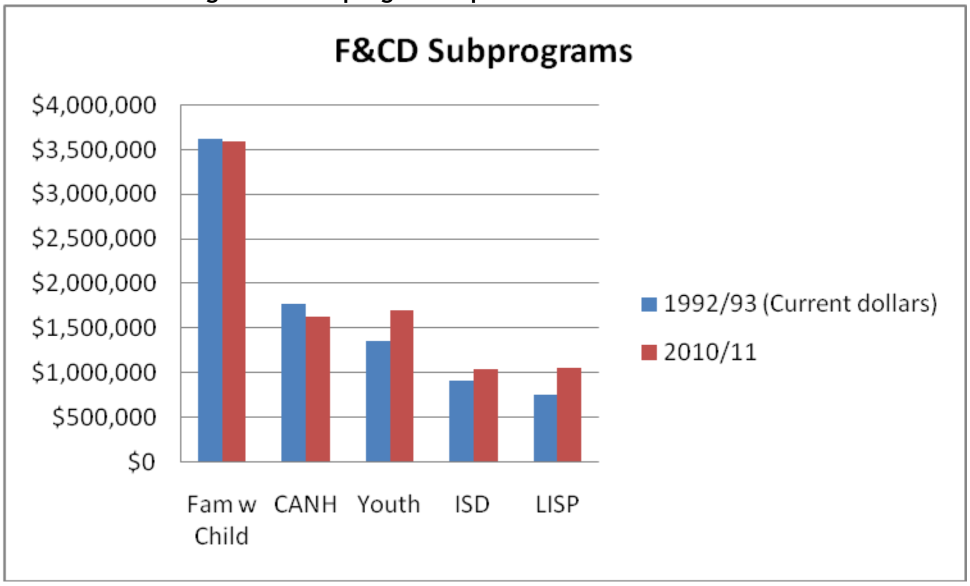
	1992-93	2010-11
Families with Children	$2,254,353	$3,586,961
Community & Neighbourhood Houses	$1,107,529	$1,629,676
Youth	$848,398	$1,707,094
Industry Support and Development	$566,746	$1,041,773
Anti Poverty (LISP)	$470,116	$1,050,427
Total	**$5,247,142**	**$9,015,931**

Source: information provided by Community Connect, DFC, Feb 2011.

SACOSS calculates (indexing to CPI All Groups – Australia) the 1992-93 total to be the equivalent of $8.423m in today's dollars. This apparent increase in the overall value of the fund to $9m is at best nominal (i.e. 7%) especially given the increasing complexity of problems faced by the various target vulnerable populations, growth in the service sector, as well as the increased sophistication of service delivery.

The changes in the real value of the sub-programs are shown in Figure 2Figure 2:

Figure 2: Sub-program expenditure in current dollars



The modest increases in some sub-programs and in the F&CD Program overall may also be subsumed by increases in the population. From 1993 to June 2010 the South Australian population grew by 12.4% (ABS, 1995; ABS, 2010). If the percentage of the population in need of services has remained constant (which would need separate empirical verification) the 7% increase in real expenditure on the F&CD would mean that, even with increased efficiencies, service providers would struggle to keep pace with increasing demand for services from a larger population.

The 2010-2011 State Budget mandates a cut of $1m in 2012-13 and $2m in 2013-14

– a cumulative saving of $3m (Treasury, 2010, p 129). Assuming the funding is still to be indexed, and based on a projected CPI growth of 2.7% p.a. (i.e. the current rate projected forward, which is in line with Treasury forecasts – although we note that government program indexing may not match CPI), the effects of the proposed funding cuts can be calculated as per Table 2.

Table 2: F&CD funding in current dollars

Year	Without cuts $m	With cuts $m	1992-93 funding in current $m
2010-11	9.0	9.0	8.3
2011-12	9.2	9.2	8.5
2012-13	9.5	8.5	8.7
2013-14	9.7	7.7	9.0

It is evident that in real terms the proposed funding cuts for 2012-13 would reduce the program funding to below the level at its inception, and by 2013-14 be some 15% below the original funding level.

Again, these figures on the funding cuts do not take account of the increase in population to be serviced in that time, or of changing needs over time. However, there is certainly concern over the adequacy of the funding of the program. DFC itself has recognised this. Its program information manual quotes its own ministerial advice in 2003 as follows:

> the program has received no expansion funding for a decade. Further, during this period the effectiveness of the program has been significantly eroded due to:
>
> - its funding not being indexed until 1998/9, and
> - inadequate indexation provided since 1999 (both are the subject of 2003/04 budget bids).
>
> Due to the lack of growth funding, there has been effectively no opportunity to support new services. This has been compounded by:
>
> - increasing demand for services placing further pressure on the agencies, with many receiving minimal levels of funding, making them barely viable
> - with intensifying resource pressure at all levels, many agencies including government have tightened eligibility criteria as a means of “rationing” services. This in turn widens the gaps for people to ‘fall through’ and puts more pressure on funded non-government agencies, ultimately increasing demand for crisis and acute services.
>
> This is adversely affecting the capacity of funded agencies to maintain service delivery levels and standards. …
>
> The program’s guiding policies have not been reviewed since it was established in the early 1990s.
>
> (Community Connect DFC, 2003, Attachment I)

SACOSS believes that many of the issues raised are equally or even more applicable today.

Program administration and outcomes

As noted above, the program is administered by the Community Connect Branch of DFC, and project officers are assigned different sub-programs to provide support. Their role includes contract management, re-negotiating contracts, monitoring visits to agencies, coordinating data collection, occasionally preparing annual reports for sub-programs, inter-departmental liaison, and attending to broader policy and ministerial concerns.

Over the years, the program has maintained the following characteristics:

- Long-term funding, with no need to re-tender for funding as sub-programs rarely change service providers
- A wide range of organisations funded and great variation in funding amounts (from as little as $4,000 p.a. to over $600,000 p.a. for services provided)
- Funding distributed across to all regions, in some cases as a contribution towards costs and in others as (allegedly) fully-funded projects
- High volunteer component in the programs funded
- Sub-programs with high volumes of service outputs, and working with a wide range of stakeholders across all levels of government and community
- Open-ended contracting, allowing NGOs to make strategic choices in the manner of service delivery and capacity to prioritise resources locally
- Reporting essentially by service provider self-assessment in a one-size-fits-all reporting regime
- Annual monitoring visits for most projects
- Data from most projects collected and recorded within DFC.

Unfortunately, over the years since the program commenced there has been no consolidated report of outcomes, outputs and/or trends. Reporting at the sub-program level has also been patchy. Annual Reports have only occurred for three of the sub-program areas, and these only number six in total over the 15 years. Despite a requirement in the original guidelines, sub-program reviews have not been regular. The guidelines themselves have not often been reviewed, although they have been supplemented in agency service agreements by reference to subsequent frameworks such as *South Australia's Strategic Plan*, DFC's five year Strategic Plan, targeted early intervention strategies under the "Keeping them Safe" Implementation Action Plan, and the DFC 7 principles of community engagement.

Given all this, the contribution and real value of the fund is hard to measure, although it is fair to say that the sector highly values much of the work done under this program and believes that those activities make a real contribution and future benefit to the South Australian community.

Changes to the program

While valuing much of the work done under this program, the sector's experience has also led to the identification of a number of other problems with the operation of the program. Apart from concerns about the adequacy of funding, operational concerns include:

- The program hasn't articulated where it fits, in relation to whether it is a gifting program assisting service providers to do what they would do anyway, or whether it is a fully funded program with all the expectations of reporting and service quality that the latter would entail
- There is a high turnover of staff in the area of Community Connect Branch that manages the program, making it difficult to maintain corporate knowledge or understanding of the sub-program and sector issues
- Funding priorities within the sub-programs have not been reviewed and it is difficult for new projects to access funding
- Information from program outcomes and client feedback is not used in any systematic way to inform sector development priorities, assist program design or local area planning, and it is questionable how much of this information influences broader departmental or government policy.

This list is by no means comprehensive, nor would all funded service providers have had the same experience to lead to these findings. Some may not agree with all the points listed, or they may have other concerns.

SACOSS' e-survey asked what changes should be made to the F&CD Program to provide more sustainable outcomes for the community. The responses are recorded in Table 3, overleaf.

Table 3: Community sector suggestions for F&CD Program changes

Suggestion	Definitely %	Possibly %	Not required %	Don't know %
Funding increased	86.0	14.0	0.0	0.0
Clearer funding guidelines	31.3	52.1	14.6	2.1
Service Delivery Manual for each sub-program	16.3	51.0	26.5	6.1
Clearer links to other levels of government in service models	38.8	51.0	4.1	6.1
Improved reporting feedback	41.7	35.4	22.9	0.0
Funding re-tendered more often	8.5	21.3	66.0	4.3
Bi-annual review of the funding guidelines	24.5	44.9	24.5	6.1
Greater involvement of NGOs in management of the fund	36.0	32.0	26.0	6.0
More flexible contract management	36.0	40.0	22.0	2.0
More transparency in the operation of the funding	30.6	42.9	20.4	6.1
Seed funding pool for emerging services	54.0	36.0	4.0	6.0
Innovation funding	57.1	38.8	0.0	4.1
Outcomes-based KPIs and reporting	40.8	40.8	14.3	4.1

This data and the broader historical experience of the sector should provide a useful starting point for discussion on the future of the program, although a more nuanced analysis is gained by examining the sub-programs in the F&CD Program. It is to these we now turn.

The sub-programs of the F&CD Program

Families with Children sub-program

Program description

The Families with Children sub-program is a suite of services delivered by community service and local government organisations, to support disadvantaged families and children in their social and emotional development. The focus is on early intervention and prevention, and services operate at all three levels of tertiary, secondary and primary intervention.

The Families with Children funded agencies provide supports to local communities, working cooperatively with other local community based services through the following types of interventions:

- Family support services
- Home based services
- Mobile crèches
- Parent education groups
- Parent/ adolescent counselling (1:1 and/or groups)
- Sexual abuse counselling to victims
- Telephone counselling
- Volunteer home visiting programs
- Advocacy
- Practical support.

Services are contracted to reach:

- families who are experiencing parenting difficulties
- families where children have been harmed, abused, neglected or exploited or are at risk of this
- families where children are suffering emotional, material, and physical hardship as a result of socio-economic factors
- families where children have special needs that require particular services to avoid long term disadvantage
- children who are not provided with adequate care, a healthy safe environment, reasonable standards of food, clothing, shelter, health and education.

Services are provided to the general public, although some programs are linked closely to Families SA District Centre services and are funded to work closely with these centres.

Issues of the sub-program dealt with were hugely diverse. The 2009-10 *Sub-program Annual Report* (Community Connect DFC, 2010, p. 8) listed the following presentations:

- Anger/aggression (540)
- Behaviour issues (1,292)
- Child abuse including child sexual abuse (667)

- Cultural differences (323)
- Developmental delays (280)
- Domestic violence (1,162)
- Financial difficulty (1,622)
- Health (751)
- Housing/homelessness (638)
- Household management (391)
- Language (350)
- Loss/grief (883)
- Isolation (1,794)
- Mental health (2,278)
- Parenting related (3,254)
- Parental separation (944)
- Disability including intellectual (833)
- Relationship /marital (2,987)
- Educational (562)
- Self esteem (1,511)
- Substance abuse (428)
- Unemployment (1,365)
- Suicide (156)

History and guidelines of the Families with Children sub-program

The forerunner to the Families with Children sub-program was the Family Support Program, jointly funded by the Commonwealth and South Australian Governments until the Commonwealth withdrew in 1989. In May 1992 DFC set up an advisory committee to oversee the formulation for the development and funding of services for Families with Children. In June 1993 DFC released its *Families Support Services Policy* (Funding Plan), the forerunner for the Families with Children funding policy of May 1994. These guidelines, entitled *Together with Families with Children* (DFC, 1994c), are the most recent with Ministerial 'sign off '. At the time, Minister David Wotton stated that:

> It is anticipated that this document will be a valuable asset for the F&CD advisory committee in the preparation of advice on the funding of services for families with children….and for the staff of the Department for Family and Communities Service in the administration of funds thought the F&CD Program.
>
> (DFC, 1994c)

A series of principles were outlined within the guidelines relating to children, families, and society. The program objectives were as follows (DFC, 1994c):

- To empower families with children to meet the needs of their children, fulfil their obligation and to ensure their children's rights are upheld.
- To enable families with children to function effectively through mutual aid, self-help and social participation.
- To provide support to dysfunctional and disadvantaged families with children to maintain and improve family functioning.
- To provide families with access to resources and service to enable them to fulfil their obligation for children and to meet children's needs.
- To prevent situations arising in which families are unable to fulfil their obligations and meet the needs and rights of their children.
- To act with families to alleviate structural disadvantage and improve services.

Funds would be distributed under six separate categories, as follows:

- Metropolitan service
- Non-metropolitan areas
- Services for Aboriginal families
- Services for ethnic groups
- Special services and innovative programs
- Training

In 2004, DFC made some internal changes to the guidelines. These did not have Ministerial sign off, but made no significant changes to the operation of the sub-program, the groups of agencies funded, nor the way in which the sub-program operated with the broader sector.

Since 2004, DFC has produced contracting information regarding outputs and outcomes in relation to the sub-program and how it fits within the department's broader agenda. However, there has been no major review with the community services sector, nor major reform of the operation of the sub-program since the guidelines were written in 1994.

This lack of review is important because, since the guidelines for the Families with Children sub-program were developed, the community services landscape has changed greatly in relation to early intervention and prevention services for families with children. These changes are in part triggered by the growing numbers of children going into state care and emergency foster care; the increasing number of notifications of children at risk; the growing pressures at Families SA to manage higher levels of demand in child protection and family support services; and the increasing range of complementary funded services from both government and non-government sectors.

There are now also a range of core funded programs that complement the Families with Children sub-program, including:

- Special Family Support Grants (DFC, recently defunded)
- Stronger Families Safer Children (DFC)
- DECS Children's Centres (State Government, early intervention under 5 yr old and parenting programs)
- Communities for Children (Commonwealth, early intervention under 5 yr old and parenting programs)
- HIPPY (Commonwealth)
- Building Family Opportunities (State Government, Social Inclusion Unit)

Given these developments, the sector and DFC should perhaps consider where the Families with Children sub-program sits within this new service delivery context. These considerations would greatly affect any reshaping of this sub-program.

Funding of the Families with Children sub-program

In 1992-3 the Families with Children sub-program was funded on an annual basis to a level of $2.254m. As of 2010-11 it currently sits at $3.58m. This funding is currently provided to 26 agencies for the provision of 25 metropolitan and nine regional based early intervention programs in South Australia.

SACOSS calculates the initial funding has an equivalent value of $3.62m in current dollars, which means that the funding has declined by 1% in real terms, and in comparison with the complementary programs listed above, the Families with Children sub-program is much more scarcely resourced. It is also working with high volumes of clients. DFC data for the most recent full year (2009-10) shows that the total number of families and individual clients receiving interventions in the year were:

- 7330 families
- 10,994 children under 18
- 2,982 group sessions (31,372 participants)
- 148 community events (25,703 participants)
- 868 total number of volunteers
- 821 volunteers who completed training

If this level of service provision is carried forward, then given the 2010-11 sub-program budget of $3.58m, this work represents a cost of less than $325 per child intervention and $489 per family intervention (Community Connect DFC, 2010).

It should also be noted that, unlike some of the programs above, the Families with Children sub-program is a general public service not limited to accepting referrals from government agencies. This tends to increase the voluntary component of the program, placing greater emphasis on the client's ownership of their own commitment to the process of improved parenting and support of their children's lives.

State governments across Australia have been tending towards funding client-based early intervention with families and children, and at the same time reducing funds to community-based preventative programs that focus on primary and secondary interventions. This trend to 'tertiary' or directly client-focused interventions, is against a backdrop of rising child protection notifications and numbers of children going into out of home care. Yet one could argue that one of the influencing factors in the current burgeoning of child protection service demands is this ever-decreasing real contribution to preventative families programs across Australia.

There has been no 'peak body' or sector-wide submissions on renewal of the Families with Children sub-program in recent years. Requests for additional funding have been made directly to DFC by individual organisations, with minimal success.

In the event of a cut of 23% or more to the Families with Children sub-program it is likely that some of the children who would otherwise have received early intervention support will fall into the alternative care system. There were 10,994 in this category least year (Community Connect DFC, 2010). The cost to the state of caring for a child in the child protection system can vary from $20,000 p.a. to more than $200,000 p.a. This is clearly a hugely difference to the cost of interventions under the Families and Communities sub-program noted above, and despite the proposed cuts to the budget, DFC recognised the false economy of any future reductions when it wrote:

> The economic benefits of providing early intervention services to disadvantaged families with children is compelling when compared with the increased longer term costs to government and society of not implementing these services and appropriately resourcing them.
>
> (Community Connect DFC, 2010, p. 4)

Core questions for the community services sector

In the 15 years of the Families with Children sub-program, minimal departmental reviews or research on its value, or otherwise, have been made available. There have been two Annual Reports produced in the last two financial years, but beyond this, the learning and knowledge gathered from the sub-program from these years of reporting and monitoring do not appear to have contributed to policy development within DFC.

The peak body for this area, the Child and Family Welfare Association (CAFWA) (2011, pers. comm. 10 February) has indicated the following as key to the ongoing success of the Families with Children sub-program:

1. To meet unmet demand, the number of families with children assisted through the fund should be doubled. This will need $7m per annum of funding to be distributed to new and existing organisations.
2. Funding allocations should include a higher component for research and policy development.
3. That pilot funds be made available for three year periods to test and research innovative programs.

Those wishing to discuss these issues further and consider the future for the Families with Children sub-program may like to consider some of the following questions:

- What should a re-modelled and renewed service system look like for the Families with Children sub-program?
- How should the sub-program integrate with other state and Commonwealth funded programs?
- Should the sub-program become more sharply focused as a result of other emerging programs of the last 10 years?
- What workforce and staff development issues exist for staff within the sub-program?
- Has the South Australian Government got the funding balance right, between direct client-based services to families and children, and more preventative and community-based strategies?

Neighbourhood House sub-program

Program description

The Neighbourhood House sub-program is arguably the 'signature' program of DFC when it comes to community development. The program seeks to develop a wide range of community services at the local level, including the following services offered through neighbourhood houses and community centres:

- Adult community education programs
- Primary healthcare programs
- Child protection programs
- Health and nutrition programs
- Social and emotional support programs
- Refugee programs
- Parenting programs
- Anti-poverty programs
- Youth programs
- Recreational programs
- Foundation skills development, providing pathways to further opportunities including to further education, training and employment
- A wide range of volunteer opportunities, programs and training services.
- Local community consultation, forums and venues for community events
- Referrals and linkages to other agencies
- Out of hours services for community and ethnic groups and programs for Aboriginal individuals and communities
- School vacation programs
- A wide range of aged care support services such as Home and Community Care
- Disability support programs
- In rural areas basic community services such as Health, Community Corrections, and Centrelink Service Outlets.

Through this wide range of services, neighbourhood houses and community centres support a multiplicity of other community services funded at the local, state and federal government level.

DFC (1994a) describes the core objectives of the sub-program as:

Outcomes for Individuals

- improved social functioning
- increased personal skills and emotional well-being
- increased ability to take control of factors affecting one's life
- improved knowledge and use of available community services
- increased access to informal support networks
- other negotiated outcomes determined by local priorities

Outcomes for the local community

- improved access for community members to effective and relevant services
- improved neighbourhood cohesion and informal support networks and links between residents

- ability to advocate and lobby effectively for increased services and resources for the community
- improved networks between residents, local helping agencies and informal support networks
- increased community awareness of the needs of most vulnerable, isolated and disadvantaged community members
- other negotiated outcomes determined by local priorities.

The sub-program Annual Report for 2008-09 (the most recent DFC data) states in relation to outputs:

> The community centres sector reportedly has two million contact hours per year. They also contribute more than 15,000 volunteer hours per week, equating to over $16 million per annum. ...
>
> The current funding provided by DFC is allocated towards 50 services, which receive between $6,120 and $68,100 per centre, per annum, an average of $32,000 per service.
>
> (Community Connect DFC, 2009)

History and guidelines of the Neighbourhood House sub-program

The Neighbourhood House sub-program commenced in 1981, at which time the number of houses funded by the state government increased from seven to more than 50 (now down to 46) (DFC, 1992b). In May 1991 DFC's 'Neighbourhood Houses' policy draft was written, and distributed for consultation to all community centres and neighbourhood houses. The policy itself also emphasised collaboration when it stated:

> FACS (now DFC) believes that all levels of government including local government authorities and locally-based non-government organisations can play a vital role in the provision of community based services and by working in partnership all parties can ensure that the most effective range of welfare services is available to the people most in need.
>
> (DFC, 1992b)

Local government was in fact already playing a significant role. Local government-owned facilities and buildings were often given over to neighbourhood houses, with state government funding then enabling program delivery.

The *Information Manual* provided by DFC for the F&CD Program cites much of the material from the original Neighbourhood Development sub-program 1992 guidelines. It appears from this there has been little policy renewal of the sub-program since 1992, despite the neighbourhood house sector regularly submitting to government suggestions for policy renewal, revised funding allocations, renewal of service systems, and better targeting of new and emerging communities for these services.

Policy renewal and regular re-allocation of funding is particularly vital to the neighbourhood house sector. The extensive development of new suburbs, and the shifting of social needs into different suburban and regional areas, requires new funding resources. This is well understood by state governments in other jurisdictions.

The NSW Government, for example, has recently conducted a review of funding allocations and policy for neighbourhood houses, and it worked closely with the sector, through the NSW peak body, to develop key performance areas and sustainable funding policies. Likewise in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania, review of this sector and renewal of the program occurs regularly with the neighbourhood house sector as a crucial partner.

By comparison, the South Australian program has been fairly static, and despite various requests has been slow to address new and emerging communities requiring these types of services. Examples include the Lower Lakes, Renmark and Murray Mallee communities. Such gaps in the program are compounded by two closures in recent years, at Playford and Elizabeth, and the threat of closure of the Aboriginal Resource Centre, all servicing high needs communities.

Funding for the Neighbourhood House sub-program

The Neighbourhood House sub-program is currently funded at $1.6 million a year. From this program, DFC figures indicate that funding goes to 46 neighbourhood houses, two volunteer support agencies, and two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (Community Connect DFC, 2009). This leaves almost 50 other community centres unfunded, spread throughout metropolitan and regional South Australia. Many of these are in high need and socially disadvantaged communities.

These shortfalls are perhaps not surprising given the long term decline in the value of funding for the program and increases in the population. When the F&CD Program took its current shape in 1992-93, the funding for this Neighbourhood Houses program was $1.1m, which SACOSS calculates as translating to about $1.78m in today's dollar terms. The current funding allocation is actually only $1.6m, effectively equating to an 8.3% decline in the real value of the funding of the sub-program. This decline in value is compounded by the 12.4% population increase over the same period, meaning more people and areas to be serviced.

Funding for this program is also poor in comparison to what other state governments contribute to the development of community and neighbourhood centres. Table 4 illustrates comparative government allocations, where figures were readily available.

Table 4: Comparative expenditure on neighbourhood houses and community centres

State	State govt contribution	Population	State government $ per capita
Victoria	$19.5m	5.29m	$3.68
NSW	$17.8m	6.96m	$2.55
Tasmania	$2.9m	0.50m	$5.82
South Australia	$1.3m[1]	1.60m	$0.81

(Extrapolated from ABS population figures and Community Centres SA national research, Feb 2011)

1 The $1.3m cited here is from Community Centres SA (CCSA) research of funding to its members. The figure is smaller than the $1.6m sub-program funding figure, which includes some other expenditures not directed to community centres and neighbourhood houses, as well as funding for centres not affiliated to CCSA. The discrepancy makes no substantive difference to the overall analysis.

This declining and comparative lack of direct investment by the South Australian Government is of profound concern in terms of preventative local community development services, although SACOSS recognises that community centres and neighbourhood houses obtain funding from a range of sources—both government and non-government. A mapping survey by the sector peak body Community Centres SA (previously the Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association), found that contributions varied as follows:

- 58% receive Adult & Community Education: SA Works (DFEEST). Funding varies ($10,000 - $50,000); applied for annually.
- 56% receive Neighbourhood Development Funding (DFC). Limited funding for centres varies ($10,000 - $62,000); three year funding agreement.
- 37% receive local government operating grant, others receive partial/in-kind support.
- 12% are auspiced by larger non-government organisations.

(CANH, 2009)

In October 2002 a Memorandum of Understanding was established between the Local Government Association, the South Australian Government and the neighbourhood house sector to assist in coordinating these diverse funding bases, and a set of principles were agreed to. DFC currently funds some local councils directly in the provision of neighbourhood development services, and these funds are redistributed within a broader community development program in each council precinct. The majority of funding, however, is directly delivered to community centres, and little collaboration occurs in any systematic way to leverage partnerships between DFC and councils.

The sources of funding available to community centres is also set to be enriched by a major new investment in adult community education with the state government's "Skills for All" initiative (Government of South Australia, 2011). This features an investment of $6.4m in additional funding for foundation skills development projects, typically delivered in community organisations such as community and neighbourhood centres. The project builds on the proven capacity of the sector to deliver such services (DFEEST, 2010), and is an example of the benefits of having core facilities and infrastructure to provide a launching pad for a range of other services. Yet it is this issue which is at the heart of current funding pressures.

Responses to the 2009 CANH mapping survey indicate that what is most needed is *recurrent* funding (77% of respondents). While it is possible to survive on a cocktail of grants, core funding enables continuity and efficiency of organisation, coherence of direction, and (as noted above) the leveraging of other funding. Again, interstate comparisons suggest that core funding of neighbourhood houses in South Australia is inadequate.

Table 5: Core funding of neighbourhood houses

State	Number of member centres	Centres with core funding	Community Services "Core" funding to Centres		Total funding to centres p.a.
			Min $	Max $	$
Victoria	340	272	21,640	86,570	19.5m
NSW	300	178	6,500	440,000	17.8m
Tasmania	33	33	84,000	93,000	2.9m
WA	73	36	22,000	90,000	N/A
SA	93	53	4,200	62,300	1.3m[2]

(Information provided by Community Centres SA national research, Feb 2011. No NT figures available)

The proportion of centres in South Australia with core state government funding is about the same as Western Australia, but lags behind other states. Both the South Australian minimum and maximum core funding is the lowest of any of the states where figures were available. Even the South Australian maximum core funding grant of $62,300 (let alone the $32k average per centre) is not sufficient to employ staff and resources to keep the doors open on a five day per week basis—let alone seven days a week.

Future sub-program needs

Apart from lack of funding, there are a range of other challenges for the Neighbourhood House sub-program that need to be addressed—some of which will also have budget implications. In its Annual Report, Community Connect DFC (2009) indicates its understanding of the concerns of the sector as being:

- Reduction in numbers of Housing SA residents congregated in one area
- New residential suburbs being established, extending the metropolitan boundary
- Influx of new immigrants, particularly from African and Asian countries, presenting with limited English skills
- An increase in older clients
- Mental health needs, in particular for aged in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the lack of mental health workers available who speak the language
- Lack of appropriate facilities for youth
- An increased demand for services by people presenting with mental health issues or other disabilities
- Increase in family violence and a lack of appropriate counselling services available to assist;
- The number of families who require low cost meals has increased and not having either the funding or staff to meet the need
- Increased cost of living, including petrol, rental and private

2 See Footnote 1.

accommodation means that the numbers of clients seeking to access services has increased;

- Transport continues to be a major issue for frail aged and disability clients living in the community who are unable to drive themselves
- Some services report that they have an increase in the numbers of asset rich but cash poor clients seeking financial assistance
- Lack of funding prohibits employing additional staff to cope with the increase of numbers
- Lack of funding prohibits paid and unpaid staff attending relevant training to deal with changes to service provision, e.g. mental health issues
- Constant and ongoing changes to Centrelink benefit obligations. The concern relates to the ability to utilise volunteers or 'work for the dole' participants as unpaid staff to assist with program implementation, office administration or even management committees.

In response to these various needs, the sector, via its peak body, put forward a budget submission identifying key issues for the future. These key issues were: appropriate funding, greater productivity, workforce recruitment, retention, succession planning, increased complexity of social issues, and sector development (CANH, 2009).

The submission outlines a $9m recurrent funding proposal to bring the state government contribution into line with the current needs and the funding benchmarks that operates nationally for this work.

Table 6 summarises the Community Centres SA request:

Table 6: CCSA Budget Submission 2010-2013

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	TOTAL FUNDING
	$'000	$'000	$'000	$'000
EXISTING FUNDING				
Retention of existing neighbourhood development foundation funding for current centres (3 years)	1,300	1,300	1,300	3,900
Retention of existing Industry Support & Development funding for Community Centres SA (3 years)	117	117	117	336
TOTAL EXISTING FUNDING	**1,417**	**1,417**	**1,417**	**4,236**
NEW FUNDING				
Increase to existing funding current centres and new and emerging centres	7,000	7,000	7,000	21,000
Engagement with most vulnerable and hard to reach people and families, partnership development, professional development, skills training	2,000	2,000	2,000	6,000
Peak agency organisational support/networking to the state-wide sector	90	90	90	270
TOTAL BUDGET INCREASE	**9,090**	**9,090**	**9,090**	**27,270**

These recommendations are consistent with the South Australian Labor party's own commitment to neighbourhood houses, evidenced in Clause 71 of their 2009 Policy platform:

> We support the development and extension of adequately staffed Community and Neighbourhood Houses as a key local community resource and centres for building social capital and community networks.
>
> (Australian Labor Party, South Australian Branch, 2009, p. 61)

Core questions for the community services sector

Organisations and groups wishing to discuss these issues further and think about the future for community centres and neighbourhood houses may like to consider some of the following questions:

- What is a reasonable core funding amount for this sub-program and what core services should these funds go towards?
- What roles should state and local government play in working with the sector in the collaboration over funding, policy development and strategic planning in relation to service delivery?
- What service model does the sector require at local, regional and state levels?
- What would be the likely impacts on the sector with 25% cut to this sub-program?
- What systems need to be put in place to ensure appropriate resourcing and development of new community centres and neighbourhood houses in new suburbs and communities of urban renewal? What should be the responsibility of developers?
- Should we ask DFC to change the name of the sub-program to reflect a title that doesn't confuse the program with housing initiatives?
- How do we move the sector to a results-based accountability framework that analyses our impact in terms of what the sector achieves for individuals, families and communities, as well as how effectively services are delivered?
- How do we incorporate research, evaluation, innovation and creative responsiveness to community needs in the funding model?

Youth sub-program

Program description

The Youth sub-program delivers services through 11 metropolitan and 5 rural community organisations across South Australia. 12-25 year olds make up 18% of the broader population in this state, and the Youth sub-program services are aimed at a subset of this group, who are deemed at risk, disengaged and/or disadvantaged. Organisations funded by the sub-program deliver services which fall into five broad categories:

- counselling (individual and family)
- group work
- community/social action
- community development
- research and involvement in social planning.

Originally, at least 50% of funding was to be targeted to direct client services delivered either individually or in a group context, but the sub-program is now almost entirely focused on direct client work. The peak body, the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA), which provides policy development, advocacy and sector development, is funded out of the Industry Support and Development sub-program.

History and guidelines of the Youth sub-program

The Youth sub-program is the only stream of the F&CD that did not include community consultation in the development of its guidelines. The guidelines were developed in 1994 and were entitled *Services and Funding Plan for Metropolitan and Ethnic Youth Services.* They have not been revised or reviewed since then. According to the guidelines, the principles of the Youth sub-program are as follows (DFC, 1994b, p. 2):

For young people

- Young people are best supported within the extended family, local community, tribal and cultural networks.
- Young people must be enabled to make the transition from dependence to independence and adulthood in a manner which fosters self control, but limits self-damaging behaviour.
- Young people experiencing disadvantage as a result of their economic status, lack of adequate support, community attitudes toward their ethnic or gender status, suffer particular difficulty in meeting their needs and aspirations.
- The family remains the best means for providing care, socialisation and support to its members and retains responsibility to do so for children.
- Young people have equal access to information and services.

For services

- That youth services should promote the right of targeted young people to be self-determining in both the delivery of service and their own lives.
- That youth services develop strategies of intervention which aim to prevent the problems experienced by targeted youth by focusing on causes.
- That youth services accept the primary role family systems play in the care and development of youth and, where possible, work to promote these structures.
- That youth services recognise the important part peer relationships play in young

people's lives and attempt to utilise these for the benefit of young people.

- That, in targeting Aboriginal and minority ethnic communities, priority be given to self-help operations able to provide specific culturally appropriate services, accessible to youth in these communities.
- That youth services concentrate upon devising services which assist the positive development of targeted young people and not just their control or containment.
- That youth services actively work towards the empowerment of targeted youth and to increase their ability to participate equally in obtaining resources.
- That youth services actively encourage youth participation in the decision-making processes of the organisation.

The original guidelines indicate a strong focus on young people within the family context. Outcomes were identified for both individual young people and for the community. For example, individual outcomes relate to decreasing violent and aggressive behaviour, improved emotional well-being, self-confidence and life skills, greater access to information relating to health, welfare, legal options, and improved cultural and sexual identity. In terms of community outcomes, the focus is on the public awareness of youth issues, increased levels of youth services and accessibility to these, client participation in the delivery of youth services and improved consumer rights.

The original vision of the Youth sub-program was that it would interface with other government services such as Education, Families SA, the SA Police, and Drug and Alcohol Services. The current focus of the sub-program is to link strongly with Families SA, and to accept directly from Families SA a high proportion of referrals of children and young people under the guardianship of the Minister.

There has been very little development of the strategic vision of the Youth sub-program since these guidelines were written, and the original 15 agencies funded under this program have been the core service delivery group for the last 15 years. DFC has not provided, to our knowledge, any consolidated report of this program in the last 15 years, and currently does not have a publicly available summary of the core components of the sub-program.

The sub-program also seems disconnected from other programs that relate to South Australian youth. In 2009 the state government's Office for Youth released research conducted by the Australian Institute of Social Research entitled *Youth Report—South Australia's Young People: Emerging Issues and Priorities* (AISR, 2009). Through extensive consultation, this research shaped the South Australian Youth Strategy for 2010-14, entitled *Youth*Connect (Government of South Australia, 2010b), which provides a blueprint for the state government response for youth needs over the four years until 2014. Yet amongst its list of strategies, *Youth*Connect makes no mention of the F&CD Youth sub-program.

Funding of the Youth sub-program

In 1992-93 the youth sub-program was funded at $848,398 per annum, which SACOSS calculates to be about $1.36m in today's dollar terms. Current funding to the program is well above that, at $1,707,094 for 2010-11. This represents a 25% increase in the sub-program over the period. This increase reflects how the Youth sub-program's funding has been mixed with Aboriginal youth program funds, and salary items for funding within the Community Connect Branch, creating discrepancies as to the funding totals for this sub-program.

Again though, these figures do not take account of changing population size or needs and it is unclear whether the program could realistically sustain substantial cuts. Assuming (as above) that the sub-program funding would still be indexed, then if a 25% cut to the sub-program funding took place by 2013-14 it would reduce the sub-program funding to $1.38m in 2013-14 ($1.28m in today's dollars), which is below the amount originally allocated.

Core questions for the future of the Youth sub-program

Since the inception of the Youth sub-program a whole new agenda of social and economic issues have emerged, illustrated in *Youth*Connect. However, the guidelines for and the position of the Youth F&CD sub-program have not changed. That said, SACOSS believes that the program still addresses a service gap of community and client-based support services being delivered to young South Australians who are at risk of poor educational outcomes, poor employment prospects and likely to experience extended unemployment and resulting impoverishment, as well as potentially being drawn into the juvenile justice system.

The following core questions remain for the future of the Youth sub-program:

- Is the sub-program funded to a sustainable level to achieve its outcomes?
- How can the sub-program be more effectively integrated with both the state government's Strategic Youth Plan, the Office for Youth, and other government programs?
- Are there service gaps within the youth sector that require greater support and should the sub-program be re-focused on such gaps?
- Have the issues and challenges for young people changed to such an extent that a re-write of the sub-program guidelines is needed for its future development?
- Does the funding require a re-positioning of the target group, or a greater focus on broader social interventions rather than just client-based services?

Industry Support and Development sub-program

Program description

The Industry Support Development (ISD) sub-program is designed to provide support, training, research, advocacy, and strategic planning for community service sector organisations. This funding is directed to peak bodies and other bodies that fulfil traditional peak functions. In a recent major research paper, SACOSS broadly defines and summarises these peak functions as:

- Research, policy development, advice and response to the needs of government, the sector and the people who use health and community services.
- Advocacy and representation to government and other decision makers.
- Information dissemination within the sector and to the community through public information and education programs.
- Sector consultation and coordination within the sector.
- Sector capacity building to enable better service delivery and functioning of community organisations.

(SACOSS, 2010, p. ii)

While there remains some debate within the literature and the sector around the definition of a peak body, these functions and the organisations that perform them have a vital leadership role in the sector. The 2010 SACOSS report points to a raft of activity under each of these functions, and highlights the contribution that such activity makes both to better and more efficient service delivery and to government policy.

A number of compacts and protocols have been developed to define and support constructive relationships between the government and peak organisations (and the sector). These have included the *Funding Protocol for Government Funding of non-Government Peak Organisations* (1995), *Working Together* (2001), *Common Ground* (2004 and 2008), and the current *Stronger Together* agreement. These types of compacts are not enforceable, and are not necessarily linked to service agreements, policy development or program guidelines, and they tend to operate outside the service delivery environment. However, they do speak of a continuing recognition by government of the importance of the peak bodies as representatives and advocates of the sector, and of establishing and maintaining constructive relations between the government and sector. Moreover peak organisations remain an efficient mechanism by which government can consult easily with the community services and health sector and its sub-sectors.

History and guidelines of the ISD sub-program

The policy for the ISD sub-program was prepared through broad-based consultation of the community services sector through 1993-95. This included the *Scaling Peaks Report* (August 1993); the *Funding Protocol for Government Funding of non-Government Peak Organisations* (May 1995); and the release of the *Industry Support and Development Policy* (October 1995) (DFC, 1995). The policy for funding industry support was finalised in 1995, and the sub-program guidelines have not been revised since this time.

The policy lists the objectives of the ISD sub-program as:

- To ensure that service which receive funding are effective in meeting identified needs, are relevant to those most in need, are delivered efficiently and are well managed
- To ensure that funds are directed to services which can best cater for the needs of disadvantaged individuals and families
- To develop a constructive and collaborative working relationship between the department and funded agencies, and to ensure credible and effective management and administration of the F&CD Program
- To ensure that an appropriate range in intervention strategies are supported through the distribution of the funds to non-Government agencies and local government
- To maximize the effective use of community resources and initiative in the meeting of individual and family needs

(DFC, 1995)

Following the policy, a funding plan was developed for 1996-99 (DFC, 1996). The plan outlined two basic service types, Best Practice (defined as working directly with agencies) and Best Advice (defined as advice to government), with a split of approximately 70% Best Practice and 30% Best Advice. (p.2)

Funding of the ISD sub-program

The experience in South Australia and elsewhere is that it is difficult sourcing independent funding for peak body functions, and so state and federal governments provide the mainstay of funding for peak organisations. Approximately 70% of respondents in Melville and Perkins' national study received more than half their funds from government (cited in SACOSS, 2010, p. 12).

However, this government funding creates a natural tension. Government may question why it funds peaks to be, in part, a watchdog on their own activities, while peak body advocacy often confronts the issue of being seen to be "biting the hand that feeds them". Finding ways to shield peaks from funding cuts by over-zealous ministers and government departments impervious to constructive criticism remains a core challenge for the sector peaks – along with getting adequate funding to fill functions.

Within the original sub-program guidelines, the funding split that allowed 30% of funding within DFC service agreements to go towards best advice to government was an excellent attempt to address this tension. This allocation appears to now have reduced in emphasis in contracting and service negotiations between the sector and DFC.

The funding of peak bodies for industry support and development is quite uneven and uncoordinated across government, and the industry support component of the F&CD Program is a small piece of the overall pie. The funding allocation at the commencement of the sub-program in 1992-93 was $566,746. SACOSS calculates (based on CPI All Groups – Australia) that in today's dollar terms the real value of that same amount would be approximately $910,000. The current level of funding for this sub-program is $1,041,773.

While on this basis the level of real funding has increased by some 14.5% since its inception, this should also be seen in the context of enormous changes in the sector. Since the early 1990s there have been a great expansion in the community services sector in terms of the numbers of organisations operating in South Australia, the ever-increasing complexity of services they are expected to deliver, the growing complexity of arrangements between these organisations, and the increasing burden of compliances and accountability. All these factors require greater rather than fewer industry support services.

Comparisons across jurisdictions are difficult, given the vast range of different funding arrangements for peak bodies and industry support functions across Australia. However, if contributions to the various Councils of Social Service (COSS) from different state and territory governments are assessed (Table 7) there is again a theme of under-resourcing by the South Australian government in comparison to the small states and territories.

Table 7: Government contributions to COSSes

Jurisidiction	Contribution by state/territory govt to COSS / $000	Peak Funding per capita
ACT	$351	$0.97
Tasmania	$785	$1.54
NT	$538	$2.53
SA	$315	$0.19

(Source: Survey of COSS network organisations by State/Territory, pers. comm. February 2011)

As one can see from these figures, South Australia has the worst funding of the smaller states and territories for their respective COSS. South Australia receives pro rata five times less funding than the ACT and 12.5 times less funding than the Northern Territory, for broadly the same 'COSS' services and industry support.

Recommendations for further development of the ISD sub-program

As SACOSS receives core funding from the ISD sub-program we declare and acknowledge our own vested interest in this fund, but we believe that the value of the peak functions described in the 2010 paper, and the government commitment to compacts with the peak bodies, suggest that the services supported by this sub-program are important for both the sector and the government.

That said, as part of this process of consultation regarding the future of the F&CD Program, SACOSS believes that the current funding allocation and structure of the ISD sub-program is deficient in a number of ways. We would like to see the following:

- Renewal and re-modelling of the sub-program guidelines
- A more realistic allocation of funding for the sub-program, sufficient to enable the key functions to be fulfilled—perhaps benchmarked on funding for similar work interstate (and taking account of the particular needs of South Australia)

- A greater coordination and clarity about the state government interaction with peaks in South Australia, as per recommendations outlined in the SACOSS peaks *Information Paper* (2010).
- DFC contracting, monitoring, reporting and engagement within the sub-program ensure that clear roles and allocations for Best Practice and Best Advice are maintained.

SACOSS submits these recommendations as the beginning of a broader conversation with other peaks funded via the sub-program, and the broader community services sector, as part of this consultation process.

Low Income Support Program (LISP) sub-program

Program description

Despite its modest funding, the LISP sub-program aims to address a broad scope of client and community issues through advocacy, research, group programs and service coordination. The LISP sub-program is not a universal service within South Australia, as some regions and 35 local council areas are not covered by funded services (LISPN, 2008). However, listed below are some examples of the types of services funded under the LISP:

- Financial and budget counselling
- Regional coordination of anti-poverty services
- General advocacy and lobbying for service provision
- Research and data collection
- Micro-finance programs
- Consumer rights advocacy
- Support of Debtors Court clients
- Food security programs
- Financial literacy programs
- Self-help groups and programs related to financial hardship issues
- Individual advocacy and support of people living on low incomes.

Many of these services are largely reliant on volunteer workers, a measure of which is recorded within DFC (Community Connect DFC, 2009; Community Connect DFC, 2010).

15 agencies provide services under the LISP. The outcomes for 2009-10, the most recent full year figures DFC has available, were as follows:

- Budget Counselling: 2288 client interviews
- Financial Counselling: 3160 client interviews
- Anti-poverty, group training/education: 769 sessions, 3630 participants,
- 574 680 learning hours
- Volunteers hours supporting anti-poverty programs: 1145 hours
- Forums & committees supported by LISP agencies: 65

(DFC Project Officer, pers. comm. Feb 2011)

These outcomes and outputs represent a very high performance level by any measure, and benchmark highly against other jurisdictions and performance levels of government provision of similar services.

The financial counselling component of the LISP needs to be differentiated from that offered directly by Families SA. When the LISP sub-program was set up, DFC had begun funding financial counselling for its own clients as part of an integrated service delivery model. It therefore did not fund LISP service providers for large scale financial counselling. However, LISP providers offered financial counselling to the public (not just Families SA clients) and these services have remained part of the LISP program.

History and guidelines of the LISP sub-program

The Anti-Poverty and Debt Fund preceded the Low Income Support Program. This Fund was a mixture of grants to a wide range of community organisations to provide emergency assistance coordination, financial counselling and some budgeting and community education programs related to anti-poverty services. In 1995 a review was conducted as part of the broader Family and Community Development Unit. The review aimed to rationalise the number of providers, and focus the fund more on community education.

The objectives for the LISP sub-program are:

- To ensure that resources allocated through the Family and Community Development Program for Anti-Poverty Services are distributed according to defined priorities
- To facilitate viable local community networks which encourage and include participation by people in poverty to ensure an understanding of the needs of these groups
- To maximise opportunities for relevant people, particularly consumers, to participate in planning, management and delivery of services
- To ensure provision of an appropriate range of services which aim to reduce the effects of and impact on the causes of poverty
- To ensure the coordination of services to maximise available resources and reduce unnecessary duplication

(LISPN, 2008).

The policy guidelines also specify that direct material assistance to individuals and families, coordination and administrative support in the provision of direct emergency relief services, and coordination and administrative support for general welfare services provision where there is no specific anti-poverty focus, would not be funded under LISP (LISPN, 2008).

Funding of the LISP sub-program

In 2010-11 DFC funded the LISP to a level of $1,050,427 delivered through 15 different agencies. The allocation in 1992-93 was $470,116, which SACOSS calculates to be worth about $754,000 in today's dollar terms. Thus there has been a 39% increase in funding in real terms over the period, although notably, given the objectives of the programme, off a very small base figure.

The LISP funding should also be seen as part of a broader matrix of anti-poverty activities that include services funded and delivered by a complex blend of state and federal government along with community sector organisations. Table 8 illustrates the varying Commonwealth, state, and NGO roles, the varying funding contributions (some of these are approximate as exact figures are not available to SACOSS), and those items that are currently at risk.

Table 8: The Anti-Poverty roles of Commonwealth, State and the NGO sector

Financial assistance	**Funding source**	**Services**	**Current spend in SA**	**At risk in next 12-18 months?**
Emergency Relief	Commonwealth NGOs	NGOs	$2.8m Commonwealth (prior to GFC) NGOs approximately $2m	Commonwealth planning to halve ER expenditure nationally as of 30 June 2011.
Emergency financial assistance	State	Families SA	$1.8m	Unknown
Concessions	State and some local government	Families SA Local councils	$132m Unknown	No. Changes to online services mean reduced demand for Families SA District Centres, and easier access for householders in SA.
Counselling services	**Funding source**	**Delivery**	**Current spend in SA**	**At risk in next 12-18 months?**
Financial counselling	State, NGO and Commonwealth	NGOs and Families SA	Unknown: could be between $13-19m for state government and between $1-1.5m Commonwealth	Yes. Families SA cutting 44 FTE's representing 40% of staffing over the next two years
Budget counselling	Voluntary and NGO	NGOs	Unknown	No
Anti-poverty community development	**Funding source**	**Delivery**	**Current spend in SA**	**At risk in next 12-18 months?**
Low Income Support Program	State	NGOs	$1m	25% cut potentially as of 30 June 2012.

(Adapted from LISPN, 2008)

The last column highlights key risks facing existing programs, particularly financial counselling programs. As noted above, financial counselling support available via the LISP is different from that provided directly by Families SA. However, with the 2009-10 State Budget announcement of a separate round of cuts to DFC's own financial counselling program (Treasury, 2010, p. 128) there is potential for the LISP funded counselling services to be overwhelmed by increased demand for their support. In this context, it should be noted that the cuts to the DFC financial counselling ($2.9m in 2013-14) are more than twice the size of the whole LISP.

While there may be good arguments for outsourcing financial counselling, in terms of both efficiency of delivery as well as the removal of conflicting roles for Families SA staff (supportive counselling and enforcement), clearly more funding will be required for NGOs to be able to pick up these services.

Core questions for a renewed LISP sub-program

In October 2008 the LISP funded agencies, working as a collaborative network, developed a position paper on the future of the program. They requested a $2m increase in the fund for both metropolitan and rural services. This was essential for the program and would ensure all regions had a funded program (LISPN, 2008).

In its January 2010 submission to the state government, the South Australian Financial Counsellors Association requested the following core items:

- 30 new financial counselling positions ($3.3m per annum)
- Establishment of a consumer credit legal service ($500k per annum)
- Funding to SAFCA , as industry support organisation, for research, industry development, and hardship policy work ($100k per annum)
- Funding towards a State Debtline service (currently now Commonwealth funded only until June 2011).

(SAFCA, 2010)

SACOSS recognises the fundamental role anti-poverty services play in supporting a wide variety of other community service programs. They are often the first point of contact for high-risk clients and families, and a point of non-threatening intervention. Anti-poverty services are crucial in assisting people to manage and navigate other areas of support, and poverty remains a key co-indicator attached to child protection referrals. Hence, under-resourcing this sector should not be entertained given the broader implications for the community of South Australia. Consequently SACOSS encourages agencies throughout South Australia to consider the changes occurring in the anti-poverty sector and the recommendations for this work outlined above.

Core questions that need to be raised with particular reference to the LISP sub-program are:

- Is the funding for the program adequately supported by the South Australian Government and if not what level of funding would be preferred?
- Are the service types of community education, community advocacy, anti-poverty regional networking, volunteer programs, financial literacy programs, micro-finance programs, self-help low income support programs, important service types that need to be maintained within the sub-program?
- Is it important to have the LISP sub-program more effectively integrated

with other components of the anti-poverty services?

- Does South Australia need an Anti-Poverty Council to assist in the coordination and non-duplication of service types and the maximisation of resources?
- What impact will a reduction in DFC's financial counselling support services (by the equivalent of at least 44 FTEs) mean for the South Australian community, and for the capacity of the NGO sector to provide financial counselling support?
- Should DFC continue to deliver any anti-poverty services directly or simply fund NGOs to do this work (as is the case in other Australian states and territories)?

Concluding Questions and Recommendations

SACOSS believes that it is the responsibility of government to support those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. Government retains ultimate responsibility for ensuring the delivery of services to those people and communities, even where they are outsourced and delivered by community sector providers. Accordingly, government must ensure that funding for those services is sufficient for them to meet community need. In this context, SACOSS sees that, historically, programs like the Family and Community Development Program have been a vital component of community service delivery in this state. As a comparatively small program, it provides important preventative, early intervention and community development services delivered at low cost by a wide range of non-government and local government organisations.

Initial community sector research findings illustrate a 100% rejection of further cuts to the program funding, and sector predictions are that any further reduction of funding may mean service delivery is no longer viable in many high needs communities. For this reason, SACOSS does not support any dilution of the F&CD Program from a funding, policy or service delivery perspective. However, we are keen to engage with the sector and government to make genuine improvement to the usefulness, cost effectiveness and dynamism of the program.

Based on the discussion in this paper, and without prejudicing any future consultations and discussion, it is possible to put forward a few preliminary recommendations for securing the future viability of the F&CD Program. These will be subject to further discussion, but at this stage the very basic recommendations are that:

- Program funding is at least doubled to $18m p.a. by June 2012, with a review of the program and re-structured guidelines put in place prior to this date.
- A clearer needs analysis and service delivery model be developed for the program, integrating state, Commonwealth and not-for-profit programs.
- Agencies funded within the sub-program are given six months warning of any potential defunding.
- Program funding should be increased to cover extra costs likely to flow from the Equal Remuneration Case, rather than maintaining the funding level and reducing the expected outcomes to the sub-program.

These are only minimum recommendations. SACOSS believes that there is an urgent need for a much broader program review and discussion about the future direction of the program. In this light, SACOSS encourages the sector to consider the following questions in relation to the F&CD Program:

- What is the true value of the work of the five sub-programs and is the forecast level of government funding level for this work appropriate? If not, what should be the allocation for the program?
- Should the program be a full cost funding program, or should it aim at supplementing existing community sector programs? What are funding, reporting and service provision implications of either choice?
- Are the sub-programs still appropriate and have we got the balance of resources right, within these streams?

- Are there strategic ways each of the sub-programs could work more effectively with other levels of government, other key stakeholders and other programs?
- Is there enough emphasis in the program on innovation and research and flexibility to meet changing needs?
- How should the learnings of the work of the sub-programs be shared more with the not-for-profit sector and influence public policy development?
- Are ongoing three-year contracts appropriate, or should funding be re-tendered on a triennial basis?
- Are there more effective ways of reporting and measuring the outcomes of the work of the sub-programs that DFC should consider?
- What type of needs analysis is required to determine distribution of funds at a local and regional level, and what effective mapping of local, state and Commonwealth government services can we draw upon to ensure that the F&CD Program addresses service gaps?
- What impact will the Equal Remuneration Case have on the viability of the program?
- What are the workforce and employment conditions that need to be considered for a robust and sustainable delivery of services into the future?
- How often should the program guidelines be reviewed and what process should be undertaken to conduct this review?

There are further questions to consider not just about the F&CD Program, but also more broadly about the role of the state government in providing for community services and in partnering with the community services sector. The answers to these questions may frame the program-specific responses. Such questions include:

- What ongoing role does the *Family and Community Services Act* play in guiding DFC in its understanding of the complementary role it plays with the not-for-profit sector in delivering community services?
- Has the state government got the balance right in community services delivery between preventative, early investment and community/social change initiatives as opposed to individual client services?
- Since the time of the Community Services Sector Review of 1991, have we made any progress on the core issues of local area planning, improved contracting and support for NGOs, real partnerships between the not-for-profit sector and all levels of government, and appropriate wages for not-for-profit employees?
- Do the activities funded through the F&CD Program express the state government's commitment to social inclusion?
- What, if any, relationship should the Social Inclusion Board have with programs and initiatives emerging from the F&CD Program?

Many of these questions were tackled 20 years ago through the Community Services Sector Review that led to the establishment of the F&CD Program in its current form.

As noted earlier, the conditions that existed then in the community services sector are similar to the challenges we now face, so there may be some historical experience which can be drawn on.

Beyond the minimal recommendations above, this paper does not necessarily seek to answer these questions. Rather, its object has been to provide background information and a facilitation of discussion around the issues.

Where to from here?

SACOSS is now inviting community organisations and the state government to respond to the issues raised in this consultation paper, with particular reference to the Family and Community Development Program. SACOSS will gather this material into a position paper reflecting the views of the sector in relation to the proposed changes to the program and funding, and submit them to the Minister and DFC for consideration.

Each section of this consultation paper has discussion points to consider and SACOSS encourages community service organisations to make submissions to SACOSS either in writing or by contacting one of our affiliates in this process, who will also be running workshops to further these discussions. Dates for these workshops will be confirmed shortly and will be available on the SACOSS website and through our newsletter.

In relation to each sub-program, the affiliate organisation and contact is:

Sub-program	Contact	Phone	Online
Families with Children	Child and Family Welfare Association	8305 4213	childandfamily-sa.org.au cafwa@communityhq.com.au
Neighbourhood House	Community Centres SA	8371 4622	www.communitycentressa.asn.au info@communitycentressa.asn.au
Youth	Youth Affairs Council of SA	8226 3080	www.yacsa.com.au yacsa@yacsa.com.au
Industry Support	SACOSS	8305 4222	www.sacoss.org.au sacoss@sacoss.org.au
Low Income Support Program	SACOSS	8305 4222	www.sacoss.org.au sacoss@sacoss.org.au

Submissions should be forwarded to SACOSS no later than Monday 9 May 2011:

sacoss@sacoss.org.au

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