Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004
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We have all enjoyed the opportunity to be involved in this case study and sincerely hope that it contributes to the crucial task of strengthening all of our families and communities.

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Disclaimer

The opinions, comments and/or analysis expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs or the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and cannot be taken in any way as expressions of Government policy.
Contents

1 Overview 1
   1.1 Study Objectives 1
   1.2 Background to the Study 1

2 The Context 3
   About Mandurah 3
   2.2 About the Strategy 4
   2.3 About the Strategy in Mandurah 5
   2.4 About What Else is Happening in Mandurah 7
   2.5 Methodology 11
   2.6 Overview 15
   2.7 Giving Effect to Strategy Principles in Mandurah 16
   2.8 The FaCS Role in Supporting the Strategy 38

3 Conclusions 53
   3.1 Findings 53
   3.2 Implications for the National Evaluation 54
   3.3 Implications for FaCSIA 59
   3.4 Final Comment 60

4 References 61
List of Tables

Table 1: Strategy project funding in Madurah ................................................................. 6
Annotated Acronyms

AIFS  Australian Institute of Family Studies

AIFS hosted the Stronger Families Learning Exchange and has an ongoing role in the SFCS 2004-2009 hosting the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA). [www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au)

ARACY  Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

ARACY is a national collaboration of researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines to generate and translate knowledge to enhance the well-being and life chances of children and young people. ARACY is now using online conferencing technology to conduct presentations and discussions with the Communities for Children Facilitating Partners at 45 sites around Australia. [www.aracy.org.au](http://www.aracy.org.au)

CAFCA  Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia


FaCS  Department of Family and Community Services


FaCSIA  Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

SFCS  Stronger Families and Communities Strategy - also referred to as the Strategy www.facsia.gov.au/sfcs

The first phase of the Strategy, 2000-2004, funded 7 linked community based initiatives, as well as several broader initiatives, to strengthen families and communities.

The renewal of the Strategy (Phase 2) was announced in April 2004 with funding of $365 million, which was subsequently increased to $490 million, with a specific early childhood focus. In the new SFCS, attention has been focussed on early intervention in early childhood and is the primary vehicle for implementing the Government’s National Agenda for Early Childhood (NAEC), which focuses on improving national coordination.

Phase 2 of the Strategy commenced in 2004 and will continue over five years until 2009. It aims to help families and communities build better futures for children; build family and community capacity; support relationships between families and the communities they live in; and improve communities’ ability to help themselves. Phase 2 of the Strategy comprises four streams, the Communities for Children initiative, Invest to Grow, Local Answers and the Choice and Flexibility in Child Care initiative.
Summary

This case study evaluated the contribution of the Australian Government’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004 (‘the Strategy’) to the process of strengthening families and communities in the rapidly growing coastal city of Mandurah in Western Australia.

This study was undertaken by a team of consultants as part of the National Evaluation of the Strategy being conducted by the Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE) at RMIT University. The Australian Government is currently implementing a revised version of the Strategy 2004-2009 that lies outside the scope of this evaluation.

The Strategy was a $226m commitment by the Australian Government administered by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). The Mandurah region was one of several areas specifically targeted for assistance.

FaCS approved over $1.5m of Strategy funding to nine projects in and around Mandurah addressing identified local issues of social isolation, youth at risk, families with young children and Aboriginal disempowerment.

Information for this case study was collected from focus group meetings, project site visits and available documentary sources.

The study found that:

- the decision to target Mandurah was soundly based on the available evidence;
- the Strategy made a valuable contribution to the process of strengthening some local families and communities in Mandurah;
- several contextual factors contributed to the positive outcomes achieved;
- FaCS staff provided valuable assistance to funded organisations;
- there was some dissatisfaction with funding decision processes;
- new strategic partnerships between community organisations and government agencies have been developed as a result of the Strategy;
- all funded Strategy projects in Mandurah were founded on an early intervention-preventative approach;
- Strategy projects in Mandurah assisted people through life transitions;
- some Strategy projects contributed to more coordinated service delivery by bringing people together who had not previously worked as one;
- stakeholders were found to be proud that Strategy-funded projects in Mandurah have been initiated as local solutions to local problems;
- Strategy project development in Mandurah was found to be mostly informed by a local ‘learning by doing’ evidence base.
1 Overview

This case study evaluated the contribution of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004 to the process of strengthening families and communities in and around the City of Mandurah in Western Australia. It was undertaken in 2003 by a team of consultants engaged by and under the direction of the Collaborative Institute for Research, Consulting and Learning in Evaluation (CIRCLE) at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University). The case study was part of a National Evaluation of the Strategy commissioned by the Australian Government’s Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). The study team comprised Dr Patricia Rogers, John Scougall, Annette Forbes and Janelle Cugley.

1.1 Study Objectives

The case study documented FaCS activities in the Mandurah region that related to the implementation of the Strategy. The specific objectives of this study were:

- to examine the extent to which the principles of the Strategy have been put into practice in Mandurah;
- to examine the effectiveness of support provided for the development of Strategy projects in Mandurah.

1.2 Background to the Study

This case study is one part of the National Evaluation of the Strategy. The Strategy was a $226m initiative of FaCS. The broad purpose of the National Evaluation was to improve:

- the impact of interventions for Australian families and communities;
- the evidence base underpinning decision making in relation to policy and practice;
- Departmental processes relating to the Strategy.

The National Evaluation addressed the following specific questions.

Outcomes, Benefits and Costs

1. How is the Strategy contributing to family and community strength in the short term, medium term and longer term?
2. To what extent has the Strategy produced unintended outcomes (positive and negative)?
3. In broad qualitative terms, what were the costs and benefits of the Strategy relative to similar national and international interventions?
Features of the Strategy and Initiatives that Affect its Outcomes

4. What were the particular features of the Strategy that made a difference (including delivery of the Strategy, the formation of partnerships, integration and co-ordination of services, capacity building, targeting funds, and the use of evidence and research)?

5. What is helping or hindering the initiatives to achieve their objectives? What explains why some initiatives work? In particular, does the interaction between different initiatives contribute to achieving better outcomes?

Other Factors that Affect Strategy Outcomes

6. How does the Strategy contribute to the achievement of outcomes in conjunction with other initiatives, programs, or services in an area (eg its interaction with other Australian Government and State programs, etc.)?

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

Potential Improvements

8. How can the Strategy achieve better outcomes?

This case study sought to throw some light on each of these evaluation questions. We shall return to consider each of these evaluation questions and the implications at the conclusion to this case study.

From the outset it is important to note that it is always difficult to make informed predictions about the long-term impact of any initiative, let alone one that has only been operating for a few years. This does not, however, preclude us from considering:

- the collaborative ground work that community organisations and FaCS put in towards effective implementation;
- the evidence base supporting the decisions and actions taken by community-based organisations and FaCS;
- outcomes that have been or seem likely to be achieved based on currently available evidence.

We can have confidence that Strategy projects will achieve positive outcomes in the medium to longer term if we know that the decisions and actions taken so far are supported by an evidence base, that they have an internal logic, that they have been supported with adequate resources, that they have been sensibly implemented, and that the early indications suggest that they have already produced some positive benefits.
2 The Context

2.1 About Mandurah

The City of Mandurah, with a population exceeding 50,000, is located about eighty kilometres to the south of Perth in the Peel Region of Western Australia. In addition to Mandurah, Peel comprises the surrounding semi-rural Shires of Serpentine, Waroona, Boddington and Harvey. The City is fringed to the north and south by smaller coastal towns, such as Dawesville and Lake Clifton.

Mandurah is one of Australia’s fastest growing cities. As a direct consequence of this, the provision of social infrastructure, government resources and community services has not been able to keep pace with the rapid rate of population increase. Most community and government agencies and support services are overstretched, under stress and consumed by immediate crises.

There are many large residential land developments in and around Mandurah. There are two main markets:

- retirees attracted by the natural beauty and lifestyle of the region;

- families in lower socio-economic groups attracted by land and housing that is more affordable than in Perth.

Social isolation emerged as a major issue for the latter group. Characteristically the residential developments that target this market are located many kilometres from facilities and services in central Mandurah. New arrivals in the region may discover that they are cut off from the established relationships and networks that have supported and sustained them elsewhere. They often struggle to make new linkages with other residents and service providers in the region.
A typical scenario is that one member of the family unit (usually an adult male) drives to Perth each day of the working week, leaving the other (usually an adult female) at home without transport and unable to easily access family, health, education, training and other services. However, there are also a significant number of single parent families without a full-time wage or salary earner. The 2001 Census confirmed that families with one vehicle, or no vehicle at all, are significantly over-represented in Mandurah.

All of this has given rise to a series of interrelated regional family and community issues. Contrary to the historical view of Mandurah as a holiday playground, recent studies have uncovered areas of high social disadvantage as evidenced by:

- low levels of educational achievement;
- limited life skilling and training opportunities;
- high rates of unemployment, especially youth and Aboriginal unemployment;
- heavy financial reliance on social security payments for income support;
- a disproportionately high proportion of the population accessing crisis assistance services;
- community fear about violence and other crime and safety issues;
- a high incidence of stress, depression and substance abuse;
- children and youth at risk.

The extent and interrelated nature of such family and community issues in Mandurah poses very real challenges.

2.2 About the Strategy

The Strategy promoted a ‘strength-based’ approach to achieve ‘sustainability’. By ‘strength-based’ we mean an approach to social issues that seeks to identify and build upon the pre-existing assets, capacities, achievements, successes and resources of families and communities. (This may be contrasted with the more familiar ‘deficit’ model that begins with the identification of social needs and problems, and seeks to fill gaps through the provision of additional services.) By ‘sustainable’ we mean a process that seeks to empower families and communities so that they are able to meet their own needs by drawing upon their own capacities (e.g. their knowledge, skills and experience), rather than being reliant upon the on-going provision of resources from outside their immediate family and community.

Specific outcomes that the Strategy sought to contribute towards included:

- Participation in the Strategy and enhanced trust;
- Greater awareness (including awareness of the Strategy and its principles and values);
- Greater choice, understanding, skills and the capacity for initiative;
- Demonstration through application of greater understanding, skills and capacity;
• The development of family and community trust (that transcends that developed in a particular project);

• Achievement of an environment where communities participate in and drive their own solutions to strengthen their families and communities;

• The achievement of stronger families and communities.

The extent to which the Strategy might have contributed to the achievement of all or any of these outcomes in Mandurah is the focus of this evaluation.

2.3 About the Strategy in Mandurah

Mandurah was one of eight regions in Western Australia specifically targeted in the FaCS 2001 ‘WA Targeting Plan’. The intention was to concentrate resources to empower these regions so that they could develop and implement their own strategies to strengthen local families and communities. Targeted regions were those assessed by FaCS as having:

• a high level of need/disadvantage;

• an inability to address that need without external support;

• the potential to build their capacity so that they could address their own future needs.

A community development facilitator engaged by FaCS as a consultant identified two community groups in Mandurah as being in particular need of support:

• people who were socially isolated or at risk of social isolation;

• the Nyoongah Aboriginal community.

In addition the FaCS ‘WA Targeting Plan’ also prioritised certain ‘disadvantaged’ social groups considered to be in special need of Strategy support across the State. ‘Youth at risk’ was one.

FaCS received a total of nineteen applications for funding from Mandurah and the surrounding area. Nine of these projects were approved for funding totalling in excess of $1.5m (Refer to Table 1). Projects 1, 2 and 3 in Table 1 primarily focused on the issue of social isolation. Projects 4, 5, 6 and 7 were directed towards youth issues and families with young children. Projects 7 and 8 were primarily directed towards the needs of the Nyoongah Aboriginal community. Project 9 involved the engagement of a community development facilitator to work with a reference group to develop a project to address the needs of the most disadvantaged.
Table 1: Strategy project funding in Mandurah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Auspice Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mandurah Community Planning</td>
<td>City of Mandurah</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Building Community in Mandurah</td>
<td>City of Mandurah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Quality Relationships Alliance</td>
<td>City of Mandurah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fairbridge Pathways for Young People Program</td>
<td>Fairbridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Peel Bullying Project</td>
<td>Curtin University of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Eyes Wide Open (including a SFCS extension of funding)</td>
<td>Peel Youth Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bilydar Leadership and Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>Peel Employment and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Healing and Re-empowerment: Working From the Inside Out</td>
<td>CSD Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mandurah Targeted Community Project</td>
<td>CSD Network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Mandurah Funding Approved** $1,528,623

A further eleven project proposals submitted to FaCS were declined funding. The scope of these unsuccessful applications was broad and diverse; the provision of community centres, emergency food distribution, education and training, community events, early childhood, youth activities, and information and referral services.

All of these projects were declined funding on one or more of the following grounds:

- inconsistency with Strategy principles (‘out of scope’) e.g. welfare-oriented proposals, no sustainable outcomes;
- the project was seen as the core functional responsibility of another agency e.g. education, health;
- the project was not considered to be a priority in a competitive funding environment.
Because of the extent of Strategy resources already committed to the Peel region, a decision was made in 2002 that Mandurah no longer be a targeted region.

2.4 About What Else is Happening in Mandurah

Community groups, universities and all tiers of government were found to be doing a lot of things to strengthen families and communities in Mandurah. From the outset it is important to make it clear that whatever may or may not have been achieved by the Strategy, was achieved in conjunction with a diverse range of other initiatives, programs and services, the scale and diversity of which was broad. It is not possible to describe all that was happening, but it is important to provide some sense of the scope of what was going on concurrently with the Strategy.

The implementation of the Strategy in Mandurah coincided with State government initiatives through the Cabinet Standing Committee on Regional Policy intended to improve the quality of life by building more sustainable and cohesive regions. Key strategies included:

- balancing social, environmental and economic considerations in decision-making processes related to regional development;
- the fostering of regional networks, partnerships and a whole-of-government approach to issues of regional development;
- adopting an early intervention-preventative approach to the needs of families and young children;
- adopting an inclusive approach to community consultation and participation;
- building the capacity of regional community governance and leadership.

The State established a WA Volunteering Reference Group to build partnerships between government and volunteers, it established a Volunteer Community Development Grants program, and it developed best practice guidelines to assist agencies that work with volunteers. Furthermore it instituted an Early Years Taskforce to develop policy in the area of early childhood and it subsequently announced certain ‘Family Strength’ initiatives under its Early Years Strategy. A Regional Investment Fund for infrastructure projects was also established. A fast new rail line link between Mandurah and Perth is currently under construction. There appears to have been considerable congruence between all of these initiatives and the philosophical underpinnings of the Strategy.

The Peel Development Commission (PDC) is the State’s local representative on many of these issues in Mandurah. The PDC has established far reaching collaborative arrangements with the five local government authorities that make up the Peel region; Mandurah, Harvey, Waroona, Boddington and Serpentine-Jarrahdale.
Regional Development Commissions are State government authorities that play a key role in coordinating regional development. Local boards determine the strategic direction and priorities of each Commission. An important part of the role involves working with community-based organisations, the private sector and all tiers of government to research and identify regional needs. The PDC was found to be particularly active in initiating and supporting such regional studies. It has produced a substantial body of hard evidence about the needs of Mandurah. This appears to have contributed to shared understandings amongst key players about regional priorities and the future of the region. The PDC is also actively fostering a regional partnership model amongst community and government agencies. Of particular relevance to this study is the establishment of a twelve member Peel Community Development Group (PCDG) that brings together the following key players:

- Quality Relationships Alliance (QRA – a Strategy-funded project);
- Department for Community Development;
- Community Health Service;
- Mental Health Services;
- Disability Services Commission;
- Department of Training;
- Peel South-West Division of General Practice;
- Mandurah Senior College;
- Mandurah online Centre;
- Peel Direct (regional web portal);
- Peel Business Enterprise Centre;
- Peel Region Youth Scheme;
- local media organisations;
- crisis care and refuge facilities;
- local employment agencies;
- local schools (P & C’s);
- youth services.

The Australian Government’s Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTaRS) provided two years of Regional Solutions funding to the PDC for a Regional Community Development Coordinator’s position to support the work of the PCDG.

Numerous studies and other reports have been initiated in the region in recent years. These include the ‘Peel Sustainable Development Strategy 2020’ (Peel Development Commission), ‘Peel Away the Mask’ (Peel Development Commission); the ‘Regional Research Strategy’ (Curtin University), a ‘Health Needs Analysis of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community in the Peel Region’ (South Metropolitan Public Health Unit in association with the Curtin Indigenous Research Centre), and, of course, this case study.
The City of Mandurah chose to devote some of its resources to community development projects that would not typically be supported by a local government authority. In particular it developed a Youth Services Directory, it provided a high level of support to the well regarded Billy Dower Youth Centre, and actively participated in numerous other community building initiatives. The Billy Dower Youth Centre offers a range of support, referral, counselling and advocacy services. The City of Mandurah was the auspice organisation for three Strategy-funded projects.

Another important regional initiative is the Peel Regional Youth Support Network (PRYS). This is a peak forum that brings together a diverse range of youth organisations in the region. PRYS plays an advocacy role on youth issues and, perhaps most importantly, it has developed a youth strategic plan for the region. PRYS is credited in some quarters with contributing towards the creation of a cohesive network out of a diverse range of formerly uncoordinated youth services that include:

- Street Net;
- Billy Dower Youth Centre;
- Peel Regional Youth Services Committee;
- Peel Regional Youth Services Accommodation Sub-Committee;
- Peel Peer Education Program Steering Committee;
- Peel High Risk Youth Action Group;
- Youth and Forum Committee;
- Mandurah Youth Commitment;
- Local Drug Action group;
- Reconnet Steering Committee;
- JPET Steering Committee;
- Centrelink Value Creation Workshop;
- Peel Youth Worker Training Program;
- Young Women’s Group;
- Youth Woodwork Program.

Certain regional activities by WA’s Department for Community Development also received special praise, especially the ‘Best Start’ early childhood program for 0–5 year olds. This program seeks to improve the life opportunities of Aboriginal children through a range of parenting, playgroup, motor skills development, nutritional, immunisation, behaviour management, social and cultural development activities.
And finally, but not least importantly, FaCS was found to be involved in supporting the work of no less than thirty community-based organisations in Mandurah alone. In addition to the Strategy, FaCS was also responsible for delivering a broad array of other social programs that impact directly on the wellbeing of families and communities. In Mandurah these programs included the Job Placement Employment and Training program (JPET). JPET is targeted at youth in the 15-21 year age range who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It also endeavours to remove barriers to youth participation in education, training and employment. FaCS had also selected Mandurah as the site for a Reconnect Family Homelessness Intervention Pilot project in association with Mission Australia. This is a community-based early intervention program for young homeless people, youth at risk of homelessness, and their families. It sought to:

- re-build relationships between youth and their families and communities;
- link youth to education, training and employment agencies.

FaCS also funded the Anglicare Supported Housing (ASH) early intervention project to assist people in danger of losing their accommodation through the provision of mediation and other practical support.

There were also many other positive initiatives in the region that supported the strengthening of families and communities.

In Mandurah it was found that there were some very active players in the closely-related fields of ‘community building’, ‘sustainable regional development’, ‘strong family policy’, ‘capacity building’, ‘community governance’ and ‘social research’. These include the Peel Development Commission, the City of Mandurah, PRYSN, Curtin University of Technology, DCD, DoTaRS and FaCS.
2.5 Methodology

Rationale for this Case Study

A case study is a form of research concerned with the interactions between people and organisations in a particular place. Mandurah with the surrounding region was considered to be an appropriate site to employ the case study method because:

- previous studies and reports suggested that it was a region characterised by pockets of high social need and a lack of capacity to address that need;
- it was an area of rapid population growth and associated social pressures;
- there was a high level of Strategy project activity in and around Mandurah;
- it provided an opportunity to consider the impact of regional targeting.

It can be helpful to distinguish between two types of case studies – instrumental and intrinsic (Stake, 1995). A case study is instrumental when a typical case is examined in order to develop a general understanding of similar cases elsewhere. This study is primarily instrumental because the intention is that it informs our understanding of the Strategy more generally beyond Mandurah. That is its main purpose. A case study is said to be intrinsic when the purpose is to understand a specific situation as an end in itself. This case study is intrinsic to the extent that it provides information that is useful to Strategy projects in Mandurah.

Information Collection

Three data collection sources have been relied upon in this study:

1. focus group meetings,
2. project site visits,
3. documents (FaCS files and other reports).

Each is expanded upon below.

1. Focus Groups

Three separate focus-group meetings of approximately two hours duration were conducted; one for funded projects; one for organisations whose funding applications were unsuccessful; and one for people involved in the implementation of the Strategy in Mandurah.

Funded Projects

Representatives from all Strategy-funded projects in the region were invited. Four individuals attended. All those who participated also had knowledge of other Strategy projects in the region and therefore their contribution to the discussion was not always limited to their own project.
Unfunded Projects

Representatives from all auspicing organisations of projects in the region that were either declined Strategy funding, or were still awaiting the outcome of their application at that time, were invited to attend. Four individuals took part. Once again the participants had knowledge about other projects in the region and their contribution to the discussion was not always confined to their own project.

Non-project Focus Group

People associated with FaCS who had a significant involvement with the targeting of Mandurah and the development of Strategy projects in the region were invited to attend. Six people attended; three staff members of FaCS, a former staff member, a member of the WA State and Territory Advisory Group (STAG) and a consultant who had been employed by FaCS to work in the Mandurah region.

The meetings followed a semi-structured questioning format and were tape recorded with the informed written consent of the participants.

The first two focus group meetings with the auspicing organisations were held at Coodanup Family House in Mandurah on Thursday 12 June 2003. This venue was selected on the advice of key community stakeholders in the region because it was generally considered to be a ‘safe’ and ‘neutral’ space where community representatives would feel comfortable enough to critically engage in discussion. The final focus group meeting was held in the FaCS office at the ‘Central Park’ tower in the City of Perth on Monday 30 June 2003. All focus group discussions were facilitated by consultant John Scougall, supported by Annette Forbes at Coodanup Family House and Janelle Cugley at the Perth office of FaCS.

A few basic ground rules were developed to guide the process of the focus group meetings. These were discussed and agreed to by the participants at the commencement of each meeting. Some of these related to simple meeting etiquette (e.g. seeking to ensure equal ‘talk time’ for all participants); some related to the management of the process (e.g. reminding participants to turn off their mobile telephones); but mostly they were about the need for each group to respect confidentiality. All participants agreed to do this. It was also stressed to each group that the consultants were ‘neutral’ and not employees of FaCS.

The focus group meetings did provide a valuable opportunity to hear the perspectives of various stakeholders about the effectiveness of the Strategy in Mandurah. All participants took the opportunity that this evaluation case study presented for them to engage in some critical reflection and constructive criticism of the process. Participants were also free to ask questions of each other and of the consultants, and some took the opportunity to do so.

Not surprisingly those that had been funded were generally, but not always, more pleased with FaCS and the Strategy than those that were not. Finally, it is important to note that the focus group meetings did not extend to hearing the views of project participants themselves. This was considered to be premature and not feasible because at that time most Strategy projects in Mandurah had only recently commenced.
2. Project Site Visits

Consultant Annette Forbes organised and conducted project site visits on behalf of the consulting team prior to the focus group meetings. Every Strategy applicant in the region was sent a letter of introduction seeking permission for Annette to visit for informal discussions about their experience of the Strategy. This letter was accompanied by:

- a 'Plain Language Statement' explaining what the case study was about;
- a written consent to be interviewed form.

In all cases the letter was followed by (mostly successful) attempts at telephone and/or personal contact. Three organisations did not respond to either the letter or the telephone call.

Annette Forbes visted and wrote a report on each of the following projects.

*Funded projects:*

- Mandurah Community Planning (City of Mandurah);
- Building Community in Mandurah (City of Mandurah);
- Quality Relationships Alliance (City of Mandurah);
- Fairbridge Pathways for Young People Program (Fairbridge);
- Eyes Wide Open (Peel Youth Programme);
- CSD Network (Healing and Re-empowerment: Working from the Inside Out);
- Bilydar Leadership and Cultural Awareness (Peel Training and Employment).

*Unfunded Projects:*

- Y.O.H. Fest (Lions Club of Mandurah);
- Families in Crisis (WestAus Crisis and Welfare Services).

Each visit lasted between one and two hours. Annette recorded notes summarising her discussions with project staff and used these as the basis for her typed report. These identified particular issues requiring further exploration and discussion at the subsequent focus group meetings. The visits also provided additional background information about the region and the way in which Strategy projects were implemented. Furthermore they assisted the process of triangulating (i.e. confirming) the data collected from the focus group meetings and documentary sources. Annette also used her site visits as an opportunity to encourage project staff to attend the subsequent focus group meetings.

Annette’s work was supported by the work of photographic consultant Janelle Cugley. Janelle made contact with funded projects, and with representatives of FaCS, to give them an opportunity to have photographs of their work activities included in this report. The photographs provided some sense of the social geography of the region, the location of SFCS projects and project-related activities. They added depth and richness to our information collection process; a process that would otherwise be solely reliant on written and spoken sources, and lacking in any sense of the ‘colour and movement’.
Preceding Annette’s fieldwork, Patricia Rogers from CIRCLE at RMIT University and John Scougall had initial discussions in Mandurah and Perth on 19th and 20th of May 2003 with representatives of:

- the City of Mandurah (including representatives of the three Strategy projects that the City had auspiced);
- Fairbridge;
- Peel Development Commission (PDC);
- CSD Network;
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

The purpose was partly to advise key people in the region about the study and partly to orientate the consultants to the region, its Strategy projects and associated issues.

**Documentary Sources**

This study was informed by the following documentary sources:

- FaCS project files and policy documents held in the WA office of FaCS;
- planning and social research reports conducted in the Mandurah region in recent years;
- questionnaires completed by two funded Strategy projects as part of the broader National Evaluation of the Strategy.

Among other things these documents provided information about the region, specific data about each project and relevant background pertaining to policy in general and, the ‘WA Targeting Strategy’ in particular. The FaCS departmental files also enabled us to identify particular issues and concerns for discussion at the focus group meetings and to triangulate data collected from other sources.

**Analysis and Reporting**

For analytical purposes all of the information collected was organised and summarised around:

- each of the principles that underpinned the Strategy;
- each of the strategies used by FaCS to support projects.

All of the information collected has been presented below in a manner that gives priority to what the participants in this study said in the focus group meetings and during the site visits. Their experiences provided us with a regional eyes view of the Strategy. Without the direct inclusion of the participants’ voices the reader would be entirely reliant on the researcher’s interpretation of the issues. It was felt that the use of unattributed quotations would add authenticity to the analysis. The intent was to allow the participants to represent their own views as much as possible. Other information sources, such as observations from the site visits and documents, were also used in the analysis as additional supporting evidence to back up or contest the views expressed by the participants.
Ethical Issues

We sought to sensitively manage issues relating to anonymity, privacy and confidentiality in this study. Particular care was taken to ensure that any information considered likely to harm any individual was not included in this report. Every participant in this study was required to sign a consent form indicating that:

- their participation was completely voluntary;
- they had been provided with a written information sheet providing background information about this case study and explaining its evaluative purpose;
- they consented to the focus group meeting being taped and transcribed;
- they understood that their contribution would be acknowledged in this report by naming them as participants;
- any comments that they chose to make in the course of the focus group meetings might be quoted in this report, but would not be directly attributed to them;
- participation in this study would not prejudice any subsequent requests for Strategy assistance that they or their organisation might wish to make;
- the information collected would not be used for any purpose other than the National Evaluation without their prior consent.

All data collected was securely stored in locked filing cabinets by the consultants for the duration of this study.

2.6 Overview

The analysis of all of the data collected during this case study revealed that the implementation of the Strategy in Mandurah has, in general, succeeded in giving practical effect to its principles. Furthermore implementation was found to be well supported by the WA office of FaCS, especially considering some human development constraints. Nevertheless the case study did identify a couple of areas where there was some scope to improve performance.

The data has been organised in two sections. The first section – ‘Giving Effect to Strategy Principles in Mandurah’ – considers information relevant to the first objective of this study. That is it examines the extent to which the principles of the Strategy have been put into practice in Mandurah. The second section – ‘The FaCS Role in Supporting the Strategy’ – considers the evidence in relation to the study’s other objective. That is it examines how effectively FaCS supported Strategy projects in Mandurah.


2.7 Giving Effect to Strategy Principles in Mandurah

Strategy Principles

The eight stated key principles that underpinned the Strategy were:

1. building strategic partnerships and a social coalition;
2. the prevention of social problems through early intervention;
3. supporting people through life transitions;
4. improved integration and coordination of service delivery;
5. the fostering of local solutions to local problems;
6. building the capacity of families and communities to meet their own needs;
7. promoting an ‘evidence-based’ approach to project development;
8. making the investment count.

The evidence gathered from this case study that was relevant to each of these principles is considered below.

Principle 1: Building strategic partnerships and a social coalition

There was evidence that strategic partnerships were being built in Mandurah and that the Strategy had made a valuable contribution to this process. Partnerships were crucial to Strategy outcomes. While the Strategy was a source of seed funding, it is the development of enduring relationships with other sources of support that are necessary to enable projects to survive and succeed in the longer term.

Many participants in this study commented favourably on efforts to build collaborative arrangements that effectively linked government and community organisations together in Mandurah.

"There are some good partnerships going on at the moment and … the overlapping of people being on different groups and boards and stuff like that, sort of fosters that and promotes it and opens those doors up for you."

Unfunded Focus Group

From the earlier discussion in this report it is apparent that the Strategy was one of several initiatives that contributed to building strategic partnerships in Mandurah.

"I think those partnerships were starting to happen already before people’s applications for [Strategy funding] went through, but that was built on. That [Strategy funding] was for more partnerships to happen, to start happening and realising the relationships between everybody."

Funded Focus Group

However, the Strategy certainly added value to the process. The following examples illustrate some of the practical contributions that Strategy projects made to partnership arrangements in Mandurah.
- The QRA project brought together many local organisations and individuals for the purpose of improving family, community and organisational relationships in Mandurah.

- The City of Mandurah auspiced and was actively involved in three Strategy projects; QRA, Mandurah Community Planning and Building Community in Mandurah.

- Numerous community and government agencies were actively contributing to the daily delivery of the Eyes Wide Open project.

- The Strategy-funded Healing and Re-empowerment: Working From the Inside Out project was credited with equipping some Aboriginal people with conflict management and coping strategies and contributing to some improvement in community harmony.

- The Strategy-funded Bilydar Leadership and Cultural Awareness project was developed as a collaborative partnership between the local Nyoongah Aboriginal community, Peel Training and Employment, the South Metropolitan Public Health Unit (SMPHU), the Police and other parties. Among other things, this proposal sought to link Aboriginal youth activities to existing youth services already operating in the region.

- Curtin University of Technology and Edith Cowan University both entered into collaborative arrangements with respect of the Strategy-funded Peel Bullying project.

The task of building strategic partnerships in Mandurah proved to be hard work, mainly because of the large and diverse number of community and government organisations actively involved in social development work of one kind or another in this region. Organisations that were interviewed identified a number of factors that sometimes present barriers to effective partnerships between agencies: divergent philosophies, personality conflicts, a silo mentality, the persistence of old habits, and a desire to maintain secrecy about funding sources.

If moves towards the emergence of a social coalition in Mandurah are to progress in the future, it will be necessary that all sectors of the community and all community organisations feel included in the process. This case study found evidence of feelings of marginalisation in some community-based organisations which could potentially undermine the emerging partnership ethos that was evident in the region. Arguably it is important to acknowledge the achievements and feelings of all agencies, especially those that might feel 'left out'. The WA office of FaCS had done something constructive about this. The office contracted a community building facilitator who worked with, and
brought together, several of the smaller community groups and organisations in the
Mandurah region.

In the course of this case study, some representatives of agencies in Mandurah spoke of the pressures that impact on them daily.

*It’s unfortunate that we keep on identifying needs and feeling compelled to fill those voids you know... Physical and mental resources are starting to be stretched to the limit … there’s nowhere to go to be debriefed. You can’t afford to get somebody to debrief you because you’re not funded.* Unfunded Focus Group

*I came back to the office one day after going to pick up a food parcel or something and the office door was shut and it was covered in blood. This guy had tried to bash the door down to get to the Secretary...* Unfunded Focus Group

The Strategy-funded QRA project, in part, addressed the issues of stress and ‘burn out’ by seeking to develop the capacity of community organisations to deal with these issues themselves.

Finally, it was noted that in Mandurah there was no significant private sector business partnering in relation to the Strategy, or other community projects for that matter. The one big notable exception to this was a large mining corporation which is the region’s main employer. It was a frequent contributor to youth projects at Fairbridge and it also funded a ‘Stronger Communities Research Centre’ (including a ‘Stronger Families Chair’) at Curtin University in Perth. The absence of any other significant private sector involvement in Strategy projects can be attributed to the fragility of a regional economy where many working people commute daily to Perth, while the remainder are unemployed, retired or otherwise not in the labour force.

Some impressive moves towards building strategic partnerships were found to be occurring in Mandurah. Very many players were working together to strengthen local families and communities. The Strategy added some additional momentum to this process. In the end partnerships are made between organisations and people that choose to partner. To be effectively maintained, they require an environment characterised by cooperation and goodwill. One of the challenges for everyone involved lies in ensuring that the process continues to be an inclusive one.

**Principle 2: The prevention of social problems through early intervention**

The Strategy sought to support families and communities before serious social issues arose. Various reports have drawn attention to the fact that community services in Mandurah have been unable to keep pace with the rapid growth of the city. This has meant that many community and government agencies exist in an environment consumed by crisis intervention, leaving little or no time to engage in preventative work.
If you take the community services sector of the town, it was basically collapsing under a crisis-focused approach, you know… The number of people who had tears in their eyes when they were talking to me about their workload, taking a crisis level approach. Non-project Focus Group

The WA office of FaCS was well aware of this issue from the beginning of its Strategy interventions in Mandurah. Project proposals that did not clearly demonstrate a preventative approach were not funded. Every project that was funded in Mandurah adopted an early intervention approach with local families and communities. The task of building close and trusting bonds between people was central to their preventative work.

Relationship is the key to everything and I think that that’s also something in preventing those social problems from happening. It’s putting emphasis on relationships again and … bringing back again those words of happy contented community and collaboration, cooperation. Just enjoying life together instead of just making a quick buck … How to relate to other people, how to see from other people’s perspectives and to not think that what you do and what you want to do is the most important thing, you know. So it’s a way of education as well I suppose … I see it all interconnected. Funded Focus Group

What I’m doing at the moment is, first of all, recognising the issues that are in the community. So I’m going from group to group … to find out what issues they are dealing with, what the similarities are between the groups. And I see my role as bridging the gap between the groups so that we can see the similarities and the differences and find something that can benefit the majority of the groups. So what I am hoping to create by starting community support days here is something that all groups can attend and benefit from. That’s basically the first step. But my longer vision … would be from the issues that are coming up about care. Because [this suburb] doesn’t have a primary school and doesn’t have a childcare centre. [This suburb] has a huge need for support for families … a centre which recognises the Indigenous input, recognises the fact that parents need somewhere that they can go, not just to drop off their children, but … to meet their needs as well. So it’s a centre for the family, not just for children. Funded Focus Group

Some participants expressed clear views about which groups in Mandurah they believed ought to be the focus of early intervention and preventative efforts.

I really do believe pro-active things should be directed to our children because I think that’s where we can make a difference. Unfunded Focus Group

We sort of concentrated on … more the older people and the middle aged … I think if there was a next time around, well we could sort of concentrate on the youth. Funded Focus Group
And I think that also, as far as early childhood is concerned, the emphasis can be placed more on that as well… I’ve always had a good vision of what I see as helping families and the community. And one of those does include early childhood because that’s my background. Because I see it as preventative to social problems escalating in later years and I also see the Indigenous culture being involved in that. In that one I think we’ve got a lot to learn from the Indigenous culture. And, I think, by applying that to community development, I think that it will help the social problems in the fact that we will expect the community to be more responsible … I don’t think two parents are supposed to do everything to bring up their children right. They need to be supported. And the Indigenous culture knew that… I see the partnership happening there where Aboriginal culture can be used in partnership to teach children through those methods: story telling, art, drama, about respect for the environment, respect for yourself, respect for each other. All those kinds of principles and values; learning through observation, the things that they will pass down from generation to generation… that will be open to all children, not just the Indigenous children. At the same time I think it could also help to lift the pride and spirit of the Indigenous culture to show that we have so much to learn from it and that they have something to be proud of. And if we learn together about what it is, and how it was traditionally, then the knowledge could be passed through. I think children … are suffering emotionally … That is creative therapy, all that art and that drama and the story telling. And it’s also about, I suppose, the core of early childhood which is about care and nurturing and self-knowledge or getting to know who you are.

It cannot be assumed that the preventative-early intervention approach to addressing social problems was necessarily well understood by everyone. This appears to be so both for some in the community sector and some in government. Not everyone is or wants to be a community builder. Nor do they necessarily have a solid grounding in how to do this type of work. The orientation of some was more towards a traditional welfare role. There was a perception in some quarters that some local agencies in Mandurah may well be inward looking and may struggle to see the broader and longer term preventative perspective. There was also a perception in some quarters that some within government have difficulty seeing the situation of the region through local eyes.

The other issue that I found really relevant in that context was the community organisations themselves generally didn’t see their role as community developers. They saw their role as giving a service to the community. Non-project Focus Group

I think, like anywhere, you’ve got lots of different people with different experiences and backgrounds and that … and their expectations were quite different. Non-project Focus Group

One unsuccessful applicant for Strategy funding said that at the time of their application, the organization did not realise that proposals needed to have a preventative-early intervention emphasis in order to ‘get up’.
In my specific case I would say it’s made me a lot more wary of how far through the process I will go before I make sure I’ve got the right information and I’m on the right track … You put a lot of time and effort into it and then to find out that you weren’t even on the right ‘bus’ to start with. It’s so frustrating … I think that it’s the way you word your submission. We will be making it look as pro-active as possible in the future. All I can say is that we didn’t realise it was geared totally towards this pro-active thing. – Unfunded Focus Group

This does not mean that strenuous efforts were not made to communicate the early intervention-preventative message. However, it does suggest that the message may take longer to get through in some cases than in others because it requires a re-orientation.

Some participants in this study felt that the Strategy had contributed to a cultural and philosophical shift towards early intervention-preventative ways of working in Mandurah.

Having the Department come in and say ‘We’ve got this new fund. This is the philosophy behind the fund. That’s what led to other things. Do you know what I mean? It was the community seeing a cultural shift within government. I think this enabled the community to think slightly differently … The strategy was enabling of that process to happen. – Non-project Focus Group

There is a change in thinking and they’re realising that, you know, there is things that they were not doing right. We’ve got a community … with all these problems and we have to change to see any difference basically. So I suppose they’re just realising that maybe they don’t know it all and maybe they have to think of new ways to do things … community workers are going to be educating the local council, yeah the local government, to think in that way and to put priority on community and on relationships. – Funded Focus Group

One factor that continues to make it difficult to achieve a philosophical move towards a preventative-early intervention orientation is simply that this approach runs counter to some pretty entrenched expectations at regional level.

A couple of participants in this study also argued that a preventative approach could only be effectively adopted after clients had first been assisted with their immediate needs. They rejected what they saw as an overly simplistic positioning of ‘welfare’ and ‘prevention’ as mutually exclusive and opposite ways of working.

How can you counsel people that are in crisis until you’ve dealt with their crisis? They can’t sit there and be counselled because they are too busy worrying about where they are going to live. Are they going to become homeless? How are they going to feed their children? All of those issues, you have to first deal with those things first. Then you can put pro-active things into place. But if governments don’t address the crisis situation, and especially in Peel, then I don’t see how the other things can work. – Unfunded Focus Group
When we first started doing the assessments for emergency relief we probably did - when we first started - did what the client wanted, the immediate need. And then as we went through we thought ‘Hey No!’ What we’ve got to do is be a little bit more pro-active. Find out what is the underlying problem here. And then if it’s counselling for sexual abuse or drug and alcohol issues, then we could point the client in the right direction. If it was a budgeting issue then we could go through with them and put some strategies in place to stop that recurring and help with the solutions. Yeah and we would put food parcels in place for six weeks so the money they would save on the food, they could then [use to] pay that bill.

Unfunded Focus Group

Every Strategy project in Mandurah was underpinned by a strong preventative-early intervention philosophy, but not everyone at the local level understood or accepted that this ought to be the priority.

Principle 3: Supporting people through life transitions

Life transitions are times of major life change; times when we are all likely to need some extra support, some information and some advice if the transition is to be a smooth one.

Strategy-funded projects in Mandurah were primarily focused on supporting local families and communities through two types of life transitions.

1. Enabling new residents to move seamlessly from somewhere else to start a new life in Mandurah;
2. Enabling young people to make the transition from dependence to responsible adulthood.

Both of these important life transitions will be discussed in turn.

The Strategy funded four projects in Mandurah – QRA; Building Community in Mandurah; Mandurah Community Planning; and Healing and Re-empowerment: Working from the Inside Out – that specifically addressed issues of social isolation and community division.

These projects sought to foster a greater sense of community belonging and connectedness. They were especially relevant to a city like Mandurah that is experiencing rapid population growth as many people move into the area from Perth and elsewhere.
Three other Strategy-funded projects in the region – Eyes Wide Open; the Peel Bullying project; and the Fairbridge Pathways for Young People – were all based on a recognition that young people needed life skills, information, support and self confidence if they were to effectively carry out parenting and all the other adult responsibilities. The Bilydar Leadership and Cultural Awareness project was also based on similar principles.

One thing that we heard during our work in Mandurah was that an important aspect of supporting people through life transitions involved working to overcome the negative stereotypes that others may put on them. Negative images can be internalised.

*There’s this stigma that’s usually attached just to teenagers and it’s [the Strategy] breaking that stigma.* Funded Focus Group

*We were talking about removing the stigma from teenager parents or from the Indigenous culture. Also from this suburb because this suburb has a stigma attached ... And part of this community building work, a big part of it, is removing that stigma and I don’t see it as just making this a socially inclusive suburb. But it’s about looking outward together and seeing how we can get other suburbs to see [this suburb] as a beneficial place. And like we’ve got a lot of natural reserves and natural bush land and we’ve got the estuary and there’s a lot of positive things ... Plus we’ve got a multicultural population here. So it’s just seeing the strengths and being able to help the community groups we have already got here to build on those and to recognise them ... that’s going to lift the reputation of the suburb. So it’s working with the groups and the strengths that we have already to try and bring them together. Because as I see it at the moment, so far they’re all working quite independently, and there’s not a lot of integration going on.* Funded Focus Group

*I think in a lot of cases, all human beings, no matter who they are, if they’re told often enough that they actually can’t do anything anyway. Or that they’re not capable. Or that they’re irresponsible or whatever. Teenage mums for instance … You know you’re going to grow to believe that anyway. And I was just thinking one of the things I think your program [the Strategy] does is actually break that belief in this total dependency on someone else.* Funded Focus Group
The Strategy projects in Mandurah were seen by various stakeholders as having the potential to moderate the negative image that some held of groups such as youth, single parents, the residents of the more impoverished suburbs and, of course, Nyoongah Aboriginal people. Intolerance, prejudice and the resultant conflicting relationships can be very real obstacles when it comes to bringing people together for the purpose of community building. It is conceivable that Strategy projects operating in Mandurah – by bringing people together who have not been brought together before – contributed to the transition towards a community in which all peoples feel valued, and where cultural and social diversity is celebrated; a kind of meta life transition that is a pre-requisite to any truly cohesive community.

I think it will break down a lot of the factional stuff between families. Funded Focus Group

Finally, it is once again important to note that the Strategy was but one of many initiatives seeking to support people through life transitions of one kind or another. Centrelink, for example, operated an income bank to provide financial support to people through difficult transitions that could otherwise result in a crisis situation. Nevertheless it was suggested that the Strategy had made a contribution to community harmony in Mandurah by equipping some in the Nyoongah Aboriginal community with the confidence and capacity to cope and respond to the conflict that had long been so divisive in this region.

Principle 4: Improved integration and coordination of service delivery

It was found that there was a large network of community and government services operating in Mandurah. Some were ‘joined up’ through established formal and informal networks, but others were not.

Improving coordination and achieving more integrated service delivery posed particular challenges in Mandurah because there was such a plethora of diverse community and government organisations, all seemingly operating across different geographic and jurisdictional boundaries. Nevertheless, this region was unusually proactive in responding to this issue as evidenced by:

- formal coordination arrangements jointly initiated by the Peel Development Commission and local government authorities;
- the willingness of most community agencies and government authorities to actively participate and cooperate in new structural arrangements intended to improve coordination.

In relation to the Strategy specifically, the potential for synergies between ‘joined up’ projects – whereby the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts – is best illustrated by reference to the City of Mandurah. The City auspiced three projects that focussed on the issue of social isolation. These projects were complementary, working in combination to build the various relationships and networks required to support more socially inclusive and empowered local communities. Project staff held joint meetings to share ideas, to report on progress and to evaluate their activities.
The City of Mandurah was found to be taking a high profile lead role in the region in relation to:

- building relationships between community groups;
- socially inclusive community planning processes.

Arguably this represents a significant and important broadening, not only of the traditional role of the City of Mandurah, but potentially for local government authorities more generally.

For Strategy projects to work effectively, the provision of funding needed to be supplemented with funding from other sources. The establishment of joint funding arrangements for particular projects was found to be a catalyst for on-going closer relationships between agencies. It provided a platform and starting point for more integrated service delivery into the future.

The WA office of FaCS was active in assisting Strategy projects in Mandurah to access additional funding sources and some projects succeeded in leveraging funds and support from other agencies ‘on the back of’ their Strategy funding. This kind of support from the WA office of FaCS was greatly appreciated at the project level.

“It’s opened up opportunities for us. We’ve got the Lotteries funding through it. So I mean that was great for us.” Unfunded Focus Group

“There’s a whole bunch of funding sources. They’re all about to pool to make that process of funding the project.” Non-project Focus Group

“I think good things are coming out of it and they are getting funding from different sources and so on.” Non-project Focus Group

Leveraging supplementary funding has been historically difficult for most community organisations in Mandurah. One reason has been the absence of any single source of information about available options and opportunities. Viewed from a regional level, avenues of possible funding appear to be something akin to a complex maze with no clear directions. There was confusion about what all the various agencies do. As a result community groups may not have always got the assistance they wanted. Improved information flows would appear to be precursor to better coordination in the community sector.

Community organisations in this study also complained about the time and paperwork associated with putting funding applications together; energy and resources that they felt should have been directed towards addressing the needs of their clients. This is why this kind of support was so valued.

The task of coordinating joint funding and resource sharing arrangements for Strategy projects was found to be problematic. One project employee said that she was hamstrung because Strategy funding for her position had preceded the provision of funding from other sources for the project activities that she was meant to organise.
I just thought that our position would have a pool of resources, financial resources which is apart from our salary that we could use, and it doesn’t seem to be the case … I have to wait now until the funding comes through, if we get it! … And so I was quite disappointed when I realised that, you know, our resources are nil basically … The idea of this is to get the community to do it for themselves … but you also want to be able to provide opportunities for that confidence building to happen so that they’re in a position to help themselves. So you really do need to have good resources and again it comes back to prioritising the social capacity building. It’s amazing! It’s like … covering a wound, but not putting anything on it. If you don’t actually have the resources to put them [projects] out there, you know, show people how they’re going to happen, they don’t generate.

Funded Focus Group

It was also noted that joint funding arrangements could be fragile and subject to unanticipated decisions made outside the region for reasons unrelated to the Strategy. One project found that the provision of creche funding was unexpectedly withdrawn.

We had JET [Job, Education and Training Program] which is no longer here at the moment. They were very very supportive last year … helping to set a crèche up for the team members… That was government funding. There’s no JET Officer at Centrelink this year … It’s a reduction in services. There’s no JET service available.

Funded Focus Group

JET funding was subsequently reinstated.

It was found that the Strategy had improved coordination between funding bodies in Mandurah by assisting some projects to access concurrent and on-going funding sources that supplemented Strategy funding. However, on-going difficulties associated with coordinating the timing of funding from multiple sources highlighted the importance of, wherever possible, effectively ‘locking in’ contributions from all stakeholders prior to project commencement. In this regard there may be greater scope to implement MOUs and other more formal joint funding mechanisms in this region.

It would be wrong to suggest that all organisations in the community sector in Mandurah operated as part of a cohesive integrated network. It was observed that some organisations work well together and some don’t. In the course of this study we heard stories about agencies pooling their resources and working effectively together. For instance the Billy Dower Youth Centre provides an innovative drop in, referral and advocacy service. Its work is integrated with that of Street Net; a youth initiative sponsored by the local Police. Street Net responds to ‘anti-social behaviour’ by creating opportunities for youth involvement in various community activities. The Peel-Peer Education Program was another often-cited example. But we also heard stories about agencies in closely related fields that don’t, by all accounts, communicate with each other well. Despite the initiatives that have been taken, effective coordination remained an on-going challenge for this region.

A positive force for coordination and integration is the body of social research that has occurred in this region in recent years. This has facilitated agencies coming together around key regional issues that these reports have identified. These include social isolation, youth at risk and the disharmony within sections of the Nyoongah Aboriginal community.
The research and everything else that’s going on with those communities enables all of these other things to happen, to come into partnership. … Hey, all that groundwork knowledge and all that research about all the needs and things is now there which wasn’t there before. Which then enables both State Governments, Lotteries Commission and everyone else to begin to come in and look at that. … In Mandurah, at the same time as the Australian Government was coming in, the State Government was coming in through the Peel Development Commission doing the ‘Peel Away the Mask’ [research report] and things like that. And what’s happened is all of these efforts have come together in one process where now the unemployment rate in the Peel region is going down.

Where we’ve got community building projects … At the same time we’ve got the Shire pouring in a large sum of money into the Billy Dower Youth Centre. So you’ve actually got the State Government looking at the disabilities services, at the Disability Services Commission and also [the WA Department for] Community Development looking at how they fund programs and issues there … And you’ve now got the Peel Community Development Group, which didn’t exist before… So we can’t look at this Strategy set aside from everything else. If we do that then we’re not ourselves making a community development analysis of the community. Non-project Focus Group

The other thing that was happening at the same time [as the Strategy] was that there was that ‘Peel Away the Mask’ being developed... And so, whereas before the whole concept was of Mandurah being this rich holiday playground. Actually it’d never been a rich playground … That whole perception was actually being removed and then people were realising that Mandurah had some major major issues and it was going to continue for a very long time. Non-project Focus Group

However, some in the region saw no need to add any further to the existing evidence base by undertaking more social research. It was suggested that in future the money would be better spent on supporting the work of their local community organisations.

It comes back to this history of ‘let’s research’. Well the research always happens but nothing else ever happens after it. So we keep researching and researching… There has certainly been a lot of studies in the Peel region we’ve discovered in the last four or five years. Unfunded Focus Group

I think there is a bit of a bitterness developing or already has developed for studies because there has been so many of them, and yet the needs are still there … There still is that great need. It is still an area of great need. Unfunded Focus Group

Some participants in this study expressed the view that many, but not all, local organisations had begun to shift away from a preoccupation with their own work towards a more strategic, shared and regional vantage. Some credited the Strategy with adding some momentum to this change process.
Principle 5: Fostering local solutions to local problems

Participants in the focus groups expressed pride in the fact that all of the Strategy project proposals were developed by local people, to address local issues identified by local people in Mandurah. There was a strong view that local community organisations are best placed to address local problems because of their close proximity to, and relationship with, local people. This was seen as creating a sense of community ownership over Strategy projects.

One of the positives that I’d like to state that is working is that we’re connecting with the people who have the needs. Not working over and above the structure, but actually doing all the groundwork. Funded Focus Group

Some of the programs are successful down here and they’re really hands on. They’ve come from the community basically. Funded Focus Group

Whatever the groups were searching for, we did workshops with them … because that was a grass roots model. That’s why we used that sort of model for getting the funding. Funded Focus Group

I think a lot of it has evolved itself. I mean there has been a need for this because there was a gap in the services down here and now the needs have been met. Funded Focus Group

Just an example though is the Indigenous community saying ‘We are going to do something for ourselves and we’re doing something.’ And if someone tried to do it for them, then it wouldn’t work … The fact that, you know, the group started on their own initiative, that’s probably half the success story. Funded Focus Group

One participant saw a danger that local initiatives and funding might get 'captured' by larger organisations outside the region.

One of the hindrances to … grass roots programs is simply that they get taken over by other bodies. Funded Focus Group

Some participants in this study clearly challenged their communities to recognise that they do not have to depend on outside support; that they can be more self-reliant by drawing on their own resources.

Do something for yourselves, you know, as a community. We have to help ourselves and we can’t just rely on government all the time. Funded Focus Group

They’d stand there and say: ‘It’d be good to go camping’. ‘Well what’s stopping you?’ ‘Oh, but we need this; we need that’. I said, ‘Well, what do you want us to do? You’ve got a car, you’ve got a truck.’ … ‘But we can’t do that because we’re this or we’re that.’ I said ‘Well why do you need that?’ Funded Focus Group
Now what I saw happening was that these families … were becoming dependent on the service … It was actually making it quite difficult for them after the volunteer had left because they had formed a dependency … Now I haven’t got written proof about that. Only my observations on the family after the volunteer has left. And what I thought might be beneficial is if we held a support day for families to meet each other and build their own support networks. And we had so many more families that participated because it wasn’t just for the families of the service … It was for families in the community. Anyone could come. … We did activities with the parents and we provided a crèche for the children so they had a bit of a break because a lot of these parents were having stress, stressful lives and just needed a break. Funded Focus Group

[It’s] about building support networks in the community and learning how to feel that they don’t need to rely on services. Plus I’m doing myself out of a job, so I’ve got to always remember that, you know. I’ve only got three years and they’d have to be self sufficient by the end of it. So that’s one of the things so that they do build up good support networks. That’s one of the outcomes we’re hoping for. And then we’d also have things like ‘Saturday in the Park’ … an initiative which happened last year. So it would be things like that, that whole families can enjoy and we conduct social events, or things like ‘Community Lunch’ where agencies can meet the participants in the community. Things where it’s crossing those boundaries of professionals and community members. Because I think often that’s a big gap that needs to be closed. They need to feel for themselves what it’s like. Just story telling, like having story telling here through different means, whether it be by someone coming from the Indigenous community … or whether it be someone coming from the library and telling stories, or a man performing arts and acting out a story. Just getting people to have time to tell stories and share with each other. Funded Focus Group

Many organisations, groups and individuals in Mandurah have long been accustomed to identifying their own needs and instituting local solutions to local problems. This was happening long before the Strategy. The PDC, for example, actively consulted local communities to identify their priorities for its Peel Regional Strategy. What the Strategy has done is to once again lend support to these processes. The Strategy in Mandurah encouraged some local communities to recognise that they could do something about their own issues by drawing upon their own strengths and capacities.
Stronger Families and Communities funding have been a catalyst, what they call a catalyst, at least for bringing that past vision into some sort of more formal structure. It actually started you thinking … about how you could bring this about. Funded Focus Group

I think for me it was all about a cultural shift because everyone has been so used to the government saying ‘This is the program, this is what the dollars are for’. Staff were so used to saying ‘These are the guidelines, if you don’t meet these too bad’. They weren’t saying ‘Well what’s the needs in the community?’ you know, ‘Let’s develop it around those’ … It was actually about the process the community went through that strengthened the community and built the community’s resources. The actual outcome, as in the product, was not the significant thing … I think that it is really much in the spirit of the program that we need to be having a conversation with communities and let’s work out what needs to be done on a zero dollar budget! And now if that proved impossible, then let’s then start talking about money. But as soon as you go to communities and say ‘Let’s start looking at what you can do with $100,000’, it actually skews the energy away from that really important ‘community development’ question to a ‘use of funding’ question which is a smaller question. It’s a littler question because it’s really just how can we use $100,000 next year, not how can we all work together. Non-project Focus Group

It was found that in this region there was a growing recognition that communities don’t always need to wait for government to orchestrate things. People can institute local solutions to local problems. The Strategy seemed to help deliver this message in Mandurah.

Principle 6: Building the capacity of families and communities to meet their own needs

Capacity building is about increasing the personal and collective resources that people are able to draw on to address their own needs and to take advantage of life opportunities. Those charged with developing and/or delivering Strategy projects in Mandurah expressed a commitment to building the capacity of families and communities in the region so that they were better able to meet their own needs.

This project has been built … on a philosophy of allowing people to bring out the potential that is inside of them, rather than being defined by their problems. Also by getting people to believe in themselves and empowering them to meet their own need for inspiration, rather than assuming that someone else has to meet them. Recognising and supporting the natural, but often unsung leaders that can… re-empower those around them. Funded Focus Group

I think half the time the biggest problem is people say ‘I can’t go because I’m dumb, I’m stupid, I don’t know how to talk’. I say ‘You’re asking me the question now. You’re asking me and I can understand you therefore that other person will also understand you so they can answer you. So you don’t need to talk for you. You can do it yourself’. Now this is what it’s all been about. Funded Focus Group

Some of the instances where people have illustrated an enhanced capacity to meet their own needs may seem pretty micro when viewed from outside the region – vehicle
sharing arrangements, regular attendance at anti-natal classes or simply finding the courage to approach a government official. But when working with disempowered people, the significance of such actions is too easily underestimated. For the main way in which the Strategy was found to have raised the capacity of people to do things for themselves in Mandurah was by building self-belief and confidence and allowing people to recognise the strengths that they already had.

They pick each other up and bring each other here now. Funded Focus Group

Just coming to the program actually gives them a standard of self-confidence to actually go ‘I’ve got all that training’, you know. Because they’ve actually left and done something … They’re doing it themselves because all the Mums are coming in and they want to do something themselves. So that’s initiated them to start up a new program. Funded Focus Group

Used to be there was always myself and these other two ladies who were always pushing them [local women]. Now we’ve got to the stage where we aren’t pushing people. The others are doing it so it’s a change. They’re sort of taking control of it and everyone’s got their confidence where they can ask their questions and are not ashamed to ask in front of people. Because you know it’s always that shame factor that people think ‘This is a silly question’; that you might think it’s silly. Someone else maybe wanted to ask the same thing? … Then they’re walking out happy because they’ve got all the answers to what they want and it’s taken away that third person. Funded Focus Group

Just things that is going to lift the spirit is one outcome. Provide opportunities for the networks to build naturally so that you’re not saying who they should network with, but they can choose who they network with. That’s really important. Funded Focus Group

Several participants in this study stressed that work to build the capacity and confidence of disempowered groups has to occur in a non-threatening environment. It requires relationships based on empathy, trust and rapport between project participants and their local community organisations. It also requires a willingness to give up some control over day-to-day project activities on the part of the project staff.

It is connecting with young parents, especially like mums in the Peel Region, offering them in-house support in a safe environment in which they could learn and develop new skills. In that environment they will learn things like lots of good role modelling. And in a safe environment where the kids could learn and we can promote parenting skills, safe choices, assertiveness, foster self-esteem, those sort of things … A lot of these girls are going into antenatal classes and … I just think it’s awful … they’re not prepared. They can come here and have a good user friendly environment where we look at their health and look at everything. Funded Focus Group
They have basically run the program themselves. You know they come in and the program ... is run to meet their needs ... So in that way, by addressing their needs and not controlling the program it’s very successful because you’re listening ... and it’s not an awkward environment. It’s really user-friendly and I think because it’s so natural, that’s why it’s been so successful. Funded Focus Group

It’s supposed to be just the women and their ability to solve their problems ... but then it also became a tool where, you know, people come and they can learn all about health. Funded Focus Group

We’ve had quite a few [Aboriginal people] that will come in [to the project]. A couple of the girls have come in and that’s wonderful because they always bring their friends. That’s lovely. But to access or to link up with one Aboriginal girl is often a little bit, maybe, intimidating for them, unless they’ve got other friends to come around ... They’ll come if they feel confident... And I think their confidence is a big thing, a really big thing. Funded Focus Group

Strategy projects in Mandurah built the capacity of families and communities to meet their own needs mainly by raising their confidence. This required a ‘safe environment’ where the participants were open to acquiring relationship and other life skills. The Strategy in Mandurah was largely about working with people in ways that built self-belief and gave them the freedom and scope to determine their own directions and to do things in their own way.

Principle 7: Promoting an ‘evidence based’ approach to project development

An evidence-based approach is one that draws on existing knowledge about what works and what doesn’t for families and communities. Strategy project formulation in Mandurah was informed by a local evidence base. There does not appear to have been much in the way of learning from similar projects outside the region. Rather participants in this study saw the most important evidence base as being that associated with their own learning from their own ‘doing’ i.e. action learning related to the processes that they were involved in day-to-day. It was the experiences of people in the region that were the main source of the ideas that shaped local project development.

Ours certainly was based on a local solution to a local problem, because we’ve faced it every day and it’s a growing need so we don’t have any need to go anywhere else to look for ideas. Unfunded Focus Group

It’s basically been formed from here. Funded Focus Group

One participant questioned the relevance of ‘outside’ experience in the specific context of their work in Mandurah. Any notion of a ‘one size fits all’ approach to family and community projects was firmly rejected all round.
I think it is good to get other people's viewpoints and ideas on how they're coping with what they are doing. But on another level it is like apples and oranges because your community and your community structure - like we've got very high youth unemployment - might be totally different to say that of Fremantle. So our issues are totally, perhaps, different to theirs. So while you're getting some feedback from them, you have to gear it up to your community and your community's needs, not necessarily what works in Fremantle because it might not work in Mandurah. So I think a lot of it is a learning curve. Unfunded Focus Group

In at least two instances, Strategy projects in the region were funded 'on the back of' successful pilot projects that had preceded them. One was the highly-regarded Peel Peer Education Program which was seen as a valued source of evidence about what works and what doesn't in Mandurah. Furthermore, the WA government health services (Healthway, Peel and Rockingham Kwinana Health Services, and the South Metropolitan Public Health Unit) were instrumental in funding and enabling the Peel Peer Education Program initiative to happen. The primary focus was on encouraging youth to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. It did this by training young people to work with others in a safe team environment where they could discuss issues such as self-esteem, relationships, communication and lifestyle. This program proved to be immensely popular, with applications far exceeding available places.

The Peer Ed program has now been going five years and it's an excellent program in building up young people's self esteem, in building up their leadership skills, getting them involved in the community and taking responsibility for stuff in the community and that sort of thing. We've seen that it's worked. Focus Group 1

Several Strategy projects in Mandurah have clearly been influenced by the peer education approach to community work.

Peer education is I guess one of the big flavours in health promotion areas where you're a young person talking to another young person about issues or problems and having them skilled and equipped to deal with it. It is great. It works with older people as well, and it works with anyone. You've got to listen to your peers if you've got an issue… Written journal articles researched it and it has its flaws, but it also has its benefits and stuff as well. But there are other models… 'Big Brother' and 'Big Sister' programs in the schools and, yeah, there's a lot out there. Unfunded Focus Group

This study found that in Mandurah there was little to suggest that there had been much direct learning from the experience of other projects operating in other regions within Australia or internationally. Furthermore there appeared to be little interaction with similar projects outside the region, with the possible exception perhaps of attendance at the occasional workshop, seminar or conference. This should not be interpreted as implying that those involved in local Strategy-funded projects didn't value external sources of information or networks. It was more that they often didn't have the 'fat' in their budgets or the time required to maintain them. While community organisations may be encouraged to extend their networks beyond their region, the reality is that they often lack the wherewithal to do so.
We did have networks happening up in Perth a few years ago, but resources and finances just meant that we had to cut them back. Unfunded Focus Group

I mean that is something that would be useful … to have links to other organisations doing similar things… In the initial stage when we were looking for funding there was a group down in Busselton and Margaret River that does some similar stuff… We talked to them about what they were doing and that sort of stuff. Unfunded Focus Group

The WA office of FaCS initiated a workshop that brought projects together to share experiences. This was regarded as a most successful initiative.

There’s also some support for the early intervention projects which are again, quite substantial. And that’s been organised by having a panel of experts available to give these services support, and as an extension of that exercise there was a seminar on Thursday and Friday here, a two day thing which was organised by one of the panel of consultants. And that was getting all of the early intervention projects in WA together … from all over the State and that served as a kind of networking support, you know, learning from each other. Non-project Focus Group

This thing that happened last week, you know, this two day thing, the Early Intervention Project seminar. They loved it! The people there thought it was fantastic and as I said … a lot of it was about telling stories. They want to make this a regular event … And it’s only happened in WA and one or two other states on a pilot level. That kind of thing seems to work extremely well, but again it’s a limited audience. Non-project Focus Group

While all of the Strategy projects in Mandurah were built upon an evidence base, by and large this was found to be a local ‘action learning’ evidence base, not something accessed from outside the region. This raises issues about what constitutes ‘evidence’ in ‘evidence-based’ policy and practice. (Evidence-based policy is the subject of an Issues Paper developed as one part of this National Evaluation.) While Strategy projects in Mandurah did not directly draw upon evidence sources beyond the region, it is stressed that several people involved in the development of the Strategy projects did have extensive relevant experience and expertise gained both in Australia and internationally.

Principle 8: Making the Investment count

‘Making the investment count’, in terms of making a lasting difference, can be considered in terms of a range of critical issues and competing imperatives:

1. Informing management of projects and of the Strategy through benchmarks and performance indicators

2. Investing in projects that are most likely to achieve long-term outcomes or most likely to make a significant difference (which involves issues such as identifying and building on pre-existing capacity, likely sustainability)

3. Investing where family and community strengthening is most needed (which involves issues such as targeting, critical mass, multiple strategies, staged approaches, long-term commitment)
4. Investing in order to learn about innovative approaches or how to adapt existing approaches to new environments, including learning from both success and failure

A comprehensive assessment of specific projects and the benefits they provide in return for dollars spent was beyond the scope of this case study. However, from the available evidence at the time of the study, the projects that were operating did appear to be effective. All were reporting their performance against agreed indicators. Some participants in this study praised the work of AIFS in working alongside their Strategy projects to raise their capacity for self-evaluation through action research. At the time of this study, the Institute was working with three Strategy projects in Mandurah. This was an important component of the Strategy funded by FaCS.

The Strategy is premised on the idea that a little seed funding can make a big difference to families and communities if it is strategically directed. This includes balancing investment in areas where there will be ‘the biggest bang for the buck’ (that is, by building on existing family and community strengths and capacities) and in areas of greatest need that will require significant and longer-term investment and development.

The general feeling among those involved is that the Strategy projects was that they did represent a solid social investment and a good use of limited resources, although this view was not universal. At the time when this case study was undertaken it was too early to comprehensively evaluate outcomes, although some projects were already seen to be generating beneficial outcomes.

_I think there’s a contribution to this area [from the Strategy] … and you can see the ripple effect it’s having on the community, you know … It means that you know people really are looking at this area and its needs. Which to me it’s ‘Thanks for Stronger Families’ for putting that amount, you know, attention to this needy area because now it has become a nationally known target area. You know, to lift homelessness, to lift some of the social relationship problems that we’re having around here too. You know to look at our needs in this area and what our realistic needs are. I think it’s had a great impact._ Funded Focus Group

_It’s [the Strategy] given us an opportunity to have a whole year in which I can re-evaluate and then look at maybe a sustainable program or something further down the track. Because now we have had two years of evaluating this program and seen how successful it is and the future of it running … I think it [on-going funding after the Strategy] will come through. I think [the project] made its landmark around the place and there’s a lot of people nationally who know about it … because it’s just been one of those ones that’s been done at the right place and the right time and it’s working._ Funded Focus Group

One unintended beneficial outcome identified in one Strategy project was the unexpected involvement of people from outside the target group. This project was directed at young mothers but soon attracted participation from other family members.

_It’s not just single mums. You’ve actually got people, younger people with partners and the partners are actually involved as well … Their parents are often down here, and grandparents … It’s just whoever wants to come along._ Funded Focus Group
The Healing and Re-empowerment: Working from the Inside Out project brought members of the badly-fractured Nyoongah Aboriginal community together for dialogue about their futures. Some subsequent outcomes achieved since suggest that a process of positive social change may be underway. Initiatives taken or maintained by Nyoongah groups since include:

- the incorporation of a Peel Aboriginal Corporation founded on a partnership model of collaborative work with mainstream organisations;
- the resilience of the Boordiya Maarman Men’s Group which meets weekly at Coodanup House to discuss issues related to culture, men’s health and wellbeing and youth issues;
- the active involvement of the QRA project with the Nyoongah community at the National Aboriginal and Islander Week celebrations;
- the accessing of LotteriesWest funding by the Bingee Busters group for weight loss, health and wellbeing activities in partnership with the Peel Division of General Practice;
- the completion of a ‘Health Needs Analysis of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community in the Peel Region’ in association with the Curtin Indigenous Research Centre and the South Metropolitan Public Health Unit.

Of course it is not possible to know whether any or all of these things would have happened without the Strategy. However, it is noted that few other regions have replicated these initiatives. Arguably the Strategy has been a catalyst for some in the Nyoongah community, giving them the confidence to start turning their ideas into actions.

During the consultations for this case study the point was repeatedly made that the Strategy ‘couldn’t take full credit’ for the positive social change processes that are now occurring in Mandurah because these were the result of numerous programs operating simultaneously through many agencies. As was made clear earlier, the Strategy was not the only initiative, nor necessarily the most important initiative, working to strengthen families and build community in Mandurah. Rather it was one of many, all working in tandem, and it would be extremely difficult to disentangle the impact of one from that of another.

_Everybody in a way can take credit and nobody can take credit. But if you ask the question ‘Did this [Strategy] work, do good stuff in Mandurah’? ‘Yep, definitely!’ If you ask the question ‘Is this [Strategy] why Mandurah has, you know, taken off’? They will say ‘No’. Non-project Focus Group_

_It’s [the Strategy] one element and I think it would be very difficult to argue that it’s the main element. Non-project Focus Group_

While several initiatives, including the Strategy, had made a valued contribution to the complex process of community building in Mandurah, there was still much that needed to be done to secure the future of this social investment. In particular there were some identifiable gaps in service provision that needed to be addressed.
Well I think these kinds of initiatives are making things stronger, but the hindrances are so many. Funded Focus Group

We don’t have emergency care for children. We don’t have respite care. The only one is the Women’s Refuge, but they’re full as well. We don’t have any kind of early childhood therapy for children in domestic violence situations or any kind of abuse situation. The therapy that they get at the moment is probably not targeted to early childhood... That’s really aimed at the eight to twelve year olds rather than in early childhood. So there’s nothing appropriate for those children. The only thing that is probably appropriate is in Fremantle… and that’s through Relationships Australia and that’s crucial. I mean to prevent social problems later on down the track, there should be something in place for the children going without; corrective therapy workshops. Funded Focus Group

Well basically, just from a community development perspective, look at community planners … Developments are obviously getting better, but still we’ve got a long way to go before they realise how and what we need to use to build a social and economic area rather than just buildings. So I think that’s one of the huge things. And then that includes things like childcare which we don’t have available. We do but it’s all full, so for the population it’s not enough. Funded Focus Group

We don’t have public transport from Pinjarra to Mandurah, you know, that linking of communities together from the Peel region … Oh there is a bus system, which has only just started really. Transperth has only just really come down and started making extra routes. Before it was really just Mandurah to Rockingham and there wasn’t much going on within the town at all… It’s in a bit of a transition period where people are not trusting it yet, so it’s in that trust factor time you know: ‘Oh god I know there’s a bus, but can you come pick me up’, because it hasn’t been a reliable service in this region. Funded Focus Group

A lot of them [local people] don’t access TAFE because, number one, there’s a transport problem and then there are no facilities for the children. Funded Focus Group

The outcomes achieved by the Strategy will be undermined in the medium to longer term if the provision of social infrastructure does not keep pace with community building activities.

One participant from the unfunded focus group did not share the prevailing view that Strategy funding in Mandurah represented a strategically sound social investment.

I think in a lot of cases regards funding it becomes a bit of a hotchpotch, sort of, you know, a bit here and a bit there and a bit in the next place… They’ve thrown a few, hundreds and thousands of dollars in one direction, and then this direction, and that direction. But the actual priority needs are still there. That hasn’t been addressed. And so it goes on… Rather than throw a bit here and a bit there, sort of streamline it so that it flows through the whole community need, rather than just isolating it in bits and pieces. Because … you can’t sort of deal with one thing without actually dealing with another, you know. Like you can’t start the car
without connecting the battery. Do you know what I mean? Unfunded Focus Group

We heard no other evidence to suggest that the Strategy contribution to Mandurah had been anything other than a sound investment. The number of people who had been directly or indirectly involved in Strategy projects in Mandurah and surrounding areas numbered in the hundreds.

2.8 The FaCS Role in Supporting the Strategy

Overview

The second objective of this case study was to consider how effective FaCS had been in resourcing the development of Strategy projects in Mandurah. FaCS sought to support the process of building stronger families and communities in Mandurah through its:

- targeting strategy;
- information dissemination;
- guidance to local projects (both pre and post project);
- facilitation of community building processes;
- funding of Strategy projects.

An assessment of the contribution of FaCS to the Strategy in Mandurah in each one of these areas follows.

Targeting

In November 2000, FaCS required each of its State and Territory Offices to prepare a targeting plan to guide Strategy project funding decisions. Mandurah is one of eight disadvantaged regions in Western Australia prioritised for Strategy assistance in the ‘WA Targeting Plan’. Furthermore the plan targeted particular groups, such as youth at risk. It also sought to promote projects that fostered innovative best practice and partnership arrangements.

The decision to target Mandurah was uncontroversial and primarily driven by the statistical analysis of need that was carried out using Australian Bureau of Statistics data.

The story is we had to develop a ‘Targeting Strategy’. Certain parameters were set nationally for that and one of them was that we were supposed to factor in certain indicators of disadvantage if you like. And the SEIFA [ABS’s Socio-Economic Index for Australia] was the major one… Essentially that gives a score to each Statistical Local Area… and we produced lists for metro and lists for regional areas... Mandurah was pretty close to the top, if not the top. Non-project Focus Group

Anyway we put our statistical data and other factors to the STAG and made recommendations as to which areas we’d focus on. They largely endorsed it. Non-project Focus Group
The FaCS WA Targeting Strategy chose to target the City of Mandurah rather than the whole Peel Region that comprises the City of Mandurah, plus four other adjoining local government authorities. This is the region that the Peel Development Commission, for instance, uses for its planning purposes. Most of the regional studies undertaken have also focused on the Peel region rather than Mandurah. The findings of these studies suggest that considerable social disadvantage is to be found right throughout the Peel Region, not just in Mandurah.

Participants at the Non-project Focus Group did not regret the decision to target Mandurah rather than the Peel region. Firstly it was felt that this enabled the WA office to ‘zero in’ on addressing the specific issue of social isolation, an issue centred on the suburbs of Mandurah. Secondly there was a human resource management consideration. The WA office was cautious not to ‘bite off more than it could chew’ with the staff at its disposal.

The main issue ‘social isolation’ was in Mandurah because you had an immediate issue about young single parents or parents who are low socio-economic. There was no public transport. Once the car breaks down that’s it. Non-project Focus Group
The social isolation in Mandurah was a major major issue. Non-project Focus Group

I think we wanted to do something that was manageable probably. Non-project Focus Group

Forty-five thousand people is big enough without bringing in all of the complexities of a small town and so on and so forth. Non-project Focus Group

Notwithstanding the fact that the focus of the WA Targeting Plan was on Mandurah, the reality on the ground was that this was interpreted pretty flexibly and responsively. In practice, expressions of interest and proposals were accepted, considered and in some cases funded from throughout the whole Peel Region. The Fairbridge Pathways for Young People program is located near the town of Pinjarra, approximately twenty kilometers east from Mandurah. This project is open to youth who don’t necessarily come from Mandurah. Furthermore the Bilydar Leadership and Cultural Leadership proposal is centred on the town of Pinjarra.

Local Nyoongah Aboriginal people were also resistant to any attempt to focus on Mandurah in isolation from the rest of the region.

The Aboriginal community argued very strongly that you can’t talk about the Mandurah Aboriginal community. You’ve got to talk about the whole region… I was focusing on Mandurah town… and then they’re saying ‘But actually it’s a nonsense definition of us to just link us to Mandurah town because our family is spread around Pinjarra’… We also recognised that some of the projects like the Aboriginal one, but others as well, would take the regional approach rather than a Mandurah approach. Non-project Focus Group

The WA ‘Targeting Plan’ was shaped by the interaction of several often competing values:

- giving priority to the most disadvantaged regions and social groups (i.e. ‘needs’ principle);
- applying limited resources to areas of identifiable existing capacity and strength so that they provide the best return on social investment (i.e. ‘effectiveness’ principle);
- making sure that auspicing organisations had the capacity to successfully manage the project, comply with the conditions of funding and acquit their expenditure (i.e. ‘efficiency’ and ‘accountability’ principles);
- distributing funding available fairly across all regions and groups (i.e. ‘equity’ principle).

The WA office (including the STAG) had to think about the appropriate balance between these competing values. There is no easy or right answer to any value question of course. Perhaps the most important thing is that the Department continues to reflect upon and ask itself the question. The answer will always have implications in terms of the regions which are targeted and the projects which are funded.
There’s always been this kind of dichotomy in the Strategy as to whether it’s something that’s targeted at disadvantage or something that’s basically building on the strengths of those who might not be at the bottom of the heap, that might you know, just need some support… And yeah so I think that … it’s a balance and that would balance things too heavily in the way of disadvantage, and not allow you to support projects where the disadvantage isn’t so great, but [where] you still get a ‘big bang for your buck’ in terms of assisting people to progress. Non-project Focus Group

You’re not going to find somewhere that doesn’t have problems … but in those areas you have to be able to focus on the advantage and you have to be able to identify the strengths. Non-project Focus Group

The Strategy for me is about the ability … to look across the State, see where the needs are, and then be able to work in those areas. So however you do it you’ve got to have a flexible approach to do that … Do you target disadvantage or do you target some communities that are strong, but just need something to stop them from crashing? Non-project Focus Group

In 2002 the WA STAG made a decision on regional equity grounds that Mandurah should no longer be a targeted region, acting on the advice of the WA office. Participants in the Non-project focus Group subsequently reflected on the rationale for this decision agreeing that it was appropriate.

You can’t put any more funding into the Mandurah region because, if you look comparatively across the State, you just can’t do that from an equity perspective. There may still be a perception that you can still apply and things like that. … Having such false expectations … if you’re trying to build communities and build stronger families, then that’s where you kind of crush people. Non-project Focus Group

It’s no longer targeted and we’re not really looking at funding projects down there. So we’re kind of moving more into the sort of project management side of things. So we have a different role you know. Non-project Focus Group

Participants at the Non-project Focus Group were resistant to the suggestion that in future the Strategy might direct more of its resources towards targeted regions so as to:

- adopt a more holistic approach;
- capitalise on the potential for synthesis between several projects operating concurrently in one region;
- eliminate the risk of spreading staff and project funding too thinly.

The prevailing view in WA encountered by the researchers in the course of conducting this case study was that the Department should retain the flexibility to respond to needs and strengths in any region.

The case study found that the Strategy targeting of Mandurah was both soundly based and beneficial.
Information Sharing

As part of the Strategy, FaCS committed itself to adding to the evidence base of what we already know about how to strengthen families and communities. From the beginning Strategy projects were seen as providing a potentially valuable learning opportunity. Communication of the lessons learnt was seen as central.

The WA Office will develop a communication strategy, which will involve a range of approaches and provide detail on how we will work not only with targeted, disadvantaged locations, but also with the Strategy’s target groups and with the various communities of interest identified in the Targeting Plan. It will be closely linked to a national communication strategy, which is being developed to promote the elements of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to the broader community. (WA Office Targeting Plan – National Partnership Group Summary, 5)

Inside the WA office of FaCS the prevailing view was that there was an opportunity to do more to ensure that the valuable lessons learnt from the Strategy are captured and shared.

Just sharing of information, sharing the learning is really crucial. Non-project Focus Group

For me the biggest problem I have is about capturing and learning and then building on that learning … capturing the elements that we defined that work and that. Because the whole question is ‘Well what are those elements that you can add those small changes to that actually bring about substantial changes?’ And what we’ve said from a action research learning point of view … is [we need] an action research project that’s part of a STAG process or something that’s capturing those learnings because I don’t think we have. Non-project Focus Group

It’s all about for me, it’s all about telling a story of how do you build a stronger community? How do you build a stronger family? It’s all about sharing and your telling of your stories which is your sharing and your telling of your learnings which then build the strength of that community or that family or whatever and how do we do that? Non-project Focus Group

With the background learning that we’ve had we can say that ‘This is an option, this is an option, this is an option.’ And these are some of the strategies that you can use that work in that community and to build that community. We’ve learnt from past experience in relation of this option and this option and this option … I think that stuff would be really useful in the process continuing on. Non-project Focus Group

FaCS funded external consultants were engaged to evaluate particular Strategy projects so as to identify what had been achieved and what could be learnt from the process. One participant felt that these evaluations were a valuable resource and stressed the importance of disseminating reports to interested stakeholders. Some at community level also picked up on the need to add to the existing evidence base.
I suppose there has got to be a way for the information from a grass roots level to get fed back to the policy makers so they don’t treat … Canberra the same as Mandurah, and Mandurah the same as Fremantle. You can’t look at it as just one big pot. You’ve got to look, you know, at a whole different set and treat each region or each area individually and as a group within that area. Unfunded Focus Group

Guidance

The funded Strategy projects in Mandurah were pleased with the level of support that they had received from FaCS staff, stating that whenever they asked for guidance it was always forthcoming. Some made favourable comparisons between FaCS and other agencies in this respect, and individual FaCS officers were singled out for praise for their efforts. The one exception to this related to extended delays between the application and funding decision experienced by some projects during the approval process. This issue is discussed in a later section of this report.

Administrative support to community organisations in Mandurah by staff of the WA office of FaCS took various forms. Some community organisations were assisted to develop their project proposals, some were helped with their progress reports, some were referred on and linked to other sources of assistance.

The Department’s been excellent; absolutely excellent … ‘Any problems ring up!’ you know… I’ve never not had messages answered. And then when this year I had a problem with the [other source of] funding I was able to … move that funding around … I’ve never had any problems, even times when report writing, when something has come up … but I’ve rung them and said ‘I don’t think I’m going to meet my deadline with the report’. ‘No problem that’s fine.’ They have been very supportive. Funded Focus Group

With ours, with our funding, it has been good so far… So far we haven’t had any problems. Funded Focus Group

The nature of such support was discretionary, depending on the judgement of the individual officers and the competing demands being made on their time.

If we think it’s a ‘Go’ as a project then we’ll work with them to write it up. Non-project Focus Group

I can think of projects where they ring up about a whole range of issues where we might simply point them in the right direction. Non-project Focus Group

A smaller agency perhaps gets a lot more support and help writing their reports and that kind of stuff… We definitely targeted support. We gave to those who needed it. Non-project Focus Group

The guidance and support provided by FaCS staff could have been enhanced if a greater level of human resources had been dedicated to the Mandurah region. Further a
longer lead in time to the official launch of the Strategy may also have reduced pressures on the WA office and in Mandurah.

Both points will be expanded upon in turn.

Firstly, the introduction of the Strategy was not accompanied by any significant rise in staffing levels within the WA office. To manage such a large initiative effectively, the office found it necessary to divert staff from other areas.

*We were able to shift some resources from other areas of the office, but with some difficulty.* Non-project Focus Group

Under the circumstances the WA office of FaCS backed up its targeting of Mandurah with a considerable human resource commitment. Initially one full-time staff member was dedicated to the region and a community development consultant was also contracted to undertake specific tasks. Furthermore a member of the WA STAG happened to be based in the Peel region and in contact with several regional players on a regular basis. One representative of FaCS stated that this had been ‘crucial’, enabling the WA office to better understand the region and also provided early warning of any issues that might need to be dealt with quickly. The active involvement of the STAG member was seen as supplementing and adding value to the work of departmental staff.

The WA office of FaCS strategically chose to concentrate its limited human resources on those proposals that it felt were most likely to fall within the scope of the Strategy criteria.

*With the resources that we have you cannot work with every group to turn something which is out of scope into something that maybe is within scope at some point, after a huge investment of time and energy. And also there is that issue of if we turn it into something that is in scope, is it in fact what they wanted to do in the first place, if we come in and hi-jack their concept?* Non-project Focus Group

Staff energy was directed towards those project proposals considered most likely to gain Ministerial approval because they were considered to be consistent with the Strategy. Some applicants felt that FaCS had been too quick in deciding that their proposals were ‘out of scope’, feeling that they did not have a sufficient opportunity to explain their project.

The WA office of FaCS was conscious of the importance of building and maintaining close and trusting relationships between FaCS staff and community organisations. Initially the WA office of FaCS devoted a full-time officer exclusively to Mandurah. After this officer left, a conscious decision was made to redirect staff resources to other areas of priority.
Remembering that it’s a relationship process is actually crucial. And so if there is staff turnover, which there inevitably will be, it will be really careful work managing it. Non-project Focus Group

The second issue was that the introduction of a large initiative such as the Strategy inevitably posed many new questions, both within the WA office and in Mandurah. Just what was this new Strategy meant to do? What was the underlying philosophy? What was the funding criteria? What sort of activities could be supported? What did this ‘new way of working’ really mean for government in practice? Did it mean that FaCS staff members would need to further develop their community building knowledge and skills? Could significant spending targets be met without a significant increase in staffing? As is the case with any new initiative, detail and clarity about such matters cannot be achieved immediately. In hindsight some felt that a longer lead in time to Strategy commencement might have been beneficial.

Everyone was trying to get a handle on what was happening, as well as communities trying to get a handle on what was happening and that kind of thing. Non-project Focus Group

Because it was such a huge program, we had concepts we were dealing with that were quite new and fairly difficult like ‘sustainability’. And I think it took us quite a long time to get used to it, and we were also dealing with the [State and Territory] Advisory Group, who were going through a similar process … That took a while you know. Probably we didn’t think we’d ever get there. Non-project Focus Group

I think you have got to go back to when it started and how it was announced and then what then proceeded once it was announced. The concepts and ideas and the background research I thought was very sound. … These guys [FaCS staff] … were hit with ‘Expressions of Interest’ left, right and centre. And what was the number in the end, like one hundred and eighty or something? Non-project Focus Group

I love this program because it struggled with really bloody difficult stuff … What people keep coming up with is ‘Oh yeah, well that’s all fine to have that community stuff, but in the end the funding bodies want particular outcomes and they define what those outcomes are’. And I’m always able to say ‘Well actually one Department has struggled with this and then try a different process, which is genuinely responsive to what’s coming up from the ground’. … I know that people had the confusion … but the struggle has been very very important … And all the way through it there were tensions because all of us, I mean we were all on new territory. I was on new territory. Everybody’s on new territory and so there was confusion. Non-project Focus Group
Not surprisingly under the circumstances, it took the WA office of FaCS some months to ‘bed down’ the Strategy and work through all of the ‘Expressions of Interest’ that had been lodged. It should also be noted that the Strategy ‘goal posts’ shifted a little over time, adding to the pressures. With the Australian Government’s launch of the Australians Working Together (AWT) welfare reform package, there was an expectation that FaCS staff would achieve some level of correspondence between Strategy and AWT objectives. In the case of the Eyes Wide Open project, for example, it became necessary to report on the employment and training outcomes achieved by the teenage mothers, something that was not an original objective of this project.

The pressures on FaCS staff slowly dissipated as the initial flood of expressions of interest and new project proposals eased and some initial areas of policy confusion were clarified. It is a testament to sound management practice that FaCS staff were able to provide support to approved projects as well as build and maintain some solid working relationships with the people who were actually doing the community building work in Mandurah, all within the Department’s existing human resource capacity.

A couple of participants stressed the need to maintain a focus on the provision of on-going monitoring and support for projects in order to ensure a long term return on the social investment. There was recognition that the support role does not end with the decision to fund.

*If this is about building Stronger Families, building strong communities and things like that then … the highest return on investment would be an ongoing involvement … not just a report type thing … We’re talking about wanting to change the way people think … information sharing, you know, all that type of stuff. But unless you’re intimately involved, I don’t think you’re going to get that.*  
Non-project Focus Group

However, it is the case that the capacity of the Department to engage in-depth with organisations and individuals at a regional level, to enter into on-going dialogue about family and community issues or to further enhance its own understanding of Mandurah is inevitably always going to be limited. FaCS did not have a regional presence in Mandurah and the Department is not ever likely to. In terms of local family and community issues it sits on the periphery. It was found that in many people’s minds FaCS was often confused with the former WA Department of Family and Children’s Services (now the Department for Community Development). It would seem that there is still scope for the Department to raise its organisational profile.

FaCS staff were found to be in a somewhat invidious position of seeking to foster and support community-building initiatives, while not having the capacity to actively engage in these processes themselves. It simply did not have the human resources and was not likely to ever have the capacity for extensive grass roots interaction with the community.

It also needs to be remembered that the early intervention-preventative message of the Strategy is not always well understood or accepted uncritically by community organisations and government agencies in Mandurah. There is scope for more educative and awareness raising work to be done in this area. It would be too easy to recommend that FaCS enter into more consultative processes with communities in Mandurah, but the reality is that it does not have the internal resources to do this.
The challenges that confronted FaCS in fulfilling a community development role have been addressed in the 2nd Strategy, not by creating an expanded role for the Department, but rather by supporting community organisations in identifying and responding to needs within their community. The introduction of Facilitating Partners in the Communities for Children initiative is a prime example. Further information is available at [www.facsia.gov.au/sfcs](http://www.facsia.gov.au/sfcs)

**Facilitating community building**

In Mandurah, before any significant project funding occurred, FaCS engaged an external community development facilitator as a consultant to do some pre-planning with some local groups. This provided an opportunity for several organisations and key individuals to temporarily step out of their daily work preoccupations and come together to engage in some strategic regional thinking. This would not have happened without FaCS support. The idea was to assist those groups lacking the capacity to successfully apply for Strategy funds without such support. This approach grew out of the recognition that some in the community have considerable capacity and just need a little help to build upon it, while others need intensive support requiring considerable consultation and advice. There was recognition that under normal circumstances some groups in the community would not be able to put in a submission and access the Strategy.

The engagement of the external community development facilitator in Mandurah was a deliberate strategy that the WA office of FaCS found to be most beneficial. This initiative is credited with enabling some organisations to achieve a deeper understanding of what the Strategy was about.

*That process of getting an outsider to come in, probably spend between five and fifteen weeks bringing people together around a question and doing the questioning, that gets people moving. People get very excited about it a lot... I think it's a simple thing of an outsider can do stuff that an insider can't do… People often think they're bringing in an outsider to give them the answer. It's actually to facilitate the answer emerging from the community. Non-project Focus Group*

*Having [a FaCS funded community development consultant] down there and somebody with community development expertise to explain the kinds of processes we were looking at was really valuable in that context. But there was still … this hump that people couldn't get over [to shift] from just looking for*
funding for a program, to looking at what they could contribute as an organisation… For me it was fascinating to see that, if you’re going to bring about a shift in culture towards community development, you’ve actually got to do it … top to bottom… You actually need cultural change right across because everybody is playing the same game. Non-project Focus Group

In terms of dealing with disadvantage, particularly disadvantaged areas like the ones targeted, I think you need some additional resources because the issue in Mandurah was people were running around like headless chooks. They didn’t know where they were going. They had so little funding and so much to do, they really didn’t have time … And what they needed was somebody with something to teach … some knowledge of the community development process to help them focus. Non-project Focus Group

In Mandurah … at the beginning of the meeting [facilitated by the consultant] there seemed to be less clarity. By the end of the meeting the community were very clear on what they wanted. They were very fired up and in fact that passion went on. Non-project Focus Group

It all comes down to … what actually brings change in the community. … Well for me in terms of Mandurah, that meeting [facilitated by the consultant] was one of the key points that moved the community on. Non-project Focus Group

Those at the non-project Focus Group believed that the use of community development facilitators in Mandurah, and also in the adjoining Kwinana region, added significant value to the Strategy in both locations. However the prevailing view was that the option of utilising community-building expertise is an approach that ought not to be automatically seen as ‘right’ for every region. The point was made that, far from being disempowered, many in the community sector already had a clear direction, could write their own project proposals and knew how to get there. They didn’t require outside facilitation. They just required a little funding to make it possible.

We didn’t take the view that it was something we’d do in all places, but we were basically experimenting, you know, with the process. Non-project Focus Group

Should you always send someone in to do some of that groundwork and to then assess? I think it has to be flexible … There are times within communities that you need to send someone in to do that. There are other communities that are further down the track who just need a facilitator to bring concepts and ideas together… I think the strategy needs to remain flexible. Non-project Focus Group

One community actually said ‘Well we’re actually really clear on where we need to go. This is what we’ve got, this is where we need to go, these are the struggling areas… if you can work on those areas that would be terrific. Strategically - as a community - this is what we are thinking’. Non-project Focus Group

The FaCS funding of community development input into Mandurah was predicated on the fact that most departmental staff lacked the time and training to engage in this kind
of work themselves. FaCS was spread far too thinly on the ground to contemplate doing this and it is also considered that this was not the Department’s role.

*It’s fairly widely understood that we are not meant to be community developers. But it’s also recognised that we need to know how to understand the community development process and the concepts like ‘social capital’ and ‘capacity’ so that we can effectively buy into the process [of building communities] if you like, and understand the process and what’s happening in the projects. So it’s acknowledged that we are not meant to be experts in that area ourselves, just to have a conceptual understanding … There were quite a few occasions over that period of time since it’s [i.e. the Strategy] been launched that we [WA FaCS office] had experts come in to kind of discuss those concepts, how it was working overseas and in Australia and things like that.* Non-project Focus Group

By all accounts the facilitative work undertaken by the community development consultant enabled local groups to come together and adopt a more unified and ‘bigger picture’ perspective extending beyond their own narrow organisational issues and concerns. Such facilitative work undertaken pre-project appears to have encouraged some community organisations to put their energy into working together more strategically to build families and communities, rather than remaining preoccupied with their own scramble for dollars.

Some participants in this study believed that FaCS had enabled some at the regional level to make the cultural shift necessary to work in a community building way, and also that this way of working was starting to ‘rub off’ on other agencies. In particular it was noted that the language and concepts that underpin the Strategy – ideas like ‘sustainability’, ‘resilience’ and ‘capacity building’ – are gaining increasing currency in both the government and community sectors.

*Other departments have got so much to learn from this Strategy - from my perspective - in terms of the question ‘How do you resource community development?’ This strategy has a lot of the answers and getting to those answers has caused a lot of problems, a lot of pain... But it’s got a lot of the answers and I reckon that’s really crucial to get across…* Non-project Focus Group

**Project Funding**

The feeling in all quarters is that lessons can be learnt from the Strategy experience so far to improve funding approval processes in the following crucial respects:

- speeding up the decision making;
- further eliminating any competitiveness from the process.

Each point will be considered in turn.

The main project funding issue, but by no means the only one, was the time span from the application to final decision. Some felt that Strategy applications took too long to process. Some applicants complained that at each stage of the decision process –they were asked to provide additional information.
I have to say that the … people who pioneered the whole project were very disheartened at how long it took for the money … Basically having to carry this whole project for eighteen months until the funding came through … It was such a passionate project and the fact that they kept being put off and put off and put off, just, you know, wasn’t pleasant basically … so it has been very disheartening for them. Funded Focus Group

You can learn a lot from the processes that other agencies have. Some agencies have very clearly specified criteria for instance. You know particularly with volunteer organisations, when people are busy they get very angry if they feel they’ve had their time wasted, understandably. So the process at FaCS is a very long one too because it’s very unusual, unlike any other government agency that I’ve ever encountered. First of all it goes through the individual Project Officer who’s dealing with the project. Sometimes that’s several people because of staff changes within the office. There’s a little internal committee of staff who then look at it and make a recommendation in the office in Perth [the Departmental Assessment Team]. Then it goes to what they call a STAG, which is a State and Territory Advisory Group. It goes to the STAG and they meet every couple of months I think. And they’re not public servants. They are people selected by the Minister … to be on that committee. Unfunded Focus Group

The WA office of FaCS was very well aware of this issue and of the importance of implementation processes that support sound relationships between community organisations and the Department.

At least one participant in the non-project Focus Group was acutely aware that relationships between FaCS and community organisations had inevitably been shaped by the fact that it is a government funding body and, as a result, it will always be perceived as wielding considerable power and influence.

I think one of the issues … was that tension between, you know, when you talk about community issues, the fact is that we are still from the government and that you just can’t, no matter what you do, ultimately you are the funding authority and it puts you in quite an awkward position. Non-project Focus Group

The multi-layered funding decision process in use during the Strategy did not lend itself to quick decision-making. The Department has learnt from this experience and a different process has been used in relation to the Strategy 2004-2009.

The second issue was the perceived competitiveness of the Strategy funding process in Mandurah. The policy position was that FaCS would foster the development of collaborative project proposals so as to avoid a competitive scramble between community organisations for the available dollars. It was also the case that Strategy applications did not lapse at the end of each budgetary process; rather they remained under consideration in subsequent financial years. Nevertheless some community organisations in Mandurah felt that funding approval processes were unnecessarily competitive. Their perception was that community organisations were pitted against each other to compete for limited funds, at least in some instances. It was suggested that this way of doing business might run counter to the cooperative partnerships that the Strategy sought to engender.
It’s a competitive process. Unfunded Focus Group

I don’t know if it’s just Stronger Families and Communities, but I think it’s funding in general. Because it’s competitive it doesn’t encourage partnerships or working together. And it contradicts the ‘Conditions of Funding’ where the community had to be creative in how they were going to work together to secure funding. I think that would create a much more dynamic partnership and encourage people to form relationships where they might not now. Funded Focus Group

We’ve had several experiences with Lotteries [LotteriesWest], but one was on a partnership level, with three groups in Lotteries House involved and each of us wanted a new phone system. And rather than going individually to Lotteries and run the risk of getting knocked back, we went as a partnership and they reward that … and we got the phones too. So there’s a lot to be said for partnerships because they see better value in bulk. They don’t like mucking around with little groups you know … Unfunded Focus Group

It may be the case that local community organisations and FaCS had quite different understandings of what a ‘competitive’ funding process was. Local organisations understood that the total amount sought by agencies in Mandurah exceeded the available dollars. In their eyes this made it a highly ‘competitive’ process. The perception of FaCS was that the process was not competitive in the sense that there was no rigid tender process involved and there were no ‘cut off’ dates by which time applications had to be received. This is an area where it appears that there may have been some scope for better communication.

Smaller community-based organisations that have not been successful in obtaining Strategy funding tended to be the most critical. Some felt unable to compete for funding on an equal footing, sometimes believing that approval processes favoured the more established organisations at their expense. It was observed that most of the Strategy funding in the region was directed through just three established institutions; a local government authority, a peak youth organisation and a university.

At the end of the day though I mean, it comes down to a submission or a tender, whichever one it is. The bigger players have got the dollars to bring in professionals to put them together. I mean with the latest submission that we put together, we were fortunate enough to get somebody who’s very well-versed in putting these things together to assist. Had we had to pay for that, it was something like two thousand dollars and we wouldn’t have been able to do it. But now the big mobs … they’re in there with an advantage over the rest of us… I’m being facetious, but the thing is, bigger groups do have a decided advantage over small groups because they can bring in the big guns and yeah just leave us for dead. Unfunded Focus Group

Most stakeholders felt that changes were required to improve funding processes.

I cannot understand why within this Strategy - and I cannot stress this any stronger - that there should not be a guaranteed three month turn around from point of application... Non-project Focus Group
I wonder if we eventually need to think... you know, how the rules might change to actually allow people to look at it and say ‘Look, no way’ ... There should be an opportunity to tell people if their project’s out of scope because it’s using pointless energy! ... ‘By the way you’ve got no chance in hell.’ ... We would encourage them to look at other funding sources. Non-project Focus Group

The broader thing to that is that when you are working on a partnership philosophy - and the whole [Strategy] program is premised on partnership philosophy - you have to have a defined sign off period. Because if you’re trying to get involved Corporates [private sector], if you try and involve State Government funding, if you try and involve Lotteries Commission funding and package that with Australian Government - which is what this whole thing is about encouraging this whole partnership, you can’t do it. If you sit there for twelve months, it doesn’t work. Non-project Focus Group

It was repeatedly suggested that there are opportunities to improve funding processes by identifying best practice. There was no shortage of suggestions. Some participants in this study were aware that numerous community groups had come together in a non-competitive process to collaboratively develop the Strategy-funded QRA project in Mandurah. Some were aware of the work that a FaCS-funded consultant had done to assist community groups that otherwise lacked the capacity to prepare a successful submission themselves. Both of these approaches were generally praised.

One participant felt that delegated authority to approve or decline projects was needed below Ministerial level, subject to strict criteria. The suggestion was that this would reduce some of the layers of the decision-making process. Another suggestion was the establishment of an appeals process so as to demonstrate transparent procedural fairness.

Another participant felt that FaCS should consider setting a fixed proportion of Strategy funding aside specifically for smaller community-based organisations. This was seen as a way of ensuring greater equity in the way in which funds are distributed, not only between large and small organisations, but also between community and government bodies.

The overall perception was that there is an opportunity to learn from the Strategy experience to streamline funding processes.
3 Conclusions

3.1 Findings

This case study has examined and documented what has been done to implement the Strategy in Mandurah.

The first objective was to examine the extent to which the principles of the Strategy were put into practice in Mandurah. The findings in relation to this are as follows:

- New strategic partnerships between community organisations and with government agencies were developed;
- All funded Strategy projects in Mandurah were founded on an *early intervention-preventative* approach;
- All funded Strategy projects in Mandurah assisted people through one or more of the following *life transitions*:
  - the transition from social isolation to community connectedness;
  - the transition from youth to responsible adulthood;
  - the transition from divided communities to cohesive communities.

Some Strategy projects have contributed to more coordinated service delivery by bringing people together who have not previously worked as one.

All stakeholders were proud that funded projects in Mandurah had been initiated as *local solutions to local problems*.

Strategy project development in Mandurah has mostly been informed by a local ‘learning by doing’ *evidence base*.

Almost all stakeholders involved in Strategy projects in Mandurah believe that they represent a sound *social investment*.

The second objective of this study was to examine how effectively FaCS lent support to the development of Strategy projects in Mandurah. Findings in relation to this objective are as follows:

- The FaCS targeting of Mandurah was soundly based and strategic;
- FaCS staff were supportive and provided much *guidance* to auspicing organisations where project proposals were considered to lie within the scope of the Strategy;
- FaCS has contributed *community-building expertise* and has helped to facilitate the process in Mandurah;
FaCS has raised awareness about the value of strengthening families and communities in Mandurah, but an on-going process of community dialogue would still seem to be required.

3.2 Implications for the National Evaluation

This section of the report considers each question that the National Evaluation was asked to address and assembles the available evidence from Mandurah in relation to each.

Outcomes, Benefits and Costs

How is the Strategy contributing to family and community strength in the short term, medium term and longer term?

Short Term Contribution

In the short term the Strategy was found to be strengthening families and communities in Mandurah by:

- creating new opportunities for people to come together and actively participate in community events;
- raising the self confidence and life skills of project participants i.e. a ‘Can do attitude’;
- building trust between project participants and the staff of the community organisations who work with them;
- fostering an environment where people are encouraged to become actively involved in, initiate and drive activities that strengthen their own families and communities;
- broadening the range of stakeholders and values involved in project development and implementation;
- providing external community building facilitation and expertise;
- enabling community organisations to leverage funds from other sources i.e. with FaCS funding approved they were in a better position to be able to get other funding bodies to also commit resources;
- committing $1.5m of Strategy funding into the regional economy.
Medium-Longer Term Contribution

In the medium to longer term the Strategy seems likely to strengthen families and communities in Mandurah by:

- reducing the incidence of social isolation e.g. linking people into networks, creating opportunities for them to build new relationships, more people-oriented and sensitive social infrastructure planning;
- enabling ‘youth at risk’ to make the life transition to responsible adulthood;
- empowering Nyoongah Aboriginal people to enact their own directions and live in greater community harmony;
- combating prevailing local stereotypes to create more tolerant communities;
- contributing to a cultural shift towards a more early intervention-preventative approach;
- creating new opportunities for community and government organisations to work together;
- raising local understandings about community building principles and how they might be enacted in Mandurah.

To what extent has the Strategy produced unintended outcomes (positive and negative)?

All social interventions have consequences – both positive and negative – consequences that were not anticipated and not originally intended by policymakers. This study has identified the following unintended outcomes in Mandurah.

Unintended Positive Outcomes

Family and friends of project participants outside the target group also have benefited from some Strategy projects.

Strategy projects may have contributed to more tolerant and cohesive communities by addressing social stereotypes (i.e. an outcome that does not appear to have been planned or anticipated by policymakers).

Delays in funding may have, by necessity, made some groups and individuals more resilient, cohesive and self-reliant.

Unintended Negative Outcomes

Extended delays in Strategy funding decisions may have:

- undermined the optimism of some groups and individuals;
- damaged relationships of trust between some community organisations and government;
- reinforced an attitude in some quarters that 'outsiders' don't understand local needs.
There is a perception among some community organisations that some funding decisions may have been inequitable and unnecessarily competitive in some instances.

Some community organisations that applied for Strategy assistance, but were unsuccessful, felt marginalised within the regional family and community services sector.

In broad qualitative term, what were the costs and benefits of the Strategy relative to similar national and international interventions?

A comparison of the costs and benefits of the Strategy with similar national and international interventions lies beyond the scope of this current case study. However, this is discussed in the Final Report of the National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004. The following evidence collected in Mandurah fed into that process.

Benefits of the Strategy

The Strategy has enhanced community pride and has created a strong sense of local ownership over Strategy projects.

The Strategy has enhanced the self-confidence of project participants and has increased their capacity to address their own needs.

The scope of projects has been broadened and strengthened in those situations where community organisations have come together in strategic partnerships based around Strategy project activities.

The Strategy has contributed towards a local ‘cultural shift’ where there is now a greater valuing of early intervention-preventative approaches to social issues.

There has been a broadening of the social responsibilities assumed by the City of Mandurah to encompass community relationship building and socially inclusive planning processes.

Costs of the Strategy

Strategy application and funding processes have:

- caused frustration and sapped the enthusiasm of some community organisations;
- damaged the relationship between FaCS and some applicants;
- possibly contributed to a sense of marginalisation within some community organisations.
Features of the Strategy and Initiatives that Affect its Outcomes

What were the particular features of the Strategy that made a difference (including delivery of the Strategy, the formation of partnerships, integration and co-ordination of services, capacity building, targeting funds, and the use of evidence and research)?

This case study suggests that the main features of the Strategy that made a difference were as follows:

- The targeting of funds towards a disadvantaged region and the identification of needs, based on a sound social research evidence base.
- Capacity building activities that raise confidence in a non-threatening environment.
- The provision of assistance to ‘in scope’ applicants during the delivery of the Strategy e.g. advice, information, facilitation and assistance in securing funding from other sources.
- The formulation of project proposals through partnership arrangements involving diverse agencies and groups.
- The encouragement of a cultural shift towards a prevention-early intervention approach.

What is helping or hindering the initiatives to achieve their objectives? What explains why some initiatives work? In particular, does the interaction between different initiatives contribute to achieving better outcomes?

Factors helping to contribute to Strategy objectives

The process of building stronger families and communities in Mandurah was helped by the following contextual factors.

- The commitment and expertise of local community builders.
- The influence of the Peel Peer Education Project (PPEP) model on some aspects of Strategy project design i.e. the notion of using peer educators to work with their own communities.
- The existence of innovative coordinating structures and cooperative agreements between various agencies in the region.
- The regional coordination role played by the PDC, especially the establishment of the Community Development Group.
- WA’s State Sustainability Policy and other initiatives that were based on similar principles to the Strategy (i.e. they were mutually reinforcing).
- The commitment of the local government authority to active engagement in community building activities.
- Numerous studies and planning reports identifying regional needs and providing a shared strategic direction for the region.
Synergies between the simultaneous operation of several related and linked Strategy projects operating in the same region at the same time.

Synergies between Strategy projects and other initiatives, programs and services that were also working to strengthen families and communities in the region.

Factors inhibiting the achievement of Strategy objectives

The process of building stronger families and communities in Mandurah was inhibited by the following contextual factors:

- Major gaps in social infrastructure and service provision in key areas such as childcare, emergency accommodation and transport.
- Insufficient post-school education, training and employment opportunities.
- An entrenched pattern of disharmony, feuding and violence within some communities.
- A high incidence of ‘burn out’ and stress amongst over-stretched organisations operating at the community service provision interface.
- A perception by some community agencies that their contribution may have been undervalued and that they may have been at risk of being ‘left out’.
- The absence of consistent geographic jurisdictions and regional planning parameters across agencies in the Mandurah region.
- Highly variable levels of understanding about the principles upon which the Strategy is based in Mandurah.

Other Factors that Affect Strategy Outcomes

How does the Strategy contribute to the achievement of outcomes in conjunction with other initiatives, programs, or services in an area (e.g. its interaction with other Australian Government and State programs, etc.)?

Strategy outcomes in Mandurah were achieved in conjunction with numerous initiatives.

- The regional development initiatives of the State government, the Peel Development Commission and the City of Mandurah.
- The State government’s commitments to strengthening families and communities e.g. the ‘Best Start’ program.
- Joint funding/resourcing arrangements between Strategy projects and LotteriesWest, the Department for Community Development, the City of Mandurah and others.

What else is helping or hindering the Strategy to achieve its objectives and outcomes?

The congruence of Strategy policy and principles with the philosophical position of key community, local government and State agencies.
What works best for whom, why and when?

In Mandurah the Strategy worked best for the following social groups because all of the Strategy projects were directed towards the needs of one or more of these groups:

- socially isolated people or people at risk of social isolation;
- youth at risk;
- members of the Nyoongah Aboriginal community.

Potential Improvements

How can the Strategy achieve better outcomes?

The evidence from this case study suggests that the Strategy might have achieved better outcomes by:

- streamlining its application and funding processes;
- giving more emphasis to its community educative/communication role in relation to disseminating information about the strengthening of families and communities.

3.3 Implications for FaCSIA

It would be methodologically unsound and inappropriate to make firm conclusions about the Strategy, outside the context of Mandurah, based on this one case study. This is especially so considering that the study was undertaken at an early stage of project implementation. Nevertheless this case study did produce sufficient evidence to allow us to pose some strategic questions.

- Did funding approval procedures and processes accord with recognised best practice?
- Is it appropriate and feasible for FaCSIA to take a lead role in raising community awareness and understanding about policy, principles and practices that strengthen families and communities?
- Did targeting strategies strike an appropriate balance between ‘need/disadvantage’, ‘equity’, ‘efficiency’, ‘effectiveness’ and ‘accountability’ criteria?
- Were the perceived benefits of STAG participation in Strategy decision processes outweighed by the costs (eg community perspective and outside expertise vs cumbersome multi-layered decision process)?
- Does FaCSIA need to further raise its organisational profile in regional Australia?
3.4 Final Comment

Significantly no-one at any stage of this case study suggested that the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy was ineffective and should be done away with; not those connected to the FaCS office, not the funded projects, and not even those who had missed out.

All of us still have much to learn about how government can work more effectively to enable families and communities to become more sustainable. It was into this challenging, new and exciting policy terrain that FaCS bravely entered in Mandurah and elsewhere. FaCS adopted an early intervention-preventative and strengths-based approach to address local social issues and it strived to adhere to its stated policy principles (although not always successfully), in ways that were likely to help make Mandurah and the surrounding Peel region a more sustainable place.

That some specific areas for possible improvement have been identified is not meant to infer criticism. Opportunities for improvement are always best seen with the great benefit of hindsight. There is an opportunity for FaCS to draw on its successes (and occasional failings) in Mandurah as an organisational learning tool; one that Australian families and communities can share and benefit from.

Through its commitment to the principles that underpin the Strategy, and by providing funding, support and guidance to local projects, the Strategy did make a significant contribution to the process of strengthening families and communities in Mandurah. The 2nd Strategy seeks to address many of the issues and questions that have been raised by this report, thereby making it possible to further build on this contribution.
4 References

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