

Family Support Services: Lessons from Evaluation

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Introduction

- ◆ *What can be learnt from local evaluations of Sure Start Family Support Services (FSSs)?*
 - ◆ Methods
 - ◆ Typical characteristics of FSSs
 - ◆ ‘Waves’ of evaluation of FSSs
 - ◆ Challenges in Evaluation of FSSs
 - ◆ Learning from evaluations – developing evaluation further for FSS sustainability

Learning from FSS Evaluation: Methods

- ◆ A review of FSSs, comprising:
 - ◆ Review of types of FSS models (descriptions and learning points) – data from existing client base and literature review
 - ◆ Collation of local evaluations of Family Support Services from NESS website. Information collated on:
 - Service delivery
 - Roles and background of workers
 - Evaluation methods
 - Outcomes and outputs
 - Pertinent findings.
- ◆ A critical and (as far as possible) systematic analysis of the sources of data above.

Typical Characteristics of FSSs

No one 'model' – but guided by assessment frameworks:

- ◆ Locally-determined structure and model of service delivery
- ◆ Philosophy – needs-led, family-centred
- ◆ Multi-faceted – comprehensive support
- ◆ Preventative:
 - ◆ Early intervention (where possible)
 - ◆ Complementary / parallel to heavy-end intervention
 - ◆ Continuing after heavy-end support ends
- ◆ Flexible – less limited by statutory rules on roles / delivery

Typical Characteristics of FSSs

- ◆ Collaboration with other agencies and professionals
- ◆ ‘Supported signposting’:
 - ◆ Navigating professional networks
 - ◆ Mediator between client and services
- ◆ ‘Professional Friend’ – more time and scope for intensive work
- ◆ Delivered via:
 - ◆ One-to-one, individual support at home or locally
 - ◆ Support groups and/or ‘safe spaces’, locally

'First Wave' Evaluations

- ◆ Evaluations done in SSLP development stage
- ◆ Published 2001-03
- ◆ Emphasis on process – set-up, development
- ◆ Contents:
 - ◆ Documenting what was happening
 - ◆ Descriptive of problems and progress in service delivery
 - ◆ In some cases, informing further service development by highlighting strengths and weaknesses

'Second Wave' Evaluations

- ◆ Evaluations done in main operational stage
- ◆ Published 2003-05
- ◆ Emphasis on impacts – outputs, outcomes
- ◆ Contents:
 - ◆ Describe support parents have needed and received
 - ◆ Measurement of:
 - Early outcomes, e.g. satisfaction of clients
 - Referrals and referral processes
 - Time period of individual cases
 - ◆ Documenting cases – 'vignettes' of support
 - ◆ Categorisation of types of problems encountered from closed cases
 - ◆ Highlighting issues of data collection and analysis

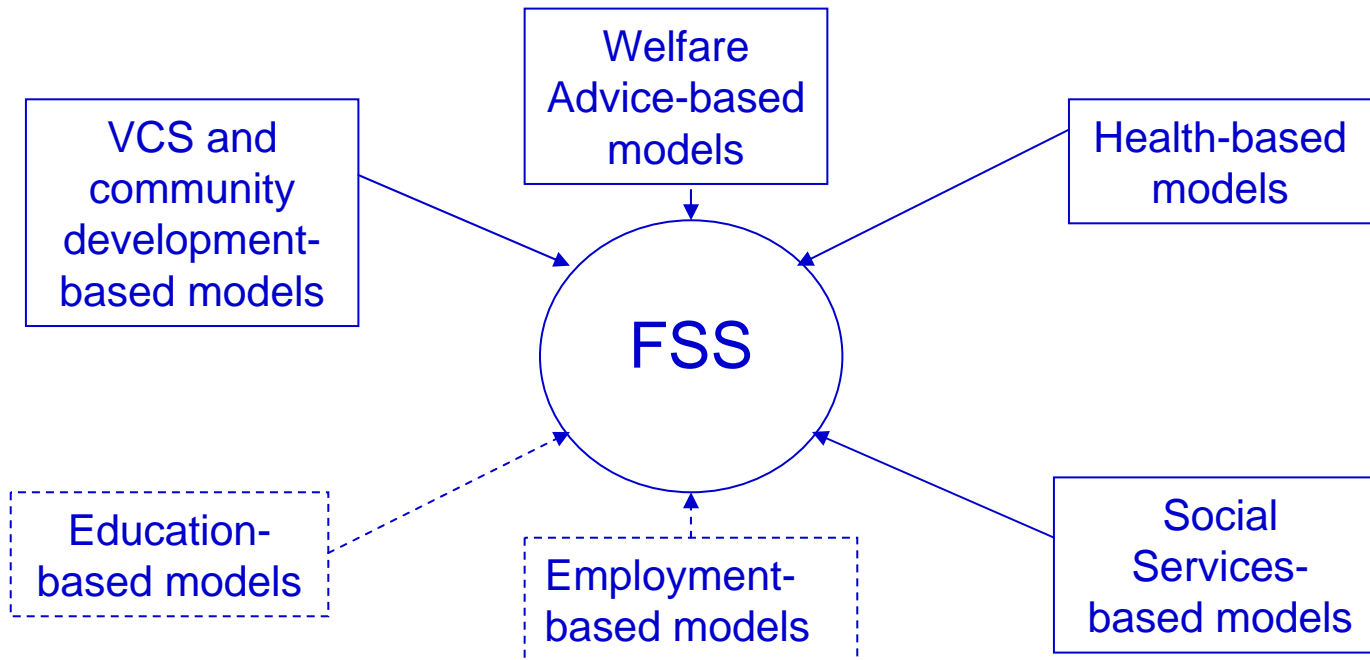
'Third Wave' Evaluations

- ◆ Evaluations done in final stages of FSS (*under Sure Start*)
- ◆ Published 2005-06
- ◆ Emphasis on *sustainability* via examination of added value or additionality over what exists or could exist
- ◆ Contents:
 - ◆ Cost-effectiveness:
 - Time / activity allocations
 - Cost per use, based on 'average use', including overheads
 - ◆ Impact on mainstream – complementary or replacement capacity?
 - How far the activity of FSSs encroaches onto statutory services
 - Examples of how FSSs highlight weaknesses of mainstream services
 - ◆ Evidencing *more* tangible outcomes – 'boxing the unboxable'

Challenges of Evaluation of FSSs

FOR FAMILIES (positives)	FOR EVALUATION (negatives?)
Locally-determine profile and delivery – no one definition or model of FSS	All FSSs are unique in their structure and nature, determined by local contexts, local service profile and understandings of family support held by key stakeholders – uniqueness makes comparisons problematic
Needs-led, family-centred	'Out there' – less 'control' over implementation of 'measurement systems'? (e.g. M7 data collection)
Multi-faceted, comprehensive provision	Broad remit – intertwined with key objectives of Sure Start programme – less focused. Not separate entity (e.g. with an SLA)
Preventative	Difficult to measure what has not happened
Flexible in approaches and responses	Constantly changing – goalposts always moving
Collaborative, in partnership	Intertwined with a range of partners – problematic to attribute outcomes to FSS alone. Stories of outcomes of referral not reported back to FSS
Supported Signposting	Grey areas to remit – outcomes dependent on other agencies and their limitations and capacity (e.g. housing)
Professional Friend – intensity of relationships with small number of clients	Difficult to measure 'relationships' and their impacts on clients. Difficult to offer 'robust' data from small sample sizes of client numbers

Influences of FSSs



Evaluation Challenges

Developing evaluation questions further to build a case for sustainability requires a re-examination of FSSs:

- ◆ Are aims, objectives clearly defined and 'SMART'?
- ◆ Is progress measurable against the aims, objectives?
- ◆ What is the time (and thus the resource) spent by staff on the main activities in family support – for how many families?
- ◆ Can the 'cost' of the FSS be adequately 'boxed'?
- ◆ What *is* the cost effectiveness of the FSS?
- ◆ What *evidence* of FSSs providing quality services families use and value?
- ◆ Is the FSS bringing added value or additionality?
- ◆ *Evidencing* outcomes – is there 'dilution' due to ineffective partnership:
 - ◆ Poor communication from referral partners on outcomes
 - ◆ Partner 'capacity' failing
 - ◆ Duplication – accidental or 'needs must'