

WHAT'S REALLY GOING TO CHANGE

Currently too many people who fail to access the right support at the right time because they do not know where to go for help. The Linker Network seeks to change that.

FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

What vulnerable people are saying today:

- Knowing who to call or go to, to get services is difficult
- When a service is found, it is usually helpful, respectful and supportive
- I don't speak up for myself because I don't know what I need
- We need a more personalised approach
- Providers only understand me through the lens of the services they provide. I get pigeon-holed
- I feel like I am missing out because I'm not being helped to find the right services

Outcomes via the Linker Network mean that people will say:

- I feel like someone with power is actually going to help me
- I'm clear about what's going on
- I feel safe, I'm getting the care I need, and my needs are being met
- They'll make sure I get exactly the right help for me and take time to understand where I'm coming from
- I'm confident that services will change as my needs change
- I've got choice about what's happening

FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

What service providers are saying today:

- Services are hampered by unduly prescriptive funding agreements (forced to pigeon hole people)
- We don't know why we're seeing more indigenous clients and families, or what we're doing when we see when we see them
- We don't know what's happening to our older kids when they get restored or how we can continue to support them
- It's a perfect storm to crack an interagency approach... but we have professional boundaries when we should have professional closeness

Linker Network members will say:

- Agencies are able to move at the family's pace
- Collaboration is normal practice and clients think services are seamless
- We have a culture of pro-active information sharing
- We always begin by exploring options with families
- We are always innovating to meet client needs
- We are able to deliver services quickly

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LINKER

A Linker is like a 'relationship manager' for a client or a family, helping to connect them to the appropriate services, and then following up with them to ensure that they get the help they need. The Linker is the client's backstop, there to ensure the people get to the help they need and to be of assistance whenever the client or family feels like they aren't able to effectively navigate the system.

Being a Linker is not the roll of an individual, it is a commitment by an organisation to "always think and act like a Linker."

WHAT CLIENTS TELL US

Clients continually tell us that their best experiences occur when they are supported by someone who really 'gets them'. Like calling a trusted friend or relative, clients want to be able to rely on someone who they feel they have a positive personal connection with.

WHAT FRONTLINE STAFF TELL US

Staff report that all too often, the artificial boundaries created by funding and service 'types', as well as time-consuming and impersonal paperwork, prevent them from developing the meaningful and lasting connections with clients that drive better outcomes.

SO, LET'S DO IT DIFFERENTLY

The Linker Network is about giving organisations the permission and the opportunity to work in a way that 'makes sense'. We are a service system that is about people supporting people, so let's make some room for the stuff that really matters; real relationships and real connections.

THINK LIKE A LINKER

To think (and act) like a Linker we invite organisations to do two things differently:

The first thing is to change the way we think of ourselves in relation to one another. We don't want staff to be limited in their thinking by their job title or their place of employment. When staff meet a client, we want them to feel strongly connected (linked) to all the available services and supports of all the service providers in their Local Linker Network.

The second thing we want organisations to do differently is take responsibility for followup. We want organisations to build capacity so that everytime they make a referral they take steps to follow up with the client and check that the client either got the help they wanted or no longer need help.

HOW ARE CLIENTS GOING TO BE BETTER OFF?

New clients will get the service and support they need sooner, and their 'customer' experience will be affirming and positive. Existing clients will feel confident and secure knowing that there is someone, their Linker, who understands their needs and is available to help. Far fewer clients will fall through the cracks.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN THE LINKER NETWORK

Currently families are referred from agency to agency, and NGO to NGO, with no single point of contact to help in times of confusion. In the Linker Network, support systems are created that allow staff to work together so clients can get to the right services quickly and easily.

WHAT CLIENTS TELL US

Loud and clear, clients are telling us that it is often hard to find the right service, and once in the service system, they find it frustrating and difficult to navigate. Or as one client put it, “You’re always being told you have to go talk to someone else, and when you get there no one knows what’s going on.”

WHAT FRONTLINE STAFF TELL US

Staff from all service types, government and non-government alike, also report being frustrated and confronted by their inability to support clients across organisations or agencies. We have been working in a service system that is disconnected, inconsistent and confusing.

SO, LET’S DO IT DIFFERENTLY

The Linker Network is all about making it easy for staff, organisations and agencies to work together. We want to get rid of the barriers that make it hard for people to work together, and start investing in the things that make it easier.

- Let’s make ourselves easy to find by using common easy to recognise branding
- Let’s commit to some common induction and training to make sure we know who everyone is, and so when we talk to clients we are using the same language
- Let’s use shared communication systems across organisations so we can safely exchange information, and clients don’t have to keep telling the same story over and over again
- Let’s have a shared set of principles and outcomes, so collectively we are all contributing to the same goals
- Let’s build a service culture that is actually client centred, and does more than pay lip-service to the ideals of ‘customer service’

YOU ARE PART OF THE LINKER NETWORK

We are so much more than individual employees working in isolated organisations and agencies. We are one linked network of services, all working to build a stronger healthier community. With the right tools and the right approach, we can ensure better outcomes for people, families and our communities.

HOW ARE CLIENTS GOING TO BE BETTER OFF?

Because our services are going to be more visible, easier to access and more valued, clients will find services sooner, will receive the support they need sooner, and their experience will be positive.

THE STORY SO FAR

“Last financial year FACS spent over \$40M in services for Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains without major improvements in outcomes. Our numbers make the argument: we need a fundamentally different approach. We have invested in multi-agency co-design to develop a new service system from the bottom-up, based on feedback from customers and providers.”

Lisa Charet

Executive District Director, FACS Western Sydney Nepean Blue Mountains District

In early 2015 FACS brought together a diverse group of about 50 people, with representatives from large and small NGO's, as well as representatives from other NSW government agencies, Health, Justice, Education and Police.

There were no preconceived outcomes, just one clear intention, to come up with ways to keep more kids safe.

Over the course of three intensive days of co-designing (facilitated by 2nd Road), we came up with four ideas:

- Make a Safe Home – a plan to keep kids safe at home by adding additional support into the home rather than removing the child.
- Responsible Stronger Communities – a project designed to empower and engage communities to drive their protective factors through increased transparency and communication.
- Spiralling Up Out of Care – A post Out-of-Home-Care support initiative focused on giving young people who turn 18 and leave care the ongoing support they need to thrive.
- The Linker Network – a service system redesign plan that is focused on removing the artificial barriers that make it hard for vulnerable people to access the right supports at the right time.

Since those first conceptual workshop days in early 2015 each of the four co-designed projects has progressed through differing stages of prototyping, testings, evaluating and implementation.

The Linker Network was not an easy idea to test.

What we wanted to do was not just one or two little things, but a whole bunch of interconnected improvements, that when done together could mean significant improvements for vulnerable people seeking support from community services.

Imagine that we want to make the experience of going to JB Hi-Fi as positive, welcoming and easy as going into an Apple store. We could not achieve this by just putting in a new 'Customer Service Assistance' desk at the back of the store - no, we would need to do a great many little things that when viewed together would radically change the experience for the customer.

The Linker Network aims to do the same for vulnerable people seeking community services. We came up with a service system re-design idea that, when implemented, will radically change the experience for the 'customer'.

In the first half of 2017 we embarked on a six month prototyped period during which we tested a range of service propositions and enablers with around 20 organisations. What we learnt was the model that the model works.

Nearly two and a half years after its first inception, having worked directly and indirectly with well over one-hundred sector representatives, including talking to and listening to clients and families, we have developed and tested a model in which people's needs are placed at the centre of the service system.

HOW TO CONVINCE YOUR BOSS

The Linker Network needs champions at every level. If you are as passionate as we are about seeing this work succeed, but you don't think your boss is convinced, try some of these compelling arguments.

THIS IS WHAT ARE WE HERE FOR

No matter which part of the community services system you and your organisation are in, at the end of the day, we are all in this together to help people. The Linker Network is tasked with doing one thing; making it easier for vulnerable people to get help. So being part of the Linker Network is a great opportunity for you and your organisation to support more people.

WE WILL LOOK GOOD

Nobody likes a 'Debbie Downer'! Our partners (government and non-government) and our clients want to work with organisations that are eager and motivated to take up opportunities which mean better service delivery. Being a proactive member of the Linker Network sends a clear message to funding bodies and our other stakeholders that you are a great organisation.

THIS ACTUALLY MAKES SENSE

Putting aside the 'looking good' argument, the stuff in the Linker Network can make a real difference. This isn't some over-complicated MBA style change we are talking about; this is common sense stuff that makes sense to real people. At the very least, it's got to be better than the system we are currently using, making our clients fit into narrow program criteria. Working together more holistically will make us more efficient at providing excellent services to our clients.

IT WON'T COST US ANYTHING

Being part of the Linker Network doesn't require us to change our operational budgets, or even change any of our programs or services – we just need to give the Network a little of our time, to build new links with the rest of the service system, so our clients get a better experience.

IT HAS BEEN DESIGNED BY NGOs

FACS realised that developing a new approach to service delivery in isolation to the NGO sector wouldn't work, so this model was developed and tested using a co-design approach, led by NGOs working in the sector who know what works and what doesn't work.

IT IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

This is about fixing all the stuff we have been complaining about for ages, and now FACS is actually listening. We've known for a long time what works better for our clients and this is the best opportunity we've had in a long time to make some meaningful changes.