

# Partnerships

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The Power & The Pain

# Today's Presentation

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- Outlines some of the powerful and painful elements in working to develop and maintain (enforced) service partnerships by:
- Focusing on the experience of two (integrated) Family Services/Child FIRST partnerships in Metropolitan Melbourne

# The Context

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- Since 2002/03 there has been considerable investment in Family Services primarily as a means of curbing steadily growing demand on Child Protection Services
- Family Support Innovation Projects commenced in 2002/03
- New Children, Youth & Families Act 2005 (links Child Protection, Family Services and Out of Home Care services under one Act, a binding principle of working in the Best Interests of Children, with a common set of legislative principles)
- A new Strategic Framework for Family Services
- The Development of catchment -based Child & Family Services Alliances

# Context continued

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- Child FIRST (Child & Family Information, Referral Support Team -centralised intake into a coordinated group of family services)
- DHS specifications required the development of partnerships as a pre-requisite to integrated service development (we had no choice!!)

# Child FIRST

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- Child FIRST is the entry point into Family Services within sub-regional catchments.
- The key purpose of Child FIRST is to ensure that vulnerable children, young people and their families are effectively linked into family or other relevant services.

# Child FIRST Service Model

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## Core Functions

- Information and advice
- Initial screening and assessment
- Prioritisation of referrals to Family Services within catchment (including community referrals and Child Protection referrals)
- Consultation with Community Child Protection worker where appropriate
- Holding work (when allocation within Family Services not yet available)
- Short term interventions/single session work when indicated
- Onward referral (to family services or other services)

# Frankston & Mornington Peninsula catchment

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- A catchment encompassing the LGA's of the City of Frankston and the Shire of Mornington Peninsula
- Existing DHS Family Service funded agencies include: Anglicare Victoria; Oz Child; Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency are a recent addition to the catchment

# Evolutions of Partnership in Frankston Mornington Peninsula

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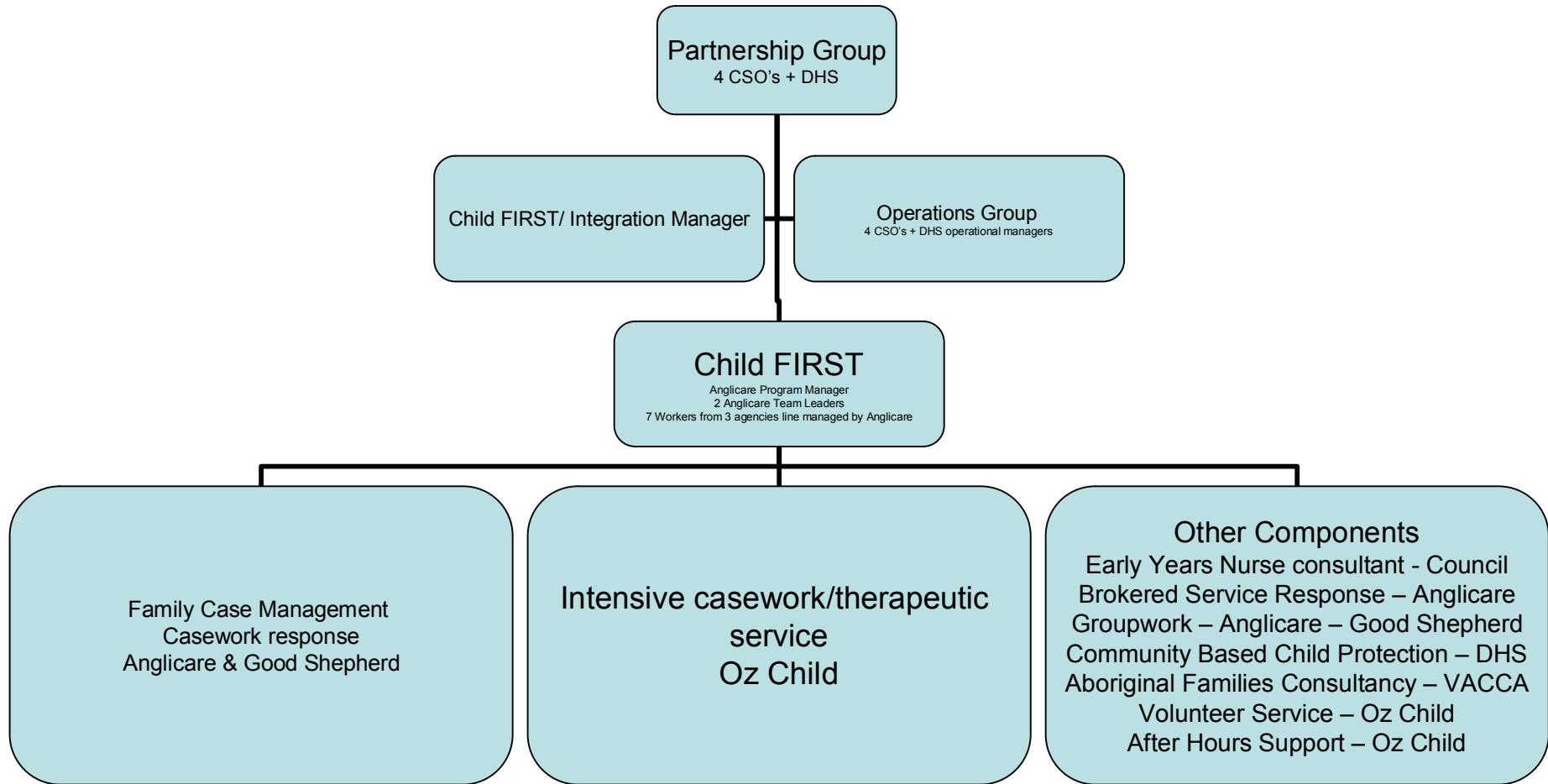
- In 2002/03 the LGA of Frankston received FSIP funding where five services formed a partnership called FIFS
- In 2005 one agency withdrew from service in the LGA and handed back its funding
- In 2005 DHS determined that the Project wasn't working well citing:
  - Problematic Governance structures
  - Service model was siloed – Parallel rather than integrated service components
  - Multiple service intakes rather than a single coordinated pathway to service provision (Child FIRST not rolled out)
  - Child Protection notifications rising (reduction was a KPI)
  - Lack of a targeted community education strategy

# Evolution - continued

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- As a result in 2005/06 New Partnership formed with a new service model incorporating fully integrated service model and governance structures and the development of centralised intake
- Over the next two years two agencies withdrew from the partnership and a new agency joined when a catchment based approach was adopted
- From 2007/08 Anglicare, Oz Child and Good Shepherd formed a non-incorporated consortium to deliver family services and Child FIRST across the Frankston/Mornington Peninsula catchment

# Our Partnership & Service Model



# The Outer East Catchment

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- Comprises 3 LGAs
- Funding rolled out over 3 years commencing 2004:  
Shire of Yarra Ranges; Knox; Maroondah
- Culminating as a total revised service system with  
Child FIRST in 2007

# Outer East Partnership

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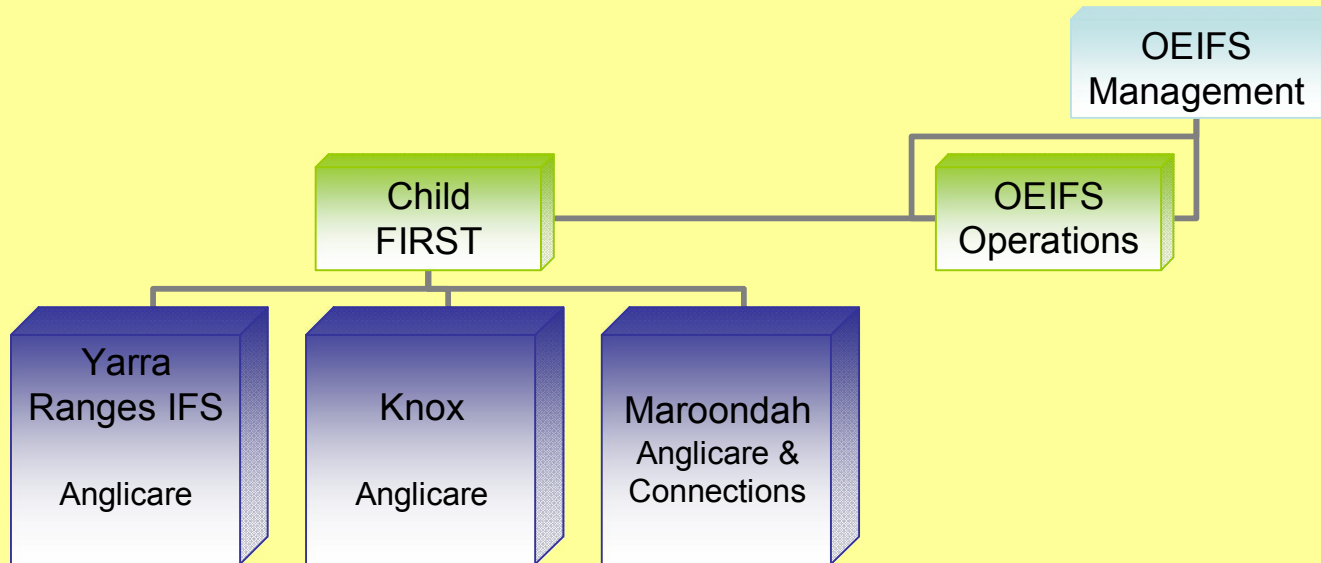
- 2 large family service providers: Anglicare and Connections in 'partnership' with DHS
- Anglicare and Connections entered a partnership with verbal shared commitment and responsibility and a range of different sub-contractual arrangements. Anglicare leads 3 of the 4 Service Agreements in the catchment
- The Partnership is based on historical relationships and good work together.  
It did not have the benefit of hindsight newer programs have had, beginning prior to changed legislation with its increasing expectations from government.
- Within the 'contracted partnership' both agencies are providing the same 'service type' across the catchment. Both agencies then provide different allied services.

# Outer East Partnership

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- The Outer East catchment is currently one of the strongest performing in the state
- However changes in organisational structures and staffing and the evolving regional service system and need for Alliance development means the concept of 'partnership' – with whom, for what purpose needs review.
- Feedback from DHS is positive about the program
- Child Protection reports are still increasing, but highest category is family, friends – a group hard to target.
- Quality data that can inform future community education and practice is currently not available from DHS.

# Outer East Partnership Structure



# Key elements of Partnership in Practice

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- The Relationship between CSO's
- Shared Responsibility – Mutual Accountability
- Level of Integration - Complementary Service Components
- Trust
- Partnership identity vs. Organisational identity
- Level of formality
- The role of government as partner
- Time
- Leadership and managing perceptions of control
- Involuntary (voluntary) partnerships
- Lead Agency/Individual Funding arrangements

# Relationship between CSO's

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- Generally better relationships lead to a better partnership
- Can lead to common recruitment practices, procedures and training
- Better Integration
- Capacity to assist other agencies at times of fluctuating demand
- New players or changes to agency philosophies can impact dynamics
  
- Relationships are not enough

# Shared Responsibility – Mutual Accountability

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- FMP – General acceptance that we are all in this together
- Commitment to joint risk management
- ‘Talk the talk’ – yet to be significantly tested
- When shared responsibility/risk does not equal shared responsibility/risk

# Level of integration – complementary service components

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- FMP – service structure developed that enables us not to tread on each other's toes too much
- OE – Tensions can occur in relation to delivering the same services in the same areas (Child FIRST is the exception)

# Trust

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- Basic rule for an effective partnership is trust
- Respect for individual agency philosophies
- Enables robust and direct conversations

# Partnership identity and Organisational identity

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- This can be a difficult area – issues have arisen in FMP in relation to partnership branding the use of a partnership letterhead which some organisations have opposed.
- Legal issues – Worker's identified as representing a non-incorporated entity
- Confusion for families as to who a worker represents, can be an issue in relation to complaints etc.

# Level of Formality

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- Structure vs Flexibility (informality) is a fine balance
- Structure is important but should not be the focus i.e. an MOU is needed but doesn't make a partnership work
- Need for more procedural guidance in relation to managing staff from other agencies

# Role of Government as Partner

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- Complexity of government (DHS) within a partnership as a funder, service provider and service user.
- DHS at times unclear as to its role particularly in relation to shared decision making principles characteristic of partnerships
- Can have a tendency to prioritise its own operational requirements eg reneging on its commitment to the provision of CBCPWs (FMP)

# Time

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- One of the biggest dilemmas of partnerships
- Considerable investment required to maintain relationships and enormous investment required to retrieve relationships
- Is it time well spent or feasible (not for some organisations in FMP)?
- Does Partnership result in better outcomes ?

# Leadership & managing perceptions of control

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- Leadership is important
- The nature of the FMP model requires Anglicare to undertake a role of finely balanced partnership facilitation without the overtly seeking to control the partnership
- FMP model means that no agency can go it alone which is a strong accountability measure
- OE – “shared leadership” – Contracted Leadership

# Involuntary (voluntary) Partnerships

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- Government policy has essentially required existing family services to partner
- Partnerships will only thrive if individual agencies are committed
- FMP has become more robust as a result of less committed CSO's leaving the Partnership
- A lot of time and energy can be exhausted on convincing a non-committed agency of the merits of partnership and developing a shared vision and purpose

# Lead Agency (sub-contracting) vs. Individual funding arrangements

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- Funding relationships can adversely affect partnerships
- CSO's being responsible for contract / performance management of other CSO's can negatively impact on relationships

# Final Reflections

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- Engagement principles in professional partnerships are the same as those required in good case practice
  - Principles of engagement are not rocket science but assume interest, respect, persistence and imagination.
  - Without effective engagement it is difficult to agree on and achieve effective outcomes
  - Compliance will have only momentary impact
  - Cooperation will create long term benefits
  - In order to engage we need to be able to share power
  - Collaboration, integration and relationships have always mattered.
  - Do forced partnerships add value?
  - We need a good sense of humour 😊
- *At the end of the day for all this activity are we..... and how do we know we are .....making a real difference for the children, youth and families we serve?*

# Final Reflection

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- Robert Fitzgerald yesterday spoke of the Challenge: We call for the “whole of government” but can the sector deliver whole of sector responses?.....or whole of Anglicare responses?

Our experience would suggest there is still much work that needs to be done if we are to work toward this outcome. 😊