



# Aboriginal In-home Support Service (AISS)

## Impact Evaluation Report Summary

### Background

The Aboriginal In-home Support Service (AISS) is an intensive in-home intervention that aims to keep Aboriginal children and young people safely at home or returned home with family and connected to country, culture and community. AISS works with families to build on their strengths, supporting them in addressing parenting issues and putting in place strategies to ensure the safety of children and young people.

AISS was initiated out of an acknowledgement from the Department of Communities (Communities/the Department) that to create better outcomes, there was a need to partner with and build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) so that Aboriginal services could serve the unique needs of Aboriginal families alongside Communities.

AISS is delivered by Wungening Moort, a contracted community sector and ACCO. Wungening Moort is a consortium made up of four service providers – Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, Coolabaroo Community Services, Ebenezer Aboriginal Corporation and Moorditj Koort.

Wungening Moort services four child protection corridors from four hubs (Cannington/Armadale, Fremantle/Rockingham, Mirrabooka/Joondalup and Perth/Midland).

### Key elements of the AISS model

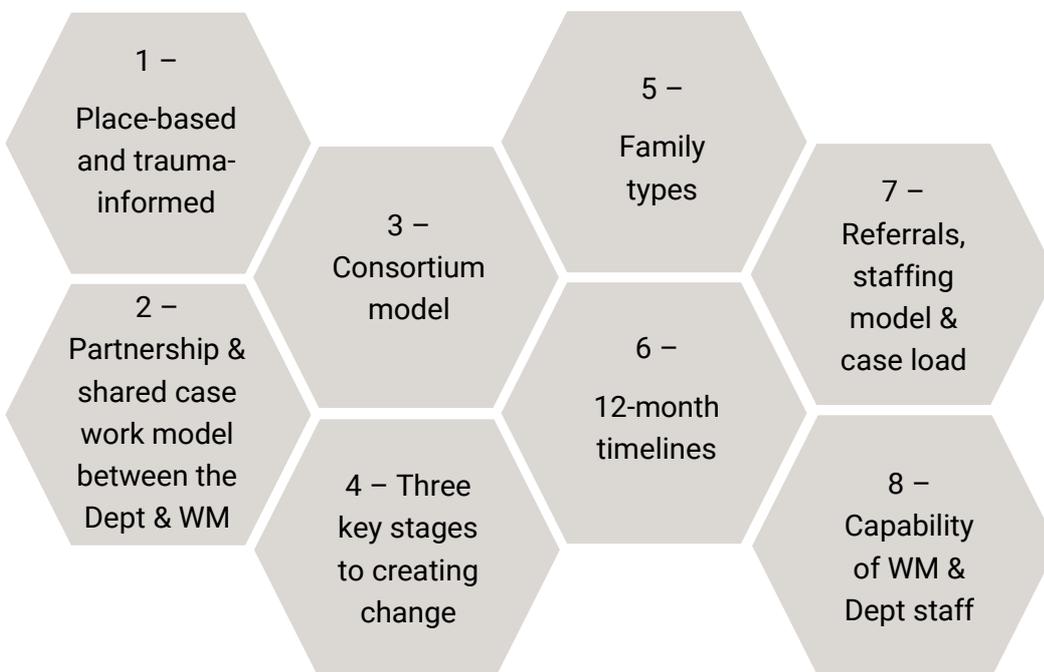


Figure 1: Elements primarily drawn from Wungening Moort's tender response to the department and from stakeholders' understanding of how the model was intended to run based on focus groups and interviews.

The service model is designed to work with families through three stages of change:

- Crisis – Focussing on engagement, assessment and responding to crisis concerns
- Finding stability and getting ready for change – Building family functioning and maintenance
- Change – Further development practical and parenting skills. Increasing empowerment.

Social Ventures Australia with support from Professor Victoria Hovane, an Aboriginal woman from Broome belonging to the Ngarluma, Jaru and Gooniyandi peoples and the senior research officer on the project were commissioned by Communities to conduct an independent evaluation.

As AISS has been operating for over two years, the Department was seeking to achieve two key purposes through this evaluation:

1. Assess the quality and success of implementation, delivery, and ongoing management of the program
2. Inform future design, development, investment and implementation decisions

This evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods approach drawing on stakeholder consultations (including with Wungening Moort, senior and District Department staff, and families), desktop research, AISS progress reports, and administrative data from the Department and Wungening Moort.

Social Ventures Australia finalised the impact evaluation report in February 2021 and developed 11 key recommendations.

The evaluation considered contracted outcomes but also four additional outcomes that emerged as important for families and the child protection system. (see figure below).

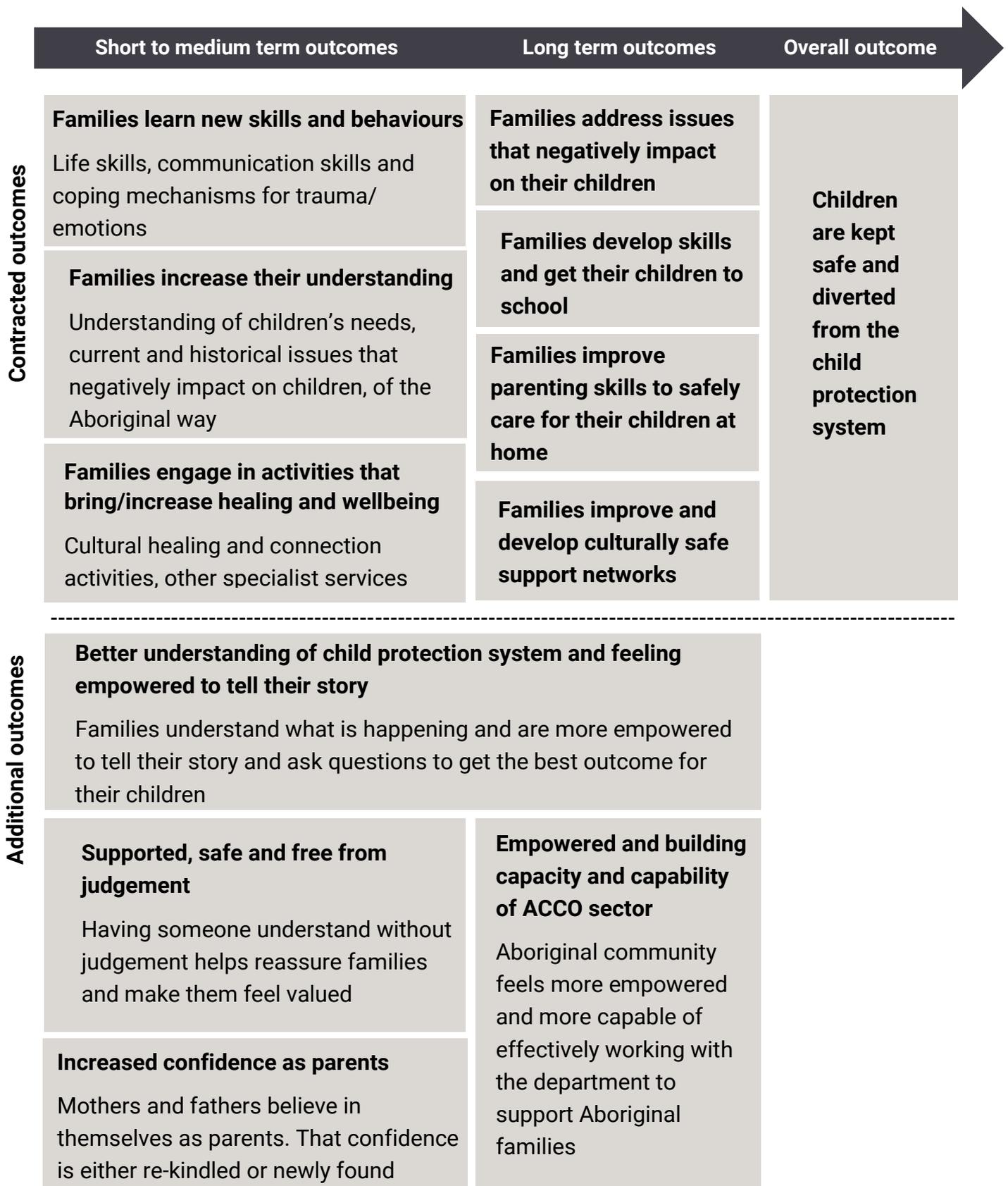


Figure 9: AISS outcomes

## Recommendations to improve AISS moving forward

### Partnership

#### **1. Strengthen the partnership between Communities and Wungening Moort (roles and responsibilities, mutual understanding of the program, communication)**

Develop standardised background materials that explain the program; why it exists, expected outcomes and how it works. Develop an operating framework that defines roles and responsibilities, processes for each stage from referral to exit, dispute resolution processes and communication protocols. Undertake compulsory induction for all new Communities district staff and Wungening Moort staff. Further investigate why some partnerships in districts are performing well and leverage off those learnings to improve partnerships in other areas.

#### **2. Reflect and learn from the partnership so far to identify new opportunities to build the ACCO service sector together**

Undertake a series of reflection sessions with Wungening Moort to learn from the partnership experience so far and identify opportunities to continue strengthening the ACCO service sector in WA.

### Program Model Design

#### **3. Review current stages and estimated timeframes for each stage and for the program overall**

Estimated timing (timeframe of service) should reflect the flexibility of the model and align with family needs. Recommendation 3 addresses the need to review stages and estimated timeframes for each stage. It also suggests co-developing a criterion to determine when families are ready to move onto the next stage or move to exit in order to help facilitate better agreement between the Department and Wungening Moort, allow more flexibility within the program and ensure the model aligns with family needs rather than pre-determined timelines.

#### **4. Review caseloads**

Wungening Moort adjusted their case load to preserve program quality and maximise potential to deliver outcomes. The need to review case load expectations and how those numbers translate to and drive family outcomes is required. Complexity of cases, service capacity and desired outcomes should be considered when setting any contractual performance measures such as case load expectations.

#### **5. Review and modify how the service supports reunification families**

Co-develop a more appropriate, targeted and coordinated approach to supporting reunification families. Considering what supports they need at different stages and what information must be shared early on from the Department and learning from previous reunification services.

#### **6. Wungening Moort to undertake more cultural healing and connection activities**

Cultural healing and connection activities could be a greater focus in service delivery. Examples include smoking ceremonies, on country trips, and connection with Elders.

#### **7. Review brokerage fee amounts per family**

Communities and Wungening Moort to agree on a suitable brokerage fee per family and the terms of use of those funds (there should be flexibility of use and clarity around how case support costs are utilised).

### **Family and Engagement**

#### **8. Improve coordination and clarity of family engagement processes from first contact to family selection to referral and beyond**

Co-define the family engagement journey and processes. Each stage should be well defined with considerations and approaches agreed upon. Co-develop family selection criteria and processes to ensure those selected for AISS are suitable and likely to achieve outcomes. Co-develop formal referral guidelines and processes to improve how referrals are triaged, prioritised, and managed in line with capacity.

### **Family Types**

#### **9. Decide whether State-wide Referral and Response Service (SRRS) families are appropriate for AISS and act accordingly depending on decision**

Communities and Wungening Moort to decide whether SRRS families should continue to be referred into AISS. If a decision is made to stop referring, make this clear to all referral pathways so that they are no longer included.

If a decision is made to keep SRRS families, Wungening Moort and the Department should ensure all family engagement processes are well defined for this cohort and included in recommendation 8. This will ensure that families are better informed, enabling increased engagement potential and efficiencies.

### **Capability and Capacity Building**

#### **10. Build the capability and capacity of Communities and Wungening Moort staff, leveraging opportunities to learn from each other**

Wungening Moort staff to benefit from more specialised child protection training and increase understanding of child protection processes overall and Communities staff to benefit from intensive cultural awareness training. By co-developing a “learn from each other” training program it will harness opportunities to learn from one another.

## Outcomes framework and reporting

### **11. Develop a theory of change, corresponding evaluation framework and improved outcomes reporting processes**

Outcomes should capture the full journey of change for families and be culturally appropriate. Indicators and data collection methods should also be developed.

Critically review current reporting and data collection methodologies and tools and co-design more effective and appropriate methods and tools that are aligned with the theory of change and evaluation framework.

**Communities will examine Social Venture Australia’s report and recommendations to develop an action plan. The action plan will drive the progression of viable actions and ensure the AISS, as a key community service, is realised to its full potential. Key actions will be published on the Communities website.**