



Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services Plus -

An expanded model of Aboriginal intensive family support and advocacy

December 2017



Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

About AbSec

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) is the peak Aboriginal organisation within the child and family sector in NSW. AbSec is committed to advocating on behalf of Aboriginal children, families and communities, to ensure they have access to the services and supports they need to keep Aboriginal children safe and provide them the best possible opportunities to fulfil their potential through Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

Central to this vision is the need to develop a holistic approach to Aboriginal child and family supports delivering universal, targeted and tertiary services within communities that cover the entire continuum of care and reflect the broader familial and community context of clients. Such services and supports would operate to mitigate risk factors or vulnerabilities thereby reducing the need for more intensive or invasive interventions, as well as ensuring that tailored and critical Aboriginal out-of-home care and after care services are provided to intervene in the cycle of disadvantage that continue to impact generations of Aboriginal families.

Our vision is that Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, and are raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture surrounded by holistic supports.

In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- 1) acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal communities;
- 2) acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal families;
- 3) underpinning the rights of Aboriginal people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children and families;
- 4) being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal control in delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities; and
- 5) committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive

Published December 2017

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Contents

About AbSec.....	1
Introduction	4
Background	4
Prevention.....	7
Restoration.....	7
Reinvestment	8
Purpose of Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services Plus	8
Eligibility, Referral and Intake	11
Eligibility.....	11
Referral	11
Intake	11
Service Elements.....	12
Commencement phase (weeks -1 to 3):.....	12
Skill building phase (weeks 4-12).....	13
Step-down phase (weeks 13-16).....	14
Information, advocacy and community development	14
Delivery Method	14
Connection to Other Supports.....	14
Follow-up and review.....	15
Staffing	15
Evaluation and Review.....	17

Introduction

Aboriginal children and young people continue to be over-represented across the statutory child protection system in NSW. In particular, Aboriginal children and young people are about 10 times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be removed from their families, and tend to remain in care longer. AbSec, as the Aboriginal child and family peak organisation, has advocated for a new approach across the continuum of care that empowers Aboriginal communities to design, develop and deliver the services and supports that Aboriginal families need. Such approaches ensure that services are tailored to the social and cultural needs of Aboriginal families, while also promoting accountability of service providers to the communities they serve.

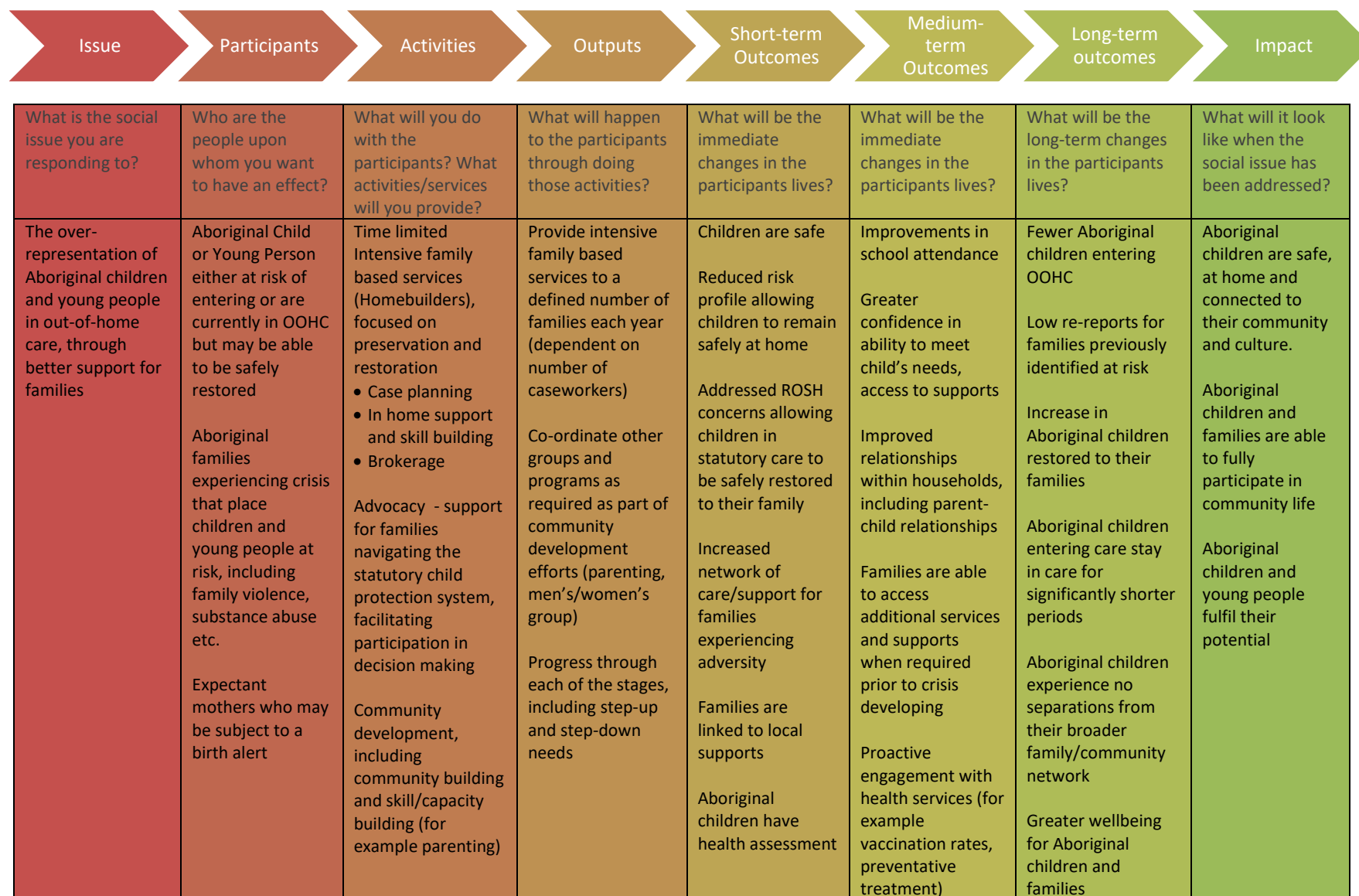
This paper applies a model framework developed by AbSec based on feedback received from practitioners. This model builds on two existing approaches that have been implemented with some effect with Aboriginal families and communities: Intensive Family Based Services (adapted from the Homebuilders model) and Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT), based on the Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (Lakidjeka), delivered by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). By combining these approaches, Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services Plus (Aboriginal IFBS+) outlines a model for family preservation, restoration, advocacy and community development that builds on the strengths of existing service strengths and practitioner experience and expertise to meet Aboriginal community expectations regarding the provision of flexible, culturally embedded services for Aboriginal children and young people, their families, and communities.

Background

There is significant recognition within the NSW child and family system regarding the need for greater investment in family preservation and restoration services to prevent entry into OOHC and to facilitate the safe reunification of children and young people with their families. This is particularly critical for Aboriginal communities, given the ongoing over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, and the greater period of time that Aboriginal children tend to remain in care.

To this end, AbSec has developed *Achieving a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Service System for NSW*, providing an overarching framework for the development of a state-wide network of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations delivering integrated services across the continuum of care. Building on this framework, AbSec has also developed *Our Families, Our Way: Strengthening Aboriginal families so their children can thrive*, emphasising the critical importance of Aboriginal family strengthening approaches to community efforts aimed at addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people within the statutory system.

Our Families, Our Way outlines a high level framework for the provision of Aboriginal family strengthening initiatives. Broadly, this approach can be represented in the following program logic:



AbSec has supported Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver specialised services operating at the crisis end of the continuum of care; Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services (AIFBS), based on the US Homebuilders Model, and Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT), based on the Victorian Lakidjeka model. These approaches include a number of key strengths. For example, the Homebuilders model is an established approach with growing evidence of efficacy with Aboriginal children and families, particularly when delivered by Aboriginal community controlled organisations. It is a time-limited, intensive service focused on strengthening families and addressing specific, identified risks that place Aboriginal children and young people at imminent risk of removal. The Lakidjeka model, implemented as Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) in NSW, supports Aboriginal families involved in the statutory child protection system and provides an important community voice in decisions about Aboriginal children and young people.

However the implementation of these models has not been without their challenges. Some Aboriginal practitioners have raised concerns about the fit of the Homebuilders model for Aboriginal children and families. Similarly, the PACT model has experienced challenges in its integration with the wider service system, with an evaluation demonstrating a significant mismatch in expectations across stakeholders. In particular, practitioners report often needing to go beyond the parameters of the model to support families to engage with services and supports and to develop critical community-level supports that may serve to prevent entries to care, or achieve the safe return of Aboriginal children to their families.

Similarly, the referral process often raises concerns for Aboriginal practitioners and communities, for both IFBS and PACT services. Until recently, all referrals are received from Family and Community Services, reflecting their positioning at the point of statutory intervention. Unfortunately, this singular referrer approach has introduced some challenges, positioning Family and Community Services as a gatekeeper of intensive family preservation and restoration services. By and large, Aboriginal community controlled organisations operating at this point in the continuum of care are not empowered to engage with FACS in an active way in determining service responses that might be offered to individual Aboriginal children and their families.

Further, Aboriginal practitioners and communities have expressed concerns about the lack of supports offered to families once children have entered the statutory system, and the need for greater focus on family restoration work so that Aboriginal children can safely return home. More recently, referrals from Aboriginal community controlled out-of-home care agencies have explored the role of these services in family restoration and reunification work, or in supporting kinship placement stability, however largely the referral process remains a significant concern for Aboriginal communities seeking to minimise potential harm to their children from all sources, including in the home and as a result of removal.

In considering the potential of these approaches within a broader localised Aboriginal child and family service system, AbSec has proposed developing a hybrid IFBS/PACT service model (Aboriginal IFBS+), building on the strengths identified in both service models. The Aboriginal IFBS+ model will provide intensive support to families where there is imminent risk of child removal by the statutory child protection system, as well as working in the broader community context to develop stronger communities of care for all Aboriginal children and young people and their families.

Prevention

That there is a clear need for Aboriginal-led strategies for family preservation is not disputed, and is a central pillar of *Their Futures Matter: A New Approach*, which describes the NSW Government's commitment to a new way of working within the child and family sector. In particular, this vision is for reform to take action to "support local leaders to work in partnership with government to design local, innovative child protection solutions, and build evidence for services that work for Aboriginal families" in order to "improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, and reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care". The Aboriginal IFBS+ represents one such Aboriginal-led approach, building on the strengths of existing approaches to develop an evidence base and implement a process of continuous improvement that seeks to drive ongoing innovation and service improvement through Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

Restoration

Aboriginal communities and practitioners have consistently identified the need to provide greater supports to families engaged with the statutory child protection system to facilitate safe restoration or family reunification. Often, when children are removed from birth families for their safety, welfare and wellbeing, families are no longer eligible for the services and supports they need to address the risk and safety issues identified, undermining the opportunity for restoration. That is, the focus on the immediate safety needs of children and young people undermines their long term wellbeing by failing to safeguard their right to remain connected to their family, and to live with them if possible. Rather, AbSec wishes to see a shift in practice culture that sees child removal as an opportunity for further intensive family supports rather than a solution to the risks identified.

In the first instance, Aboriginal IFBS+ should be engaged prior to removal, however it is also the case that there are many families whose children have been in the statutory system for a considerable period of time where restoration may be a possibility. As noted above, safety planning during the Commencement Phase will identify the actions to be taken should risk escalate at any point during work with families, however will seek to continue working towards family goals where possible, with the aim of addressing the safety and risk concerns while ensuring the immediate safety of children and young people.

However, it is also anticipated that families or accredited out-of-home care agencies may engage with Aboriginal IFBS+ services to work towards restoration. In such cases, a triage approach will identify the key issues to be addressed prior to the possibility of restoration, and support families to navigate the system to facilitate restoration (for example, connecting with legal services, engage with drug and alcohol treatment services etc.). This planning will also identify the point at which Aboriginal IFBS+ services will be engaged to provide intensive supports to achieve safety and to support the transition home for children and young people.

At this stage, the restoration function of Aboriginal IFBS is relatively new, and there is limited information available on the systems and service designs that best facilitate services. Further work and evaluation is needed to determine these elements in a data-driven way. However, it is likely that the principles of Aboriginal IFBS will be featured, namely a time-limited period of intensive supports with relevant step-down and follow up to ensure the changes are sustained. In this way, the service system for restoration will include "step up" issue identification and referral services, intensive

family based services to achieve safety and facilitate transition, and step down services to support sustainable change and ensure safety for children and families.

Reinvestment

A significant proportion of savings generated by communities as a result of diverting families from out-of-home care should be reinvested through Aboriginal community controlled organisations into further community development, including at the Aboriginal Community Response (Tier 1 - universal) and Aboriginal Family Strengthening (Tier 2- secondary) levels. By taking this approach, Family and Community Services will drive greater dividends in intensive family supports, as well as creating upstream investment to improve the capacity of communities to address challenges early and strengthen Aboriginal families and communities around Aboriginal children and young people.

Purpose of Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Services Plus

The existing Aboriginal IFBS and PACT models each play an important role in supporting Aboriginal children, families and communities to address issues associated with risk of harm and strengthening Aboriginal families and communities so children can thrive. The Aboriginal IFBS+ model seeks to build on the significant contribution of each of these approaches by creating a more integrated service offering for local Aboriginal communities.

The overarching goal of the Aboriginal IFBS+ model is to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people within the statutory system by effectively addressing risk of harm concerns that place Aboriginal children at risk, as well as supporting families to allow children to be safely restored. Recognising the important role that communities play in supporting families to raise children, including immediate and extended family as well as broader peer networks, the Aboriginal IFBS+ model seeks to enhance community-level supports for families, creating an integrated approach to family supports at the local level.

Put simply, Aboriginal IFBS+ is focused on strengthening Aboriginal families' capacity to meet their children's needs, enhancing community-level supports for families, and advocating on behalf of families within the statutory child protection system.

In achieving these aims, Aboriginal IFBS+ must address three main challenges:

1. Addressing the immediate challenges impacting on the family's ability to provide a safe and stable home (including external challenges such as adequate housing etc), with step-down supports to sustain changes achieved
2. Supporting parents to enact more appropriate and effective strategies with respect to their parenting and broader relationships that impact on their ability to provide a safe and stable home (including healing)
3. Strengthen community level responses and family engagement to support families to access effective formal and informal supports sooner, preventing harm

To achieve these goals, Aboriginal IFBS+ proposes intensive, time-limited in-home supports targeted at clearly identified risks, with step-down supports that promote the sustainability of changes achieved and seek to build on that momentum to further support change in families that reduce the risk of harm arising in the future, as well as providing a trusted entry point for Aboriginal families and community members seeking support. Drawing on the data gathered through these services, and the

position of Aboriginal community controlled organisations within their community, these services will also design and implement community development programs aimed at addressing identified issues within local communities that contribute to risk. Specifically, Aboriginal IFBS+ will provide:

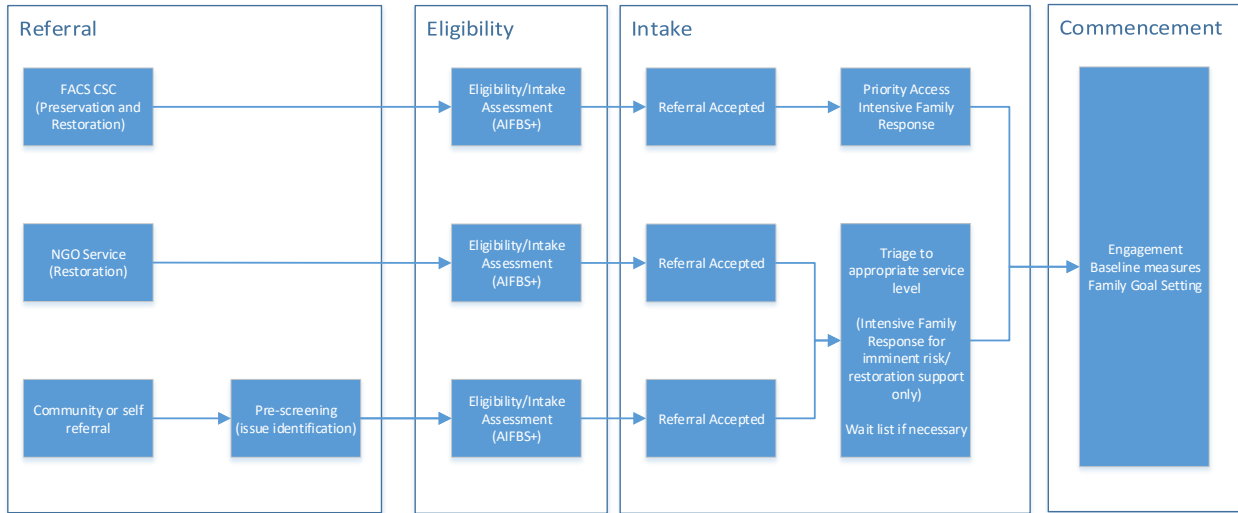
- time-limited intensive family based interventions to address risk concerns
- advocacy and support services to assist families with accessing family supports, restoration planning and addressing risk so that children’s time in care is as brief as possible
- support intake and step-down processes that positions intensive services within a broader holistic service system for Aboriginal children and families
- community development activities to assist communities with addressing systemic child protection concerns, leading to greater impact in strengthening families and keeping children in the home environment safely

The design of the Aboriginal IFBS+ model reflects the following service results logic:

Domain	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Medium Term Outcomes	Long term outcomes
Intensive Family Based Support	Number of families/children receiving Aboriginal IFBS+ service Number of families completing Aboriginal IFBS+	Improvements in assessed strengths/Reduction in assessed risk (SARA, Family Assessment tool, at referral/intake relative to closure) Successful restoration to family Preservation of imminent placement breakdown Families report feeling supported	Reduced entry to care (proportion of families entering statutory care 6/12 months) Reduced re-report (proportion of families reported at ROSH 6/12 months) Reduced placement breakdown/movements	Increased proportion of Aboriginal children safe at home (preservation/restoration) Placements for Aboriginal children are more stable
Transition Supports	Number of families supported by step-up/step-down supports	Families report feeling supported Increased access to/participation in early intervention supports Continued positive change to strengths/risk	Aboriginal children supported in safe and stable homes (proportion of families reported at ROSH, relapse etc)	Reduction in ROSH Risk is reduced (notifications are more likely to be assessed as lower risk)
Advocacy	Number of families supported to participate in child protection decision making	Increased family participation in decision making Identification of family connections/cultural needs		Increase in successful preservation/restoration Aboriginal children spend less time in statutory care

				Increased compliance with the ACPP
Community Development	Endorsed community development strategy Community development activities aligned to strategy	Outcomes aligned to strategy (might include assessed parenting skills, growth/strengthening of informal support networks for new parents, increased financial literacy etc)	Aboriginal people/families feel better supported/empowered in their community Greater participation in community	Reduction in ROSH reports Improved social and economic outcomes aligned to community development plan

Eligibility, Referral and Intake



Eligibility

Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Support and Advocacy Service (Aboriginal IFBS+) will serve the families of Aboriginal children and young people, and communities, who are experiencing crisis, specifically:

- At imminent risk of removal by the statutory child protection system, or
- Currently engaged with the Children’s Court system, or
- Seeking to restore/reunify children with their families, and
- Undertake collective community activities to address systemic concerns

Referral

The Aboriginal IFBS+ model utilises a diversified approach to referral, including self-referral, community outreach and referrals as part of a holistic local service system, as well as direct referral from FACS (including those not allocated through FACS allocation processes). This recognises the capability for agencies to do more, locally within communities, to benefit families. The referral process must include the key information regarding service eligibility, clearly articulating the key risks or concerns related to the family as well as known strengths and supports.

Diversified referral streams will also improve access to restoration services, allowing soft entry points for Aboriginal families seeking restoration of their children, or for out-of-home care providers to engage with specialised support services to achieve reunification of Aboriginal children and young people with their families.

Intake

Reflecting the diversity of referral pathways under the Aboriginal IFBS+ model, a robust intake procedure is required to prioritise families experiencing the greatest need. Given the imperative of providing effective supports and diversion for families at risk of imminent intervention by the statutory child protection system, those families referred by FACS will be designated the highest priority. Likewise, in order to support the timely restoration of Aboriginal children and young people to their families, Aboriginal families seeking restoration will also be triaged and allocated to the service

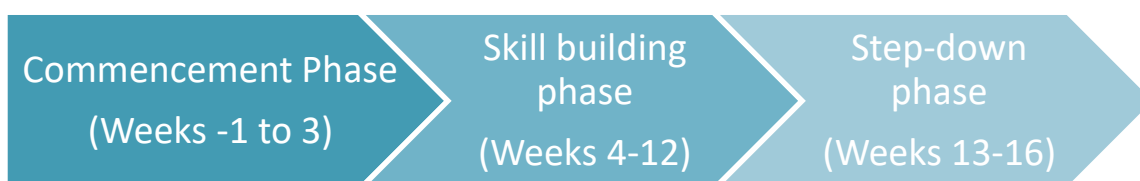
intensity aligned to identified need. This assessment will include the establishment of a service plan that includes “step up” service responses where needed around the point of restoration to increase the likelihood of restoration success and minimise risk of re-entry to care. Families identified by FACS but not allocated on the basis of the risks present, and those self-referring will be allocated the lowest priority for high intensity service responses, with triage seeking to provide effective diversionary supports where available. Where services are not available, a waiting list will be established, with regular review and assessment of new and existing referrals to prioritise families according to need.

Similarly, review of the waiting list and referrals received will be regularly conducted in partnership with FACS at the local level to align service balance with need and ensure that lower-intensity responses are properly resourced to prevent escalation towards the high intensity response before preservation services are received. In addition to improving service responsiveness, this process seeks to guard against “service creep” towards the more intensive end, thereby failing to intervene early and divert families at the earliest possible point.

Finally, triage processes used in intake will be regularly reviewed, drawing on data about the service responses received by families to further hone intake assessments. In particular, the frequency with which families experience a shift in service intensity required soon after assessment will be used to validate and continuously improve intake procedures.

Service Elements

The Aboriginal IFBS+ service is expected to be a time-limited model targeted to the families at the precipice of statutory intervention, consistent with the Homebuilders model. However, given the concern about the fit of the Homebuilders model for Aboriginal families, there is a need for some degree of flexibility in the delivery of the service, tailored to the specific needs of families. At the same time, service provision must be focussed on achieving change that can be sustained within the broader family network, and guard against creating an overreliance on intensive services. For this reason, the period of engagement with individual families will be monitored to ensure accountability in service delivery.



Commencement phase (weeks -1 to 3):

IFBS+ services commence upon acceptance of a referral. It is critical at this point to clearly identify the reason(s) for referral, articulating the risk issues that need to be addressed in order for children to safely remain at home.

This includes:

- Clearly stating the risks which, if not addressed, would result in the child(ren)’s removal from their family within the next 1-2 months, with the aim of preserving the family, or
- Clearly stating the steps required to safely restore children currently in care to their family

The commencement phase is focused on engaging with families to build rapport, identifying issues that impact on their ability to provide safety for their children, and scoping broader family and informal community supports that can contribute to safety.

Aboriginal Family-Led Decision Making (AFLDM) is an important participatory approach to achieving safety for Aboriginal children and families. Community-based (that is, independent of the statutory system) AFLDM approaches may support engagement and create momentum for change, as well as establishing safety plans if risks to the child escalate at some point during the service delivery. Safety plans should include identification of an appropriate family placement, ensuring that children remain with people that are known to them within their family support network, limiting trauma and disruption that often accompanies removal.

In addition to identifying risks and resources, this early engagement should also clearly articulate signs of success, the outcomes to be achieved through the service provision. In this way, early engagement develops a family-led action plan and creates momentum for change.

For restoration, this phase identifies the challenges to be addressed in order for children to be safely returned home.

The Commencement phase will end with the benchmarking of risks/issues (including use of the North Carolina Family Assessment Scales consistent with the Homebuilders model), as well as strengths, resources and other coping skills, completed by practitioners and involving families and other relevant stakeholders. This will form a key pre-service measure to compare against as the service progresses, allowing families to appreciate the changes achieved.

Key outputs of this phase include an agreed understanding of risks identified, and a family-led action plan to achieve the changes needed.

Skill building phase (weeks 4-12)

Having established the signs of success and built momentum within the family and broader network of change, the middle phase of IFBS+ includes intensive work to build the skills and resilience of families. This includes:

- Building emotion regulation skills
- Building positive strategies to challenges, including parenting, relationships and coping strategies
- Engaging and strengthen social supports and creating helpful service connections.

At the midpoint of this phase (approximately week 7-8), a review would be undertaken with the family and their relevant supports and stakeholders (possibly as a second AFLDM gathering) to check in on the progress of the service and ensure that the intervention is on track. This is a great opportunity to celebrate achievements of the family network as well as identify any additional supports needed or new and emerging challenges that need to be addressed

The skill building phase ends with the achievement meeting, marking the completion of the intensive phase of the program and the transition to the step-down phase. This meeting provides an opportunity for families and services providers to reflect on their achievements and shift the focus to sustaining the changes made, including engagement of other local services and supports to continue to address the underlying causes of risk present in the family.

Step-down phase (weeks 13-16)

This phase is focused on supporting engagement with ongoing community supports and other step-down measures aimed to help families to sustain the gains made through the service without relying on ongoing intensive supports. Building on the AFLDM processes, this phase will include engagement strengthening informal and community supports, while maintaining some existing service elements targeted at relapse prevention.

Information, advocacy and community development

Drawing from the identified strengths of Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) Services, the Aboriginal IFBS+ model would likewise include a component of family advocacy and support as well as community development and information sharing. This includes supporting Aboriginal families to successfully navigate the statutory child protection system from the earliest point of contact, as well as providing a community contact point for families seeking the restoration of their child(ren) to their care. While not intended as a legal service, this service would engage with other existing services to educate families and communities on the statutory child protection system, the legal rights of Aboriginal children and families, and provide direct advocacy and support for families currently engaged with the statutory child protection system or seeking restoration.

Delivery Method

Connection to Other Supports

As part of AbSec's vision for a holistic Aboriginal service system across the continuum of care, it is important that all elements are positioned within a broader network of integrated child and family supports, and includes a mechanism for connecting families with other services. For Aboriginal IFBS+ services, this includes connecting families with less intense supports to further strengthen families and reduce the risk of re-reporting. This approach seeks to build on the trust and momentum achieved through the intensive service stage to engage with additional supports that may help families achieve their goals.

AbSec has outlined the key tiers of service intervention within the targeted prevention/early intervention space in *Our Families, Our Way*. These tiers include:

Low level (Diversionary Response): key worker supports families to navigate formal and informal services and supports, focused on strengthening parenting skills and addressing family challenges, linked with community development initiatives (Case load 1:50 or 60)

Medium level (Targeted Preventive Response): part diversion, part low intensity family case management responding to identified challenges through universal supports and Parent Support networks (case load 1: 25 or 35)

High level (Targeted Family Response): direct family case management to address identified challenges and preserve families (case load 1:16)

Significant level (Intensive Family Response): intensive casework practice to address imminent risk of removal (case load 1:2 or 3).

The Aboriginal IFBS+ model operates at the Significant level (Intensive Family Response), providing intense family based supports with a case load ratio of 2 to 3 families per practitioner. In addition,

transition supports including step-down and step up elements can be understood as operating at the High level (Targeted Family Response) and Medium level (Targeted Preventative Response), providing lower intensity case management, providing family case management to address identified challenges with a significantly higher case load. Similarly, the community development aspects are intended to provide low (Diversionary Response) and medium (Targeted Preventive Response) level services to link families with the relevant supports and skills and build supportive communities of care around families that may benefit from additional supports. As such, Aboriginal IFBS+ is focused on providing an integrated response across the targeted (secondary) level.

Follow-up and review

In addition to the review points during service provision (at Weeks 7 and 12), there will also be follow up points following case closure to examine the efficacy of service delivery and ensure achievements are sustained long term. Follow ups will include engagement with the family and, where applicable, FACS, to identify any subsequent re-reports at 3, 6 and 12 months. The short, medium and longer term outcomes that may be achieved through the Aboriginal IFBS+ approach are outlined in the program logic presented previously.

Staffing

Aboriginal IFBS+ may include the following roles: Manager Casework, Intensive Family Based Support Practitioners, Family Support Practitioner (covering Targeted Family Response, Targeted Preventive Response and Diversionary Response for lower intensity, step-up and step-down supports), Community Development Officer and Administrative Officer.

The exact staffing complement will be determined by local Aboriginal community governance processes (including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations) in partnership with Family and Community Services, and may include different distributions of practitioners across these roles, including practitioners covering various roles in this continuum. For example, a practitioner might combine Intensive Family Based Support roles with Community Development tasks, taking a reduced caseload to complete community development projects. Aboriginal communities should be flexibly supported to establish the staffing complement required for their community, informed by data-driven processes regarding local need (for example, the number of families in need of support across the various service intensity levels outlined above).

The Aboriginal IFBS+ Manager Casework will be an experienced intensive family support practitioner and is expected to offer practice support, supervision and quality assurance for all practitioners in the team. This might include active field work in support of the allocated caseworker, observation, practice support and coaching, as well as casework supervision and professional development roles. The Aboriginal IFBS+ Manager Casework will not carry an independent caseload, in recognition of the active role expected to be taken to support casework and skill development of practitioners in their team.

Aboriginal IFBS+ Caseworkers will be supported to spend the majority of their time in the field working directly with families to support the changes needed, aiming to spend approximately 80% of their time working directly with families.

For example, in a 35 hr week:

- 28 hours family work (up to three families per worker, averaging 8-10 hours per week, however flexibility within the service to account for complexity and other factors such as travel etc.)
- 1 hours follow up with previous families at defined points
- 3 hours supervision/self care
- 3 hours administrative tasks, record keeping etc.

It is noted that this breakdown is indicative of the broader aggregate of service delivery, and would vary from week to week depending on current workloads, intervention phase and follow up and advocacy requirements.

In line with these processes, a full-time practitioner would be expected to support between 6 to 9 families per year, depending on the size of families (noting that the increased logistics and complexity of large sibling groups of four or more children requires additional consideration with respect to practitioner load).

Practitioners will receive training in the Homebuilders model and ongoing practice support in working with Aboriginal families to achieve change. This training will be focused on establishing a tool kit of skills that practitioners can apply as needed to support families, focused around the following domains:

- Engagement and motivating change
- Safety assessment and planning for safety
- Social, emotional and family skill building
- Practice skills, including record keeping and evaluation

Consistent with the Homebuilders approach, individual elements within these domains should be considered through a family-focused lens, ensuring that the approaches are attuned to the social and cultural needs of families. For Aboriginal communities, this is best achieved through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations themselves, with AbSec providing a centralised avenue for practitioner training and development, including adapting models alongside Aboriginal practitioners and communities. This will help to create a state-wide community of Aboriginal practice, further refining and distributing tailored tools and approaches. In line with a workforce development approach, efforts to integrate the Homebuilders training with formalised qualifications through an appropriate Registered Training Organisation should be considered.

The Aboriginal IFBS+ model also includes practitioners delivering direct case management to support as part of the step-down and step-up services. This role requires significant experience in family support and child protection, including assessment and case management. Given the significantly lower case load intensity, only one step-down practitioner is required for each team. In smaller teams, this role may be balanced alongside the community development role to create a single full-time equivalent role, however this balance should be determined by local Aboriginal community governance processes (supported by relevant data) to tailor services to local need and community priorities.

As noted above, the community development role will operate at a significant lower level of intensity, and be focused on establishing community-focused programs and services to strengthen families and

support informal networks of care around children and families within the community. This is consistent with the approach that achieving improved outcomes for children and young people requires investment in the capacity and capabilities of important adults within their community. Community Development officers will have a foundation in child development and child and family support, as well as project management.

Evaluation and Review

Outcomes of the Aboriginal IFBS+ process will be flexible to the needs of Aboriginal families. However, to ensure that services are accountable to the families and communities they serve and drive continuous improvement, evidence-based processes focused on outcomes and impacts for Aboriginal children and families will be routinely measured and reported. These measures are articulated in the Service Results Logic, and will be centred around outcomes achieved for children and young people, while also including important practice and performance measures (including output measures) that may inform ongoing service improvements.

Measures will include:

- Outcomes:
 - Multi-domain assessment of family strengths and challenges
 - Change in strengths and challenges (pre- and post- intervention)
 - Outcome of risk-reassessment
 - Completion – goals achieved
 - Re-report for risk of significant harm (6 and 12 months)
- Outputs:
 - Number of families
 - Referred and meeting criteria
 - Progress through the phases
 - Completing

The focus of Aboriginal IFBS+ data collection will be on changes achieved for families. This will use a tailored family assessment tool that provides an assessment of the strengths and challenges present in a family, in particular identifying the specific areas of risk that are the focus of the referral. Families referred by Family and Community Services will have this assessment completed by the casework practitioner as part of the referral process. An independent assessment will be completed by the Aboriginal IFBS+ practitioner during the Commencement phase. This multi-rater initial assessment will set the framework for action, with key referral goals aligned to the specific risk of significant harm concerns identified. Additional goals will be set by families through their engagement with the service as part of case planning activities, including through Aboriginal family-led decision making processes. This assessment will reflect key domains including (but not limited to) safety, parenting capacity, drug and alcohol, family violence, and family and community connectedness.

This assessment will be reviewed at the midpoint review, allowing families and practitioners to reflect on achievements towards the identified goals reflected in the measures. A final multi-rater independent assessment will then be completed by the Aboriginal IFBS+ and Family and Community Services practitioner at the completion of the intervention, contributing to a risk re-assessment to inform further decision making and case planning through collaborative Aboriginal family-led decision making processes. This final assessment will allow measurement of the changes achieved through the

intervention period, as well as supporting families to identify additional priorities or goals, linking families to the necessary services and response tiers.

Evaluation will include the voice of children and families, through survey measures or semi-structured interviews at key points (entry, step down/closure, follow up). Domains will include participation/empowerment, changes achieved (aligned to referral goals), and overall whether they felt the service was ultimately beneficial to them. These measures will be used at the service level to support workforce development, and more broadly to improve service alignment to the needs of families.

In the longer term, rates at which families are re-reported at risk of significant harm within 6 and 12 month intervals will also be assessed, taking into account the reasons for re-report relative to the referral goals and initial assessment. This will allow overall family strengthening and sustainability to be assessed, as well as identifying additional key areas of service improvement. Broader systems measures such as child engagement in community activities (including education), reduction in family stressors (housing, health, justice) and the strengthening of formal and informal support networks will also be included.

Output measures will also be included, such as the number of families referred, accepted and completing the service, the period of time that families are engaged and their progress through the three distinct phases of the model.

As noted above, intake and triage process will also be regularly reviewed, allowing for improvements to initial assessment and referral pathways and further aligning the service response to the needs of Aboriginal children and families.

Aboriginal community controlled organisations will report quarterly, focused particularly on qualitative report and feedback from Aboriginal families and other stakeholders, given the service periods involved. This regular reporting and feedback will be aggregated at 6 monthly intervals, supporting the strengthening of practice and building an evidence base. As more Aboriginal community-controlled organisations transition to this broad model, shared reporting processes will support comparison within and across services to further build the evidence base and strengthen the model.

Following establishment, and at regular intervals thereafter, a formal evaluation of the service model will be undertaken, focused on further strengthening evidence, and supporting critical reflection and continuous improvement of the model. This commitment to regular ongoing reporting, the integration of system, practitioner and client data and feedback and regular periodic evaluation reflects the Aboriginal child and family sector's commitment to service system excellence, improvement and accountability.