

Sure Steps Families

Accessing Service

Systems Project



Sure Steps was established in 2017 by YFS Ltd. in collaboration with Logan Together and funded by the Department of Housing and Public Works. This unique and innovative family coaching program works with vulnerable families living in public housing who are experiencing tenancy difficulties and have a child under eight.

Encompass Family and Community was commissioned by the Sure Steps Reference Group¹ to:

- identify and analyse barriers to service access for Sure Steps families
- consider strategies for addressing those barriers.



Service Needs

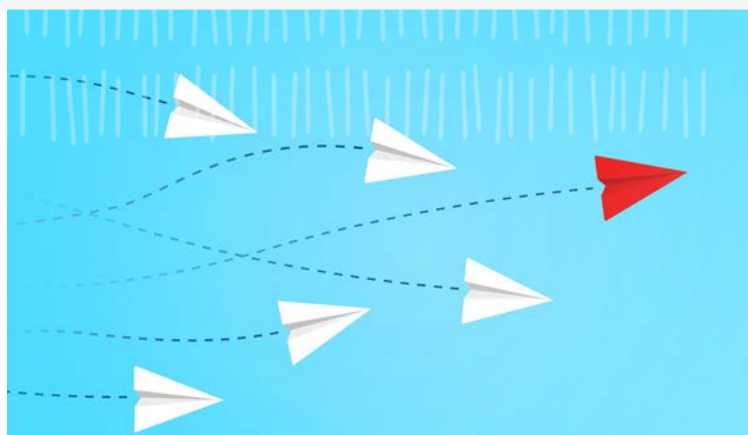
Sure Steps families present with multiple, high and complex needs, including domestic and family violence, trauma, homelessness and mental health.

These issues are cumulative and compounding, making families more vulnerable to crises, reducing their capacity to respond, and increasing the risk of poor outcomes for children.

As such, families require access to multiple and diverse services (for the whole family and individual members), across different systems (mental health, disability, etc) and at different levels (universal, targeted, specialist).



¹Consisting of representatives from Logan Together, YFS and the Logan Housing Service Centre



Navigating the service system

Resource-poor families start 'behind the eight-ball' when it comes to negotiating access to services.

To adequately support families, Sure Steps Family Coaches require the capacity for:

- 'horizontal' reach across service systems
- 'vertical' stretch within systems silos.

Barriers to Service Access

For families to access the support they need, services must exist, be visible, available and responsive to families' needs.

The Encompass report identified barriers at each of these levels.

Exist

Visible

Available

Responsive

Key gaps in the Logan area include:

- paediatric assessment and treatment services
- allied health services for children and adults
- case management services in the mental health field
- in-home and longer-term support options for families.

Visibility is obscured by:

- the existence of multiple siloed service systems that are not well connected.

Availability is hampered by:

- long wait times
- limited opening hours
- inappropriate facilities for children
- inconsistent information
- use of jargon
- presumptions of English proficiency and computer literacy.

Responsiveness is impeded by:

- a lack of trauma-informed approaches
- a lack of flexibility
- negative, judgmental or culturally inappropriate experiences.

Impact of service access barriers upon families

Common experiences include:

- The bounce-around – where families are referred back and forth between service providers, wasting energy, time and resources in multiple intake processes, often without gaining a service, leaving families frustrated
- The domino effect – where interactions with one part of the system create a negative 'flow-on' effect upon families' circumstances (e.g. not attending a ParentsNext appointment triggers a cut off of Centrelink payments, making it difficult to pay rent)
- Stuck in the middle - when the requirements of different services do not 'join up' well leaving families feeling trapped in a space between services (e.g. lack of identification documents or immunisation requirements prevent enrolment in kindergarten)
- A corridor of doors – when families do what is required to go through a door, expecting to gain assistance, only to find another door with more requirements.

Moving forward

There needs to be a fundamental shift in how service systems understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable families with young children.

Potential strategies for addressing barriers include:

- strategic and collective advocacy to address identified service gaps
- design services to improve availability (including out of hours, in-home, longer-term support)
- develop a "Connector-Receptor" Network of key contact points in each service, to enable access across and with in systems silos (by identifying short cuts through processes, unclogging blockages, fast-tracking intake, and unlocking resources such as discretionary funding)
- adopt a 'family team' concept, consisting of cross-system service providers committed to a specific family
- establish a shared understanding of the impacts of trauma and disadvantage
- find out what families think – actively construct opportunities for families' voices to be heard and fed into service design
- investigate a 'family-to-family' peer support approach for enhancing service access.

'Systems literacy' versus 'family literacy'

The service system expects that families have a reasonable degree of 'systems literacy', that they are able to advocate for themselves, understand processes and have access to telephones, computers and transport. This assumption is not realistic for families with complex needs created by trauma and disadvantage.

Rather, service systems need to be 'family literate', to understand and respond to the needs and experiences of those they seek to support, and to design services accordingly.

"There appears to be a fundamental mismatch between the intentions of the service system and the experience that Sure Steps families can have of service provision."

For more information contact communications@yfs.org.au