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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A literature scan of international context
and overseas programmes 2019

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**ORANGA
TAMARIKI**
Ministry for Children

EVIDENCE CENTRE

TE POKAPŪ TAUNAKITANGA

Aurora Centre, 56 The Terrace, Wellington

The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Team works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people and their whānau.

Email: research@ot.govt.nz

Author: Dr Iain Matheson

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this short literature scan is to provide the international context and an overview of overseas programmes that are similar to the Strengthening Families programme in Aotearoa New Zealand. This literature scan supplements the research report 'Strengthening Families: Research into the programmes function, history, and changes up to 2019.' (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2020).

Background

What is Strengthening Families?

Strengthening Families in Aotearoa New Zealand is a programme for whānau/families with tamariki/children who need help and support, where a coordinator helps the family with a 'structured interagency case conferencing' to coordinate services across government agencies. The primary purpose is to help families with multiple issues by providing one 'place to go' instead of having to approach several government agencies, thereby providing families with access to coordinated and integrated services and support. Strengthening Families was first established in 1997 and now operates in 32 areas with one or more part-time or full-time coordinators per area. Over most of the history of Strengthening Families, the focus has been on providing early intervention to families.

While Strengthening Families has changed over time, the current model largely reflects the model that was articulated by 11 government agencies in 2006. These agencies include Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children, Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), Department of Corrections, Department of Internal Affairs, District Health Boards, Housing New Zealand Corporation, Inland Revenue, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, and the New Zealand Police. While a coordinator looks after the family initially, a single government agency then becomes the lead agency for the family to coordinate other services.

Strengthening Families performs various tasks and has various goals to help families. For instance, Strengthening Families aims to be a more efficient and effective service and help families to build their strengths and resilience. It also facilitates access to other support services and resources and provides a wrap-around service to ensure that children and their families get the support they need.

According to a recent review (MSD, 2015), Strengthening Families as a model is varied in delivery and operation across regions, and coordinators and facilitators/lead agencies act with some degree of autonomy and independence.

Background to the literature scan report

The literature scan included conventional commercially and academically published books and journal articles, other publisher reports and material (grey literature), and a scan of websites. The included literature can be grouped into the following three categories:

1. There is a very small body of literature on Strengthening Families in New Zealand; it mainly covers the period from 1999 to 2006 (for example, Christchurch City Council,

n.d.; Majumdar, 2006; Maharey, 2003; Ministry of Social Development, 2005; Ministry of Social Policy, 1999; Walker, 2001).

2. Evidence-based and systematic review websites: Several recommended (SuPERU, 2016) evidence-based and systematic review websites were searched for any evidence-based or informed programmes that were similar to Strengthening Families. The scan included the following sites:
 - Blueprints;
 - Campbell Collaboration;
 - California Evidence Based Clearing House for Child Welfare;
 - Cochrane Library;
 - Crime Solutions;
 - Investing in Children; and
 - Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
3. Early Intervention models were also identified, and some overseas programmes examined.

This literature report discusses the international context for Strengthening Families and overseas programmes, and covers the following:

- Strengthening Families programmes overseas;
- Four Contextual Models and Frameworks;
- Strengthening Families-type programmes listed on international evidence-based websites; and
- Relevant overseas programs and services more closely aligned to New Zealand's Strengthening Families.

FINDINGS

Strengthening Families programmes overseas

While very different to Strengthening Families in New Zealand, three relevant overseas programmes that carry the name 'Strengthening Families' have been identified, as follows:

Strengthening Families Program, United States (and in up to 35 other countries)

The *Strengthening Families Program* is a "14-session, evidence-based parenting skills, children's social skills, and family life skills training program specifically designed for high-risk families. Parents and children participate in SFP, both separately and together. Group Leader Manuals contain a complete lesson for every session. Parents' and children's handouts are also provided for every session" (Strengthening Families Program, n.d.). Different versions of the programme are available depending on the ages of children and whether they were highly targeted. There is also a home-view DVD and online version. The face-to-face 14-week program has a strong focus on preventing alcohol and drug abuse. However, the program can also be used in contexts such as child welfare, home visiting, child abuse and neglect prevention, and early care and education (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

Materials and training are delivered through a network of five organisations; in the United States there is also a *Strengthening Families National Network* which includes national partner organisations and leadership teams from implementing states. The Strengthening Families Program also operates in Australia (Burn, Lewis, McDonald, & Toumbourou, 2019; Nest What Works for Kids, n.d.).

Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC), United Kingdom

SFSC is "an inclusive [universal] evidence-based [13 week] parenting programme, designed to promote protective factors which are associated with good parenting and better outcomes for children. SFSC has enjoyed success with parents from a number of backgrounds, including African American and minority ethnic parents, teenaged parents, parents with learning disabilities and parents from marginalised communities, including those with experience of drugs, alcohol or violence." (Race Equality Foundation, 2018). An online six-week introductory programme is also available.

Strengthening Families Australia

Strengthening Families Australia (different to the US Strengthening Families Program above) is "an independent voice for families navigating the child protection system. SFA is a not for profit community service" (Strengthening Families Australia, 2018)

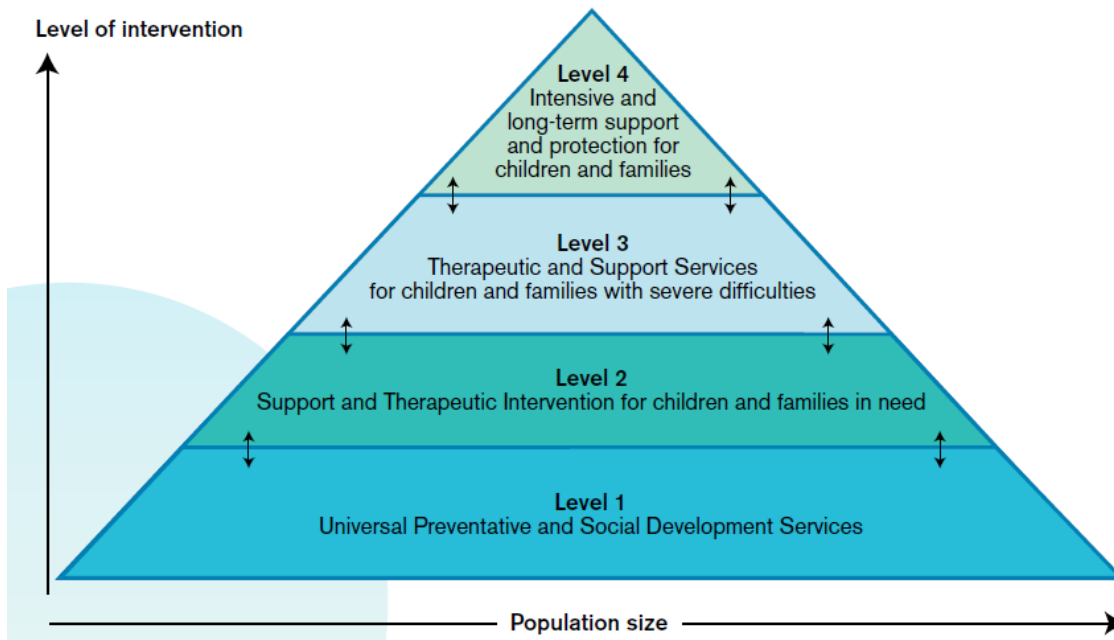
Four Contextual Models and Frameworks

The Hardiker Model

In the UK in the 1990s, and building on an extra logical perspective, Pauline Hardiker and colleagues developed a model to help understand different levels of need within populations of children. This

long established four-level model is widely used in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (Owen, 2010).

Figure 1: The Hardiker Model



Level one: This level refers to mainstream services that are available to all children, such as healthcare, education, leisure, and other community-based services. It may also include mainstream services that are available to the whole community but are targeted at disadvantaged communities.

Level two: Level two represent services to children that have some additional needs. These services are characterised by referral, and full parental consent to negotiation, e.g. behaviour support, parenting support, additional education services, and support for children who are deemed vulnerable through assessment of what they need is, and via specific target services provided by education, health, social services, law-enforcement, and the voluntary sector.

Level three: This level represents support to families or individual children and young people where they are chronic or serious problems. Support is often provided through a complex mix of services which usually need to work together well in order to provide the best support. State intervention can have a high profile of this level. Examples would be children where there are child protection risks or who have come before the courts.

Level four: Level four represents support for families and individual children or young people where the family has broken down temporarily or permanently, and where the child or young person may be in residential or foster care. It can also include young people in youth custody or prison, or as an inpatient due to disability or mental health problems.

3Cs Interagency Collaboration Model

Collaboration has been defined by The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (2013) as the “means of producing something joined and new, from the interactions of people or organisations, their knowledge and resources”. While not new, integrated social services are

“increasingly being seen as key to addressing service fragmentation and inefficiencies: (Superu, 2015, p.1.), and the literature continues to support the notion that “collaboration between agencies and disciplines is most effective and most appropriate for vulnerable and at-risk families...[as] these families often have multiple and complex problems that cannot be resolved by a single service provider” (McDonald & Rossier, 2011, p.6).

ARACY (2013) has developed the following table that can help in exploring the nature of Strengthening Families inter-professional and organisational relationships (and purpose, level of integration, and contribution required), whether that be at the point of referral, around the table at meetings with families, with and between contract holders, and between those on the Local Management Group or organisations at a local, regional or national level.

Table 1: Relationship continuum: characteristics of the 3Cs

COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COLLABORATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Loose connections, low trust – Tacit information sharing – Ad hoc communication flows – Independent goals – Adapting to each other, or accommodating others' actions and goals – Power remains with organisations – Resources remain with organisations – Commitment and accountability to own organisation – Relational timeframe short – Low risk/low reward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Medium connections, work-based trust – Structured communication flows, formalised project-based information sharing – Joint policies, programs and aligned resources – Semi-interdependent goals – Power remains with parent organisations – Commitment and accountability to parent organisation and project – Relational timeframe medium-based on prior projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dense interdependent connections, high trust – Frequent communication – Tactical information sharing – Systems change – Collective resources – Negotiated shared goals – Power is shared between organisations – Commitment and accountability to network first then community and parent organisation – Relational timeframe—long term (3 years) – High risk/high reward

Note. Reproduced from “What is collaboration (Fact sheet 1)” by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2013. Copyright 1994 by ARACY.

While not included in this table, it should be noted that some other versions of this model preface ‘Cooperation’, ‘Co-ordination’ and ‘Collaboration’ with two other forms of relationship; ‘Communication’ (telling another party what you are going to do before you do it) and ‘Consultation’ (asking for their opinion first).

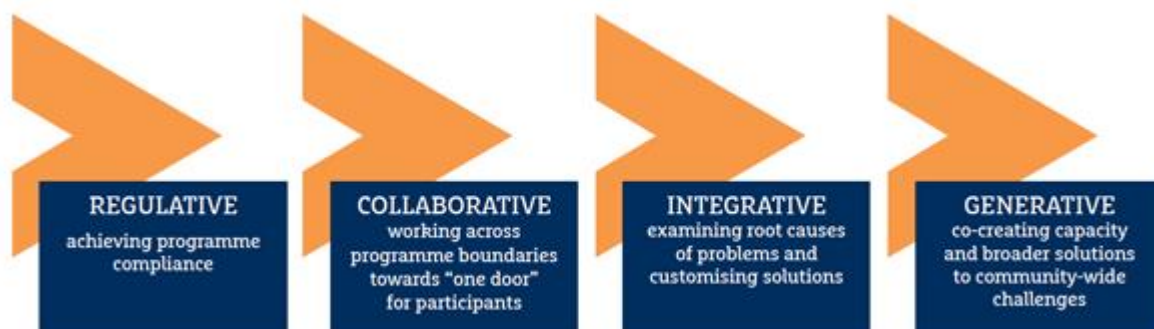
Importantly, the current literature also confirms a number of benefits for families of directly involving them in interagency collaboration such as increases in confidence, skill and knowledge, accessing opportunities that may not have otherwise been available to them, and helping to ensure that the process remains child and family-focused. However, there is also evidence that some families could find a collaborative process frustrating, meetings emotionally distressing, and the power dynamics difficult to adjust to, and that marginalised groups in particular may require support in order to participate, e.g. recent migrants (McDonald & Rossier, 2011). As such, in some circumstances a navigator model (e.g., Whanua Ora) may be more suitable for some families.

The Human Services Value Curve Model

The Human Services Value Curve Model from the US Leadership for a Networked World (2014) describes four stages as social service provision moves progressively towards greater integration and improved efficiency and effectiveness in achieving outcomes:

- Regulative: Services are delivered within the confines of a single agency;
- Collaborative: Services work across agency boundaries to provide a mix of services;
- Integrative: Services are organised and coordinated around client needs; and
- Generative: Services involve agencies working together with vulnerable groups to identify and address the underlying determinants of community health and wellbeing.

Figure 2: The Human Services Value Curve Model



Note. Reproduced from "Integrated social services for vulnerable people" by Superu, 2015, p. 3. Copyright 2015 by Superu.

According to Superu (2015): "Social service integration initiatives commonly include elements of integrated case management (where the combination of services is designed around client needs), integration of frontline service delivery (access to multiple services through one door), integration of back-office operations (e.g., pooled budgets and integrated databases) and co-location (e.g., of practitioners, services)" (p. 3).

Ten Principles of the Wraparound process

'Wraparound' has been defined as: "A philosophy of care that includes a definable planning process involving the child and family that results in a unique set of community services and natural supports individualized for that child and family to achieve a positive set of outcomes" (Burns & Goldman, 1999, p. 13). Their ten principles (Bruns et al., 2004) are reproduced below:

1. Family voice and choice:

Family and youth/child perspectives are intentionally elicited and prioritised during all phases of the wraparound process. Planning is grounded in family members' perspectives, and the team strives to provide options and choices such that the plan reflects the family values and preferences.

2. Team based:

The wraparound team consists of individuals agreed upon by the family and committed to them through informal, formal, and community support and services relationships.

3. Natural supports:

The team actively seeks out and encourages the full participation of team members drawn from family members' networks of interpersonal and community relationships. The wraparound plan reflects activities and interventions that draw on sources of natural support.

4. Collaboration:

Team members work cooperatively and share responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a single wraparound plan. The plan reflects a blending of team members' perspectives, mandates, and resources. The plan guides and coordinates each team members' work towards meeting the teams' goals.

5. Community-based:

The wraparound team implements service and support strategies that take place in the most inclusive, most responsive, most accessible, and least restrictive settings possible, and that safely promote child and family integration into home and community life.

6. Culturally competent:

The wraparound process demonstrates respect for and builds on the values, preferences, beliefs, culture and identity of the child/youth and family, and their community.

7. Individualised:

To achieve the goals laid out in the wraparound plan, the team develops and implements a customized set of strategies, support and services.

8. Strengths based:

The wraparound process and the wraparound plan identify, build on, and enhance the capabilities, knowledge, skills, and assets of the child and family, their community, and other team members.

9. Persistence:

Despite challenges, the team persists in working toward the goals included in the wraparound plan until the team reaches agreement that a formal wraparound process is no longer required.

10. Outcome based:

The team ties the goals and strategies of the wraparound plan to observable or measurable indicators of success, monitors progress in terms of these indicators, and revise the plan accordingly.

Strengthening Families-type programmes listed on international evidence-based websites

The following evidence based and systematic review websites, as recommended by Superu (2016) for child and family provision, have all been reviewed for relevant programmes. However, it is important to note that most evidenced-based websites are either US-based or solely focused on US programmes. While 'wraparound services' are common in North America and the United States in particular (see later 'Wraparound' section), integrated interagency working per se is not a strong feature of child and family welfare provision. Furthermore, child welfare programmes and services in North America (and elsewhere) tend to be highly segmented in terms of the ages of individual children (for example ages 0-2, 3-4, 5-11, 12-14, 15-18), very individualised, and address specific risk factors and wanted outcomes.

Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (US)

US Strengthening Families Program parent and child (10 to 14 years of age) programme as previously identified – deemed 'promising' – see 'Cochrane Library' section below.

Campbell Collaboration (US)

No results found.

California Evidence Based Clearing House for Child Welfare;

No results found.

Cochrane Library (UK);

A 2006 Cochrane Review of interventions delivered to young people in non-school settings for the prevention of drug use found the US Strengthening Families Program (a 14-week programme) referred to previously (known then as the Iowa Strengthening Families Program) may have been beneficial in preventing self-reported cannabis use (Gates, McCambridge, Smith, & Foxcroft, 2006).

Investing in Children - Dartington Service Design Lab (UK)

No results found.

Washington State Institute for Public Policy (US)

- US Strengthening Families Program parent and child (10 to 14 years of age) programme as previously identified was deemed to be a research-based programme. Odds of a positive net present value is 76% i.e. programme benefit per individual of \$5,381 as against programme costs per individual of \$835.
- Alternative (Differential) Response is a system of responding to child protection referrals that is an alternative to a traditional investigation. If there are no imminent concerns about a child's safety, the Alternative Response method includes a family assessment, with the goal of engaging a family to determine strengths and needs, and plan for the future, without requiring a determination that maltreatment has occurred or that the child is at risk of maltreatment - odds of a positive net present value is 81%

- Homebuilders Family Preservation Services is an intensive round-the-clock family support of four to six weeks to prevent children coming into care - odds of a positive net present value is 97%.
- Communities that Care (CTC) is a multiagency based community prevention programme that was deemed to be 'promising'. Implementing programmes in response to an analysis of risks and protective factors arising from issues raised in a population-based survey with young people, CTC aims to prevent problems such as underage drinking, tobacco use, violence, delinquency, school dropout, and substance abuse - odds of a positive net present value is 85%.
- Interestingly the Early Start (New Zealand) family-based parenting home visiting programme is also included - odds of a positive net present value is deemed to be 8%.

Relevant overseas programmes, services, and strategies more closely aligned to New Zealand's Strengthening Families

Below are a range of overseas programs, services or initiatives with some similarities to Strengthening Families in New Zealand from:

- Australia
- North America
- Europe
- International

From the literature, the closest to Strengthening Families is probably Western Australia's Family Support Networks.

Australia

Family Support Network, Western Australia

In place since 2011 and now part of a state-wide early intervention and family support strategy (Government of Western Australia Department of Child Protection and Family Support, 2016), the *Family Support Network* (FSN) "integrated collaborative service delivery model [now called 'Family Support Networks+']... provides local networks of high quality, [and] integrated services that support families and young people at risk" (Government of Western Australia Department of Communities, n.d.). There is an assessment and coordination pathway, as well as an intensive case management pathway. It has many similarities to *Strengthening Families* in New Zealand as well as some significant differences":

Western Australian (WA) Family Support Network (FSNs) are a partnership of community sector services and the Department of Communities (...) providing a common entry point to services and delivering earlier, targeted support to families with complex problems and those most vulnerable to involvement with the child protection system. FSNs operate across the metropolitan area in four service corridors. Each corridor is managed by a Lead Agency from the community services sector. Each lead agency is partnered with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) (...) Lead Agencies partner with local family support services

(Partner Agencies) to form an FSN alliance of agencies in their corridor. This alliance provides targeted support to families including counselling, parenting support, homelessness services, and family and domestic violence intervention” (Government of Western Australia Department of Communities, 2018, p. 3).

Each of the ‘corridors’ (mainly Perth metro) is led by a designated NGO (referred to as a ‘Lead Agency’) and is supported by an ‘integrated governance framework’ and FSN steering committees. A common assessment framework has also been developed. The initiative has been externally evaluated by KPMG (2014). As well as *Strengthening Families*, with FSN’s narrower focus some similarities can also be seen with New Zealand’s Differential Response model.

Early Intervention Research Directorate, South Australia

In response to a key recommendation from the recent Royal Commission into their Child Protection System’s report *The Life They Deserve* (Nyland, 2016) the South Australian government has established an *Early Intervention Research Directorate*, responsible for creating and coordinating an evidence-led five-year whole-of-government prevention and early intervention strategy. Supported by an external consortium of researchers, the directorate acts as the intersection between data and child protection evidence, evaluation, research, and practice. In collaboration with the academic sector, it will take an evidence-based approach to universal and secondary interventions, providing strategies to help families before they reach crisis point.

United States

Partnerships for Family Success

This 12- to 24-month Minnesota Anoka County voluntary programme (Karatekin et al., 2014) provides integrative case management for families dependent on at least two government services (e.g., child welfare, disability, chemical dependency, vocational rehabilitation), who are also on a low income and not making progress with their existing support services. It is staffed by members of the five departments (income support, training/employment, child protection/mental health, corrections, and public health) that make up the Anoka Human Services Division. Referrals are comprehensively assessed, and a primary case manager is appointed to both co-ordinate the work of the multi-professional team and to engage with other appropriate agencies. A strengths-based plan is developed with the family and actioned – 80% of the families referred engage with the programme.

Of the families who engage with the programme, 90% reportedly complete their plans. A collaboratively-conducted matched comparison evaluation found that outcomes related to child maltreatment improved within two years after exit, although educational outcomes, which were not a primary focus of the programme, were more mixed. This programme was included in Superu’s (2016) *What works* publication under *Integrated Social Services for Vulnerable People*, and the evidence of effectiveness was deemed by them to be ‘promising’ i.e. The evidence suggests that integrated social services improve outcomes in this initiative, but the results are not statistically significant.

Europe

Interagency collaborative is a strong feature of work with children and families in Northern Europe, and in the UK, in particular case conferencing in relation to children at risk, in care, or with disabilities has long been a strong feature of their systems. As well as reflecting a strong commitment to collaborative interagency working across Northern Europe, many of the services that are delivered to

children and families may come from a single local authority. Integrated interagency working also has a strong practical dimension.

Family Centres

While not a feature in New Zealand, Family Centres are widely used in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and much of the rest of Northern Europe. In some countries family centres with a similar purpose may be referred to as Children's Centre's, Child & Family Centres, or Child & Parent Centres (e.g. Western Australia). They may have an early years focus and 'one stop' integrated focus with other professionals either being based at the family centre, or regularly visiting. In some instances day-care for children may also be provided. Swedish family centres are described as follows:

"A Family Centre is engaged in activities for parents and their children. Its aim is to provide health promotion, family support and early prevention. A Family Centre should include maternity and child health care, an open pre-school and preventative social service. A Family Centre employs various professionals such as Midwives, Paediatric nurses, Paediatricians, Psychologists, Preschool teachers and Social workers. They collaborate to provide a service to the needs of children and their parents. Other professionals such as Health promoters, Librarians, Family counsellors and Community workers can also work at Family Centres. The feature of Family Centres is that principals and local government coordinate their resources to enable multidisciplinary collaboration and early prevention" (Swedish Association to Promote Family Centres, n.d., p.1).

Family Partnership Model, United Kingdom

Developed by the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust's Centre for Parent and Child Support, The Family Partnership Model (FPM) is a UK "integrated approach which has the potential to address three key issues affecting the provision of family support: the identification of unmet mental health need in the community; barriers to interagency collaboration; and the need for skilled clinical supervision for front-line practitioners. By addressing these problems within a single framework, this model can help [government and] community agencies to engage and work more effectively with children and their families" (Wilson & Huntingdon, 2009, p. 5). Currently also in use in parts of Australia (McDonald, O'Byrne, & Prichard, 2015; Rossiter et al., 2011) the FPM has been (previously) implemented in New Zealand by the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society in partnership with MSD's then Family and Community Services (Wilson & Huntingdon, 2009).

The Early Intervention Foundation

Established in 2013, the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) (<https://www.eif.org.uk>) sees its role as championing and supporting the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes. As a member of the English government's *What Works Network*, EIF is increasingly becoming the go-to source for evidence and advice on effective early intervention for children and young people.

Children's Trusts Pathfinders Programme, UK (operated from 2004-2006)

The UK Children's Trusts Pathfinders was a 35-site programme that supported the implementation of integrated services, using multidisciplinary teams, key workers, joint training, and information sharing among agencies. Social, educational, and health services were involved. This programme was included in Superu's (2016) *What works* publication under *Integrated Social Services for Vulnerable People*, and the evidence of effectiveness was deemed by them to be 'mixed' i.e. there

was evidence of both effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the integration initiative in terms of improving outcomes.

International Perspectives

International Journals

Many of the vast array of available academic and professional journals in relation to children and their families, have a multi-professional focus, for example *Children and Youth Services Review*, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *Children & Society*, *Child Development*, *Child & Family Social Work*, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, and the *Journal of Early Intervention*. Articles of relevance to Strengthening Families may also appear in other journals with a collaborative focus such as the *International Journal of Integrated Care* and the *Journal of Interprofessional Care*.

International Management Consulting Firms

It is also perhaps worth noting that in some countries, a need for public and social services to become more 'integrated' and citizen-centric' have become major policy planks; several large international management consulting and accounting firms have published positioning 'think pieces' reports, white papers, and media releases (for example, Accenture, 2009; Deloitte, 2018; KPMG International & Mowat Centre, 2013; McKinsey & Company, n.d.). Two of these reports were cited by MSD (2015) in their report on the effectiveness of Strengthening Families.

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