

Good morning.

The process that we have been engaged in over the past year is about the future. Creating a future for an organisation that is profoundly different in some ways – larger, more diverse and with a web of identities - than the organisations that we planned for in the past. In other ways, we are taking forward commitments, concepts and ways of working that have been effective and that we have developed over time.

In any process where we are looking to the future, it is important that we learn from and celebrate the achievements of the past.

Patrick Henry, a leader in the American Revolution in the 1700's was probably thinking of very grand themes of the past when he said 'I know of no way of judging the future but by the past'. But it is equally important for us at this stage of our own development as an organisation to have a sense of where we have been, what we have learned and how we might understand what comes next. This is as necessary as a vision for the future.

As an organisation bring a many pasts and achievements with us on our next journey. As we could no doubt learn from many of the people we work with, there are many lenses through which to see the past - each one produces a slightly different view. Today I will be looking through one lens – the accumulation of learning that comes from the review of the outcomes of the three Strategic Plans that are finished or finishing in the next couple of months.

Today gives us an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of three Strategic Plans.

Supported Living's Strategic Plan formally ended in 2006, but the strategic objectives contained within it have continued to guide the organisation.

Supported Living aimed to:

- Deliver high quality, innovative and flexible services.
- Promote innovation and responsiveness.
- Value relationships as the key mechanism for support and change.
- Be a catalyst for sectoral change through advocacy and lobbying.
- Promote professionalism and self-reflective practice.
- Work collaboratively within service and professional networks.

In 2005 Unifam went through a Strategic Planning process designed to take the organisation towards 2010. This gracefully dovetails into this new Plan.

Unifam's Strategic Plan had as its focus 'new solutions in relationships' and 9 areas as the organisation's 'most important work'. Amongst these were:

- growing the range of services offered,
- delivering high quality clinical services,
- increasing the number of families using non-adversarial approaches to family law
- increasing the participation of children and young people in programs

Burnside's ambitious three year Strategic Plan concludes this year. It set out a vision of growth, with a focus on priority areas including:

- Safe, resilient and child friendly communities
- Out of home care
- Social justice

- Education and learning
- Elimination of locational disadvantage
- Responsive and sustainable services.

I have only a short time to reflect on the achievements of each of these plans, so I am going to illustrate the outcomes and achievements thematically. What was most interesting to me in reviewing the material prepared by Linda Ward from Supported Living and Clive Price from Unifam as well as having the unique perspective of seeing all the data and reports coming through from Burnside is that there is quite a bit of thematic consistency in what we were all trying to achieve.

These achievements occurred against a backdrop of considerable change and growth in each of the agencies.

While the early 2000's were unfolding, our organisations were impacted by the changes and developments in the world around us. As the boom years in Australia played out, we were also growing. Part of the growth of our services was that perverse conundrum of modern capitalism – growth in welfare services where the boom passes lightly or not at all over many people's lives. Increasingly punitive approaches to welfare by the former government put pressure on many families too. Record numbers of children came to the attention of child protection agencies and there were significant increases in the number of children coming into out of home care.

At the same time increasingly paternalistic rhetoric around social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could not silence the call for apology, reparation and acknowledgement. This clearly required that we do better and narrow the gap between life outcomes of indigenous and non indigenous Australians. The injustice in the gaps between the health, social

and educational outcomes for indigenous children has been especially influential. Burnside programs have grown as we have taken more responsibility for being part of a positive movement that values our indigenous staff and our connections with indigenous people, and responds flexibly to opportunities in this area where it is right and appropriate. 16% of Burnside service users identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

During this period, the consensus about early intervention and prevention – particularly the bit about intervening early in children’s lives – gained currency in Australia. In NSW, an Inquiry or two later, government finally invested in the child protection system and developed a new stream of work in early i. Over the past two years the Brighter Futures program has been an important part of Burnside’s story.

Other drivers behind growth included the review and changes to the family law system that resulted in an actual increase in the quantum of funding and services available. A commitment to reducing the costly and negative impacts on children and families of adversarial proceedings in the Family Court has driven significant spending and development in the family dispute resolution area. Working with couples and families ordered to attend mediation in the first instance or in situations where the parties have become increasingly intransigent in relation to contact and residency of children has been a significant area of growth for Unifam.

Hearing the voices of children in families affected by family conflict, separation and divorce is a policy direction being embraced by governments after strong leadership from the NGO sector and Unifam in particular. This is supported by research - again informed by Unifam and other agencies. The growth of Child Inclusive Practice has been an essential part of Unifam’s journey.

Unifam was positioned well to take this agenda and grow. Four Unifam run Family Relationship Centres opened their doors over the past 2 years – as they did so the well of unmet need for advice, resolution and support in the community became quickly apparent.

In disability services a focus on meeting the needs of individuals has led to systemic changes and growth in funding for people with disabilities living independently in the community. As people choose not to stay in or join group living settings and seek a more independent life outside their family homes, Supported Living has continued to grow with a focus on assisting people to achieve their goals. At the same time, the right of people with disabilities to live what Parliamentary Secretary for Disability Services Bill Shorten recently called ‘an ordinary life’ has continued to inform our work so that the focus of Supported Living’s growth has not just been on getting people a place to live, but to assist people to have a meaningful connected life, based firmly in their community, enriched by family and friends.

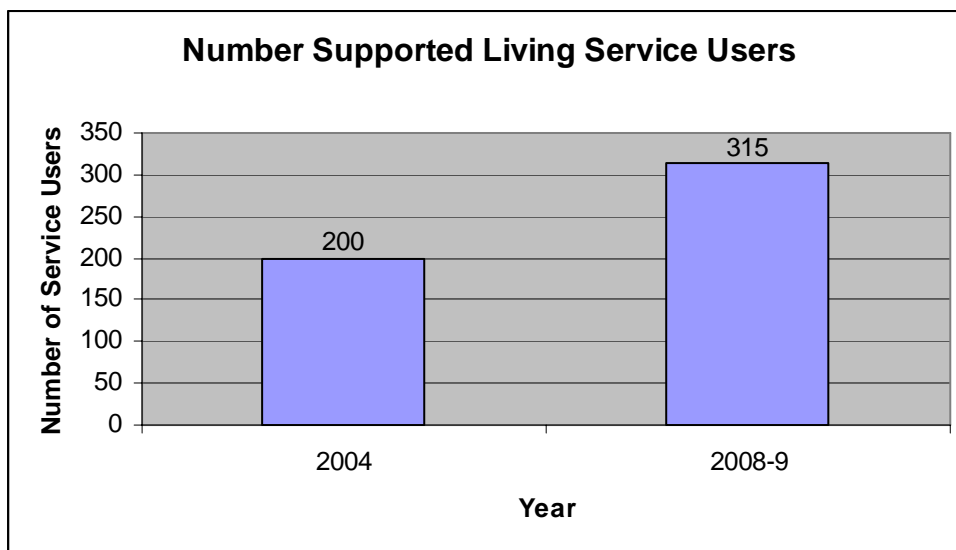
The net result of many of these and other changes has been a picture of growth. Importantly, this has also seen a diversification of funding sources and streams, all of which is important is keeping the organisation sustainable in the longer term.

The community sector workforce and the infrastructure that sustains it has also become an important strategic focus. Each agency had a focus on training, development and improving support services. Increased requirements from funders to report on what we do, acquit the funds in increasingly complex ways and employ the right people, screen them and train them combined with our own focus on providing quality services,

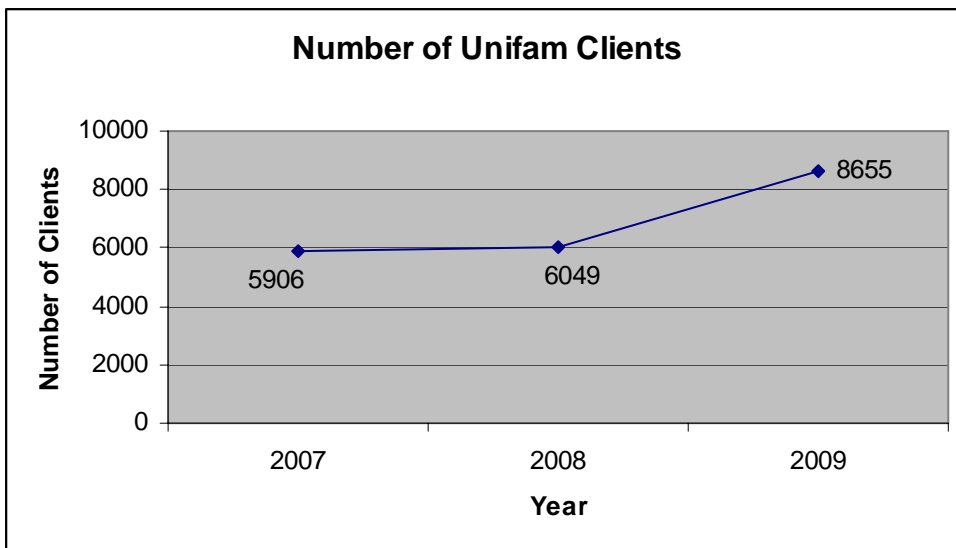
recruiting and retaining staff and maintaining support services is an important area of work.

When you think that in Australia the non government community sector employs more people than the coal industry, you get a picture of the importance of this part of our work. In our recent past we have invested in support services, as well as training and management. The Institute of Family Practice is one way that the focus of each strategic plan on supporting and training staff has been manifest.

In deference to the Results Based Accountability approach, first let's review the growth in the number of people we have seen – in terms of how much we have done.

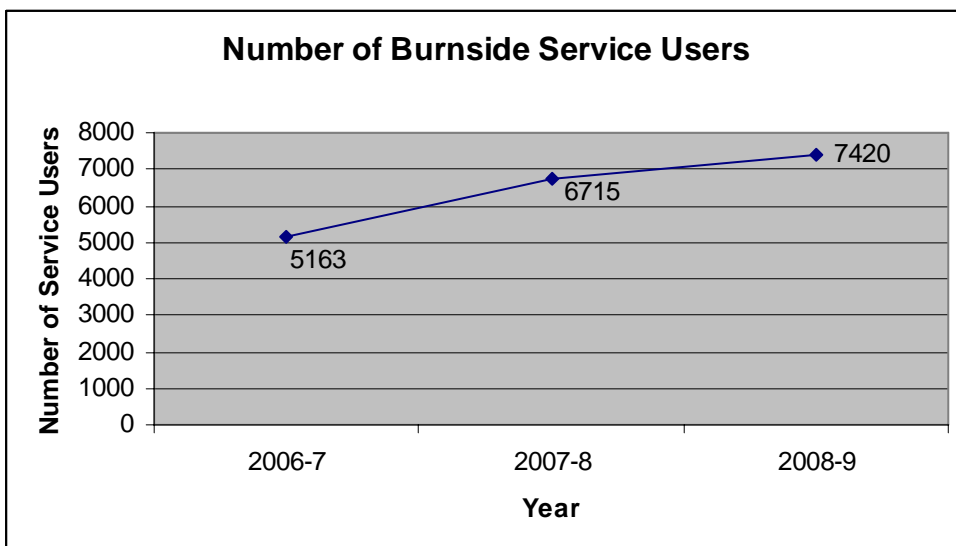


As you can see Supported Living has grown from a client base of about 200 in 2004 to supporting around 315 people in 2009. The key areas of growth have been in case management and provision of flexible respite services.



This line graph illustrates Unifam’s significant growth over the last 3 years. Family Relationship Centres represent the majority of the growth in client numbers – around 2 800 people accessed Family Relationship Centres in 2008/09 –around 700 more than in their first year of operation in 07/08.

Other programs also sustained or slightly increased the number of people accessing their services. The Parenting Orders Program, the court ordered program for families where there has been entrenched conflict over contact and residency, also saw significantly more families in 08/09. Child inclusive interventions also grew in this period – for example in the Supporting Children after Separation program (for which we successfully tendered in NSW) we saw 269 people in 08/09.



As you can see, the number of people accessing Burnside's programs has also trended upwards. The sharp rise between 06/07 and 07/08 is largely reflected in the increased number of programs. In particular, Brighter Futures programs opened in Coffs Harbour, the Central Coast, Mount Druitt, Ermington and the Macarthur region. Changes to Burnside's out of home care program in Coffs Harbour increased the number of children in our care. Supported playgroups and other group work also contribute strongly to Burnside's growth over the last 3 years.

The themes which emerged when looking at what we have achieved take us to the other Results Based Accountability questions around how well we did it and what difference did it make.

Taking a bit of creative license, and with some apologies to Mark Friedman, I will combine these to talk about some of the high level outcomes that emerge from our data.

It is probably also helpful to say at this point that engaging with the Results Based Accountability approach has been a significant project across Burnside over the last 3 years and these concepts are certainly not unfamiliar to Unifam and Supported Living either. The concept that doing more and more in the hope that we will make a difference is not in itself good enough has been a challenge for the whole sector. Making a difference requires a more nuanced approach.

Burnside engaged bravely with this, using a complex reporting system that looked to how our interventions might impact at the population level. While we probably aimed beyond the areas we could influence and that was a weakness of the process, we have learned an enormous amount about how to find out whether we have made a difference and – using our theme about

looking backwards in order to move forwards – we will use a more simple set of measures that the whole Service Group can engage with to identify whether we have made a difference over the next three years. Simple and elegant – or at least that is the plan.

I will use some of the data collected in Burnside from the RBA project, along with two years worth of data from Have Your Say across Burnside and Unifam and the work conducted within each agency to help tell the next part of this story.

### **Theme 1: Social inclusion**

**Supporting people to participate and connect with their communities, their families and their own hopes and dreams.**

As John Falzon has so eloquently highlighted this morning while social inclusion is a relatively new policy framework for government in Australia, the ideas behind it have been around a long time. The belief that all people should be able to fully participate in their community and benefit from its resources is a powerful underlying philosophy across our sectors.

In Supported Living, a key area of work of the last five years has been to assist clients to create meaningful connections and relationships within their community. Supported Living has actively sought ways of making community inclusion happen. Successful applications for grants have allowed the organisation to assist clients to access transport and community activities while a case management focus on social activities and community events has made this access a reality for people with a disability.

In Unifam services, social inclusion is a particularly powerful concept when viewed through the lens of children affected by separation and divorce. Much

of Unifam's work assists couples to complete an end to one form of connection – the couple relationship. However a significant proportion of the work is about how ongoing connections between parents who are separated or divorced can be better managed for the benefit of children and young people. These new connections are of course not unproblematic.

In response to the experience of Unifam's clinicians and the growing research about the impact of this experience on children, particularly the impact of high conflict separation and divorce on children, over the period of Unifam's strategic plan there has been a significant growth in services that assist people to manage the impact of their separation on their children. The use of Child Inclusive Practice has been highly effective in improving the outcomes of children.

As one person put it in last year's Have Your Say process 'Unifam assisted us in making a tough divorce easier on the kids'. What research tells us is this is likely to have flow on effects in terms of children's connections in their family, their community and in domains such as educational and social outcomes.

For Burnside services social inclusion is an explicit focus. For example, through the Operational Plan reporting process, a picture emerged about the sense of safety, or lack of safety that was experienced by many Burnside service users. What we learned showed that many service users feel unsafe – in their homes and in their communities. In some programs half of all service users reported that they had been victims of crime in the preceding 12 month period. We know that lack of safety impacts of people's engagement with their communities and this in turn can negatively impact on social inclusion – contributing to social exclusion.

At the same time however, the majority of families using Burnside services reported an increase in social support networks and community connections – highlighting the difference that a positive, community oriented approach can make.

As one Burnside service user put it in the 2008 Have Your Say report:

‘Being involved in this service has helped us become part of the community. We have recently moved here and transition has been so enjoyable and positive... ‘

## **Theme 2: Quality Services**

**Evidence informed, responsive services to people who need them, where they are, when they need them.**

Supported Living undertook reviews of all their programs in order to create a shared understanding of client-centred service models. All reviews involved clients in identifying the way forward, with evaluation recommendations shaping service development.

Unifam looked to growing the number of programs they delivered, maintaining and strengthening specialist programs and delivering high quality clinical services as part of the strategic plan. While there is limited outcome data available, a recent review of Child Inclusive Practice across Unifam programs highlighted the evidence base of our approach.

Family Relationship Centres as we noted earlier have tapped a deep well of unmet need in Wollongong, Campbelltown and Fairfield, we have seen increasing numbers of people access support and information.

In Burnside, the focus on evidence informed practice has also been important, with evaluation helping to reshape programs and respond to the needs of service users. Early findings from the research partnership between Macquarie University and Newpin St Marys has started to highlight the benefits of how intentionally integrated approaches can improve outcomes for children.

In 2008/09 of the 3 600 service users who answered the question - are you better off since using Burnside's services - more than 3 200 answered that they were better off. About one third of those saw themselves as substantially better off.

### **Theme 3: Influence**

#### **Influence beyond our boundaries: advocacy, policy, sector development and training.**

In order to really make a difference, we are required to step outside of the boundaries that are often placed around service providers. Many of the systems we work with interact in incredibly unhelpful ways that trap people in difficult circumstances and create more drama than they resolve.

All of our agencies have focussed on influencing systems – whether at the local area level in negotiating the way that systems work, at the state level on committees and in peak organisations and at the national level where we have been heard by government Ministers, bureaucrats and the media.

From the Family Law Council to Fams, playgroups with the Prime Minister to negotiations with Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care, we have leveraged our influence to make a difference.

## **Theme 4: Social Justice**

### **Contributing to social justice: telling stories, using analysis and research and joining the dots for policy makers.**

Our research partnerships have built our credibility and helped us learn more. We have made more than 50 submissions to Inquiries and reviews over the last 3 years. People using our services have spoken directly to those in power about what worked for them and what doesn't.

Locally, we have stood beside people as they held systems accountable and staff have used their skills to help people negotiate resolution.

We told the Minister for Education about the hundreds of hours that children and young people spent not being educated as the school system found ever more creative ways of excluding them. Then we explained, politely and with great patience, how we worked with children and young people to make education a priority, to help children and young people in out of home care have a chance to achieve.

One lasting impression – while the Commissioner for the Special Inquiry into child protection listened to our staff, the Burnside CEO sat in the room next door taking evidence from our service users on their experiences of the child protection system. We bore witness to these stories so that these stories could be heard, though the Commissioner could not (or would not?) hear them himself. For me, personally, holding hands across a table with a woman whose children had come home making a promise that I will never stop delivering on – to tell stories to make change.

This is what we have achieved.

Karen Bevan

11/8/09