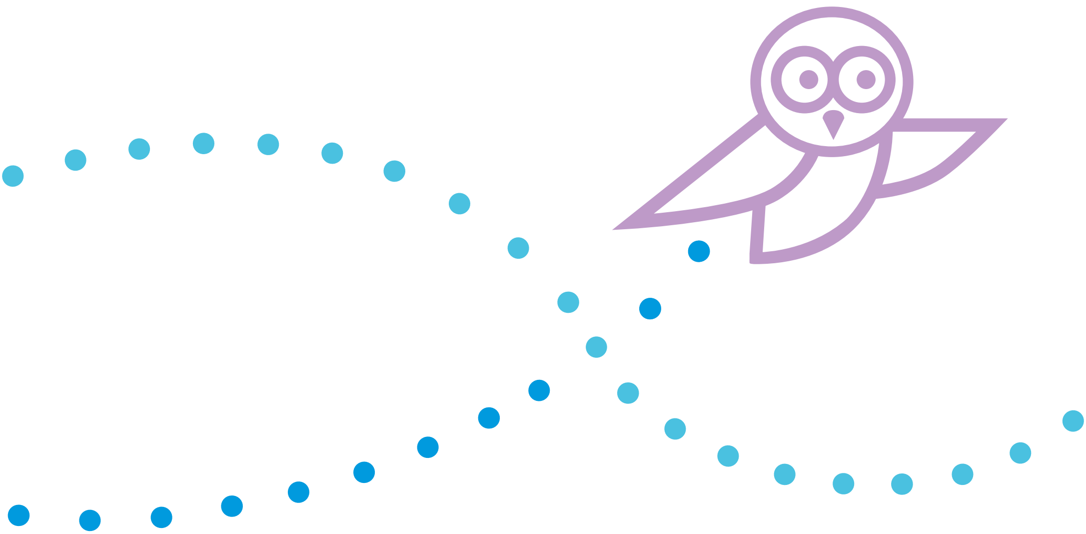
Mapping the Journey:

Using the Program Story Approach to build the evidence for your program



Centre for FAMILY RESEARCH and EVALUATION

Acknowledgements

CFRE respectfully acknowledges the Kulin Nation as Traditional Owners of the land where we deliver our services. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia. Sovereignty was never ceded, and they remain strong in their connection to land, culture and in resisting colonisation.

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Introduction

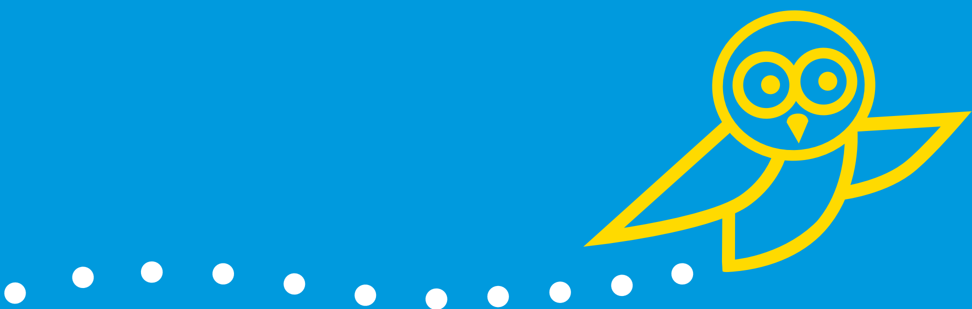
This guide was developed as result of a capacity-building project funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, the 'EVA' Project: Evaluation in the context of Violence and Abuse, Building the Evidence.

During this project, the Centre for Family Research and Evaluation worked with partner agencies around Australia who provide services for people who are experiencing or are likely to experience family violence. The purpose was to develop the capacity of organisations and staff to use evidence-based practice and measure program outcomes. This was achieved by developing and delivering tailored workshops and follow-up support on program design, planning, implementation and evaluation and, thus equip programs to be able to map their journey in telling their 'program story'.

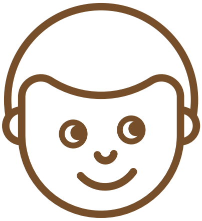
This guide has been developed to share the program story approach developed for the purpose of these workshops with participating organisations and the wider sector.

Through our work with agencies around the country who participated in the EVA project in 2019, we piloted an approach to understanding and applying evidence-based practice and evaluation thinking to program design, implementation and monitoring, which we called the 'program story' approach. This approach was well-received by the teams we worked with because it is practical and realistic, uses familiar concepts and simple tools that program staff at any level can easily understand and start to apply immediately. The approach is grounded in a realistic case study of a program aimed to increase primary school attendance, which many of the program staff working with children and families can relate to. Whilst it is not possible to replicate a 2-day face to face workshop in a small booklet such as this, this guide attempts to bring together the key elements of the approach to share learnings with the sector more broadly.

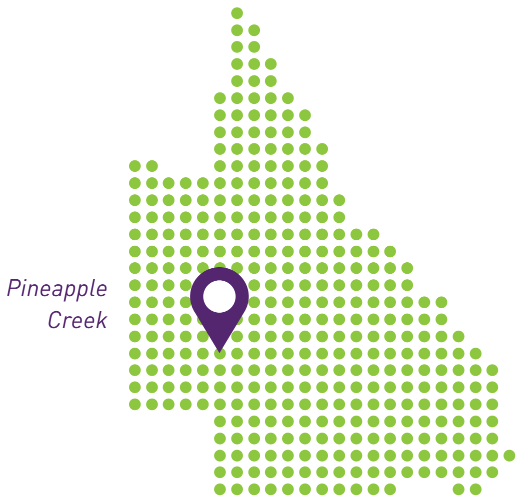
As each component builds upon the one before, it is recommended that it is read consecutively in order to develop knowledge and understanding of the content. Whilst the case study that we use in this guide is starting a program from scratch, the key elements, tools and theories are as applicable to a new program as it is to one that is already up and running. If you have any feedback, ideas or would like to hear more about our workshop and consultancy services, please do not hesitate to get in contact with the CFRE team by email to **cfre@ds.org.au** or via our website **www.cfre.org.au**.



Part 1: Evidence



Hi there! We'd love to introduce you to Fredrick.
Fredrick is a community development worker who lives in a small town called Pineapple Creek. Pineapple Creek is a small remote community which hosts 1000 people, 350 of which are children and youth. The town is classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as a significantly disadvantaged community due to most households having a low income and employment being largely concentrated within low skill requirement industries. Local timber mills and mines have recently cut back on staff, resulting in unemployment rates increasing. Most people currently employed experience underemployment, as businesses are unable to provide additional work hours due to the lack of revenue being generated. Community members experience additional difficulties as public transport is non-existent. Further challenges are experienced as there are only two schools within the community: one primary school and one secondary school. For families who do not have a car, both schools are difficult for families to get their children to.



The town mayor was recently able to recruit a skilled, dynamic and enthusiastic principal for Pineapple Creek Primary School. The new principal has been dismayed to see that school attendance rates were at an all-time low of 65%. This surprised the principal as his previous school had an attendance rate of well over 95%. Due to these alarming statistics, he linked up with Fredrick to discuss any possible solutions to this issue. Fredrick was already quite familiar with the challenges experienced by students and families as he had worked within the school for three years. Fredrick has always wanted to do something about this problem, but now with a change in school leadership, Fredrick sees a rare opportunity to do something great for the school. However, he did not know what this would look like or how this change would surface.

Whilst on his walk back home after a long day, Fredrick began to think about the issues faced by the community and the need for a program which would address poor student attendance within Pineapple Creek Primary School. Fredrick reflected on what the program would provide and how this program would support students. He thought about previous attempts that had not been successful and how frustrating it can be when a program doesn't seem to have the impact you would like or doesn't create long-term change. Fredrick wanted to develop something that would work long-term; something which would deliver sustainable positive impacts on student engagement, achievement and long-term health and education outcomes. Fredrick realised that if he wanted this program to work, it had to be evidence-based.

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS: This is a systematic approach to decision-making that relies on the use of the best available information. Sources include a range of types of evidence suitable to program requirements, aims and context such as research evidence, clinical experience, family and client values. We refer to this as the evidence base.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE: These are programs that both use and generate evidence to ensure program appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, adaptability and sustainability. They have often been standardised, systematised and rigorously evaluated.

Part 1: Evidence

WHAT IS EVIDENCE

Fredrick was naturally very excited about creating a new program idea and what it would look like. However, he knew that he had to control his excitement and not get ahead of himself. Fredrick naturally had a lot of questions come to mind that he didn't have all the answers to. Questions like;

- What counts as evidence for developing programs, and where do we find it?
- How do we use evidence to develop programs?
- How do we develop evidence which assesses what works in a program?
- How do we use evidence of what does, and what does not work in our own programs, to make program decisions?

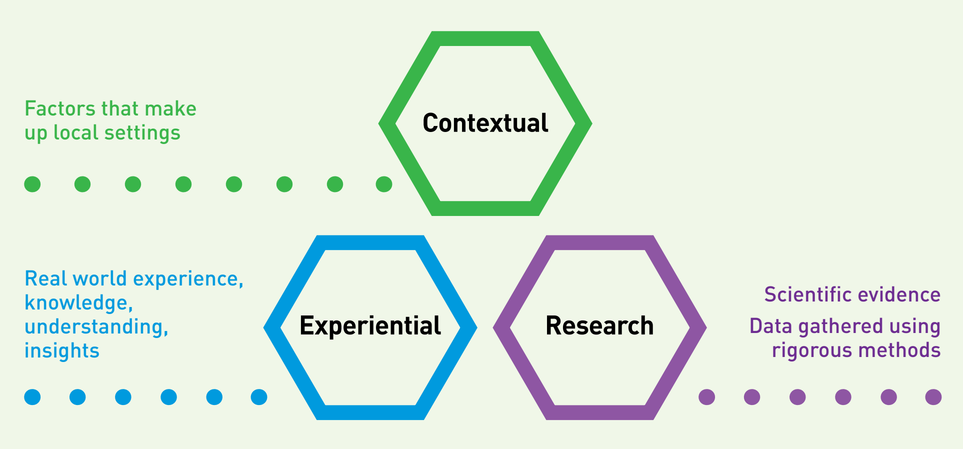
Fredrick wanted to educate himself in order to be sure of what constituted good evidence, and how to use it in developing programs. In addition, he wanted to know how to ensure that the program would have the desired impacts. Fredrick started researching any available resources which would assist him. His search brought him to *The Centre for Family Research and Evaluation* (CFRE), whose website provided a useful resource which comprehensively described what evidence was, and how to use, and develop it.

WHAT IS EVIDENCE?

The Oxford Dictionary defines Evidence as, "The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid". Best guesses and assumptions, however well intentioned, are not likely to deliver the same results as informed use of evidence in effective decision making.

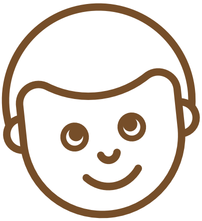
TYPES OF EVIDENCE

Fredrick discovered that there are different types of evidence – contextual, research and experiential. He learnt that these types of evidence are unique, as each serves a specific purpose and can be used to achieve different goals. He still questioned what counted as evidence and how evidence could be developed to prove that a program was working as intended. He discovered three broad types of evidence and how to go about accessing or developing this evidence to show that a program is working as intended. The diagram and table which follow, illustrate what he learned.



Types of Evidence	Contextual	Experimental	Research
Description	Factors that make up a local setting, including its population. Contextual evidence can help you work out whether an intervention or policy is needed, feasible, likely to be accepted and/or useful in a specific local setting. Contextual information can be location specific.	The collective 'real-world' experience and expertise of people who practice or live in the setting you're focusing on.	A body of empirically determined facts or information that can be numerically-based (quantitative), more descriptive (qualitative), or a combination of the two, and generally focuses on the dynamics of a problem, and/or the demonstrated effectiveness of a particular solution or program/intervention/service option.
How to Find it	Process or formative evaluations, surveys or census data, community needs assessments, observational studies, analysis of administrative data. Lots of local and state government authorities can provide this information.	Case studies, focus groups, surveys, service user feedback, service provider feedback, participation rates. This is the type of information an organisation can collect for themselves.	Published or publicly available research and evaluation reports.

Part 1: Evidence

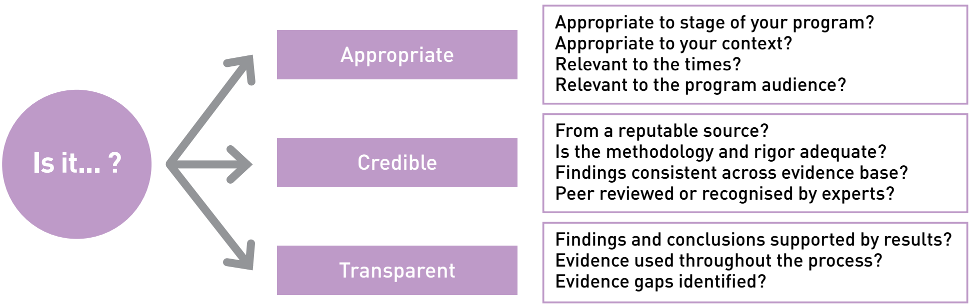


Frederick's mind is swimming with all this theory; but he's not going to take his eye off the ball because he knows that understanding evidence will serve him well in the long run when it comes time to develop his program. He knows that the local council often complete community needs assessments and that there were some researchers at the school last year analysing attendance data, talking about community needs and something called the Australian Early Development Census. He wondered what other types of evidence might already exist if he went looking for it, and how he would know whether it was useful or strong enough to help inform the development of a program in Pineapple Creek.

SELECTING EVIDENCE

Unfortunately, not all evidence is of equal quality, and should therefore be selected carefully. Selecting and using the best evidence, means not manipulating or cherry-picking evidence to suit a particular preconceived idea or desired outcome.

Three good questions to ask when selecting evidence (whether it be research, contextual, or experiential evidence) is whether the evidence is appropriate, credible or transparent, as represented below.



LIMITED EVIDENCE

Sometimes, there just is not much evidence to be found, the evidence-base is weak, or the evidence is simply not suited to your context. Where evidence is lacking, innovative program approaches are required. In order to do this, program managers require a solid understanding of program theory, and have the knowledge and skills to design and test the program using monitoring and evaluation during roll-out. By doing so, managers are able to develop the evidence-based for the program. Where appropriate resources are available, developing research studies that assist us to understand the nature and context of the problem is a helpful starting point. Pilot studies and demonstration programs are other useful strategies for generating evidence.

Where evidence is contradictory, there are some important questions to ask to explore the possible reasons why:

- Were the programs delivered in very different contexts or to very different populations? What works for one group may not work for another.
- Were there differences in the way the programs were implemented that led to different outcomes?
- Is the evaluation evidence itself questionable due to poor evaluation approaches?

WHERE THE EVIDENCE-BASE IS WEAK

When the research evidence base is consistent in its findings but weak (perhaps with little research or few evaluations), it can be helpful to place more emphasis on experiential evidence, including exploring public perception and acceptability. This requires the engagement of people who could be affected by the changes a policy or program may bring.

This was all very exciting for Fredrick, and he realised that he might need to think more broadly. Fredrick knew that there were many remote communities which experienced similar challenges when it came to school attendance. What if the challenges experienced by Pineapple Creek Primary School was something which extended beyond the Pineapple Creek community? What if this was an issue experienced by many other remote communities? If this were indeed the case, who were the major stakeholders impacted by this problem? These were all vital questions which needed to be answered before starting to develop the program. Therefore, next Frederick turned his attention to engaging with other members of the community who had a stake in the issue of poor school attendance. So, he turned his attention to stakeholder engagement.

Part 2:
Stakeholder Engagement

After having conducted additional research on the prevalence of low school attendance rates around the country, Fredrick began to realise how widespread the issue was. Low school attendance rates were not only experienced within Pineapple Creek, but also throughout various remote communities around Western Queensland. Fredrick knew that if he was going to address poor school attendance rates in Pineapple Creek Primary School, it would be a good time to develop a program which effectively responded to the needs of students and families living in other remote communities too.

WHO ARE STAKEHOLDERS?

Fredrick knew that he was going to engage with a range of stakeholders who were either directly or indirectly affected by this issue. Stakeholders can range from a variety of different professional and demographic backgrounds.

STAKEHOLDERS

People who are either affected by, or can influence the outcomes of a program.

WHY IS STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Fredrick appreciated the importance of engaging with different stakeholders throughout the program development process. He knew there was likely to be multiple benefits to including people from different communities who are also impacted by this issue. It was likely that:

- Community members would have greater buy-in and potentially take a more ownership of the program development process;
- Shared decision making would enhance the quality of the program design process;
- A range of perspectives allows for greater understanding of what might work or won't work in these communities.
- Dynamics of the core issues would likely be discovered much earlier.

ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Wanting to learn more about achieving optimal stakeholder engagement in program design, Fredrick hopped on a plane and travelled down to Melbourne, where he attended a CFRE Stakeholder Engagement Workshop. This workshop covered the different levels of stakeholder engagement, the goals for each level, and the most effective methods of engaging with stakeholders. The table which follows provides a summary of what he learned:

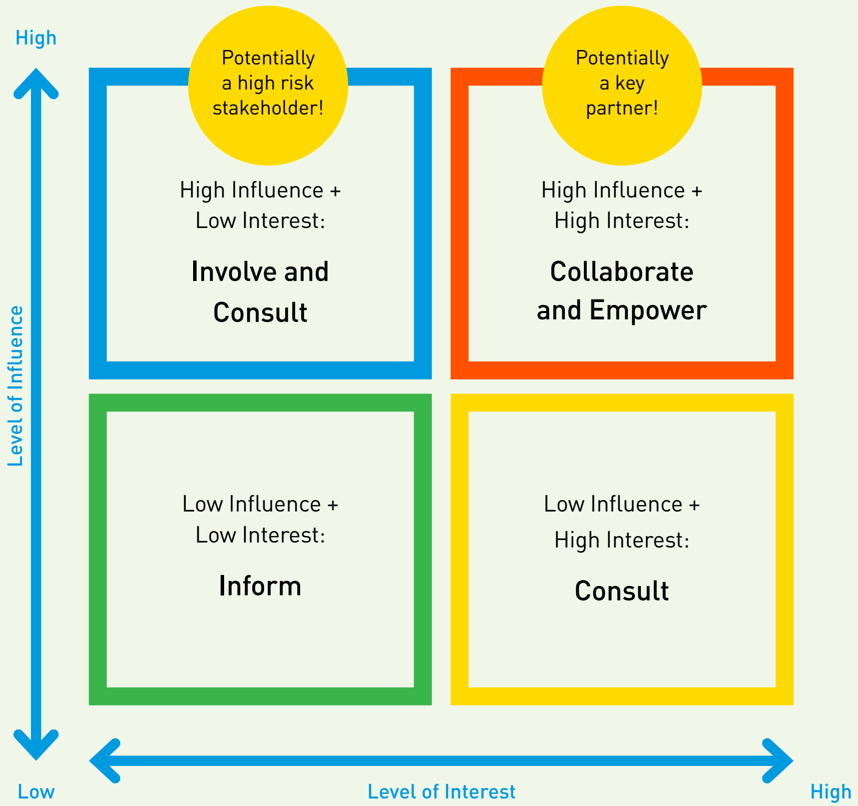
Degrees of Engagement	Stakeholder Engagement Goal	Methods of Engagement
Empower	To place final decision-making in the hands of the stakeholder	• Integration of stakeholders into governance structure (e.g. As members or shareholders on particular committees)
Collaborate	To partner with the stakeholder including the development of alternatives, making decisions and the identification of the preferred solution	• Stakeholder reference groups • Joint projects • Multi-stakeholder initiatives • Partnerships
Involve	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and needs are consistently understood and considered	• Multi-stakeholder forums • Advisory panels • Consultative Committees • Participatory decision making • Workshops • Deliberative polling • Forums
Consult	To obtain feedback from stakeholders on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	• One on one meetings • Public comment • Online feedback and discussion • Focus groups • Surveys • Public Meetings
Inform	To provide balanced, objective, accurate and consistent information to assist stakeholders to understand the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	• Fact sheets • Open houses • Newsletters, bulletins, circulars • Corporate documents (annual report) • Speeches, conferences, public speaking • Websites, social media • Media releases and advertising

Adapted from: Managing Projects at DEECD (2012). Training materials prepared by the Australian Institute of Management for the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Part 2: Stakeholder Engagement

STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENT

Stakeholders can be assessed to determine the most appropriate level of engagement to be applied, by rating their level of interest against their level of influence. Stakeholders with a low level of interest and influence should be kept informed of the program, while those who have a high level of interest but low level of influence should be consulted. Stakeholders who are highly influential but have a low level of interest should be involved and consulted so that any risks can be identified and mitigated easily and effectively. The most highly valuable stakeholders for any project are those with a high level of interest and a high level of influence on the program outcomes. These stakeholders are potential partners and should be invited to collaborate on the projects.



Adapted from: Managing Projects at DEECD (2012). Training materials prepared by the Australian Institute of Management for the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Given the importance of getting stakeholder engagement right, particularly in the unique setting of a remote community, Frederick opted to take a collaborative approach to program development as far as possible.

Fredrick was keen to engage and partner with key stakeholders in the creation of the new program, so he thought that the logical first step was to meet with his local council, as he had assessed them as a potential key partner. Upon arrival, he met community development officer Kelly. Fredrick and Kelly discussed the issue of poor school attendance rates within remote communities and how this was resulting in poor educational outcomes. Kelly shared Fredricks' concerns and agreed that a new program was needed to address this issue within remote communities. She was also able to obtain some recent research that the council had undertaken to begin to understand the nature of the problem in Pineapple Creek.

Kelly and Fredrick put their heads together and started thinking about the next logical steps required to move their plans forward. They knew that they first had to get the necessary funding in place to make this project happen. Secondly, they needed to scope possible key stakeholders impacted by this issue. Kelly was highly knowledgeable about the kind of funding available through various funding bodies, so she connected them up with representatives in local and state government. Fredrick was already very connected with the schooling community within Pineapple Creek and other neighbouring communities, so he had numerous contacts he could get in touch with. He planned to contact the principals and teachers within affected schools first, as they would be able not only to provide feedback on the nature of the social issue in question, but also on the project's development. Other important stakeholders included parents, community-based practitioners working directly with disengaged youth, and young people themselves.

The foundational work was done, now Kelly and Fredrick were ready to start to put all the pieces of this puzzle together. They realised that this aspect of the project required a skill set they needed to develop. Fredrick knew that CFRE provided a range of skills development support ideally suited to their needs: workshops for professional development and program co-design facilitation. Kelly and Fredrick contacted CFRE and discussed their new program for addressing youth school disengagement in their communities. Each party made the necessary project agreements and the next chapter to their journey was in motion.

CFRE suggested to Fredrick and Kelly that the first step would be to contact the relevant stakeholders and invite them to a community forum. In this forum, they would be able to unpack the relevant issues, present the key findings of current research and gauge the level of interest the general community would have in contributing to the co-design process of the new program. The interest and support from the community was overwhelmingly positive, with 70% of those attending wishing to participate in the program development process. These stakeholders were invited to form a program development reference group.

Part 3:
The Program Story Approach

CFRE facilitated the program development process by guiding the program development reference group through the process of thinking about the nature and size of the problem; what would need to change; how this could be done; and how they would know if the program had worked as intended. This process was framed within CFRE's Program Story Approach (PSA). This approach is built around four primary components; problem analysis, theory of change, plan of action and monitoring, evaluation and learning, which fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to enable programs to tell their story.

Component	Purpose
Problem Analysis	Establishes the nature, size, dynamics, root causes and effects of the problem
Theory of Change	Articulates the theory underpinning how the various aspects of a program would work to act on the problem and bring about change
Action Plan	Uses a program logic model to represent the resources used and the actions undertaken to achieve the program aims
Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning	Identifies the questions and evidence that will be used to establish how effective, efficient, appropriate, accessible and equitable the program has been, and what improvements could be made

Each jigsaw piece has a corresponding **Q**uestion, **E**vidence sources and **T**ools that are used to develop program staff knowledge and evidence-base to describe and guide the development of their program. These are illustrated below:

Frederick was very excited about the reference group, and was ready to implement the PSA model in developing the program.

Problem Analysis

Q ***What is the nature and size of the problem?***

E Contextual
Experiential
Research Evidence

T Problem Tree &
Objective Tree

Fredrick and the reference group asked themselves the very important question, 'What is the nature and size of this problem?' In order to answer this question, the problem first had to be clearly defined. Only once the reference group had completed this very important step, would they be able to get down to the nuts and bolts of program development.

In order to define the problem, in addition to the research evidence that was available, everyone had to utilise their contextual knowledge of the nature of the problem and how it manifested within their respective communities. CFRE facilitated an activity where each group constructed a Problem Tree & an Objectives Tree. These tools helped the group to define the root causes and effects of the problem of low school attendance rates, the area of the problem that their program would address, and the likely indicators of program success.

PROBLEM TREE

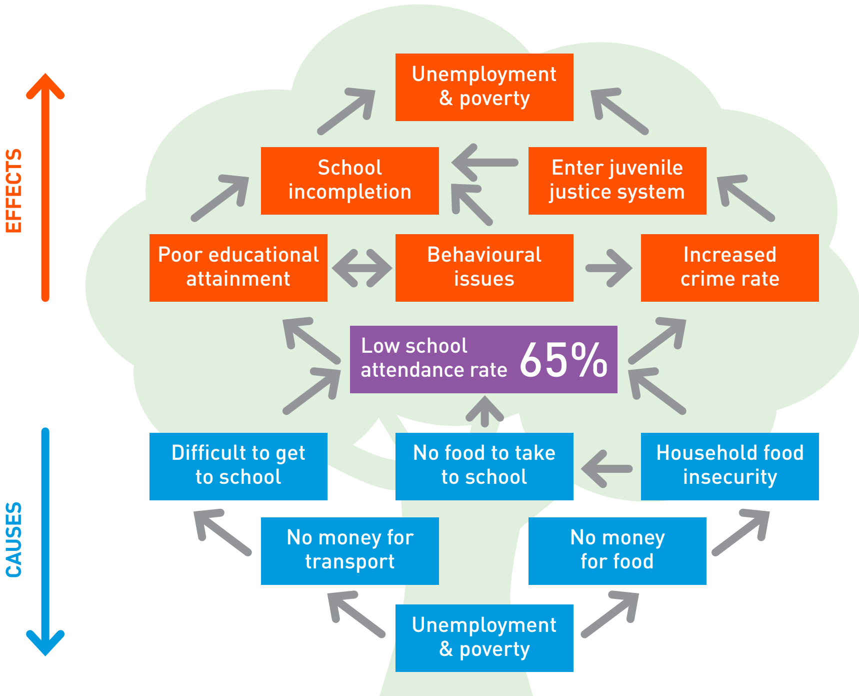
To construct a problem tree, Fredrick and his group started by defining the key issue needing to be addressed. Having reflected upon the statistics provided by the ABS, low school attendance rates was clearly the main issue. Fredrick and his group placed this issue at the centre of the tree. From here, they thought about the likely root causes and effects of this single issue. On the problem tree, directly underneath the key issue being assessed [low school attendance rate], they listed the root causes of the problem.

They theorised that a direct cause of young people not attending school was difficulty in getting to school and students having no food to take to school – a consequence of there being very little food at home. The causes of students not being able to get to school, bring food to school or have food at home, was related to the fact that students had no money for transport or food. Given the ABS data they had to hand, and direct knowledge of community life, they decided that unemployment and consequent poverty was the most likely root cause of this.

Now that the root causes of low attendance rates had been established, Frederick and his team reflected upon the potential results of continued low attendance at school. This examination of effects is just as important as the causes of low attendance rates, in understanding the context of the issue. They concluded that poor attendance rates could lead to poor educational attainment, more children with behavioural issues and an increase in community-based crime. This may in turn lead to higher rates of school incompletion and increased contact with the justice system, and subsequently increased likelihood of unemployment and poverty; the very root cause of poor school attendance to occur in the first place.

PROBLEM TREE

A problem tree is a simple analysis tool that provides a graphic representation of a problem, depicting the causes and effects. This analysis tool helps the project team develop an idea of where their program will act in order to solve, or reduce the size of the problem.



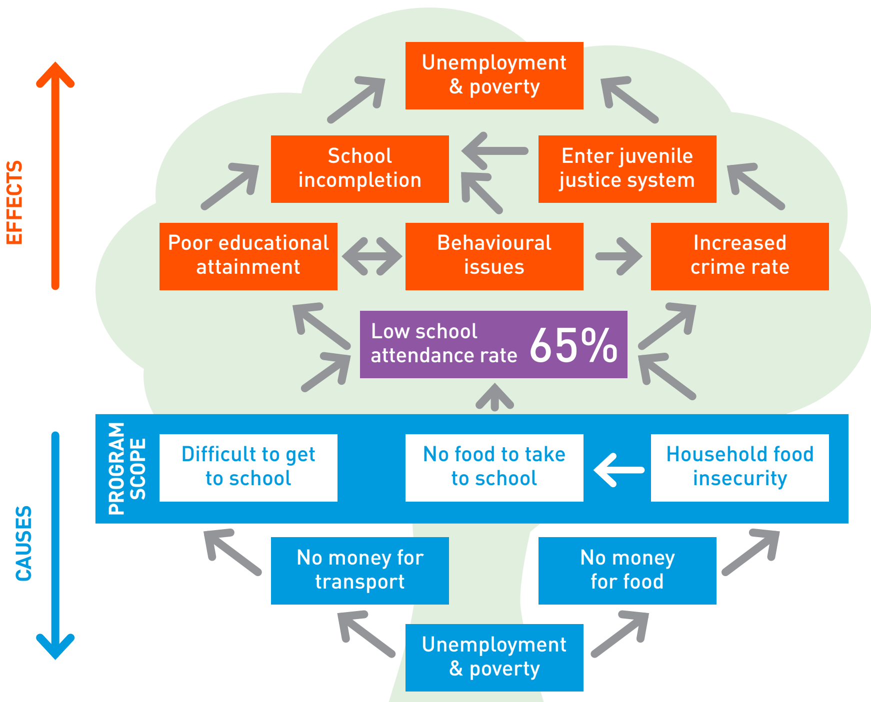
Problem Analysis (cont.)

PROGRAM SCOPE

The Problem Tree activity enabled Fredrick and his team to really think about which aspects of the problem they could feasibly act upon given the necessary resources they had available to them, and also identify those aspects that they may not be able to control. They used the Problem Tree to determine the scope of this program: preventing low school attendance by addressing the difficulties students face in getting to school and their food insecurity.

OBJECTIVES TREE

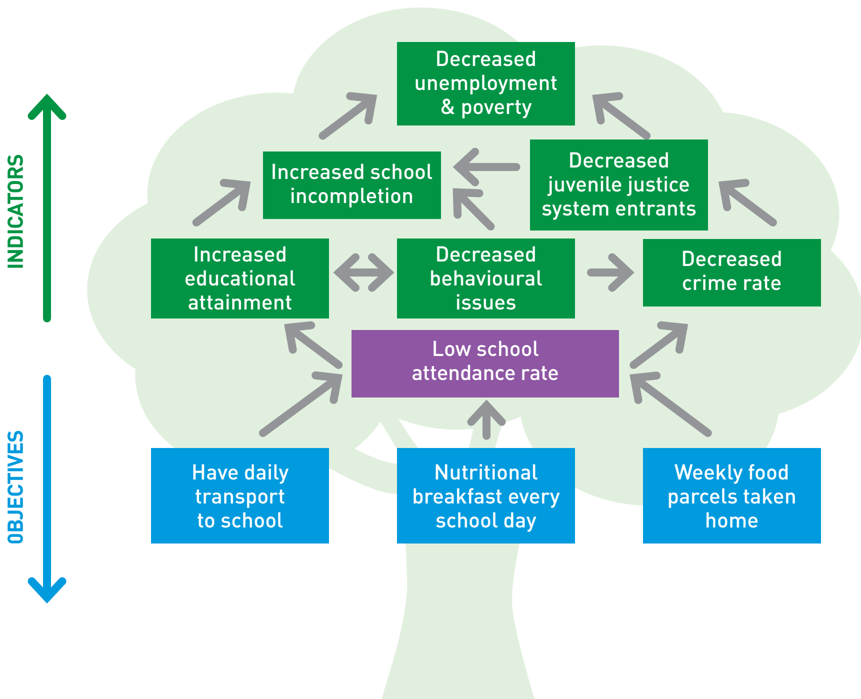
Objective Analysis Tree is a project planning tool that helps to analyse and graphically break down objectives into smaller and more manageable parts. The Objective Analysis Tree is a tool derived from its parent tool the Problem Analysis Tree.



The CFRE consultants were very impressed with the progress Fredrick and his group had made upon their Problem Tree. Having established the causes of low school attendance rates, they then turned this tree into an Objective Tree by reframing each element of the problem tree into an equivalent objective. As such, 'low school attendance rate' was reframed to 'increased school attendance rate' and 'poor educational attainment' was reframed as 'increased educational attainment'. Once this was completed, they were able to identify the objectives of the program they wished to design: daily transport to school, nutritional breakfast every school day and weekly food parcels. Therefore, the program components began to take shape.

The Problem/Objectives tree activity enabled the reference group to develop a thorough understanding of the issue their program sought to address and assisted them to define the scope of their program: To increase school attendance rates by providing school children with;

1. Daily transport to school,
2. A nutritional breakfast handed to each child as they climbed on the bus in the morning, and
3. Weekly food parcels for each child to take home as they got off the bus on a Friday afternoon.



Part 4:
Theory of Change

Q *What needs to change and how?*
E Contextual
Research
Experiential
T Outcomes Chain

Having established the core issues to be addressed and the objectives of the program, Fredrick and other stakeholders then developed a Theory of Change to underpin the program. The Theory of Change articulates how the program will achieve these objectives, that is, how the program will increase school attendance rates. The theory behind the program is that the provision of food on the bus will serve both as a motivator for students to get on the bus and attend school but also to provide the valuable nutrition necessary for children to concentrate in the classroom and reduce behaviour problems so that they are ready to learn. The weekly food parcels will provide a motivator for families to send their children to the bus each day. Subsequently, this increased school attendance and increased food security for families will lead to greater job prospects and decreased poverty levels in the community. They named it 'The Breakfast Bus' program.

Having adopted a systematic evidence-based approach to developing the Problem Tree and Objectives tree, Fredrick was in a strong position to use the Outcomes Chain activity to articulate the mechanisms of change that underly their proposed program.

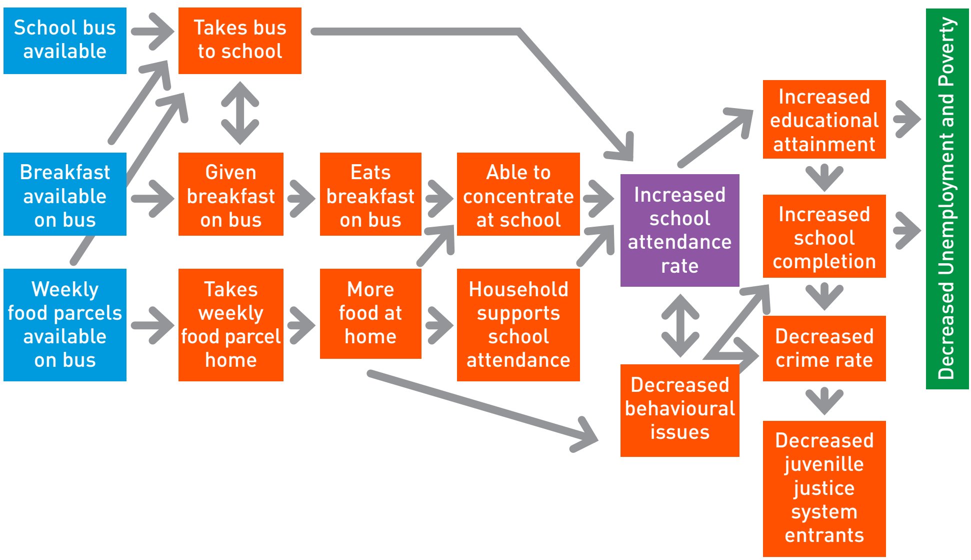
OUTCOMES CHAIN

Fredrick's Outcomes Chain was based upon the low-level outcomes, mid-level outcomes and high-level outcomes they the reference group had identified in their objectives tree.

Low-Level Outcomes	Relates to the general outcomes which are achieved simply by participants engaging with the program.
Mid-Level Outcomes	Relates to program participants not merely attending but engaging with the program through participation.
High-Level Outcomes	Relates to the overarching impacts which result from participants engaging with the program over a period of time.

The Outcomes Chain is constructed by connecting these three outcome variables to make a singular, coherent story. The variables are connected by context-specific pieces of knowledge such a program activities and processes that occur in a sequence and logically lead from one to the next, until the low-level, mid-level and high-level outcomes are connected. There are often several paths, with interconnecting components and the more multi-faceted the program, the more complex the outcomes chain is likely to be.

The 'Breakfast Bus' Outcomes Chain



The Outcomes Chain activity enabled Fredrick to understand the resources required to achieve the program outcomes, how these resources would impact students, and how these impacts would impact upon the overall objective to decrease unemployment and poverty.

Part 5:
Plan of Action

Q ***How will we do it?***

T Program Logic Model

Having engaged with the process of understanding the problem and identifying objectives, the Breakfast Bus reference group was now able to design a plan of action for the program. Having worked so diligently alongside the other stakeholders, Frederick was eager to see how everything they had developed so for could come together to create a program to help young people in their communities. CFRE recommended using a 'Program Logic Model' (PLM) to articulate the plan. This model was preferred above other models as the PLM is a model commonly used by government in assessing whether projects are researched based, and generally favoured by various funding bodies.

PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

PLMs come is various forms however the common approach uses a linear-based 'logframe' model which is comprised of three different components; inputs, outputs, outcomes. It describes what is required to make the program function, what activities or services will be provided within the program and what results will be achieved as a direct result of the program.

INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		
	Activities	Participants	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Resources required to deliver the program	What we do (Number)	Who we reach (Number)	Short-term results *Learning* Awareness Knowledge Attitudes Skills Motivations Aspirations Participation	Medium-term results *Action* Behaviour Practice Decision-making	The ultimate impact *Conditions* Social Economic Civic

DEFINITIONS	
Inputs	Resources invested within the program. These can be financial, materialistic and/or human-based in nature.
Outputs	Outputs have two different components: Activities and Participants. • Activities relate to the different services or actions which will incorporated within the service provided within the program. • Participants relate to the people who the program is design to best support.
Outcomes	Outcomes are the results achieved once participants have engaged with the program. These achievements can be short-term, medium-term and long-term.

Drawing from the Outcomes Chain developed, all stakeholders started completing a PLM.

The 'Breakfast Bus' Program Logic Model

INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		
	Activities	Participants	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Project funding Project staff School bus Food supplies Kitchen facilities Project offices Bus route Student wellbeing workers	Number of breakfast packages distributed Number of weekly food parcels distributed Number of bus trips	Number of Breakfast Bus passengers Number of families receiving weekly food packages	Uptake of bus service Uptake of breakfast parcels Uptake of weekly food parcels Household support of school attendance Increased school attendance Able to concentrate at school	Decreased behavioural issues Increased school completion Increased educational attainment Decreased crime rate Decreased number of juvenile justice system entrants	Decreased unemployment and poverty

The reference group now had a systematic, well thought out program represented by the PLM. Fredrick consulted with those within the reference group to determine the best school to trial the program and selected Pineapple Creek Primary School, who had the resources required; such as a bus, student wellbeing workers and a bus driver. A member of the reference group who was connected to a local charity organisation donated food and volunteer time to put together the breakfast packs and food parcels. Fredrick, Kelly and the school principal were very excited by this new partnership being developed.

The "Breakfast Bus" program was to be piloted for a 2-school-term period, during which output and outcomes data was collected in order to assess program effectiveness in addressing school attendance and food security.

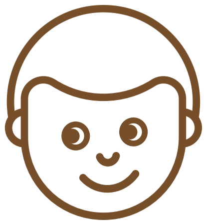
Part 6: Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

Q *How will we know if it worked?*

E Monitoring & Evaluation Findings

T MEL Framework

Fredrick understood the importance of monitoring and evaluation in determining the effectiveness of the program how he was unsure where to start. Fredrick and the reference group attended a workshop on monitoring and evaluation to ensure they designed and implemented the program with evaluation in mind.



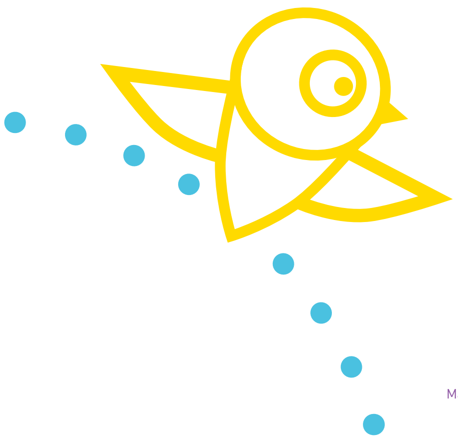
Monitoring Outcomes Vs Evaluation

Fredrick wasn't particularly knowledgeable about evaluation or outcomes monitoring. In fact, his natural assumption was that they were the same thing! But little did he know that they were completely different.

Outcomes Monitoring	Outcomes Monitoring is an ongoing activity that tells us what and how much we have achieved during and following program activities. It involves the routine collection of data (both quantitative & qualitative), that delivers performance information with a focus on program outputs and outcomes. It is descriptive in nature.
Evaulation	Evaluation involves a deeper form of assessment. It tells us how good, relevant, appropriate or equitable program outputs and outcomes are. It is particularly aimed at informing program development. It uses logic to form a judgement of program performance against agreed criteria and standards. Evaluation also answers questions about how well the program is being implemented, or how effectively and efficiently services are being delivered for example.

Evaluation is different from Outcomes Monitoring. Outcomes Monitoring primarily focuses on the overall results achieved from a program, whereas Evaluation uses Outcomes Monitoring results in order to assesses the overall effectiveness and efficiency of a program as whole. Evaluation goes on to produce evidence to determine whether the program needs to be developed further, expanded or come to an end because it is not effective or even harmful.

So, what does evaluative thinking look like? How do we go about making a judgement on some element of a program?



Evaluation

Evaluation is the art of asking questions which determine the needs of a specific program. These questions assess the overall role of the program in achieving change, describing what change looks like and determining what is required within the program in order to meet its objectives. Essentially, evaluation is the method by which we demonstrate the extent to which a program has accomplished its objectives. The various activities within the program are examined to determine whether expected and/or unexpected results have been achieved. Ideally, it also provides a voice for key stakeholders (including program participants) to report on their experience of the service.

For an evaluation to be effective, a person must establish criteria, set standards, measure performance and use evidence to make a judgement.

Establishing Criteria	These criteria provide a framework in order to be able to assess whether participants have experienced the desired outcomes of the program. These criteria can be subjective in nature, as many different stakeholders can have different perspectives. Therefore, several criteria can be used within an evaluation.
Set Standards	Standards quantify the different degrees of achievement for each criterion. These different degrees can be weighted according to a grading system, which can be measured as 'excellent', 'acceptable', or 'poor', for example.
Measure Performance	Output and Outcome data is collected throughout the program to determine current program performance levels.
Use Evidence to Make a Judgement	These performance levels are weighed against the set criteria and standards, a judgement about the real 'value' of the program can be made.

Evaluation can be used to answer a variety of different questions according to the desired aspect of the program being examined. Typically, evaluation questions address the:

- Impact of the program,
- Effectiveness of the program,
- Appropriateness of the program,
- Efficiency of the program, and
- Lessons & Legacy of a program.

For the purposes of the Breakfast Bus program, only program effectiveness will be evaluated.

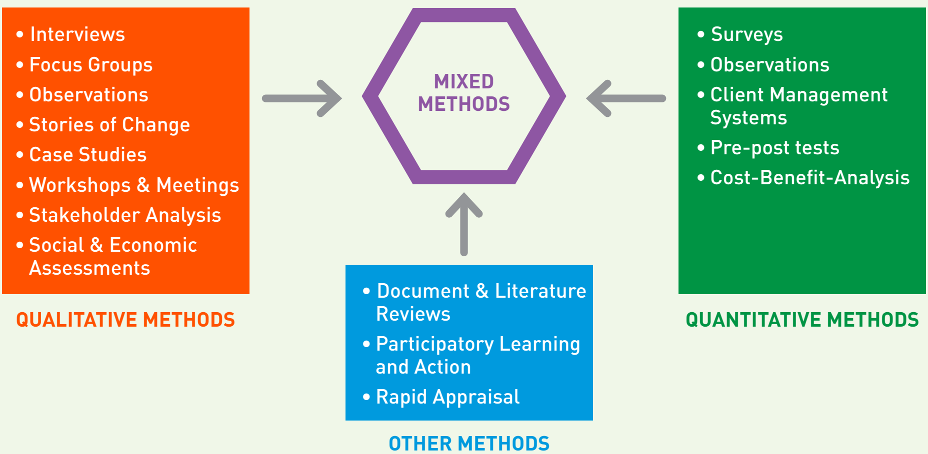
MEASUREMENTS & INDICATORS

Measurements and indicators are very similar in nature but have distinct differences. Measures are any form of participation which can be directly observed by how a participant interacts and responds to a program. Once particular example of this occurring within the Breakfast Bus program would be the number of students attending utilising the bus service. An indicator, however, is slightly different. Indicators, however may imply or be interpreted as change but they do not directly measure it. For example, a child whose shoes are too tight indicates that they have grown out of their shoes however this can only be directly confirmed by comparing a measurement of their feet over time.

Measurements	A direct and accurate appraisal of something *Example: Number of program participants.*
Indicators	An indirect measure of something *Example: Increased ability to concentrate at school, as an indicator of decreased food insecurity.*

METHODS

The nature of the method which is used to collect data is largely determined by the nature of the social problem you are investigating. When dealing with social issues, usually a mixed method approach is most useful because it not only tells you what is happening but also tells the story behind it. Data that you collect and analyse yourself is known as *primary data*. It is often also useful to draw on *secondary data*, such as drawn from reviews and reports authored by government and other organisations.



Evaluating Effectiveness in Practice

When evaluating effectiveness, the purpose is to examine the extent to which the targeted objectives have been achieved through the activities of the program. Evaluation questions with an effectiveness focus ask 'to what extend have planned activities and outcomes been achieved?'. In Fredrick's case, this was certainly the question he and his reference group were asking themselves. Together, they shifted their brain power and started focusing on developing their evaluation strategy.

ESTABLISHING CRITERIA

Fredrick and his reference group put their heads together to think about the criteria of the Breakfast Bus which would govern positive impacts upon low school attendance rates. They concluded that the following criteria would highlight the level of impact they would have upon school attendance rates;

- Uptake of transport service,
- Uptake of the food support service,
- School attendance, and
- Behaviour and learning.

SETTING STANDARDS

Fredricks team stipulated the standards for each of the criteria were as follows:

- To be considered Excellent outcomes measurement would need to provide evidence of;
  - 90% of participants taking the bus service,
  - 90% of participants eat breakfast and take food parcels,
  - School attendance rates improve to meet national average,
  - Teachers report significant improvement in behaviour and learning outcomes.
- To be considered Adequate outcomes measurement would need to provide evidence of;
  - 60% of participants taking the bus service,
  - 60% of participants eat breakfast and take food parcels,
  - School attendance rates improve by 15%,
  - Teachers report some improvement in behaviour and learning outcomes.
- To be considered Poor outcomes measurement would need to provide evidence of;
  - 30% of participants taking the bus service,
  - 30% of participants eat breakfast and take food parcels,
  - School attendance rates remain the same,
  - Teachers report no improvement in behaviour and learning outcomes.

Set Criteria Standards	Excellent	Adequate	Poor
Uptake of bus service	›90% of eligible program participants take the bus to school	›60% of eligible program participants take the bus to school	‹30% of eligible program participants use the service
Uptake of food support service	›90% of eligible program participants eat breakfast and take home food parcels	›60% of eligible program participants eat breakfast and take home food parcels	‹30% of eligible program participants eat breakfast and take home food parcels
School attendance	Improves to meet the national average	Improves to ‹15% below the national average	Remains at ›25% below the national average
Behaviour and learning	Teachers report significant improvement	Teachers report some improvement	Teachers report no change

Now that the working group had identified criteria and standards against which to judge the effectiveness of the Breakfast Bus Program, their next step was to consider:

- Which measures or indicators would be used?
- How would data on these measures and indicators be collected?

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS

Fredrick and the team sought to collate quantitative data for uptake of bus service by measuring the total number of students taking the bus, the number of children eating breakfast on the bus and school attendance according to school administration records. To measure student behaviour and learning improvements, a questionnaire was provided to teachers which ask various questions related to the dominant behaviours and learning patterns they have witnessed within students.

Therefore, this evaluation took a mixed methods approach because it used both quantitative and qualitative data.

Evaluating Effectiveness in Practice (cont.)

Measures and Indicators of Performance	Measure	Indicator	Data Source
Uptake of bus service	Number of students using bus		Program administration records
Uptake of food support service	Number of students having breakfast on bus		Program administration records
School attendance	School attendance rates		School administration records
Behaviour and learning		Teachers report on observed changes	Teacher survey

ASSESSING EVIDENCE TO MAKE A JUDGEMENT

Based upon the data collected, the Reference group was able to use criteria and standards to measure the outcomes of the program;

Pilot period outcomes evaluation	Excellent	Adequate	Poor
Uptake of bus service		>75% of eligible program participants take the bus to school	
Uptake of food support service			<25% of eligible program participants eat breakfast and take home food parcels
School attendance		Improves to <15% below the national average	
Behaviour and learning			Teachers report no change

Having collected monitoring and evaluation data and applied this against established criteria and standards, Frederick was able to form some judgements about the effectiveness of the Breakfast Bus program. Their evaluation indicated that 75% of those eligible for the program regularly took the bus, which resulted in a 15% increase in school attendance rates. However, the evaluation revealed that more than 25% of students were not accepting the food provided by the program for breakfast, or the food home parcels. Additionally, teachers reported that student behaviour had not changed during the pilot period. Frederick was pleased that his evaluation indicated that the program was somewhat effective in increasing school attendance rates but it was disappointing that it was not effective in improving behaviours and learning outcomes of students, and food security.

Fredrick and the reference group decided that based on the evaluation findings they would continue to deliver the program however there was clearly some room for improvement of the program. Frederick reflect that he had previously implemented programs that didn't seem to work out and usually, those programs would be abandoned or even continued, due to a lack of any ideas how to improve it. The reference group was grateful that they had evidence to identify the areas of the program that required improvement in order to address the program objectives. Notably, their efforts to meet the food insecurity issues experienced by families were unsuccessful and their next task was to determine why that was the case and how to change the program to better meet families' needs.

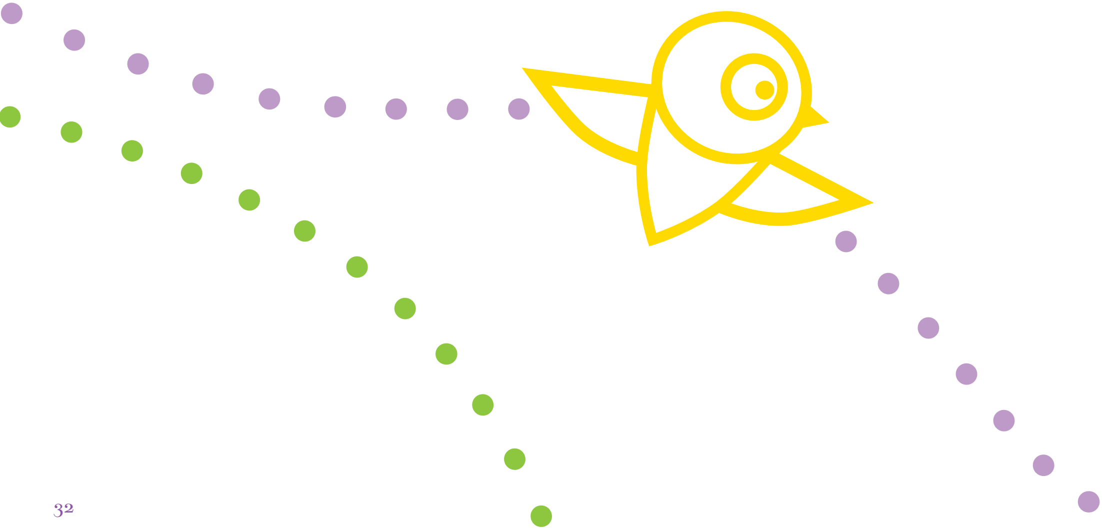
The reference group decided to conduct a discrete research study to investigate the reasons for so many children not making use of the food support offered, in order to redesign the food support aspect of the program accordingly. This study could comprise a literature review, interviews, focus group and consultation forums with local service providers and community members. They approached the research group that had previously been in the community who helped them develop a research proposal to take to the local government for consideration.

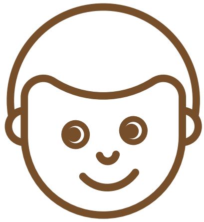
Communicating Monitoring and Evaluation Findings

The final step in program evaluation is to share findings with participants, stakeholders and organisations battling similar issues. Communicating monitoring and evaluation findings both within organisation, and outside of an organisation is a critical part of the journey in bringing evidence of what works to practice. Clearly communicating findings within the organisation serves to keep everyone on the same page regarding what we are doing, why we are doing it, how it is going, what we are learning, and what we need to change in order to do better.

Frederick presented the program findings at a school staff meeting, the school council, and in the school newsletter. He used social media, the school website and a flyer for parents to share the findings with participating families and invite them to attend a parent consultation session to voice their experiences and provide an opportunity for parents to share their ideas for ways that the program could be improved. He spoke in front of assembly to let students know that the program was going to continue and to invite students to attend a student consultation session.

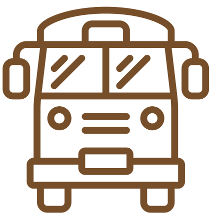
Communicating to stakeholders is very important in ensuring that everybody involved remains invested and that their voices remain heard. Communicating findings to the sector in general serves the vital function of building the knowledge base around evidence of what works. The way we report and use evaluation findings with funders is probably one of the most crucial requirements in ensuring program financial sustainability.





Frederick wrote a report for the Department of Education describing the process that he followed to develop the Breakfast Bus program and outlining provisional outcomes. Given the promising results, and the clear articulation of the process that was followed, his Grant Agreement Manager telephoned Frederick to invite him to present the project learnings at a state-wide forum on student wellbeing and engagement. Frederick was surprised to discover that even though the program wasn't successful in meeting all of its objectives, the department was still keen for him to share his experience. He was also glad that, thanks to the Program Story approach, he was able to confidently describe the program goals and reasoning for the activities, outputs and outcomes. Lots of forum participants asked some helpful questions and were able to relate to some of Frederick's frustrations and challenges. This sparked a few ideas for the next stage of the project and also some other sources of evidence they hadn't come across. After his presentation, he was approached by several people from other schools in Queensland who had similar experiences and challenges and they formed an informal network group that would keep in contact by email and teleconferences to share experiences and resources.

Here we have reached the end of Frederick's story, but not the end of the Breakfast Bus program. Despite the fact that the program wasn't perfect, Frederick and the reference group were motivated and optimistic that they were a step closer to understanding the nature of school attendance and food insecurity problems in Pineapple Creek. By thinking through the program design process thoroughly, and collecting and analysing monitoring and evaluation data, they were able to capitalise upon the aspects of the program that had been effective and knew where to start to address the areas that were not yet having the desired impact.



By continuing to develop the evidence for their Breakfast Bus program, they were not only developing their own knowledge but also contributing to the evidence base for what works in rural and remote towns struggling with low school attendance rates. Frederick was keen to continue to develop the Breakfast Bus program, using a logical and thorough process to refine the program objectives, identify appropriate activities, collect information on outputs and measure outcomes. He was grateful that the program story approach had helped him to learn how to design a program with evaluation in mind. Now that Frederick had applied the program story approach to the issue of low school attendance, he felt confident to approach other problems and design and develop future programs. He was keen to continue to apply and refine his ability to design, monitor and evaluate existing and potential programs and communicate the findings effectively so that he could understand their impact, improve programs and build the evidence base.

Useful Resources

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT EVALUATION

→ Better Evaluation is a useful website to understand evaluation practice and theory: www.betterevaluation.org

→ Community Sustainability Project's Evaluation Toolbox has a lot of useful tools for evaluation: www.evaluationtoolbox.net.au

→ The Australian Institute of Family Studies' (AIFS) Child Family Community Australia page provides a lot of useful evaluation information for the child and family sector: www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/expert-panel-project/research-evaluation-and-expert-panel-project-resources

PROGRAM LOGIC TOOLS

→ The University of Wisconsin Extension project provides some useful templates and tutorials: www.fyi.extension.wisc.edu/programdevelopment/logic-models/

→ The United States Institute for Education Sciences has a Logic Model Workshop Toolkit: www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?ProjectID=401 and a quick reference guide: www.ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=REL2014007

→ AIFS has a guide and helpful tutorial to guide program planning and evaluation: www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/expert-panel-project/program-planning-evaluation-guide/plan-your-program-or-service/how-develop-program-logic-planning-and-evaluation

→ Evaluation Toolbox steps the reader through program logic development with helpful graphics and short powerpoint tutorials: www.evaluationtoolbox.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30&Itemid=136

OTHER TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS

→ The Victorian Government Department of Health & Human Services provides an evaluation framework for health promotion and disease prevention programs: www2.health.vic.gov.au/getfile/?sc_itemid=%7B33944722-B41A-4FE3-9EA4-BD360DFDD7FA%7D&title=Evaluation%20framework%20for%20health%20promotion%20and%20disease%20prevention%20programs

→ VicHealth have a useful Partnership Analysis Tool: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-partnerships-analysis-tool

About Us

WHO IS CFRE?

The Centre for Family Research and Evaluation (CFRE) is a collaborative applied research centre located within drummond street services, an innovative community services organisation. CFRE was initiated by drummond street services CEO Karen Field through a recognition that services need to stay connected to research evidence and researchers need to stay connected to practice.

We have a team of research consultants experienced in designing and planning programs, conducting research and evaluation work, as well as training and mentoring others. We partner with service delivery and academic partners on projects to build the capacity of individuals, project teams and organisations to generate and use evidence in their work.

We work in the nexus between research, policy and practice. By combining our years of experience in service delivery, strong academic partnerships and involvement in policy, we understand the challenges of program improvement in the context of a changing social context and shifting government priorities. We work hard to ensure the support we provide is fit for purpose, flexible and practical. We enable organisations to understand quality program design and development, to adapt to evidence as it emerges and to be able to demonstrate the merit and worth of their services. By helping service delivery agencies and policy makers to use evidence, empower their communities and improve their services and programs, we believe that the outcomes for children, families and communities across Australia will improve.

Services that we provide include:

- Tailored program support
- Individualised support from strategic planning to outcome evaluation
- Workshops and training
- Practical and targeted capacity building for program planning and development
- Research
- Gathering evidence and collecting data to inform decision-making
- Independent evaluations
- Rigorous, strengths-based evaluations to measure the impact of your work

Centre for
FAMILY RESEARCH
and EVALUATION

HOW DO WE WORK?

CFRE have existing training modules and workshops, as well as models for mentoring project teams and organisations to build capacity in a self-sustaining way. We have found the best approach for building capacity is using a combination of methods and applying a collaborative and reflective approach, which allows individuals and groups to direct their learning, self-assess and be coached through change. We're experienced in principles of human-centred design and adopt a flexible and creative approach to collaboration.

CFRE supports agencies and project teams to design, develop and improve their programs. We deliver workshops and training, provide consultancy services (in person or remotely) and conduct research and evaluation projects. Many organisations come into contact with us through capacity-building projects. Australia-wide, funded by federal and state government departments. We are members of expert panels and industry lists that are curated by the Department of Social Services and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Agencies also contact us directly to discuss their needs and deliver projects according to their specific strategic priorities.

www.cfre.org.au

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