



Background to Focus Group: addressing support needs of Siblings

About Families Australia

Families Australia is the national peak not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the needs and interests of families. It seeks to do this at the national level by acting as a conduit for information and views between, on one hand, the Federal Government and its agencies, and, on the other, individuals, families and community-based organisations. From time-to-time, Families Australia conducts focus groups and other forms of consultation to explore understandings about contemporary family issues.

Work to date on siblings issues

Since 2009, Families Australia has worked with Siblings Australia to advocate for and raise the profile of siblings as a cohort, for whom the public policy debate about their wellbeing and potential, is largely silent.

During this period of collaboration, Families Australia has worked together with Siblings Australia to develop a position paper prior to the last Federal election, contributed to the development of the Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) position paper on siblings, promoted Siblings Australia web resources, as well as regularly included siblings issues in advocacy papers to the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

Families Australia welcomes the recent undertaking by the RANZCP, in advancing the interests of siblings living in complex environments. Their Position Paper 69: Addressing the needs of siblings of children with disability or chronic illness, (http://www.ranzcp.org/images/stories/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/College_Statements/Position_Statements/ps69.pdf) is supported by a more comprehensive report, (http://www.ranzcp.org/images/stories/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/siblings_report.pdf) in which the lack of data and information about sibling needs and supports is articulated. Strategically, the lack of evidence on siblings and their needs creates a 'greenfield' or under-developed public policy area, which presents as an opportunity for policy and program development.

Families Australia is particularly interested to understand the implications of mental health and wellbeing issues facing siblings. Siblings are defined as those who have brothers and/or sisters with a chronic condition; whether that condition is disability or chronic illness and includes mental illness.

Purpose of sibling consultation

The purpose of this focus group is to explore the recommendations made by the RANZCP. The aim is to identify practical strategies to underpin the RANZCP recommendations and which Families Australia will utilise in its on-going support for siblings in the national policy arena.

Focus group arrangements

The focus group will consist of approximately 10 people, the majority being siblings, and may include teachers or other workers with a specific interest in sibling support and potentially one or two parents. This diverse mix will create opportunities for multiple interests to be taken into consideration, for example young siblings or teachers who support young siblings within the education system.

The duration of each session will be 1 ½ hours.

The two alternate dates are Friday, 10th February, 5 – 6.30 pm OR Saturday, 11th February, 10 – 11.30.

The venue: UnitingCare Wesley, Adelaide, 2nd Floor, 10 Pitt Street, Adelaide.

Your hosts: Kate Strohm, Siblings Australia and Stella Conroy, Families Australia. Light refreshments will be available.

The discussion and feedback will contribute to future advocacy for siblings.

The Hosts

Kate is the founder and Director of Siblings Australia, and has a sister with cerebral palsy. Stella has a long history in the human services sector, working across diverse family settings and is currently the senior policy manager with Families Australia. Stella is a sibling of an adult brother, who has an enduring mental illness.

RSVP

If you are interested in attending one of the sessions please send your details (name, phone, email) and preferred session via return email or phone 0408720558 by **30 January**.

NB I am away 15-21 January and will be accessing emails sporadically.

If you would like to contribute, but cannot attend either session, please call me to discuss – it may be that you could provide a written response.