# Contribution Analysis: Evaluating the impact of intensive family services, applying theory in a realworld context

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## I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of

### the Eora Nation, who are the traditional

custodians of this land and pay my respects to

the Elders both past, present and emerging

# What I'm going to talk about

- Our evaluation and its purpose
- Why we chose Contribution Analysis
- The 'steps' of Contribution Analysis
- Our experiences using Contribution Analysis
  - The value it brings
  - o Its challenges and limitations

## What you'll take away from today's session

By using theory - we can *Strengthen* and *Guide* decisions about *what* data to collect and *when* 

- Applying theory to real-world evaluations can be
  - *Messy* data collection and quality may vary
  - o *Iterative* counterintuitively we may need to go backwards to move forward
  - *Challenging* assumptions may not be met or be wrong
- This is our first go at applying contribution analysis we are learning as we go ...

## **Purpose of the evaluation**

To understand the impact of the 200 Hours Intensive

Family Support Program (as a whole) in terms of family

functioning and preventing children from entering the

statutory child protection system

Establishing causality for programs operating in complex systems



## **Evaluation design**



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# How does Contribution Analysis add value?

• A systematic framework (including an explicit Theory of

Change) to conduct analysis by

- Does not require a counterfactual
- *Reduces* uncertainty about how an program contributes towards

observed results (evidence supporting the causal chain)

## The Framework – Contribution Analysis's 6 steps



(Mayne 2008, 2011)

## **Step 1: The attribution problem** ...

- Has 200 hours made a difference to or influenced the expected outcomes?
- Is it reasonable to conclude 200 hours has added value?



- $\circ$  Families been preserved (staying together)
  - Reunification of children with their families
    - (both of these keeping children out of out-

of-home-care)

• Family functioning improves

### Steps 2 & 4: Develop & assess the Theory of Change

#### Our *first* rendition of the Theory of Change

	Results chain	Theory of change: assumptions and risks		Results chain	Theory of change: Assumptions	Risks
Final Outcomes	Families remain preserved     Families remain reunified	Assumptions: • 200 hours of tailored family support will result in improved family functioning that will ultimately result in family preservation	Longer-term Outcomes (more than 12- months post 200h)	Families remain preserved     Families remain reunified     Families are able to use support structures (formal & informal) established for them, ongoing, as needed     Participating families develop improved connection with their community	Assumptions: • 200 hours of tailored family support contributes to improved family functioning and potentially preservation of the family unit • Family services will work with all children in a family, irrespective of whether only one child on orders • Referral processes occur in a timely fashion	Risks: Children may still remain in the statutory system and families not be unified Referral processes <u>not</u> timely
Intermediate outcomes (post 6 months)	Families are preserved     Families are reunified	Assumptions:           • Participant families apply new skills and behaviours over time and with consistency beyond the 200 Hours Intensive Support Program	Intermediate outcomes (greater than 6-months 200h)	Families are preserved or reunified     The safety and well-being of children is maintained or     improved     Support structures set up around families, post the     intensive 200h support ending	Assumptions: <ul> <li>It is appropriate and in the best interests of the child for them to remain with their family</li> <li>It is appropriate and in the best interests of the child for them to remain with their family</li> <li>Participant families learn new skills and behaviours or build upon existing strengths that they can apply consistently over time, moving beyond the support period for 200h Hours</li> <li>That 200h intensive family support will be sufficient for most families to change behaviours and apply new skills</li> </ul>	Risks: Some families require more than 200h of intensive support to reach point of independence from support • Children may be placed
Immediate outcomes (post 200 hrs)	<ul> <li>Intensive support prevents children from entering the statutory protection system</li> <li>Increased services provided to support family preservation or reunification</li> <li>Improved parental wellbeing</li> <li>Improved child wellbeing</li> <li>Improved parent-child relationship</li> <li>Improved family functioning</li> <li>Effective partnership between family services and child protection</li> </ul>	Assumptions: (up to 6-	outcomes (up to 6- months post	Intensive support to families prevents children from remaining in or re-entering the statutory protection system     Family case plans may contain one or more therapeutic approaches targeting the below outcomes (dependent upon needs of families and their circumstances)     Increased services provided to support family preservation or reunification     Improved parent-childrelia Improved parent-childrelia Improved parent-childrelia Improved family functioning     Iffective partnership between organisations     Family's formal & informal supports improve and connection with community	Assumptions:           • Families are ready and open to receiving intensive support from Family Services to support preservation or reunification           • Families are ready and open to receiving intensive support from Family Services to support preservation or reunification           • Family Services staff receive training to ensure they have the skills to deliver tailored support strategies that aim to build family functioning, capability and promote child safety/wellbeing and development           • Program specific training for Family Services and Child Protection is ongoing to ensure staff can deliver 200h as intended           • 200h is sufficient time for participant families to integrate knowledge and skills learned across the period of their intensive support           • The environment of participating families is sufficiently non-chaotic for them to engage meaningfully with IFS           • Interventions employed by contracted agencies in delivering the intensive 200h are wholistic, in the best interests of the children and mostly effective, contributing towards intended outcomes           • There is a shared understanding of program goals and practice           • There are tools available or existing practices used by contracted agencies to capture changes in family functioning to Contracted agencies have flexibility to tailor interventions in response to changes in family case plans/situations           • Program goals and outcomes are clearly articulated	Risks:           • Families situation is chaotic and a barrier to them engaging with Family Services           • Training and support for Family Services and Child Protection staff not delivered and impacts on their capacity to deliver the 200h model as intended           • There is poor shared understanding of program roles and responsibilities for 200h by Family Services and Child Protection, which results in inconsistent program delivery (practice)           • Capacity of Child Protection to meet their KPIs is restricted by systemic barriers outside their control, impacting upon Family Services and ultimately families           • Families are not ready/willing to work with
	•		Outputs	200 hours of intensive family services for 300 families with a family preservation or reunification order     Cross organisational partnership is encouraged     Joint case planning meetings occur regularly     Referrals are appropriate	Assumptions:         • Eligible families are referred into 200h         • Eligible families receive 200h intensive support from contracted agencies         • Increased level of service intensity improves likelihood of family preservation or reunification         • Participant families are at a stage where they are receptive and wanting to engage with contracted agencies         • Participant families want to work with contracted agencies to move out of the statutory system         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are tailored appropriately for individual families         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing best practice principles         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing best practice principles         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing best practice principles         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to statutoriag         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing best practice principles         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing best practice principles         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing best practice principles         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing by the statutories         • Interventions employed by contracted agencies are implemented to sing by the statutories	Family Services

intensive support vulnerable families functioning will improve resulting in families being preserved or reunified and children being kept out of the out-of-home-care system

#### Our *second* rendition of the Theory of Change Results chain Theory of change: Assumptions Risks

With critical input from Intensive Family Preservation Support workers

Contracted agencies able to focus usage of 200h in direct service delivery to support familie.

Intensive support given for 200h able to focus working with families to achieve desired outcon

Delivery of 200h support absorbed by cri

driven responses by Family Services

# **Step 3: Gathering the evidence**

Challenges faced

- Mixed findings
- Variability of strength and quality of evidence
- Variation in how outcomes defined
- Model discussed in literature differs to that used in Victoria

# **Limitations of Contribution Analysis**

You can only make a contribution claim when:

- You have a clearly articulated Theory of Change
- The program has been implemented as depicted in the Theory of Change

### Contribution Analysis also:

- Cannot be used to uncover a new Theory of Change
- Does not provide definitive proof or quantitate the degree that a program contributes to observed changes



As long as there is a clearly articulated Theory of Change applying Contribution Analysis can help you to construct a reasoned argument supporting a conclusion that a program has plausibly contributed to observed results

## Where are we now and next steps?

and ...



 Compiling client service journeys Steps Analysing administrative data





## What are your experiences?

Has anyone used contribution analysis, other theory based approaches to evaluation?

What have you learnt?

Its key

- Strengths?
- Weaknesses?

Would you use it again? Why, why not?





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# **Useful references**

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