



Building better futures  
for children with disabilities

## Feedback Services Project 2016

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of the Feedback Services Project is to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in relation to key areas of Noah's Ark service delivery of the Commonwealth funded Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) including:

- Interacting in a respectful and professional manner
- Working collaboratively
- Strengthening Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services
- Building the capacity of educators
- Supporting community engagement and linkages
- Assisting services to access (IPSP) resources as appropriate.
- Providing practical professional advice and guidance, and sourcing information to respond to identified need
- Supporting services to work in partnership with families and local support networks
- Assisting eligible services to identify their professional development needs and opportunities
- Supporting services to engage in ongoing reflective practices and continuous improvement related to inclusive practices
- Overall satisfaction

In December 2015 Noah's Ark interviewed a random sample of 443 ECEC service educators who had accessed inclusion support from one of Noah's Ark's nine Inclusion support Agencies (ISA) during October 2015. A total of 96 educators participated in this project, representing 21.67% of the ECEC services who received support from Noah's Ark during this period. Based on the analysis of strengths and areas for improvement a set of recommendations for future practice were developed.

### Major findings

Overall, participants were satisfied with the support they received from Noah's Ark. The highest performing areas were the experience of initial contact, experience of the Inclusion Support

Facilitator (ISF) and their overall satisfaction. The lower performing areas were related to the provision of written information, the development of Inclusion Improvement Plans (IIPs) and capacity building.

In summary:

- 91.6% of services were satisfied with the support they received from Noah's Ark
- Services highly valued the relationship they had with the ISF
- Services indicated that they felt more confident and better equipped to plan for the inclusion of all children after working with the ISF
- Educators felt that developing the IIP in collaboration with their ISF enabled them to reflect on their practices and identify resources to support inclusion.

The data also highlighted a number of inconsistencies of practice in the ISF's delivery of the program, particularly in the level of support offered to ECEC services. Inconsistency is often related to frequency of contact with services, provision of support within the care environment and assistance in developing IIPs. Key recommendations for Noah's Ark include to:

- Increase consistency of practice of the ISF's
- Provide support and training for educators to assist them to understand how to develop a meaningful IIP
- Update the Noah's Ark website with IPSP program information and relevant forms
- Email information packages to each ECEC service at the beginning of the year or when there is a change in service management.

## **Introduction**

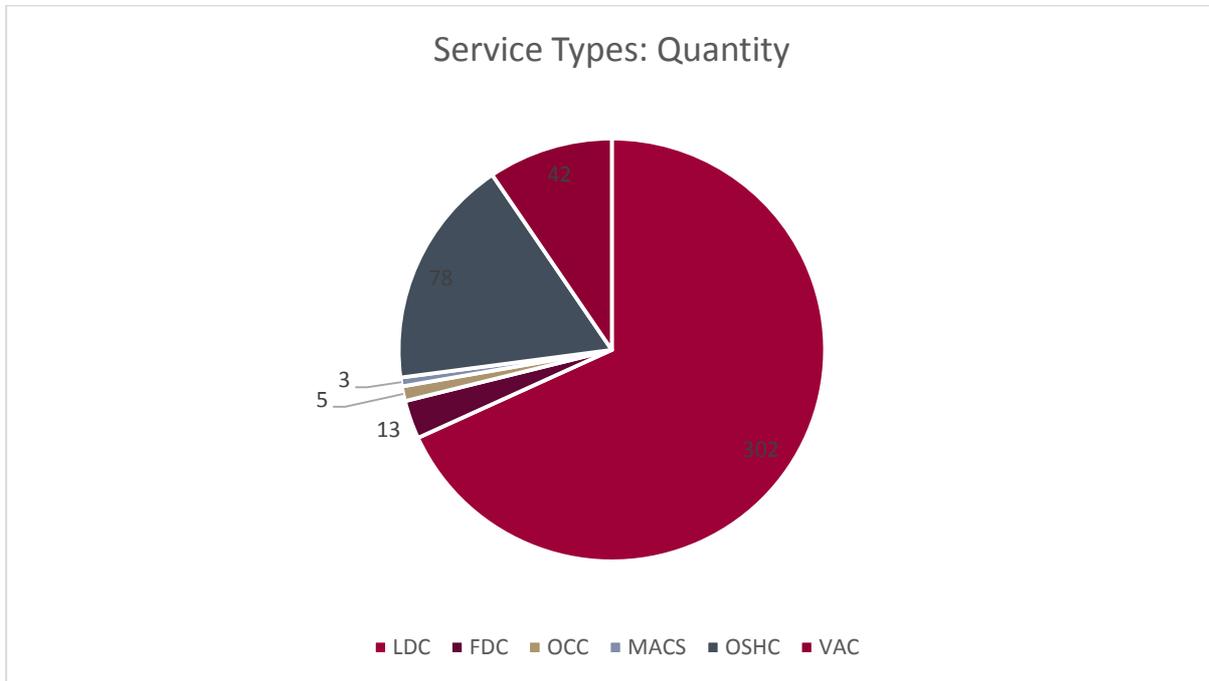
The purpose of the Services Feedback Project was to gather information about the experiences of services who have recently worked with a Noahs Ark ISF. Feedback was gathered across a range of areas and used to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The information was also used to inform recommendations for future practice. The project was completed by Sharne Wheaton (ISF), with the assistance of Lauren Falconer (ECIS) and Michele Totterdell (Project Manager).

## **Methodology**

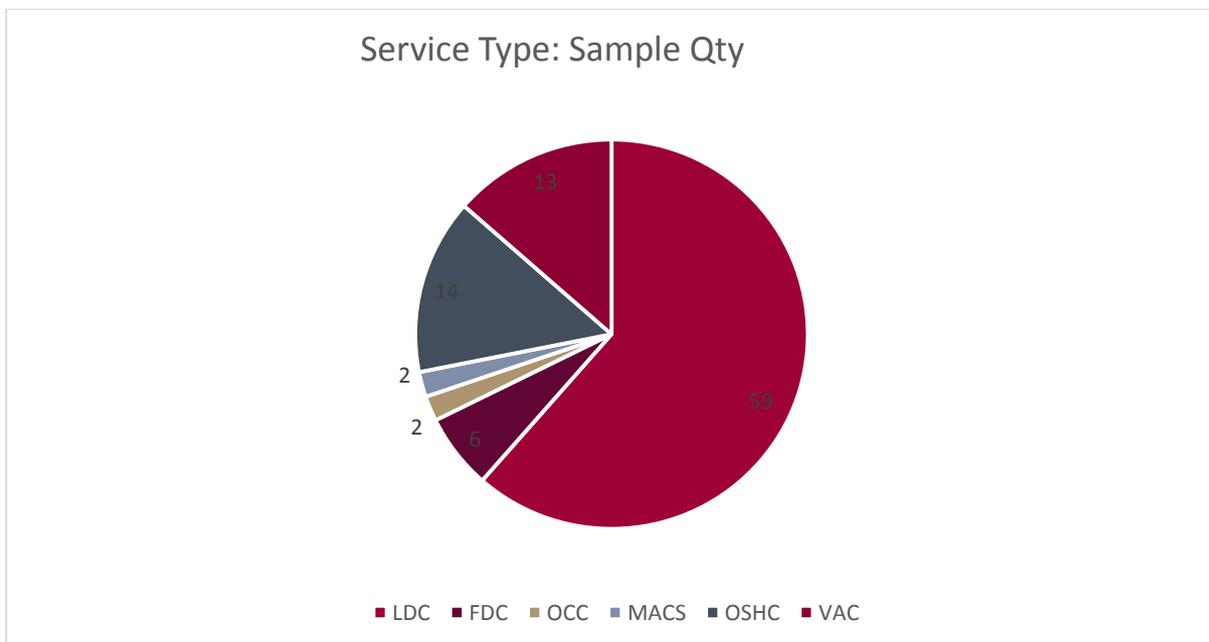
Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with ECEC services who had worked with an ISF in the month of October 2015. Team Leaders from each ISA provided a list of relevant services, broken down into service type. Service types included Long Day Care (LDC), Outside School Hours Care (OSHC), Vacation Care (VC), Family Day Care (FDC), Occasional Care (OCC) and Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS). Participants were randomly selected from each ISA service list using a systematic sampling approach, ensuring a cross section of service types.

A total of 443 participants worked with an ISF in the month of October 2015. A total of 96 ECEC services participated in the project, representing 21.67% of the population (n=443). The majority of interviews were conducted with the Director or Co-ordinator of the services and occasionally with room educators. Interviews were conducted in December 2015 and lasted an average 20 minutes.

The semi-structured interview format explored six key areas: the initial visit, experience of the ISF, Inclusion Improvement Plan, information provided, building capacity and overall satisfaction. Open ended questions were used to gather qualitative information. Quantitative data was gathered by asking participants to rate their experience of each area on a scale of 1-10, where one was the lowest and ten the highest. All participants were informed that their interviews were confidential and that their name would not be attached to their responses. All but one of the participants gave consent for the call to be recorded so that the information shared was transcribed accurately. These recordings were deleted within a week of the interview taking place. Consent was also obtained to use de-identified comments in Noah's Ark reports or brochures.



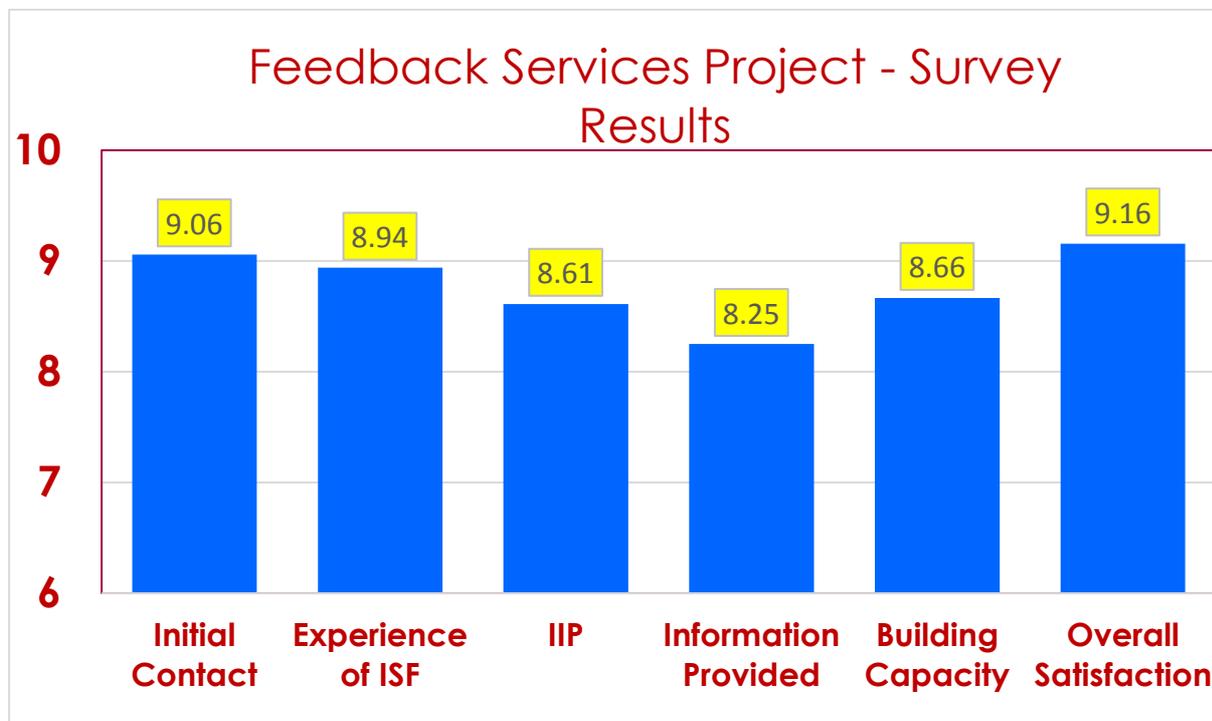
**Figure 1.** Number of services that worked with a Noah’s Ark ISF in October 2015.



**Figure 2.** Number of ECEC services that participated in the project interviews

## Results

Overall the feedback from services was positive, particularly related to initial contact, experience of the ISF and overall satisfaction. The average scores for each area are represented in the graph below. Average scores ranged from 8.25/10 for information provided and 9.16/10 for overall satisfaction. Based on the scoring the highest performing areas were overall satisfaction, initial contact and experience of the ISF. This data is consistent with the qualitative feedback provided during the semi-structured interviews. The specific feedback from services has been grouped according to the interview questions.



**Table 1.** Scores of satisfaction from ECEC interviews

### Experience of initial contact

The average score for this question was 9.06 out of 10 indicating that most services found the experience of initial contact to be very positive. Most of the services had long established relationships with Noah's Ark ISFs and were clear about the process for requesting support. This may have contributed to the high scores in this area. Initial contact was made with their ISF via phone or email and in most cases this request was responded to promptly. Responses from

most services indicated that Noah's Ark has a high profile in the early childhood sector and that the organisation has a good reputation for supporting children with additional needs.

*"I have a rapport with my inclusion support facilitator, we found her to be supportive, she empowers us, and we are able to ask questions, her mobile number is always available. I have found it to be an amazingly terrific service."*

Many services felt their ISFs were reliable, knowledgeable and professional. Almost all services suggested that their ISF was friendly, non-judgemental and responsive to their needs.

*"They were extremely supportive. Always happy to help me."*

Two services suggested that they had some initial difficulty getting in touch with the relevant ISA and a small number of participants felt that they would like more visits from their ISF.

*"Process of getting support easy but usually when I call there is no one available but they do get back to me promptly."*

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue to focus on developing and maintaining relationships with services
- Be responsive to service needs and make a clear agreement with services around frequency of visits
- Continue to raise the profile of the organisation and IPSP through participation in networks, local government working groups and attendance at ECEC service team meeting
- Consider further promotion of the IPSP program by hosting regional meetings at the beginning of each year for ECEC services and invite guest speakers
- Consider a central phone number, manned for the duration of business hours, for services to call and make a request for support.

### **Experience of the ISF**

The average score for this question was 8.95 out of 10 indicating that services were mostly happy with the experience of working with their ISF. Services indicated that when the ISF visited them they met with room educators both in and out of the care environment, held discussions with directors and management and often met with external supports services and occasionally, with families.

Many services indicated that the most important task their ISF supported them with was applying for Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) Funding, particularly the language required when writing a funding application. Participants indicated that their ISF had a good breadth of knowledge and experience, particularly around the inclusion of children with additional needs. Services have an understanding of the IPSP program and the resources available to support inclusion as well as other resources available.

“Our ISF provided lots of support and shared her experience and knowledge with us. She was very professional, gave advice when needed and answered any questions we had. If she didn't have the answer straight away she would get back to us within a day or two.”

Many participants indicated that their ISF offered practical supports by helping them through the process of accessing IPSP supports and providing strategies and resources to address their identified needs. Many services spoke about the importance of the ISF spending time in the care environment, as well as meeting with educators outside the care environment.

“We don't have a lot of visitors out here. Having her spend time out here to chat with the girls informally was really wonderful. She spent time in the yard and in the room with the kids, and the staff felt really confident and comfortable around her. It was a really positive experience for the staff out here,

“Our ISF listened, offered available resources, discussed strategies, did room observations and actioned things immediately. The ISF has the expertise to make

the process easy and they were able to identify resources that we were not aware of.”

Many participants indicated that they felt well supported by their ISF but would like more follow up visits after the initial support. Some Family Day Care Schemes stated that they would like the ISF to visit with the educator at their home as well as the Scheme, offering support to both the FDC management and the educator. Some large providers of VC and OSHC programs felt that the majority of the work was done with management but not always with the services. These services often had different ISFs supporting them each program and there seemed to be no handover process to support this change, thus making the process more time consuming and not as effective. Participants indicated that the support would have been more effective if the ISF had worked more intensively with the program educators rather than management.

“Generally the meetings are held with VC manager for all the programs. It would be better if they could also visit the educators at the individual programs to offer more specific strategies, see the program setup and do the IIP with them.”

Almost all services reported that they liked information being gathered through visits and discussions, explaining that a good collaborative relationship with their ISF is the key to facilitating information sharing and reflective conversations. Services found their ISF to be approachable and friendly. They also identified their ISF had a good understanding of ECEC environments and was very supportive.

“I've built a really strong relationship with our ISF, she's a real people person and a great communicator, she's always very calming and supportive, offers different ideas and knows our service really well. She is really respectful towards us as educators and that we do know what we are doing in some respects, but offers us additional support to compliment what we are already doing.”

Many services indicated that their ISF used reflective questioning and coaching in their discussions, which they found helpful.

“She just picks a moment where she can add something of value to the conversation and that's where her experience and knowledge will come in. She will say, have you thought about doing it this way? Everything she says to try works. We call her our fairy godmother. “

“It's always really positive, allows me to reflect and really think about things and what we want to see happen.”

“I really liked that we worked together as a team.”

“Everything's been great. They were always supportive. The educators always feel like they've been listened to and encouraged, never shut down.”

Whilst most services were pleased with the experience of the ISF there also appears to be inconsistent approaches in the way ISFs work. This is particularly evident around the practice of going into rooms during a visit, attending ECEC staff meetings, meeting with families and completing paperwork requirements. Some services that have worked with different ISFs from the same or different ISA have highlighted the dissimilarity in practice and the level of support offered.

“I would like the ISF to go in the room but says it's not her role. It would be good at times to have support meetings with the family, ISF and ECIS to exchange information and strategies. This option has never been offered to us.”

“We did most of the paperwork which was time consuming. Would like the ISF to visit more and spend more time in rooms getting to know the child.”

A high percentage of services requested that they would like to have the ISF visit their service more frequently.

### **Recommendations:**

- Explore service expectations upon the initial visit to determine number and frequency of visits
- Increase consistency of practice of the ISFs.
- Continue to reflect on relationships with services and examine how ISFs can adapt their approach to build rapport
- Develop a clear process around changes in ISF to minimise the disruption to services.

### **Inclusion Improvement Plan (IIP)**

The average score for this question was 8.61 out of 10 indicating that the majority of services were positive about the way the ISF supported them to develop their IIP. The development of the IIP was usually done with one or more of the educators working in the particular care environment and in some instances with the director or manager as well. Participants emphasised that they liked that the IIP was developed collaboratively with their ISF and that they were supported to identify their needs and develop their goals and actions.

“She was able to work collaboratively with our educators to assist us in identifying our needs and setting goals. I liked the way it linked to the NQS and QIP and found it a useful tool for continuous improvement.”

“It's collaborative. There's information sharing and guidance, without it being prescriptive.”

“Was developed in consultation with the Educational Leader the ISF and Co-ordinator. ISF was fantastic in stepping us through the most effective way of completing the IIP and making sure it was relevant to our service.”

Although services mostly found developing the IIP useful, the process by which the document was developed varied greatly between ISFs. Some services were required to develop the IIP by themselves and others were developed in collaboration with the ISF. In some cases the IIP was typed by the service and in others it was typed by the ISF. Services also indicated that goals in the IIP were specific while others were too broad.

“Different ISF's will offer varying levels of support in developing the IIP. Some give lots of resources and links and others not so much.”

“ISF left us to do it on our own with no support. Found the document repetitive and wordy. Would have been helpful to have some specific questions to get us thinking. Would like ISF to support us through the process.”

Most services were able to identify a goal that was meaningful to them and based on the whole environment rather than an individual child. Goals related to modifications to the environment, supporting children's social and emotional development, supporting children with challenging behaviours, transitions, communicating effectively with families and working collaboratively with families and support services.

“I was able to sit with my educators prior to the ISF coming to visit to discuss inclusion needs and then I developed the IIP with the ISF. She assisted us to modify our environment to support smaller groups. We reflect on the IIP at team meetings. I like the way it links to the frameworks and makes you reflect on your practice.”

Many services identified that the IIP enabled them to identify resources that were available to assist them in reaching their goals and that their ISF was knowledgeable about the resources available. In some cases ISFs provided the educators with resources such as visual aids, books and toys.

On the whole, services liked that the IIP linked goals to the National Quality Standards (NQS) as this aligned well with their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Many services stated that the IIP was a useful document to reflect on current practice and the process of evaluating the IIP enabled them to keep track of their progress.

“The IIP assists us to breakdown our needs and develop goals that support all children. We use the IIP regularly to reflect on our progress at team meetings.”

When asked about reviewing or evaluating their IIP, many services said that they didn't often reflect on the plan. Many services identified that increased consistency in review periods would be an area for improvement

“The process of developing the IIP was straight forward. We typed it up together with our ISF. Found the plan useful initially but then tend to forget about it until we are reminded to do progress notes by our ISF.”

A common theme emerging from feedback was that the process of developing the IIP was very time consuming. It can often be difficult for educators to have time release from their room to meet with the ISF. Many services also stated that they would have liked the discussions to be held with all educators in the room as well as management but this was not always possible.

“The process of developing an IIP is time consuming and it's not always possible to have all relevant parties participate.”

### **Recommendations**

- Build the capacity of individual services to develop a meaningful IIP and provide support and training as required
- Support services to review their IIP and document progress
- Ensure that roles and responsibilities of ISF and educator are clarified at the initial meeting.

### **Experience of information provided**

Experience of information provided was the lowest scoring area with an average rating of 8.25 out of 10. Services were mostly happy with the written information provided but identified that it would be beneficial to have the information more readily available. It should be noted that introduction packs, with comprehensive written material about the IPSP program and role of the ISF, were given to services upon initial request for support but the information is often lost over time due to changes in staff.

“Written information on the IPSP program needs to be updated and emailed regularly as there is a high changeover in staff and the information gets lost. Maybe send out with initial request for support.”

Most participants were happy that information was provided using a variety of methods such as: email, phone, visits and face-to-face conversations. They valued the resources and written strategies that their ISF was able to provide, and found email updates about relevant professional development opportunities useful.

“ISF always keeps us up to date with changes and things that may impact us through phone calls and emails. She knows about all the resources available through the IPSP program that can help us.”

“The ISF provided us with an information pack as I was new. She came out and demonstrated how to use the ISS portal. She emailed helpful tips and hints on completing the paperwork.”

Most services have accessed one or more of the IPSP resources (ISS, FSF, Specialist Equipment, Bicultural Support) with the support of their ISF. A large number of participants were not aware of all of the IPSP resources available.

“I had not heard about the program resources until we needed them and then they were explained. Maybe that information needs to be updated regularly. Sometimes it is not passed down to educators from Management.”

When asked about areas for improvement, services identified that providing written information electronically would be helpful. However there were also a number of services who preferred to have hard copies available for families.

**Recommendations:**

- Website to be updated with IPSP program information and relevant forms

- Determine the service's preference for how they receive information and provide that information accordingly
- Email Information packs to services at the beginning of the year or when there is a change in management
- Attend regional networks and ECEC service team meetings to disseminate information
- Develop a quarterly newsletter to be emailed to ECEC services. Include updated information on the IPSP program and relevant professional development opportunities.

### **Building capacity**

The average score for this question was 8.6 out of 10 indicating that overall services felt that their capacity to be more inclusive has been strengthened in response to ISF support. There were some challenges with this question as many participants did not understand the concept of capacity-building and some of the questions had to be re-worded in order to gather a meaningful response.

Many of the participants felt that having a funded additional Educator was a successful measure of inclusion and that the ISF was invaluable in supporting them to access that funding.

“The funding support has made a huge difference in how we are able to include all children. The ISF assisted us in achieving this but taking on a lot of the work in getting this approved.”

Most services indicated that they have a better understanding of broad inclusion principles with educators feeling more confident to include children with additional needs. They valued discussing ideas with their ISF. The discussions included resources to support inclusion, links to training and to assistance in applying for ISS funding.

“We now think about inclusion in a different way. It's not just about children having the right to access a program but how you make their experience meaningful and engaging.”

“The ISF has supported us to learn more about what resources are available to support educators in their role, whether that may be around resources they can use, access or borrow; as well as training available that Noah’s Ark make us aware of. The most valuable thing we have gained from working with the ISF is the relationship we have developed and the confidence that the staff now have in themselves that they can support these families and all sorts of children. We find it very rewarding that we can now try new things and that we know the support is there for us if we need it.”

Many services indicated that the ISF supported them to reflect on their practices and offered strategies, suggestions and resources to address barriers to inclusion. Some of the practices discussed were; modifications to the environment, working collaboratively with families, linking with support services, looking at policies and procedures, accessing suitable training, accessing IPSP resources and program support.

“When you are working with children with additional needs it can be quite challenging so it really enabled us to see what we can do for that child to ensure they are included in the everyday program. The way the educators have changed their practice in the ways they approach situations and have incorporated things into their daily practice which has had a huge impact.”

“With the support of Noah’s Ark I’ve been able to work with the team to take inclusion to a different level. I’m happy to say that our centre is very inclusive as a result of working with our ISF to reflect on our practice and look at continuous improvement.”

“The information and strategies are useful for the whole room, not just one child.”

When asked about areas for improvement, many participants indicated that the inconsistency of the support from different ISFs was an issue. Services also indicated that they would like the ISF to visit more often, specifically to spend time in the rooms modelling strategies and looking at their program practices.

“Would like more visits from ISF to continue to support educators to reflect on their practice.”

“We would like the ISF to spend more time in the room observing our children and Educator practices.”

**Recommendations:**

- Identify and promote inclusion training opportunities with ECEC services
- Explore the service’s knowledge and understanding of inclusive practice to determine the level and frequency of support they require
- Ensure a greater level on consistency between ISFs
- ISFs to use coaching and reflective practice with educators to support inclusion.
- Offer training on Noah’s Ark Inclusion Practices resources to increase services’ understanding and knowledge of inclusion.

**Overall satisfaction**

Almost all services reported that they were satisfied with the service received from Noah’s Ark, with an average rating of 9.1 out of 10.

“Services that have used Noahs Ark are your best ambassadors to promote the program. I don't think people realize how great the service is until they have worked with Noah's Ark.”

Most services valued the relationship they have developed with their ISF and described them as approachable, supportive and understanding.

“The relationship we have been able to build with Noah’s Ark helps us to see what successful inclusion looks like which ultimately supports better outcomes for the children and families.”

“Having developed such good relationships with our ISF makes us feel like we are supported and the work we do is valued. For me, having someone is who so friendly and willing to help is a great resource for us and I like how we can work together as a team.”

“The relationship with our ISF has only gotten better as time goes by.”

Many participants described their ISF as professional, knowledgeable and responsive to their needs.

“The thing I liked most about working with Noahs Ark was the professionalism, communication, the interactions with our ISF was very friendly, and she’s approachable and takes the time to make sure that we are fully supported.”

“ISF is good at tailoring her support to what she knows about our service to make it applicable to our service, it’s not just a one size fits all approach.”

“It wasn’t like having someone visit standing back. She actually got into the sandpit to talk to the educator if that’s where they were. If we were singing songs she actually included herself in that by teaching a new song to the children that we hadn’t learnt. I really liked that she got down to the same level as us and didn’t just stand back and watch.”

Many services valued the support their ISF gave them in explaining and assisting with the paperwork associated with accessing IPSP resources.

“It was nice to have the process for funding mapped out step by step as this can often be overwhelming and confusing at times.”

“The most beneficial thing for us has been having the ISF assist us with all the paperwork required for funding and her knowledge of the process we need to go through.”

When asked about areas for improvement it was identified that some services felt that there was an inconsistency in the level of support offered from different ISFs. A large number of services stated that they would like the ISF to visit more often and to spend more time supporting educators in the rooms.

“Sometimes the ISF does not have a good understanding of the additional needs of each child which can make it hard when discussing the supports needed. Visits to observe the child and environment would be beneficial.”

“More consistency in practice with ISFs. Some are great and some are not. Not really sure of exactly what the ISF role is as I have had so many different experiences.”

“Would like more ISF visits and more hands on in rooms. Less paperwork requirements.”

**Recommendations:**

- Explore the ISFs' current model of service delivery and their capacity to increase service visits or contact
- Ensure consistency of practice across ISAs with regard to spending time in the care environment

Develop ISF competencies and practice manual to support consistency of practice.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview questions**

Hi. My name is Sharne and I am from Noah's Ark. I am contacting services who have recently worked with an Inclusion Support Facilitator to get some feedback about your experiences.

Would it be possible to ask you some questions about your experiences with Noah's Ark? Is now a good time?

I will ask you a range of questions. Noah's Ark values your honest feedback and participation in the process. This information will be used to improve services for the future. This discussion is confidential. I will be writing down your responses but your name is not attached to those answers. With your permission, I will also record the conversation to ensure that I transcribe your responses accurately and then the recording will be deleted within one week of our interview.

Do you give permission for me to record the call?

With your permission Noah's Ark may also use some of your comments in a report or brochure; again this would be completely anonymous. Do you give your consent for your responses to be used for that purpose?

#### **1. EXPERIENCE OF INITIAL CONTACT**

What did you know about Noah's Ark before your first contact with the ISF? Thinking back to your first contact with Noah's Ark what was that like? Any suggestions for change?

#### **2. EXPERIENCE OF THE ISF**

Tell us about your experience of working with the ISF. Describe their expertise. Is there anything you particularly liked or disliked about the way the ISF works with you? Any suggestions for change?

#### **3. INCLUSION IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Tell about your experience of developing the IIP. Can you give me an example of a goal that was meaningful for you? Did you use the plan? Did you find it useful? Why? Any suggestions for change?

#### 4. EXPERIENCE OF INFORMATION PROVIDED

The ISF will have explained or provided you with information about the role of the ISF. Was the explanation or written information useful? Which things in particular? Why?

Has the ISF explained or provided you with information about:

- FSF (Flexible Support Funding)
- ISS (Inclusion Support Subsidy)
- Bicultural Support
- SWEPP (State Wide Equipment Program)

Was the explanation or written information useful? Why?

Any suggestions on how we could improve the information we provide?

#### 5. BUILDING YOUR CAPACITY

Are there things you have learnt while working with the ISF that have changed your practice? Example? What's the most valuable thing you have gained from working with the ISF? As a result of working with the ISF do you feel better equipped to plan for the inclusion of all children in your programme? What's changed?

#### 6. OVERALL SATISFACTION

What would you say to others that you liked most about working with Noah's Ark? Overall how satisfied were you with the service you received through the ISF? Why?