

Evaluation of FAST Galiwin'ku program

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Prepared by John Guenther

For FAST Northern Territory

Cat Conatus 

Research and evaluation consultancy
PO Box 469, Ulverstone, Tasmania. 7315
john@catconatus.com.au
03 6425 9016

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

FAST (Families And Schools Together) is an eight-week, early intervention/prevention program, designed to strengthen family functioning and so build protective factors in children. In the Northern Territory the program is run in remote and urban/regional contexts. While the program is essentially the same in both remote and urban contexts, the way it is evaluated is different. The reasons for this relate primarily to language and cultural issues. Translating the standardised international evaluation to remote Aboriginal contexts has proved problematic.

For a number of years, FAST has attempted to develop more culturally sensitive evaluation tools that effectively capture evidence so that is both meaningful for program participants and relevant to the needs of funders. Funders demand evidence that programs work. Hence, the development of a useful set of evaluation tools has been a priority for FAST Northern Territory. The development of these tools has reached a stage where it is possible to conduct a full trial in a remote context. To support this process, FAST Northern Territory engaged evaluation consultancy Cat Conatus to conduct an externally supported evaluation at Galiwin'ku, in Arnhem Land. Galiwin'ku is a remote Aboriginal community of about 2500 people.

1.2 Evaluation tools

The tools used for the evaluation included participant surveys, teacher surveys, semi-structured interviews with FAST staff, team members and community stakeholders and evaluator observations. Attendance data for children who participated in FAST was also reviewed. The tools were developed to test assumptions in a theory of change model.

1.3 Findings

The findings from participant surveys suggested quite strong outcomes in at least three areas: social relationships, parental self-efficacy and family environment. More than 60 per cent of responses in these domains indicated that since FAST there had been some improvement for families involved. The results for parental involvement in education and child behaviour were not as strong but respondents suggested that this was because these things were already good. While it is difficult to say whether these results are good or bad, they do provide a useful baseline for comparison with future programs and potentially programs in other remote communities.

The findings from teacher surveys presented a more conservative assessment of outcomes for children and parent engagement in schools. Teachers identified three out of 13 children who had either changed behaviour (for the better), given more respect or improved their peer relationships as a consequence of FAST. Attendance data from the school showed no significant difference in attendance rates for FAST children, compared with the corresponding term at the end of 2010. Overall, attendance rates of FAST children were comparable with the whole school.

Team and stakeholder interviews identified a range of qualitative outcomes that were attributed to FAST. These related to changes in child behaviour, increased helpfulness, better respect and improved school attendance for children. For parents, the outcomes were described in terms of improved family support and greater self-efficacy. These outcomes are entirely consistent with the theory of change model for FAST.

A further significant outcome related to community development. The findings suggest a high level of community ownership for the program. Key leaders are playing a vital role in supporting the program. They see it as a process that allows them to achieve their own goals for local families.

1.4 What works?

The evaluation supports the view that FAST works to strengthen families. The factors that contribute to its success—as they were identified at Galiwin'ku—are related to community support, strong local Aboriginal coordination, a trusting relationship with the school, the program's fit with perceived needs in the community, and team cohesion. These factors worked together to produce a program that engaged families, most of who attended consistently, over eight weeks.

The evaluation does however raise some questions. These questions are discussed in terms of:

- Sustainability of outcomes;
- The need to incorporate community development in the theory of change model;
- What FAST offers remote communities that other programs do not;
- How the program can be made more sustainable;
- What can be done to build on the outcomes achieved; and
- What the implications are for evaluation.

2. Introduction

FAST (Families And Schools Together) is an eight-week, early intervention/prevention program, designed to strengthen family functioning and so build protective factors in children. The program targets the whole family and participation is strictly voluntary. It is conducted in the context of a local school. The core of the program involves eight weekly multi-family meetings usually held in the school during which positive interactional experiences for families are structured and facilitated by a collaborative leadership team. The collaborative team consists of at least four members: a parent partner, a school partner, a community-based agency partner, and a community-based partner.

As part of an ongoing process to build its evidence base, FAST commissioned evaluation consultancy Cat Conatus to conduct a formal external evaluation of the FAST Galiwin'ku program in its first full iteration in 2011. The evaluation was conducted in April 2011 at the time of the program's graduation. It involved using a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach. This report presents the findings of the evaluation.

Galiwin'ku is a community of about 2500 people, located on Elcho Island, 150km north west of Nhulunbuy. It is a community with over 90 per cent of the population being Aboriginal, most of who do not speak English as a first language. At the 2006 Census, 58 per cent of the population was aged 24 and under. Of all Indigenous people at the community, 88.5 per cent speak an Indigenous language. The vast majority of these speak a dialect of Yolngu Matha (ABS 2007). The school at Galiwin'ku, Shepherdson College, provides education for children up to year 12.

2.1 Background

FAST programs grew out of suburban, rural, inner city, Native American and First Nation communities in North America. The program was developed by Dr Lynn McDonald, a family therapist and academic at the University of Wisconsin. FAST targeted families with young children who were not succeeding at school. FAST has operated in Australia since 1996, mainly in Victoria and Western Australia, where it included urban Indigenous families. The FAST program's implementation in the Northern Territory communities in 2002 was part of a holistic approach to enhance educational outcomes for Indigenous students in that region. FAST aims to:

1. Enhance family functioning

- Strengthen the parent-child relationship in specific focused ways.
- Empower the parents to help them become the primary prevention agents for their own children.

2. Prevent the target child from experiencing school failure

- Improve the child's behaviour and performance in school, both short-term and long-term.
- Empower the parents in their role as partners in the educational process.
- Increase the child's and family's feelings of affiliation toward their school.

3. Prevent substance abuse by the child and family

- Increase the family's knowledge and awareness of substance abuse, and the impact of substance abuse upon child development.
- Link the family to appropriate assessment and treatment services, as needed.

4. Reduce the stress that parents and children experience from daily life situations

- Develop an ongoing support group for parents of at-risk children.
- Link the family to appropriate community resources and services, as needed.
- Build the self-esteem of each family member.

2.2 Development of a remote FAST evaluation process

FAST programs have been run in remote parts of the Northern Territory for more than five years. While FAST internationally is built on a sound evidence base and uses validated evaluation tools to assess program outcomes, it soon became evident that in remote Indigenous contexts, these tools would not work primarily because of cultural and language issues. To this end a consultancy was commissioned in 2008 to develop a new evaluation process that was designed to:

- a) to build a robust evidence base that supports the ongoing improvement of the program and satisfies the evidence requirements of funding bodies;
- b) develop a mechanism that will provide meaningful data about the outcomes of the program (consistent with existing program objectives and expectations) in remote Indigenous locations where program participants and facilitators do not have the skills in English language, literacy and numeracy to be able to complete the existing evaluation response forms;
- c) use tools that were designed to be replicable and adaptable to other Indigenous locations; and
- d) be used locally with minimum support from non-Indigenous FAST staff or external evaluators.

An extensive development process followed that produced and then trialled a set of pre- and post-program tools at three sites in remote Northern Territory: Yirrkala, Garrthlala and Pine Creek/Kybrook (see Guenther and Boonstra 2009 for details of the process). While this newly developed tool did show results, the practicalities of administering surveys before and after programs proved difficult and a further revision of the tools was made ready for trial at Galiwin'ku in 2011 (see Appendix 1: FAST participant evaluation, page 31).

It was also recognised that narrative processes may contribute to richer findings and explain how and why things were working (or not) for a particular site. To this end, FAST Northern Territory staff engaged in narrative inquiry professional development in August 2010. In addition, an updated Teacher evaluation tool was developed in early 2011 and trialled at Galiwin'ku (see Appendix 2: Teacher evaluation form, page 34).

The Galiwin'ku program emerged with Communities for Children and GP Northern Territory funding. The program was in its second iteration at the time of the evaluation reported here. An external evaluation consultant was contracted to support the process, collate the evidence and report on findings.

3. Literature

The literature reviewed here first places FAST within a context of family strengthening programs. Seven alternative programs that focus on Indigenous families in Australia are described. The evidence base for FAST is then briefly discussed. The connections between family strengthening and community development are then explored. Finally the literature considers evaluations in cross-cultural contexts.

3.1 Family strengthening programs in Australia

There are numerous programs like FAST that acknowledge the important role of parents and other family members as the child's first educators. International programs include Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY); the Yachad Accelerated Learning Project (YALP) which both originated in Israel; and Parents as Teachers (PAT) which originated in the United States.

Programs currently operating in Australia and specifically targeting Indigenous families include:

- Parents and Learning (PaL) in Napranum, Mapoon and Hopevale (QLD) Newcastle (NSW), Echuca (VIC) and Roebourne (WA);
- Play and Learn Group in Arnhem Land (NT);
- YALP in Alice Springs (NT), Aurukun (QLD), Halls Creek (WA), North Adelaide (SA) and Shepparton (VIC);
- HIPPY in La Perouse (NSW and NT);
- Families as First Teachers (FAFT) in Kuranda (QLD and NT);
- Reading Discovery (VIC) and
- Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) in Napranum (QLD).

The most significant difference between the different programs is the stage of child development that the program targets. Parents as Teachers (PAT) and the Play and Learn Group in Arnhem Land support families with children from birth to three years of age. HIPPY, PaL and Reading Discovery work with children at pre-school age, generally three to five year olds. PAFT and FAFT are concentrating on young children already at school, five to eight year olds. YALP works to develop teachers of all grades and so works with any child at school i.e. five years and older.

3.1.1 Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

HIPPY is but one of many models that is being used in Australia and to a large extent it is applied to disadvantaged families in mainstream contexts. However, there is considerable international support for many of the principles underpinning HIPPY methodology (e.g. Keeley 2007; OECD 2006; UNESCO 2006). The need for such programs to address factors impacting on outcomes for disadvantaged families and children is also supported by national and international literature (e.g. Centre for Community Child Health and The Smith Family 2004; The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee 2004). Notable international reports such as the OECD's *Well-being of the Nations* (OECD 2001) and *PISA* (OECD 2003; 2004) highlight the significance and value of early interventions that support parents and young children—particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds—not only at school but with targeted pre-school programs that help parents and caregivers engage with schools and their children (Zubrick et al. 2006). HIPPY, while focussing on home tutoring as a vehicle for improving parent-child interaction, does not necessarily make the connection to parent-school interaction.

Dean et al. (2007), in a review of Australian HIPPY research point to the following findings from multiple evaluation studies conducted in a variety of contexts. They suggest that 'relationships form the core of HIPPY'. That is, the relationships and networks formed as a result of engaging in HIPPY, support increasing attachment of participants within their community. They also report increasing parent-child attachment as a result of participation in the program. Australian longitudinal studies reviewed by Dean et al. show that HIPPY has a significant impact on school readiness for disadvantaged children. It also produced significantly improved socio-emotional development outcomes. The evaluations show that parents report increased self-confidence in their own parenting abilities; they feel a greater sense of closeness with their child(ren) and 'an expansion of relationships with others in the surrounding community' (p. 14). Tutors also reported increased confidence and knowledge, with many taking steps toward further education. Stanley (2007), in pre-empting a further Australian national evaluation of HIPPY notes that

Parents' skills and confidence as their child's first teacher are developed through these home visits and through gatherings with other parents. The intensive, extended contact with parents is an essential component in facilitating long-term development in these families.

Many of these findings are supported by a series of theses relating to HIPPY research reviewed by Victoria University (2007) and are echoed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which acts as an umbrella organisation for HIPPY in Australia (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2007; Gilley 2003). International studies and evaluations (e.g. Bakermans-Kranenburg et al. 2005; Barlow et al. 2007; LeMare and Audet 2003) draw similar conclusions, though there is some research that suggests that home-based programs such as HIPPY would be more effective if a 'centre-based' or institutional component was added to the program (e.g. Blok et al. 2005). Also, there is some evidence to suggest that learning outcomes that emerge from home visiting methods are not necessarily linked directly to the parents' increased confidence (e.g. Rosenberg et al. 2002; van Tuijl et al. 2001).

3.1.2 Parents and Learning (PaL)

Based in Napranum on Cape York Peninsula, Parents and Learning (PaL) was developed in 1999 using the foundations of the HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) program. It is a two year home based program, which focuses on early literacy and numeracy, on parents as teachers of their own children and parents teaching other parents. It is an 'early childhood parent engagement program owned, developed and implemented by Indigenous people. It builds capacity in Indigenous communities by supporting parents and family members to become engaged in their young children's learning' (Parents and Learning n.d.). The program has been supported by Rio Tinto since 2000. PaL is currently operating in four states across Australia: Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales.

A 2009 evaluation of the program found a range of qualitative outcomes emerging from the program (Guenther and Maughan 2009). In particular it found that parents, children and program staff gained more confidence as a result of their involvement in PaL. This confidence then led to increases in parenting skills and knowledge, improved parent-child interaction and a range of employment and career outcomes. Stakeholders identified a range of literacy and learning outcomes for children. The program acted to support role models in the community.

3.1.3 YALP

Like HIPPY, the Yachad Accelerated Learning Project (YALP) also comes from Israel. Yachad was developed by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in collaboration with schools (teachers,

educators and students) and the wider community including parents (YALP 2010). YALP began in Australia in 2005 as a three-year pilot program in Halls Creek (WA), Aurukun (QLD) and Shepparton (VIC) with the aim of improving literacy and numeracy outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in remote, regional and rural locations of Australia. YALP engages with the Indigenous community, parents and caregivers, and local agencies through a process of consultations (YALP 2007). It is currently based only in Victoria.

One explanation of why the above approaches work is related to the increased presence of social and cultural capital among parents. Berthelsen and Walker (2008), drawing on the findings of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) suggest that:

Families with more social and cultural capital tend to be more involved at school because these families are more comfortable with teachers and schools and are more likely to have supportive social networks. (p. 36)

3.1.4 Play and Learn

As part of their East Arnhem Communities for Children program, Anglicare (Northern Territory) are developing a Play and Learn Group activity, which is also designed to build capacity of parents and carers. However, this program is more of a health intervention model that depends on expertise of a qualified practitioner such as a Paediatric Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist to impart knowledge to parents and carers either directly through home visits or through an intermediary local Indigenous coordinator. The programs are subject to evaluation but a formal evaluation report is yet to be prepared.

Under the same program, Anglicare is also supporting another model of play and learn group on Bickerton Island near Groote Eylandt: The Milyakburra Mothers Club (Anglicare-NT 2011). The community of 150 people had never had a playgroup of this kind before. It has been running on the Island now for two years. Attendance varies, but typically about six or seven parents and carers (who might be grandparents, aunts or other female family friends) bring their children along. Most participants speak English as a second language. The playgroup operates every day of the week and has a semi structured program, which includes activities such as story time, cooking programs for mums, trips to the beach, collecting bush tucker, input from health clinic workers. The local evaluators noted that there is some evidence of improved engagement with the local school and that parents and carers are now recognising the value of intentional engagement with their children. It was anticipated that the project will lead to improved attendance in pre- and primary school (Guenther and Arnott 2009).

3.1.5 Parents as Teachers (PAT), Parents as First Teachers (PAFT)

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is another international early childhood parent education and family support program for families with children birth to three years of age. Parents as Teachers began in 1981 in Missouri after educators noted that children were beginning kindergarten with varying levels of learning readiness. Early childhood professionals suggested that a program to help parents understand their role in encouraging their child's development from birth could help prepare children for school and life success (PAT 2010). PAT now operates in many countries including 14 sites throughout NSW and the ACT (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 2007).

Parents as Teachers (PAT) provides parents with child development knowledge and parenting support. This is achieved by trained and certified parent educators, visiting the home and covering a lesson from the national PAT curriculum (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 2007). Like PaL, HIPPY and other programs previously

discussed home visiting allows Parents as Teachers advisors to model appropriate behaviour guidance practices to assist parents in their parenting role (Meldrum 2004).

The New Zealand version of the PAT program is called Parents as First Teachers (PAFT). Regardless of the name used the basic educational component of the PAT/PAFT program is the home visit, in which a trained educator spends an hour each month helping parents to understand each stage of their child's development. In New Zealand, the government funds PAFT through Early Childhood Development for parents (Williams et al. 2002).

On the Cape York Peninsula the Western Cape College Weipa Campus have an initiative also known as Parents as First Teachers (PAFT). Initiated in 2007 PAFT is a community engagement program that aims to increase awareness of the value of education and the positive life impact that school completion can have on economic independence, health and life outcomes to the close-by Napranum community (Western Cape College n.d.).

To achieve this PAFT has been working with community service providers to build relationships with families and hosting various activities to engage parents with their children's education, such as homework centres and workshops with visiting professionals (Western Cape College n.d.). An example of these relationship-building activities is the monthly Napranum Parents Afternoon Tea, a collaboration between PAFT, Western Cape College and the CAPE PCYC (Police-Citizen Youth Clubs) Centre in Napranum (Cape York PCYC 2005).

3.1.6 FAFT

Also operating in Northern Queensland is Families as First Teachers (FAFT). FAFT is about helping families support their pre-school aged children's early literacy and numeracy development. The FAFT project operating at Kuranda District State College developed out of an identified need from Indigenous families through an initial reference committee made up of two community liaison officers, the principal and representatives from local Indigenous community organisations. Recognising that some families in the past have been reluctant or unable to come into the school grounds, FAFT was implemented in each of the five surrounding Kuranda communities by a team of Indigenous community workers and non-Indigenous teachers (Education Queensland n.d.)

FAFT parents and caregivers reported that they are more aware, confident and skilled in the learning that their children are doing at school. In addition, the Kuranda District State College reported the following outcomes:

- Attendance rates for indigenous children improved by 40%;
- Negative behaviour incidents reduced by 74%;
- Employment of Indigenous staff grew from three in 2004 , five (2005), eight (2006) and 11 in 2007; and
- There was an increase in parents who feel the school is a good school. 62% of parents (satisfied or very satisfied) in 2004 rose to 76% in 2005 and remained constant at 76% in 2006. (Education Queensland n.d.)

FAFT also operates in the Northern Territory and is based on the Kuranda program. In the Northern Territory it aims 'to ensure that families get the support they need and children get the best possible start in life' (Department of Education and Training 2011: 4) as part of the Department of Education and Training's (DET) Indigenous Parenting Support Services (IPSS) program.

The program's objectives, as articulated in the *Handbook* (Department of Education and Training 2011: 7) are

- *Increased access of young remote Indigenous children and their families to early childhood programs prior to school entry.*
- *Increased participation of young remote Indigenous children and their families in early childhood programs prior to school entry*
- *Increased focus on early literacy and numeracy foundations within early learning programs*
- *Build capacity within the community to provide early learning and parenting support*
- *Increased Indigenous employment in early learning and parenting programs*
- *Increased resources available for learning and parenting programs*
- *Enhanced infrastructure available for early learning and parenting programs*
- *Integrated delivery of early childhood and family support programs via linking services*
- *Children and their families are linked with the school in their community prior to school entry*

While the program is designed to be place-based and responsive to community needs the *Handbook* lists a number of exemplar strategies. These include dual generational playgroups, home visiting, parent workshops, 'books in homes', transition to school programs, and Counsel the Family on Care for Child Development (CCD). Process evaluation of FAFT in the Northern Territory is currently underway but as yet an outcomes evaluation has not been undertaken.

3.1.7 Reading Discovery

Operating in Victoria with support from BHP Billiton is the Reading Discovery project, a family literacy program aimed at parents and their preschool children in marginalized rural groups. The Reading Discovery practitioners visit referred families for one hour per week to model shared reading, and creative play with parents. There is a specific Indigenous Reading Recovery program that uses Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literature with Indigenous children (Reading Discovery 2008).

The literature in general supports a view that parent-teacher and parent-school relationships are important for promoting attendance at school and improving school-community outcomes (e.g. Bourke et al. 2000; Department of Education 2006; Mellor and Corrigan 2004). Further, there is evidence that school readiness of children is not just dependent on the characteristics of the child or his or her parents. Rather, collaborations that link a number of partners engaged in school-readiness are needed. In a recent Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) topical paper, Sorin and Markotsis (2008) conclude that:

Strong, positive relationships between partners in the readiness process are essential. Effective communication between partners includes knowledge of each other's practices.

The literature review will now go on to discuss the issues relating to the role that learning plays in community development processes before returning to the issue of partnerships in the subsequent section.

3.2 Evidence for FAST

FAST shares many of the underpinning principles that are encapsulated in the list of family strengthening program listed above. The efficacy of the approaches used by FAST is supported by a body of literature that includes evaluation and research conducted by FAST internationally (Casper and Lopez 2006) and within Australia (Coote 2000; Datatab and Burgess 2003; Seiffert 2005; 2006) and by other research conducted more generically relating to application of FAST operational principles and practices. These translate into elements of the program model (Wisconsin Center for Education Research 2007) as: a shared meal; communication games played at a family table, time for couples; a self-help parent group, one-to-one quality play, and a fixed lucky door prize in which each family wins once. The basis of these activities is drawn from an extensive array of research sources drawn from work carried out up to the early 1990s. The literature cited by FAST (McDonald 2000) describes the importance of parent-child interaction (e.g. Dunst et al. 1988; Gettinger et al. 1992; Webster-Stratton 2002); child-initiated play (e.g. Barkeley 1987); and empowering parents to be involved in their children's learning (e.g. Dunst et al. 1988) also cited in (Rous et al. 2003).

3.3 Family strengthening in community development processes

While capacity building may be a worthwhile goal in itself, another approach worth considering in remote communities is one that supports community development. This is fundamentally different than capacity building as the focus and is more about empowering communities to take ownership and control of processes involving service delivery, education and governance rather than simply providing services. Ledwith (2005: 73), for example, describes this as an approach that requires 'emancipatory action research', which leads to 'reciprocal, collaborative, transformative and empowering' processes. A crucial aspect of ownership and control is representation—who has authority to sanction and control cultural and community knowledge and decision making and who has the authority to represent this information.

Even a fairly generic interpretation of community development acknowledges the importance of involvement and participation. For example Green and Haines (2008) suggest that community development is not merely about the development of community assets:

Community development requires the involvement and participation of local residents in identifying the strategies they wish to use to improve their quality of life. (p. 13)

The broad principle is that Indigenous people must control all representations and interpretations of their cultural, social and economic affairs. Talking to the 'right' people with the right knowledge is not always as easy as it sounds. The term community suggests unity of purpose and opinion but it can just as easily mean diversity. As a rule people can and will speak for their own country and affairs based on clan and family affiliations but will not and cannot speak for others. For community development to occur, realistic timelines are important to give the community time for familiarisation with the project and to be clear about its intent and the actions proposed. Time is needed for traditional decision making practices to establish legitimacy and to make effective ongoing decisions about project management.

While on the surface the connection between FAST and community development might appear to be somewhat tenuous, there is indeed a strong connection. Programs like FAST operate at a number of levels—they offer outcomes for children, parents, communities, institutions and society more generally (Deutsch 1998). On the one hand they are designed to build the capacity of parents and children to improve early learning outcomes. However a key consequence of the engagement of parents, team members and children is the learning that occurs—mostly either informally or non-formally—which in turn builds the confidence of parents. Hammond (2004), describes this in terms of self-esteem and self-efficacy, identity, purpose and future, communication and competences, and social integration. The increased confidence produces what could be described as an identity change which allows individuals to make choices and see opportunities that they previously did not have (Guenther 2008).

In the context of families, the relationship between parental and children's learning has been shown to have a number of positive effects. Brassett-Grundy (2004) observed several themes from research related to:

Valuing—as a result of their own participation in learning, parents came to give more value to their children's educational achievement;
Supporting—parents were more able to offer support to their children, directly in their studies or indirectly by involvement in their school;
Role-modelling—parents became model learners for their children;
Reciprocating—children helped their parents, giving them motivation for or support in learning; and
Enjoying—children and parents learnt together as a highly enjoyable joint activity. (p. 85)

This list suggests that a program like FAST can be expected to have multiple outcomes that are not restricted to early learning or family function outcomes. These outcomes could be seen as part of a community development process where stakeholders involved are empowered to initiate actions needed or desired for their own communities.

3.4 Evaluation in cross-cultural, complex contexts

While the evidence for the FAST approach and its underpinning principles is readily acknowledged in the literature, the distinctive nature of evidence-gathering in cross-cultural is not so readily acknowledged. However, demonstrating outcomes in the cross-cultural environment of remote Australia is challenging. This is not only because of the remote context or issues of language, worldview and culture but also because of the ever-changing policy environment in which service delivery occurs. In the context of remote Australia there are very few constants. The only certainty is continual change.

Evaluations can be divided into those that are simple, those that are complicated and those that are complex. The simplest evaluations could be said to employ a linear logic where causality follows predictably from inputs through to outcomes. Patton (2008: 376) suggests that complexity occurs when there is a 'low certainty' about the outcomes that a program will achieve and 'low agreement' about how outcomes should be achieved.

Rogers (2008), following arguments presented by Glouberman and Zimmerman (2002), differentiates between simple, complicated and complex evaluations. Complicated evaluations are those where there are interdisciplinary and cross-jurisdictional governance structures, there are multiple and simultaneous causal strands, and where different causal mechanisms occur in different contexts. Complex evaluations on the other hand are those where outcomes

are achieved through non-linear feedback loops and where outcomes are emergent—and where measures cannot be determined in advance. Rogers suggests that:

...it is complex interventions that present the greatest challenge for evaluation and for the utilization of evaluation, because the path to success is so variable and it cannot be articulated in advance. (p. 31)

Rogers (2008) proposes that for complex interventions an evolving logic model may be required or alternatively 'a series of logic models can be developed alongside development of the intervention, reflecting changes in the understanding' (p. 39). Patton (2011: 90) adds that the 'outcomes of interventions aimed at solving problems under conditions of complexity are unpredictable'. It should come as no surprise then that in the context of remote communities, the outcomes that are achieved are not necessarily what we expect from a logic model.

Complexity however, is not just about predicting outcomes or their causes through a single strand or simultaneous or multiple cause and effect diagrams. Evaluations are also complex because of the context. That is, depending on context, a theory of change model may work well in one context and not in another. Burton et al. (2006: 307) suggest a number of context factors that contribute to complexity. These include (among others): History of previous attempts at involvement; the socio-demographic profile; the state of local voluntary and community sector; availability of resources; and timing of interventions.

Further, while at the outset, a program may be envisaged as simple, through the course of implementation, it may become complex. Mason and Barnes (2007) make the point that:

Programmes and projects change and develop over time (particularly where an element is participation of users in further design) and, more importantly, it may not be possible to make explicit connections between each element of the change process, no matter how detailed the initial work. It is only once data collection is under way with services, their stakeholders and users that such detail of operation and implementation becomes apparent. Thus, programme theory becomes refined while it is being explored. (p. 159)

They go on to conclude that this refining process may cause a problem for policy makers wanting to know 'what works' for the sake of building an evidence base. They see the emergent nature of program theory to be a process of knowledge building:

Policy-makers should not be looking to evaluators simply to present them with evidence of 'what works', but be open to a dialogue about the way policy initiatives work in practice and to reflect on the consequences of adopting different approaches to achieving positive change. (p. 168)

It is arguable that all evaluations carried out in an Indigenous context are necessarily complex. This is in part because of the reasons outlined in the literature above, including the contextual factors pointed out by Mason and Barnes, but more specifically because of the often disparate worldviews of the evaluands, the funding bodies, the evaluators, the auspicing bodies. This issue is raised in the context of multicultural health evaluation in California (Ngoc Nguyen et al. 2003):

The cultural value orientations and philosophical worldviews that evaluators bring to a project often determine the whole process of research and evaluation, including: what questions are asked, how programs are designed,

what program aspects are evaluated, how effectiveness is assessed, how data are interpreted, and what results are highlighted and disseminated. (p. 3)

It could well be argued that application of this understanding goes well beyond the need for 'cultural competence' in evaluation (Botcheva et al. 2009). It may be more akin to the kind of qualitative approaches that Liamputtong (2010: 20-21) describes as 'culturally sensitive' where 'researchers develop their theory(s) from the participants' lived experiences and their cultural understandings of the issues being researched'. This is of course easier said than done, especially when the funder calls for a particular form of evidence that is at odds with this approach. Smith (1999: 92) also suggests that 'many researchers... frame their research in ways that assume that the locus of a particular research problem lies with the indigenous individual or community rather than with other social or structural issues'.

Complexity then, is a multi-faceted concern for evaluators. It has certainly been a concern for those involved in remote FAST evaluation projects. It is reflected in the apparent difficulty the team in the Northern Territory has had as it approached building a reliable evidence base for its programs (as noted earlier in Development of a remote FAST evaluation process, page 4). As the reader will see later in this report, it is also reflected in the conclusions that may be drawn from the findings of the evaluation process described in the next and subsequent sections.

4. Methodology

In this section the approach used for the evaluation is described. Limitations are noted and discussed. The underpinning assumptions of the theory of change model are presented. Evaluation questions are detailed and instruments used for the evaluation are described.

4.1 Approach

The evaluation of remote FAST programs relies on a mixed methodology. The Monitoring and Framework on which the Galiwin'ku evaluation is based, draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources gathered in each program. Mixed methods approaches help explain what has occurred and how or why things happened using a combination of inductive and deductive analytical tools (see Johnson and Christensen 2004: 18). 'In many cases both qualitative and quantitative methods should be used together' (Patton 2008: 438). Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007: 188) suggest that 'Use of both quantitative and qualitative methods is intended to ensure dependable feedback on a wide range of questions...'. The comparison of qualitative and quantitative data in what is termed 'Triangulation Design' (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007: 62) helps to validate or contrast the findings from different sources. This evaluation has sought to draw together evidence from multiple sources that demonstrate the nature and extent of outcomes as they are predicted in the theory of change model.

4.2 Limitations

This evaluation has a number of limitations that require a cautionary approach to interpretation of findings and implications.

4.2.1 Cross-cultural complexity

It is acknowledged that the single most important limitation that affects this evaluation is its cross-culturally complex context. As noted in the literature earlier (see Evaluation in cross-cultural, complex contexts, page 11) this complexity creates uncertainty in the evidence-gathering process. It affects implications and conclusions that can be made from the findings. This is not to suggest that the evaluation is somehow invalid. Rather, it suggests that the findings and conclusions will be viewed through a lens which in some ways distorts the meanings and interpretations that emerge. It also suggests that the report itself is written with a lens that may well (or probably will) distort the truth of what is observed.

4.2.2 Attribution of outcomes

While the theory of change model (see Figure 1, page 16) articulated for FAST is generically applicable to a range of contexts, it assumes that low level outcomes are not significantly influenced by any other interventions. The reality at Galiwin'ku is that there are any number of interventions being applied simultaneously on or to families who are involved in FAST. While this should not deter the team from pursuing its goals for families, it does suggest the need for caution in interpretation of findings and conclusions.

4.2.3 Sample size

While this evaluation canvassed views of a variety of stakeholders it should be noted that for this evaluation, the entire cohort of families involved in evaluation activities was just nine. While the findings for these nine families are certainly defensible, there are no guarantees that the next group of families participating in FAST at Galiwin'ku will achieve the same results.

4.2.4 Generalisability of findings

There may be a tendency to try and generalise the findings from this site to others. Because of the variability between sites—particularly remote sites—the findings from one site are impossible to transfer to another. Previous evaluation exercises at other sites show that outcomes for each site are quite different. That said, many of the underpinning principles that affect outcomes may be applied to a number of sites.

4.3 Theory of change

While the use of Program Logic and the embedded theory of change assumptions (Pawson 2003) used to assess FAST may appear to constrain the outcomes to those that are anticipated in the model (see Figure 1), it should be seen more as a tool to help frame monitoring and evaluation in terms of the Program's logical progression from inputs to results (Frechtling 2007; W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2004). It 'portrays a reasonable, defensible, and sequential order of inputs through activities to outputs, outcomes and impacts' (Patton 2002: 163). The model itself represents anticipated changes based on the experience of FAST team members in the Northern Territory. The expected changes are to a large extent supported by the national and international research on FAST (See Evidence for FAST, page 10). The anticipated outcomes should however be considered in the light of limitations discussed earlier (see page 14).

Figure 1. Program Logic model for FAST

The objective of FAST is to strengthen families, empowering them so that their children are more likely to succeed at home, school and in the community.



4.4 Evaluation questions

Evaluation questions form an important starting point for any evaluation design. Rossi et al (2004: 20) suggest that 'the role of the evaluation is to provide answers to questions about a program that will be useful and will actually be used' and that these questions should be developed before an evaluation begins through a process of 'discourse and negotiation' (p. 69) between the evaluator and the key stakeholders. They define what it is specifically that the evaluation will respond to and therefore can be used as a frame for reporting purposes. Evaluation questions are intrinsically related to the program theory and logic model that flow from a theory of change (Frechtling 2007).

The following evaluation questions were applied to the Galiwin'ku context. The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for FAST (Guenther 2010) suggests two evaluation questions. For this evaluation, points e) and f) have been added to question 1.

1. What kinds of changes result from FAST?
 - a. For parents and carers
 - b. For children
 - c. For whole families
 - d. For schools
 - e. For team members
 - f. For the community
2. To what extent does FAST achieve outcomes for families as they are anticipated in the logic model?

In addition, a third question is added here:

3. What works in the FAST program?
 - a. In terms of programmatic factors that contribute to outcomes identified
 - b. In terms of relational factors
 - c. In terms of resourcing factors

4.5 Evaluation instruments

4.5.1 Participant surveys

Participant surveys for this evaluation were designed to capture perceptions of change that had occurred as a result of the program. The post-program survey was administered by the local coordinator with the support of the external evaluator. All nine families who completed the eight week program participated in the survey (see Appendix 1: FAST participant evaluation, page 31). For each question four choices were available: a) things are better now; b) nothing changed; c) don't really know; and d) no, it's worse now. Respondents were also encouraged to discuss their responses and to give examples of what they meant, particularly when they noted a change for the better.

The data from the surveys was collated into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using the statistical analysis functions of the program.

4.5.2 Teacher surveys

Teacher surveys developed for this evaluation were designed to capture perceptions of change in the focus child, who participated in the program. The survey (see Appendix 2: Teacher evaluation form, page 34) was self-administered and completed within two weeks of program completion. The data from the surveys was collated into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed

using the statistical analysis functions of the program. Surveys for 13 children were obtained. The survey responses included children who were not identified specifically as the focus child.

4.5.3 School attendance data

School attendance data for the FAST participant children was obtained from Shepherdson College. The data included attendance and absence statistics for the term before the FAST program (Term 4, 2010) and the term of the FAST program (Term 1, 2011). The data for 15 children were included. The data was collated into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using the statistical analysis functions of the program.

4.5.4 FAST team and staff interviews

A number of semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with FAST staff and team members at Galiwin'ku (see Appendix 3: Interview schedule for staff and team members, page 38). These interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis in an NVivo (qualitative analysis software) project.

4.5.5 Evaluator observations

The evaluator's site visit (12-15 April 2011) to Galiwin'ku allowed for independent observations and notes to be made. Field notes and photographs were used for reflective purposes.

5. Findings

Findings in this section are presented for each of the instruments used. These included participant surveys, teacher surveys, attendance data, interviews and evaluator observations.

5.1 Participant surveys

Results of participant surveys are shown below in Table 3, page 23. The data shows that overall, an average of 54.9 per cent of responses indicated positive change across all FAST domains. A further 44.6 per cent of responses indicated no change. Only one response suggested a negative change (0.5 per cent).

Two-thirds of all responses in the 'parental self-efficacy' domain indicated a change for the better since the FAST program. In discussing this, participants talked about how they felt stronger when speaking up during FAST and how they felt more confident disciplining their children (or telling them what to do). A selection of comments from respondents demonstrates this.

- Feels a bit stronger since FAST.
- Yes mum feels stronger to speak during FAST.
- Yes. We talk. Easier to tell children what to do.
- [Use] strong voice rather than hitting.
- Feel stronger to discipline the children.

A total of 61.1 per cent of all responses in the 'family environment' domain suggested a change for the better since the FAST program. Most of the comments from families suggested that children were more helpful doing jobs around the house. A selection of comments from those who agreed that things had improved, is shown below.

- Getting better but they were already good, for example helping their uncle pick up rubbish before he mowed the lawns. Natasha also cooked kangaroo meat for everyone to share.
- Better. Always help now. Cleaning and putting away dishes. Youngest son was trying to mop the floor yesterday! And sometimes he goes and helps mum at her job at childcare.
- Yes. Very helpful. Planting, watering in the garden, cleaning kitchen and laundry.
- [We] do more things together. Yes, agree.
- Helping more with cooking and cleaning.
- FAST has encouraged them to go to school.
- Better at helping with jobs.

A total of 60 per cent of all responses in the 'social relationships' domain indicated positive change since the FAST program. The strongest positive response was in relation to the question 'Do you get more support or help from the people in your life/family?'. Of those who felt they now had more support, this tended to be limited to that given during the FAST program, and not necessarily from the broader community. A selection of responses that reflect change in the social relationships domain, is given below.

- More [relationships] since FAST from family, friends and other FAST families and team.
- Oldest son—before he didn't want to go to school and he was shy. But since FAST he has changed a bit. He goes to school more and is more confident. It helped him.

- Better support from family at home, including aunties.
- Since FAST it is better. By doing activities together and getting ideas at parent time about how to talk to children.
- Yes, more support. From FAST families and outside as well. Communication with the families. Relationships.
- At FAST on Tuesdays [mum] feels more supported.
- Eldest daughter is respectful. Doesn't swear at mum.
- They listen more carefully.
- Different at FAST than here at home. Get more support from FAST.

Just under half of all responses (48.9 per cent) in the 'child behaviour' domain indicated a positive change because of the FAST program. Questions in this domain were predominantly about sharing and respect given by children in different contexts. Seven of the nine families surveyed indicated a change in their children for at least one question. The positive changes noted were fairly general and were not tied to a particular issue. While the last question attracted the most positive responses, this may be because respondents were at that point beginning to think more generally about FAST and its impact. A selection of responses related to improved sharing and respect is given below.

- Yes, sharing. All the kids come around here. They play with the neighbour's kids more.
- Much better. Seeing the other families every week and supporting each other. Getting to know each other.
- Showing more respect to grandmother (who is a team member)
- Better relationships with the other FAST families. FAST has been helpful. It gives mothers help and encourages them and helps them support each other.
- Better at sharing at FAST and at school.
- Respects teachers more.

The least positive change (40.7 per cent) was reported in the 'parent involvement in education' domain. Of the seven families who reported 'no change' for at least one question in this domain, the following explanations were given:

- Nothing changed. Already helped with culture week activities etc.
- Same, but has never gone into class to talk to teacher.
- Already working as a tutor at the school.
- Goes to school every day to help her daughter and son—she has been helping since last year.
- Same. But still haven't talked to [child's] teacher. Was already taking [other child] into school sometimes.

Table 1. Summary of participant survey results (n=9)

FAST domain	Survey question	Per cent of respondents reporting improvements	Per cent of respondents reporting no change
Social relationships	1	66.7%	33.3%
	2	37.5%	55.6%
	3	55.6%	44.4%
	4	88.9%	11.1%
	5	55.6%	44.4%
	6	60.0%	40.0%
	7	60.0%	40.0%
Total domain		60.0%	38.4%
Parent involvement in education	8	44.4%	55.6%
	9	22.2%	77.8%
	10	55.6%	44.4%
Total		40.7%	59.3%
Family environment	11	66.7%	33.3%
	12	55.6%	44.4%
Total domain		61.1%	38.9%
Parental self-efficacy	13	44.4%	55.6%
	14	88.9%	11.1%
Total domain		66.7%	33.3%
Child behaviour	15	44.4%	55.6%
	16	33.3%	66.7%
	17	44.4%	55.6%
	18	44.4%	55.6%
	19	77.8%	22.2%
Total domain		48.9%	51.1%
Total all domains		54.9%	44.6%

5.2 Teacher surveys

The results shown in Table 2 show that teachers were generally unable to identify changes that had occurred in children. Of 13 children, teachers were able to attribute positive changes in three children directly to their participation in FAST. They identified positive changes in a further four children, but were unsure whether the changes they observed were due to FAST or not. Three of the 13 FAST children were reported to show improved behaviour. Two were demonstrating more respect for teachers. One child was reported to have improved relationships with peers at school. One parent was noted as having more contact with the teacher. Negative changes were observed for three FAST children. These changes were reported in terms of respect for teachers, behaviour, attendance and attitude to school.

Table 2. Teacher survey responses (n=13)

Question	Worse	Worse but unsure if due to FAST	No change	Improved but unsure if due to FAST	Improved	No response	Total responses
Have you seen any changes in this child's respect for you as a teacher?	0	1	10	0	2	0	13
Have you seen any changes in this child's behaviour at school?	0	1	9	0	3	0	13
Have you seen any changes in this child's relationship with peers at school?	0	0	10	2	1	0	13
Have you seen any changes in this child's learning outcomes as a result of participating in FAST?	0	0	10	3	0	0	13
Have you seen any changes in this child's attitude toward school as a result of participating in FAST?	0	1	11	1	0	0	13
Have you seen any changes in this child's attendance?	0	2	7	3	0	1	12
Have you noticed a difference in how much contact you have with this child's parent(s) or caregiver (s)	0	0	11	0	1	1	12
Have you noticed a difference in how much help this child's parent(s) or caregiver(s) give in regard to school work?	0	0	12	0	0	1	12
All responses	0	5	80	9	7	3	101
Per cent of responses	0.00%	4.95%	79.21%	8.91%	6.93%		

In terms of the high number of 'no change' responses, the absence of positive change is not necessarily bad. Some of the teacher comments indicated that some children always showed respect, were always well behaved, 'couldn't be better' or 'always works well with peers'. Some of the teacher comments indicated change that the survey did not ask about. These included children being 'better dressed for school' and showing 'increased confidence'.

5.3 Attendance data

Table 3 summarises attendance data for FAST children at Shepherdson College before and during the program. The table shows a slight increase in mean attendance for FAST children identified at Term 4, 2010 and Term 1, 2011. However the change is not significantly different (using t-tests, $p < .1$). A total of 8 of the 15 children reviewed showed improved attendance.

Table 3. School attendance rates, Term 4, 2010 and Term 1, 2011 (n=15)

	Term 4, 2010	Term 1, 2011
Mean attendance (per cent of days attended of available school days)	48.4%	53.0%
Range of attendance rate	2.0% to 98.0%	11.5% to 98.0%
Median attendance rate	50.0%	49.0%
Percentage of children with improved attendance		53.3%

Source: Shepherdson college school attendance data

5.4 Interviews with FAST team, staff and community stakeholders

The following notes are derived from a series of five interviews and focus groups with team members and staff. These interviews involved a total of approximately 20 adults.

5.4.1 Parent outcomes

Two main outcomes were reported for parents. The first relates to increased support. The second relates to increasing parental capacity.

Family support was identified in all interviews and was described in a number of ways. It was about parents being more connected with each other; strengthened within themselves; and encouraged in their role as parents. It was also about building mutual support structures within and between families that had participated in FAST.

Parental capacity was identified as an outcome in three of the five interviews. It was described in terms of parents being empowered to take responsibility for their parenting role. This was reflected in approaches to discipline and giving instructions to their children. It was also described in terms of increasing confidence in their role as parents.

5.4.2 Outcomes for children

Four main outcomes were described by respondents. These could be categorised in terms of behaviour, being more helpful, school attendance, and being more respectful.

Comments about *behaviour* came from those who had direct involvement in the school. Their observations suggested that there was a clear difference for some children who had attended FAST. In particular they commented on children listening to their teachers and teasing other children less.

Reports about children being *more helpful* at home came from several people, particularly those on the team. Changes noted in children included them helping with cleaning up in the house and helping out in the garden.

Team members were keen to point to *improved school attendance*. They gave specific examples of children who were not attending regularly at school and who now were. These outcomes reflected the team and community members' desire to see school attendance as a priority for families.

The outcome of *respect* was closely aligned to behaviours such as listening. It was also aligned to the idea of mutual support within the family. Respondents also commented on respect for other children in terms of finding alternatives to violence and teasing as a way of dealing with conflict.

5.4.3 Team outcomes

Team outcomes described were a mix of skill, relational and learning outcomes. The main outcome however was described in terms of family support. This was a little difficult to distinguish from support described for parents as discussed earlier because some of the team had previously been FAST participants. However, in relation to the specific comments made by FAST team members and staff, the outcomes were described as mutual support for each other, being able to work together, encouraging one another and being able to support their own families better. It was also about improved communication within families, growing stronger together, and passing knowledge on to children and other family members. Other outcomes, less frequently reported included employment, leadership, being able to use skills for the benefit of the community, understanding Balanda (non-Indigenous) ways of working and modelling behaviour.

5.4.4 Community outcomes

While a number of community outcomes were alluded to, the most frequently noted outcome for the community related to community development processes. Respondents described the FAST process in ways that suggested a level of grass-roots engagement and ownership. They also suggested that FAST was a vehicle for community-based action that allowed for culturally appropriate ways of addressing an issue that was of concern to them. FAST was seen not so much as a program, but as a process and at this level the important thing was the process not the outcomes. The issue they were most concerned about was empowering parents to take responsibility for their children and was reflected in comments about discipline, school attendance, respect and behaviour—all of which have been noted above as outcomes.

5.4.5 School outcomes

There were very few comments about school outcomes in the focus groups and interviews, beyond what has already been said about school attendance. However, it was evident that FAST has fostered a mutually beneficial relationship with the school which was described as being supportive of FAST. There was little evidence of parent-school engagement outcomes (with the exception of some comments about the level of comfort parents had because they had spent regular time in the school grounds on FAST nights).

5.5 Evaluator observations

The observations here are a brief summary of first impressions noted by the evaluator immediately after the site visit. These first impressions are divided into key findings and critical success factors.

5.5.1 Key findings

The observations noted by the evaluator do not necessarily reflect the actual data obtained as they are reported above. They are reflective opinions based on the data gathering process at Galiwin'ku.

- There appeared to be strong participant engagement with the eight week program evidenced by 11/12 completions;
- There were reports of improved parent self-efficacy (for example in terms of capacity to discipline children);
- Some reports of changed child behaviour and respect (feedback from teachers, parents and community stakeholders) were noted;
- There were reports of improved school attendance (notably from the school);
- There were reports of improved engagement in learning (from at least one teacher);
- Strong interagency coordination with health clinic and school was observed by the evaluator;

- Support from the school was evidenced by willingness to have the FAST program on site after hours;
- A number of positive relationships with key stakeholders were clearly developing;
- Strong support and commitment from various local community stakeholders was evident at a number of levels; and
- There was a developing skills base among team members (reported by team members themselves).

5.5.2 Critical success factors

A number of critical success factors underpin the outcomes reported earlier in this evaluation. These include:

- The networking/coordination/skills of the coordinator and trainer;
- The relationships developed and developing with local stakeholders—there was a collaborative approach taken;
- Support from local stakeholders particularly in terms of participant selection but also in advocating for the program;
- The fit with Yolngu approaches to learning, family strengthening and both ways approaches; and
- The critical role of the Yolngu coordinator and the team in facilitating relationships, family connections, and evaluation activities.

6. Synthesis

In this synthesis the various data are brought together and discussed. The first part considers a response to the evaluation questions. The second outlines implications in the form of a series of questions that arise.

6.1 Response to evaluation questions

6.1.1 What kinds of changes result from FAST?

This evaluation of FAST at Galiwin'ku points to a number of changes that have occurred as a result of the program's implementation. It should be noted though that these changes were not universally experienced by all participants. Nor were they observed or reported by all other stakeholders who had a role to play in FAST. What we can say though in qualitative terms is that for some participants, the program had a profound affect.

The kinds of changes reported by FAST team members and participants were focused on family support and parental capacity. These two outcomes are invariably linked—strengthening the family increases parents' (and carers') capacity to fulfil their roles. In turn, the results that follow from that can be seen in how they see outcomes for children, particularly in terms of better behaviour, respect and being helpful around the home. These outcomes are entirely consistent with those anticipated in the theory of change model (see Figure 1, page 16).

In terms of school attendance (which is also anticipated in the theory of change model), it is clear that supporters of FAST are motivated by the desire to see school attendance improve. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that for some children who participated in FAST, attendance has improved. There is also evidence to suggest that for some children school attendance has not improved (and potentially worsened) since their involvement in FAST. We therefore need to be careful in attributing the improvements to FAST without at the same time attributing the poorer results to FAST. In reality, as noted in the limitations earlier (see Attribution of outcomes, page 14) there are any number of factors that will contribute to improved or poorer attendance at school, particularly given the number of interventions that are occurring at Galiwin'ku—not to mention the factors related to the challenges faced by particular families.

For the team itself it was evident that FAST had produced outcomes in many ways. Apart from the apparent increase in parenting skills, team members' capacity to support each other and their families was noted. There are indications that team members are using skills learned in a range of other contexts, for example in employment and in the broader community. These changes are anticipated in the theory of change, but they are included as mid-level outcomes rather than low level outcomes, which is where they have occurred here.

Perhaps the most significant outcome that is not anticipated in the theory of change model relates to community development outcomes. The feedback from community members interviewed and observations noted by the evaluator, suggest that there is a high level of ownership of the FAST program among key senior community members. This is what is effectively driving the program. They saw FAST as a framework that allowed them to facilitate a process of engaging families in a culturally sensitive way in order to strengthen families in their community. They have effectively adopted FAST as a vehicle to achieve their own goals. As noted in the literature (see Evidence for FAST, page 10) this should not come as a surprise.

6.1.2 To what extent does FAST achieve outcomes for families as they are anticipated in the logic model?

One of the key 'selling points' of FAST is that it works to support schools and families by increasing school attendance and improving learning outcomes for participating children. It is also designed to improve parent-school engagement. A review of the quantitative data from teachers suggests that changes have been minimal—79 per cent of responses suggested no change over eight questions. It was noted earlier that of 13 children, teachers were able to attribute positive changes in three children directly to their participation in FAST. The changes they reported related to behaviour, respect and peer relationships.

Parent reports in the child behaviour domain were somewhat more optimistic with nearly 50 per cent of responses suggesting positive changes. Seven of the nine families interviewed reported positive change for at least one of the questions in the child behaviour domain.

In terms of parent-school engagement only one teacher reported increased parent-teacher contact as a result of FAST. However, a little over 40 per cent of parent responses suggested positive changes in this regard. Six of the nine families surveyed reported at least one positive change in this domain.

The above results suggest something of a dissonance between the perceptions of teachers and the perceptions of FAST participants. It could be argued that parents and caregivers are in a better position to comment about the changes they observe for themselves and their children. On the other hand teachers may offer a more objective assessment based on what they observe in classrooms and the school environment.

Teachers observed improved attendance in three children. They were unable to say whether this was due to FAST or not. School attendance data is similarly ambiguous. The data shows that of 15 children monitored, 8 had improved attendance. The remainder had poorer attendance. While overall, there was a slight increase in attendance rates, from 48 per cent to 53 per cent, the difference was not statistically significant and is consistent with average attendance at the school as noted in the *Galiwin'ku Local Implementation Plan* (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2011: 49).

Aside from school outcomes, the quantitative data from participant surveys indicates some strong changes in terms of social relationships, family environment and parental self-efficacy. In each of these domains, 60 per cent or more of the responses suggested that improvement had occurred as a result of participating in FAST. All nine families interviewed reported at least one change for the better in the social relationships and self-efficacy domains. Seven families reported improvements in the family environment domain.

In summary then, what we see from the quantitative data obtained is that positive changes have occurred as a result of FAST but the extent of those changes is arguably small, especially in relation to school and behaviour outcomes. Parents and caregivers are generally more optimistic about the changes than teachers. Their perceptions about changes that had occurred in terms of social relationships and parental self-efficacy were particularly strong.

6.1.3 What works in the FAST program?

Parents keep coming back to this program and there is strong support for it in the community. In the case of Galiwin'ku participant retention was close to 100 per cent. There is something intrinsic to the structure and design of the program that makes it attractive to parents and children. This is not limited to the remote Indigenous context. While we could pose the question 'why do participants like FAST?', the answer is probably obvious. They like FAST

because it makes a difference—it empowers them. It helps them parent their children. It builds their network of social supports. They and their children enjoy the program. Fundamentally, what FAST does is engage families in a process, which allows them to make choices for themselves that will be of benefit to them.

There are a number of factors that were noted at the Galiwin'ku program that contribute to its effectiveness in engaging families in the eight week process. Some of these factors might apply to other communities. Some may not.

Firstly, the level of community support that was achieved made a significant difference to the effectiveness of the program. The support from key community health workers in the first instance was seen to be critical for recruitment and retention of participants. Their adoption of the program as a community development vehicle also points to the sustainability of the program. The perceived locus of control sits not with the FAST office and manager in Darwin, but with the community itself. That said, the level of commitment and support from FAST Northern Territory should not be underestimated.

Secondly, having a local coordinator with connections to the community and the school was valuable. Without the coordinator, bringing families together would have been far more difficult and evaluation would have been almost impossible. Her language skills (English and Yolngu Matha) and an ability to negotiate both the Balanda and Yolngu worlds were critically important for the process.

Thirdly, the relationship with the school (Shepherdson College) was important. There was a level of trust that had built up between the principal, the trainer and the coordinator that exhibited itself in the school's willingness to use its facilities after hours. The school's willingness to offer attendance data and contribute to teacher evaluations was also evidence of this trust.

Fourthly, the aims of FAST around family strengthening fit well with the aspirations of many in the community. There is strong support for the program because it is not a mandated program—it is voluntary. It empowers parents and caregivers to take responsibility for their families by giving them skills that support their immediate and their extended family—and there are few things (if any) more important than family.

Fifthly, the Galiwin'ku team worked well together and this enhanced the outcomes. The support offered by the trainer was also invaluable. The strength of the relationships developed between the trainer, coordinator and the team more generally were evident.

6.2 Implications

In some ways this evaluation raises more questions than it answers. The findings support the assumptions of the theory of change model, at least in qualitative terms. Evidence has been collected that shows the nature and extent of outcomes for FAST. But an important reason for carrying out evaluations is to effect change so that service delivery can improve and adapt to the needs of stakeholders. The questions posed below, together with the answers offered, point to ways that the program can be built to ensure its ongoing development within the community.

6.2.1 Are the changes observed sustainable?

Realistically change is going to be incremental. It would be unreasonable to expect that one program run over eight weeks will result in changes for everyone. Given the significance of enculturated values within communities the process of change that occurs when outsiders

come in and introduce new values and norms of behaviour will inevitably be slow. There is an expectation that values about school attendance and what the mainstream calls appropriate standards of behaviour will somehow be acculturated by means of an eight week program. This is simply not possible. However, what we can hypothesise is that provided the program can maintain an ongoing presence in the community there is a strong probability that new values and norms will be enculturated within broader family groups, rather than acculturated by a dominant cultural worldview. The proponents of the program within the community see FAST values as their own values, which are entirely consistent with their own cultural ways of being, believing and doing. It is critical then that the local proponents and supporters of the program see it as an ongoing process, rather than just another 'flash in the pan'.

6.2.2 Does the theory of change need changing to incorporate community development as an outcome?

It became evident during this evaluation that while outcomes noted in the theory of change model were identified, there was an 'other' outcome that was somehow hard to define or describe. On reflection this outcome has a lot to do with community development, empowerment and local ownership. It is not about what happens to families and children, or the team, it is what happens in terms of leadership, community support and embedded community engagement. While the theory of change rather blandly talks about 'consultation' as a process ahead of the activities, it may be that something deeper should be embedded as a specific *activity* within the model. This activity has something to do with actively pursuing a level of community support, as has been exhibited at Galiwin'ku, so that ownership of the program is assured throughout the FAST cycle. Coupled with this, the model should then reflect corresponding community outcomes at the low level. These low level outcomes may be described in terms of strategic partnerships, support from senior local elders or leaders and/or the generation of community specific needs that FAST may address.

6.2.3 What does FAST offer remote communities that other programs do not?

The literature reviewed (see Family strengthening programs in Australia, page 5) shows a plethora of similar programs that all purport to do the same or similar things as FAST does. The success of these programs could probably be attributed to the same kind of factors that have been identified in this evaluation (see What works in the FAST program?, page 27). At Galiwin'ku, the FAFT program has a strong presence and could be seen to be doing much the same thing as FAST. It too has a strong emphasis on community engagement as noted in its operational *Handbook* (see Department of Education and Training 2011). This program also has significant resources attached to it—far greater than FAST's. It is specifically mentioned in the *Local Implementation Plan* (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2011).

However, it could be argued that there is room for more than one family strengthening program at Galiwin'ku. Further, in terms of a community development approach, government agencies have incredible difficulty shifting from a top-down approach to one that engages communities at the grass-roots level. Government agencies are inherently bureaucratic and while their rhetoric may seem to support a community development approach the reality may be something different. This is one key point of difference between FAST and FAFT in the Galiwin'ku context. As an NGO, FAST has the potential to be more flexible, responsive and culturally sensitive than FAFT. FAST also has the advantage of having an established evaluation process already in place. FAFT, at the time of writing has only just commenced a process evaluation and there are no plans for an outcome evaluation process at this time. There is real opportunity for FAST to jump ahead of FAFT and show the way forward for establishing its remote evidence base.

In more general terms, the community development approach identified in this evaluation, may be a point of difference that could be a useful distinction when FAST is compared with other programs. FAST then is seen more as a process (albeit with a structure) rather than a program. In this way, the process as it is now, then becomes another activity in the logic model. Outcomes are then achieved not just because of the activities but primarily because of the community development processes as well.

6.2.4 How can the program be made more sustainable?

The sustainability of the FAST program at Galiwin'ku is ultimately dependent on ongoing funding. To some extent the sustainability of FAST is dependent on the demonstration of outcomes, which are supported by this evaluation. At another level the willingness of organisations to fund the FAST program is dependent on those organisations' *perceptions* of its worthiness. This means that the program must present an image of worthiness to potential funders. This can be generated in a number of ways, but at its core the image is generated through relationships. These relationships are strategic and therefore must be nurtured and developed.

Pragmatically, at the local level at Galiwin'ku this requires maintaining and building relationships with key stakeholders: the school, health clinic, the shire and perhaps more significantly the Local Reference Group. Much of this relationship building can and should be done through the local trainer and coordinator.

At the Territory level, the strategic relationships with existing funders and potential funders becomes increasingly significant as the program expands its reach. What is required is a proactive effort that helps create an image of FAST and what it does. This evaluation report may be a way of offering something to key government and non-government stakeholders by way of the evidence base. But beyond this, there are undoubtedly many opportunities for giving presentations about FAST and publicly promoting the work it is doing.

6.2.5 What can be done to build on the outcomes?

A number of the outcomes demonstrated in this evaluation are reported reasonably strongly in qualitative terms but rather tenuously in quantitative terms. If, as suggested earlier in this section, outcomes take time to bed down, then continued effort needs to be made to encourage and support families who have participated in the eight week program. Strengthening the FASTWORKS process may help this. However, repetition of the eight week program will probably do the same if not more, especially if participants become team members. If, also as suggested earlier, the community development process is seen as an activity leading to outcomes in its own right, then this must be supported and nurtured. It may need supporting financially. The ongoing development of local networks and strategic partnerships also needs to be a priority—particularly with the school and health clinic.

6.2.6 What are the implications for evaluation?

This report represents a considerable investment in building an evidence base for FAST's remote activities. The mix of evaluation tools are probably now about as good as they can be to demonstrate the mix of quantitative and qualitative outcomes. There is no reason why the participant and teacher tools cannot be reused for each program both at Galiwin'ku and other remote sites. They provide a good basis for gathering evidence. In terms of adapting the participant tool to local contexts, it could be translated into local languages and dialects quite easily. While there is sufficient internal capacity to carry out most evaluation activities, there is still scope for periodic external evaluation support to provide professional development and to support evaluation processes with an objective outsider perspective.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: FAST participant evaluation

Program Date completed

	Since your involvement in FAST...	 Yes, it's better now	 Nothing changed	 Don't really know	 No, it's worse now
1.	Do you feel happier talking about your problems with friends?				
2.	Do you feel more comfortable talking about your health with someone at the clinic?				
3.	Do you feel your family talks more about their feelings with each other?				
4.	Do you get more support or help from the people in your life/family?				
5.	Do your children have better relationships?				
6.	Do your children give you more respect?				
7.	Do your children listen more carefully?				
8.	Do you talk to your children's teachers at school more?				
9.	Do you help with school activities or trips more than you did before?				
10.	Do you talk more about school with your child?				
11.	Are your children more helpful with jobs around the house?				
12.	Would you say that your family relationships are closer now?				
13.	Would you feel stronger to speak up and say what you think in front of a group?				
14.	Do you feel stronger when you have to discipline your children?				
15.	Do you see your child sharing more with other children?				
16.	Do you feel that your children respect their teachers more?				
17.	Do you feel that your children respect each other more?				
18.	Do your children show more respect to grandparents and elders?				
19.	Do you feel that your children respect other FAST families more?				

Can you tell us a little about your family



Who are the people in your family?

Can you tell us a little about your family?

Administration guide

Start with a discussion about the FAST family perhaps using the diagram on the previous page (or the felt board). For each section it would be good to hear a story that relates to each section:

- Social relationships
- Education
- Family
- Parental self efficacy
- Child strengths

The idea is to get a sense of what has changed *as a result of participating in FAST*

The way in for the story might be a prompt like

What part of the program helped with this?

What do you your children do now that you didn't before?

How do your children now show respect?

What do you think makes your family stronger? How has FAST helped?

7.2 Appendix 2: Teacher evaluation form

Instructions

This is a short evaluation document with questions and tick boxes to be completed by you to help FAST NT to properly evaluate the outcomes for students in your class who have in FAST. We appreciate your assistance as we endeavour to improve outcomes for students in your class/school. We will keep you and the school updated on FAST's progress in your community. **Please note:**

- We are specifically interested in changes you observed in the FAST child identified below
- The form will be picked up by the trainer in one to two weeks
- If you have questions please contact the trainer on _____
- It should take no more than 10 minutes to complete this survey.

Section A. About the FAST child

A1. Name/Code _____

A2. School Name _____

A3. Term and Year _____

A4. What is the gender of the FAST child? Male Female

A5. What is the Childs ethnicity?

Indigenous Anglo Asian Other (specify) _____

A6. What is the FAST child's grade? _____

Section B. Changes in the FAST child

Since the child's involvement with FAST...

B1. Have you seen any changes in this child's **respect for you as a teacher?** (for example listening to you and following instructions)

It became worse

It became worse
but unsure if was a
result of FAST

Did not change
significantly

It did improve but
unsure if it was a
result of FAST

It improved

Give any specific examples here of changes in respect

B2. Have you seen any changes in this child's **behaviour** at school?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| It became worse | It became worse but unsure if was a result of FAST | Did not change significantly | It did improve but unsure if it was a result of FAST | It improved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here of changes in behaviour

B3. Have you seen any changes in this child's **relationship with peers** at school?

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------|
| Relationships became worse | Relationships became worse but unsure if was a result of FAST | Relationships did not change significantly | Relationships improved but unsure if it was a result of FAST | Relationships improved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here

B4. Have you seen any changes in this child's **learning outcomes** as a result of participating in FAST?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|----------------------------|
| Learning outcomes deteriorated | Learning outcomes deteriorated but unsure if was a result of FAST | I did not observe any changes in learning outcomes | Learning outcomes improved but unsure if it was a result of FAST | Learning outcomes improved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here of changes in learning outcomes

B5. Have you seen any changes in this child's **attitude toward school** as a result of participating in FAST?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------------|
| Attitude became worse | Attitude became worse but unsure if was a result of FAST | I did not observe any changes in the child's attitude toward school | Attitude improved but unsure if it was a result of FAST | Attitude improved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here of changes in attitude to the school

B6. Have you seen any changes in this child's **attendance**?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------------|
| Attendance became worse | Attendance became worse but unsure if was a result of FAST | I did not note any significant change in attendance | Attendance improved but unsure if it was a result of FAST | Attendance improved |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here of changes in attendance

B7. What was his or her average attendance (days/week) 2 weeks before FAST? _____

B8. What has his or her attendance been (days/week) 2 weeks after FAST ended? _____

Section C: Parent-school contact

Since participating in FAST...

C1. Have you noticed a difference in how much contact you have with this child's parent(s) or caregiver (s)?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|--------------------------|
| I have less contact | I have less contact but unsure if was a result of FAST | I have not noticed a change in the amount of contact | I have more contact but unsure if it was a result of FAST | I have more contact |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here

C2. Have you noticed a difference in how much help this child's parent(s) or caregiver(s) give in regard to school work?

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|------------------------------------|
| The child
receives less help | The child
receives less help
but unsure if was
a result of FAST | I have not
noticed a change
in the amount of
help given | The child
receives more
help but unsure
if it was a result
of FAST | The child
receives more
help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Give any specific examples here

Section D: Other observations

Did you see any benefits for this child's parent(s) as a result of participating in FAST?

(tick the box below if 'yes')

- D1. Improved health and well-being
- D2. Improved confidence and self-esteem
- D3. Increased parenting skills
- D4. Increased involvement in school
- D5. I did not observe any specific benefits for parents

D6. Add comments here if you need to

How do you think FAST could have worked better with you to support this child?

D7. Add comments about FAST here

Have you got other comments you would like to make in relation to this child and FAST?

D8. Add other comments here

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

Please contact FAST Northern Territory on 08 89204335 if you have any questions or comments regarding this form.

7.3 Appendix 3: Interview schedule for staff and team members

FAST team evaluation

Galiwinku

April 2011

Reflecting on FAST since last year, how do you feel about the program here?

What were the key outcomes: for children, families, school, community?

How do you feel that the team worked together?

What worked and what didn't?

What happened for the parents?

What changes did you observe? What outcomes did you see?

What happened for the children?

What changes did you observe? What outcomes did you see?

What are the key things you learned?

Learnings might be in terms of outcomes, processes or contextual issues.

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