



**Tasmanian**  
Audit Office

Accessing services for the safety and  
wellbeing of children and young people  
– the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice  
and Referral Line

Report No.6 of 2021-22





# Audit Objective

The objective of the audit was to express an opinion on whether, as the primary point of access, the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line (ARL) has been implemented effectively to provide expected levels of service to support the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.



# Audit Scope

In scope agency: Department of Communities Tasmania

Period covered: From initial announcement August 2015 to December 2021  
(end of 3<sup>rd</sup> year of operation)

Also consulted but not subject to audit: Departments of Education, Health, Justice and Police, Fire & Emergency Management  
NGOs: Baptcare and Mission Australia  
Child Safety Services

Out of scope: The ARL's clinical decision-making and appropriateness of chosen referral pathways.



# Audit Criteria

1. Was there an effective, planned approach to the design and rollout of the ARL?
2. Have the plans for the introduction of the ARL been efficiently and effectively implemented?
3. Is the ARL operating effectively to achieve better access to services for the safety and welfare of children?
4. Does Communities Tasmania know whether it is achieving the objectives of the ARL?



## Audit Conclusion

The ARL, as the primary point of access, as measured against the audit criteria was, in all material respects, implemented effectively to provide expected levels of service to support the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

# Recommendations

Communities Tasmania (or its succeeding agency):

1. Ensure sufficient and appropriate project resources and effective project management methodology are deployed in future significant sub-projects of major reforms.
2. Work with DPFEM to improve the manual or electronic interchange of information relevant to child safety, and specifically information flowing between the existing CARDI and ATLAS systems, in order to reduce reworking of data leading to inefficient practices within both agencies.

## Recommendations cont'.

3. Review its processes regarding the delivery of feedback of next steps and outcomes to persons contacting the ARL to ensure consistency of approach.
4. Work with stakeholder agencies to raise both awareness of the ARL and its role and encourage those agencies to promote their own responsibilities in child safety and wellbeing.

## Recommendations cont’.

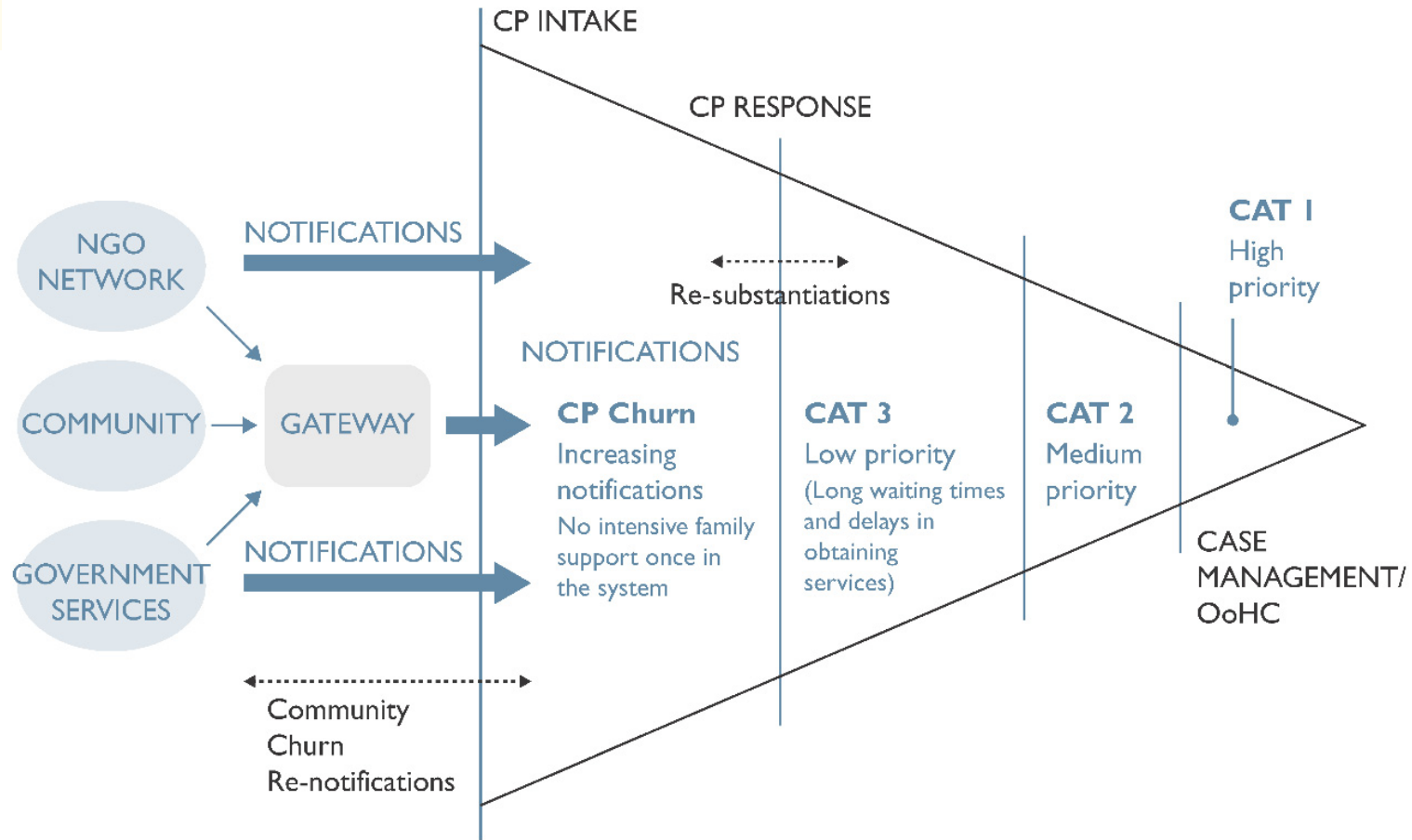
5. Work with DPFEM and DOJ, as system owners, to find a solution to barriers that prevent non-government ARL workers from accessing information systems that would enable them to perform their jobs more efficiently and effectively.
6. Prioritise the resourcing of liaison officers within the ARL to increase both their capacity to work within communities and with service providers, as well as provide ongoing training and education required to support a more proactive and preventative approach to child safety and wellbeing.



## Recommendations cont'.

7. Develop effectiveness indicators for the ARL to better understand if the original objectives of SFSK are being met. The indicators to complement the throughput and efficiency indicators already in place and to include measures of client satisfaction.

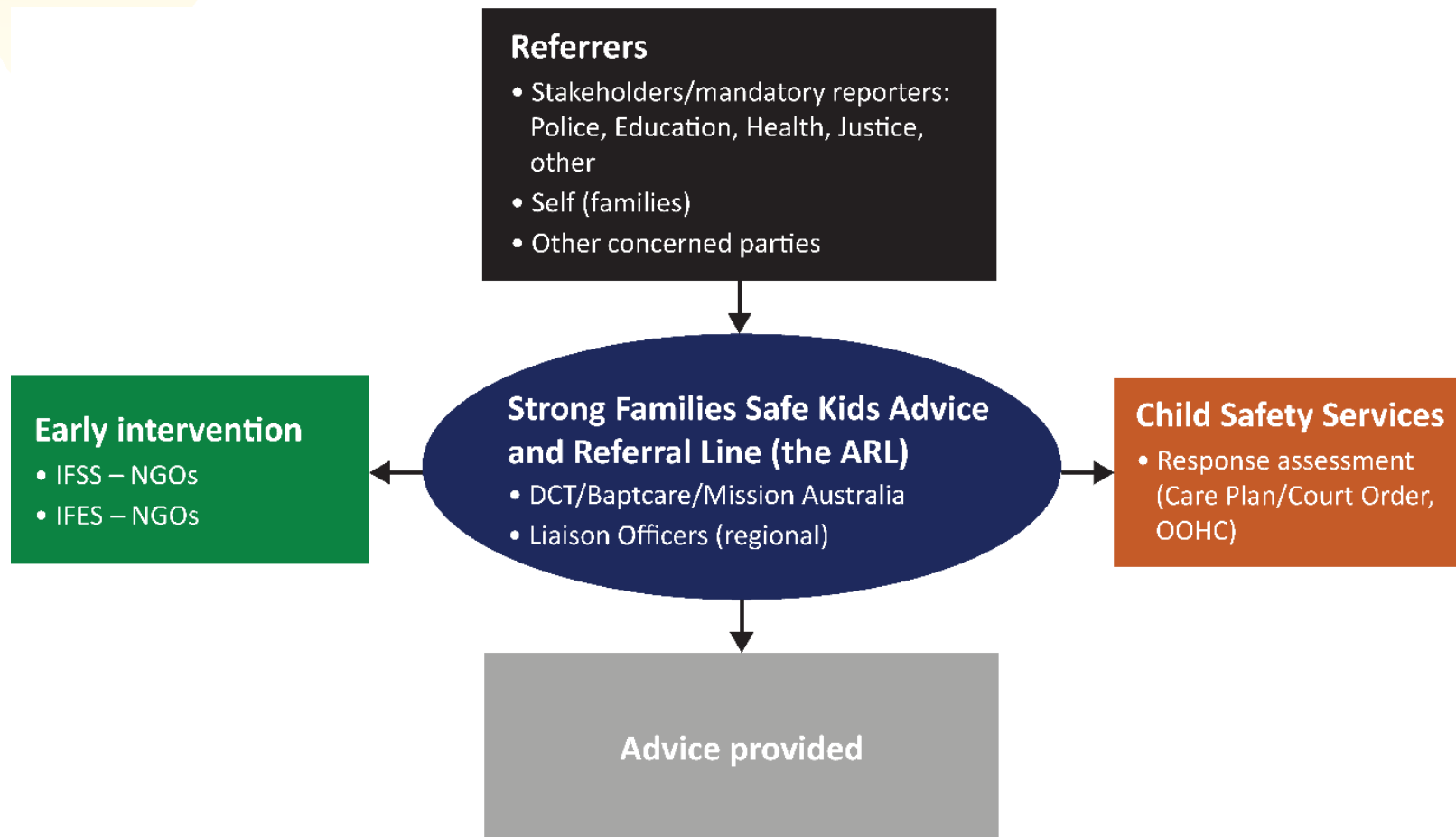
# Child protection system to 2018



# What is the ARL?



# What is the ARL?



# Findings – criteria 1

- Clear drivers and rationale for change – Strong Families Safe Kids reforms
- The 'single front door' became the ARL
- Push for detailed change management and rollout of the ARL did not occur until 2 years into the reforms.
- Speed became a driver, rather than dedicated project management methodology. Truncated timeframes for delivery.
- Despite this, broadly successful implementation.

## Findings – criteria 2

- Effective transition arrangements:
  - supported going live
  - helped ensure continuity of service for families.
- A shared sense of purpose between Government agencies and NGOs developed and mitigated concerns in how they would work together.

## Findings – criteria 2 cont.

- Shortened timeframe for implementation - 4 factors put additional strain on ARL workers post going live. These were:
  - duplication of effort during transition
  - staffing vacancies
  - the separation of duties between Government and NGO workforces
  - higher than anticipated call numbers.
- Adjustments were made after going live to improve operational efficiency, including the introduction of the online form.

## Findings – criteria 3

- The ARL is broadly effective
- Pathways in: work well
- Pathways out: there have been improvements in connecting families to appropriate interventions, whether that be early support for wellbeing concerns, or response action for safety concerns.

### Areas for improvement:

- Liaison Officers critical but wide coverage and limited capacity
- Early intervention and family support services, once connected, can be at capacity and not initially available



## Findings – criteria 3 cont.

- Compromise with unions on staffing model for the ARL: the initial splitting of Government and Non-Government workforce was inefficient and impacted clients
- Non-government ARL workers not currently able to access all relevant Government information systems
- Lack of broader understanding of ARL's purpose and function
  - insufficient resourcing of communication and education through liaisons
  - inconsistent provision of feedback from the ARL to callers.

## Findings – criteria 4

- Reporting focused on ARL activity and throughput
- Some evidence available the ARL is starting to meet its intended outcomes as articulated in the SFSK reforms.
- Third measure, client satisfaction, has not yet been subject to detailed review
- RoGS data on child safety in Tasmania has also been subject to misinterpretation of its meaning and impact
- There is a need to clarify performance measures and promote further the positive outcomes from the reforms.

## Findings – criteria 4

- Finally, it should be reinforced that the ARL is one part of a broader suite of reforms and has interdependencies on the success of those other areas, being the capacity of early intervention and family support services as well as the effectiveness and responsiveness of CSS.



# Responses

Received from:

- Minister for Education, Children and Young People
- Secretary, Department of Communities
- CPSU

Questions?



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