

NSW Social Sector Transformation Fund Tranche 3 (SSTF T3) Advisory & Information Services

Giving Taree children the best start in life

Client story: First Steps Count

This story was contributed by Social Enterprise Finance Australia (Sefa) and is an excerpt from the [NCOSS SSTF Coordination Highlights and Outcomes Report, Dec 2022](#). The story can also be found in Sefa's [website](#).

Situated in regional NSW on the mid-north coast, Taree is characterised by significant social and economic disadvantage, with fragmented and difficult to navigate child and family services. With a critical shortage of allied health service providers, outcomes for children have remained stagnant in the region. First Steps Count's challenge was to provide an integrated model of service delivery, coordination of programs and services for children, young people and families as well as serving as a thriving community hub. First Steps Count wanted to play a facilitator/catalyser role and needed an operating model to be developed so that the ongoing costs of the centre including maintenance and staff salaries are met.

"We needed help to get clarity around what we wanted to achieve - to try and contain it and measure it tangibly. Developing the Theory of Change has been a really good resource for us to demonstrate why we're doing this and how we're going to get there." - Clare Brennan, Transition Manager at First Steps Count

Sefa worked to ensure:

there is clarity around the impact that First Steps Count is seeking to deliver in its catalytic / facilitator role and as part of the collective impact work that is underway on the mid-coast through development of a Theory of Change;

the outcomes that will underpin that impact have been defined, and the way to measure those outcomes has been determined;

the organisation benefits from enhanced governance capability; and

a viable business model has been resolved.

"Personally, Sefa's mentorship and the Theory of Change made me feel really confident going into conversations with our partners and potential funding bodies. They have given us an invaluable skillset and toolkit as we move forward." - Clare Brennan, Transition Manager at First Steps Count

What worked and didn't work?

- High engagement, drive and passion from the client and the broader stakeholder group consulted
- Sefa helped First Steps Count shape their strategy and outcomes measurement from the very beginning so they were set up well from day 1
- Sefa linked in Infoxchange to support on the more technical side of things – advising the organisation on how best to capture the data – it was great to be able to leverage other SSTF providers expertise as part of this project.
- High community engagement

Whilst nothing 'didn't work', the following areas were more challenging:

- Building a financial operating model with so many unknowns given no track record yet was challenging – it meant the model was largely assumption based & will need further refinement by the client.
- Balancing everyone's feedback, sometimes conflicting, given the wide group consulted with
- Sifting through a lot of resources shared with Sefa e.g., data collection approaches, and figuring out what was more applicable to First Steps Count

-
- Getting clear around the data requirements and supporting systems that would be needed to realise the vision and desired level of outcomes measurement

What were the outcomes?

- First Steps Count is now armed with everything it needs to create the change the Taree community has been waiting over a decade for.
- It can demonstrate its purpose and how it will achieve its goals, and in the future, it will be able to show its impact on the lives of children and families. With a solid financial operating model in place, it can open its doors with confidence later this year.
- Stage 1 of the hub is on track to open in November 2022. With a further \$3.2m in Federal Government funding, First Steps Count will begin planning the final stage of the build.

“As an organisation, Sefa has given us an invaluable skillset, tools and resources so as we move forward, we can continue to reflect and evolve our frameworks and model. Personally, Sefa’s mentorship and Theory of Change made me feel really confident going into conversations with our partners and potential funding bodies. It’s a huge win for the community and it’s such a privilege to be involved in creating such an important hub for the community.” - Clare Brennan, Transition Manager at First Steps Count

What did we learn?

- There is huge value added, providing strategic support (which in this case included a theory of change, financial operating model, governance support and an outcomes measurement framework) at the establishment phase for an organisation. FSC was literally starting with a blank slate and so to come in and offer much needed structure and strategic advice was extremely valuable to the client.
- Play to your strengths and draw on other organisations where needed – for e.g., in this case, when it came to advice around the best system to support the data collection, Sefa brought in Infoxchange. Similarly, for the governance support offered to the board, they leveraged a subcontractor – Future Directors – to deliver this element of the work.
- Wide consultation and engagement from the community – the primary beneficiary of the new centre – was the way to go and was aligned to the co-design approach being taken by First Steps Count.
- Developing outputs that were simple and visual in nature was well received as they could easily be shared and explained with community members involved in the co-design process.

For queries about NCOSS SSTF Tranche 3 Coordination Project, please email:

info@ncoss.org.au (ATTN: SSTF)

