



FIRST STEPS COUNT INCORPORATED

BUSINESS/GOVERNANCE PLAN

(Revised)

2016

FIRST STEPS COUNT INCORPORATED

BUSINESS/GOVERNANCE PLAN

- 1. Review of current service provision and the way ahead**
- 2. Our Vision, Beliefs and Culture**
- 3. Objectives**
- 4. Goals, Outcomes and Strategies**
- 5. Sustainability**
- 6. Implementation Plan:**
 - a. Structure... flow chart**
 - b. Administration**
 - c. Risk Analysis and Mitigating Strategies for each identified risk**
 - d. Training**
 - e. Opportunities for Program Participation**
- 7. Stakeholders—partners/relationships**
- 8. Communication Strategy**

BUSINESS PLAN

1. COMMUNITY PROFILE

Taree operates as the central hub in a wider agricultural district of the Manning Valley in New South Wales. It has been identified as an area of persistent disadvantage ranking in the most disadvantaged postcodes in Tony Vinson's (Dropping off the Edge) 2015 and 2007 studies and in others as early as 2004 and 1999.

Demographic and socio-economic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census indicates that there are high rates of unemployment, median incomes well below the national average, and of those who rent, renters are more likely than average to rent from a state housing authority than the average Australian renter.

There is a higher than average percentage of people who are divorced or separated (14.5% compared to 11.3%). The proportion of Aboriginal residents is higher than the Australian average (6.9% compared to 2.3%).

Taree's ABS index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSED) score places it in the most disadvantaged 10 per cent of suburbs in Australia with:

- Over 11% unemployed
- The lowest proportion of people aged 15+ in the labour force at 45% (highest in NSW)
- Well below average median incomes
- High % of families living in state run housing estates

Taree has higher than average;

- Family breakdown-(20% of children in out of home care Manning Gardens precinct)
- Aboriginal residency is 6.95 compared with national average of 2.3%
- Year 10 or lower education standards –only 26.54% completing year 12, the 3rd lowest in NSW

ACCESS TO SERVICES and SERVICE PROVISION

Many residents have difficulty in accessing mainstream services primarily due to transport. Limited public transport, insufficient finance to purchase and maintain a car, and people not having a driver's license are all contributing factors (Parliament of Australia: Senate Committee: Rural and regional affairs and transport committee, 2009).

A significant number of families in the Taree area do not own computers, have internet access or skills in information technology, therefore access to online information about services is more difficult. Other barriers to accessing services include people's past experiences with a service, such as, experiencing a service's lack of understanding of the issues and needs of disadvantaged people (Murphy, E. and Wraith, C. 1998).

The Greater Taree City Council Community Plan 2005-2009 identified that the community based support agencies were under resourced and this limited early intervention and support service provision. They also identified gaps in service provision such as limited access to respite options and affordable childcare for low income families; isolation for children and families in outlying areas; and safety concerns relating to child safety and crime prevention.

Community service organisations are not always aware of the range of services offered by other organisations. Clients with complex needs do not always fall into a specific target criteria (ACOSS, 2009) therefore they may need to access several support services or organisations.

A more co-ordinated service provision offered by a child and family centre would contribute to:

- Increased accessibility to services and information for the Manning Valley and the wider Mid North Coast community
- Service provision that is culturally appropriate for the community
- An effective use of financial and human resources
- Excellence in education
- Greater job opportunities for young people
- The total wellbeing of the community

THE WAY AHEAD..

First Steps Count Inc. is guided by **The Nest**, a national plan for child and youth wellbeing developed by ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) in 2013 following extensive consultation with government and service organisations and most importantly with children and youth who are affected by the decisions and pathways made on their behalf.

The Nest identifies six outcomes towards which we will work in collaboration with all involved in the care and protection of children- All young people are loved and safe, have material basics, are healthy, are learning and participating and have a positive sense of identity and culture.

BUSINESS PLAN

2. OUR VISION, BELIEFS AND CULTURE

a) VISION:

Children first in everything we do

- Raise the profile of children as valued members of the community and the importance of the early years in the development of children
- All children on the Mid North Coast are safe, happy and contributing community members.
- All children are ready for formal schooling
- Families are confident in nurturing their children
- The regional service provider system is effectively co-ordinated
- Everyone works towards a reconciled, just and equitable community
- Everyone in the community works together for children
- First Steps Count child and family centre's environmentally sustainable design model 'the Living Building Challenge' is a visionary path for a restorative future. It is an holistic tool resulting in a creative and innovative relationship between the building and landscaping and all who access it

b) BELIEFS:

- Children have the right to be loved and nurtured and to feel safe
- Greater value should be placed on the education of children from day one of a child's life
- We all have a responsibility to ensure that children are valued as individuals and to ensure that they are safe within the community
- Families need to be supported and empowered in the child rearing role
- Antenatal care is an important component
- Children deserve the best possible start in life in order to become caring contributing community members

c) CULTURE:

- With the wellbeing of the child as the foremost consideration in every deliberation and decision, effective partnerships will include working together, power sharing, mutual respect, complementary expertise, open negotiation and communication.

- Children and their families are able to enjoy participation in educational and community activities and promote their own particular culture in a child focused learning environment.
- First Steps Count provides a warm, welcoming and safe community environment where children and their families are respectfully offered a range of co-ordinated services that meet their needs
- Employ the ‘bottom up’ approach
- An ‘open door’ policy which includes ease of access, is inclusive and non stigmatising. The neutral nature of the centre works to increase privacy and reduce stigma. This is complemented by connecting outdoor activities in a natural restorative environment.
- Provide a platform for ongoing environmental education
- First Steps Count staff and partner services provide a co-ordinated outreach and consultancy service with ongoing community engagement - all working to the agreed philosophy and culture. These services are facilitated by collaborative working arrangements with local, state and federal governments, philanthropic organisations, agencies and organisations, the business and general community including the Aboriginal community.
- This environment builds on the strengths of previously disempowered individuals who discover skills and talents which in turn encourage positive change in others.
- Children are the direct beneficiaries.

BUSINESS PLAN

FIRST STEPS COUNT CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE

3. OBJECTIVES

- 1.Provision of integrated early intervention services for children (0-12) and their families especially where poverty, distress, suffering, misfortune or helplessness occurs.
- 2.Provision of a happy, safe, supportive, welcoming and inclusive environment for children and their families in the Manning Valley.
- 3.Facilitation of partnerships with early childhood services and the general community for the well being of children and their families
- 4.Provision of intensive family support services for children and their families where destructive family relationships have occurred.
- 5.Provision of comprehensive antenatal services for parents-to-be and services for families where mothers suffer post natal depression.
- 6.Provision of life skills education and recreational facilities for general health and wellbeing of children and their families.
- 7.To operate as a not- for-profit incorporated association.
- 8.Any other activities which may from time to time be deemed appropriate.

4. GOALS - Child, Family and Community

- Socialisation of children
- Parent/child engagement with early childhood programs
- Children achieving expected literacy and numeracy competency by 5 years of age
- Expectant parents understand the needs of the unborn child, infants and young children
- Children and their families understand the importance of nutritious food and a healthy lifestyle
- Families are supported in times of crisis
- Decrease in the incidence of postnatal depression
- Decrease in the incidence of drug abuse and family violence
- Community awareness of the rights and needs of children
- Children feel safe in the home and in the community
- Children are involved in the decision making process in matters which affect them
- Community involvement in the path to reconciliation

OUTCOMES

- All children are ready for school and are engaged for continued learning
- Maximum school attendance for all children
- Aboriginal children attain high education standards
- Children have a positive sense of identity and culture
- Children are loved and safe
- Children are healthy and happy
- Families are confident in nurturing their children
- Children are valued within the community as individual members of the community

- A marked reduction in the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse/family violence
- Children are healthier and happier
- Children with a disability receive early detection and intervention
- Higher levels of productivity in the region

STRATEGIES:

A. HOW WE ARE PLANNING TO DO IT

- In partnership with University of Wollongong to participate in the Early Start Engagement Centre Network for training and community education
- Provide opportunities for relationship building through Parenting Programs eg 'Bringing Up Great Kids' and 'PPP'
- Create opportunities for families with babies and young children to access transition to school programs, connecting with relevant services such as 'Play and Learn' programs, 'Parents Plus', Dad's programs (Communities for Children)
- Create opportunities for disadvantaged children and their families to participate in social activities- by conducting Kids Can, Dad's program, organised family days such as Teddy Bears Picnic and participation in the annual Aboriginal Saltwater/Freshwater festival at Old Bar
- Create opportunities for parents/children to actively participate in early childhood programs including early intervention programs - by ensuring a warm and welcoming attractive environment, provision of nutritious snack/meals, and provision of transport for families who otherwise would not attend. Transport will be arranged with existing services eg Valley Industries
- Create opportunities for reading programs by children and families participating in the 'Paint the Town Read' program
- Create opportunities for children to participate in numeracy and literacy programs (Australian Numeracy and Literacy Foundation)
- Create opportunities for parents and future parents to adopt healthy diet and lifestyle for themselves and their families – by providing access to nutrition education, community garden involvement and cooking classes

- Create opportunities for Aboriginal and non Aboriginal children to learn about Aboriginal culture in mentoring programs/ activities conducted by local Elders
- Create opportunities for families to learn to make appropriate choices for themselves and their children- through Play and Learn programs and evidence based parenting programs eg Every Parent Every Community
- Create opportunities for families needing intensive support to access relevant services –eg; by referral to Newpin (Uniting Care Burnside) intensive family support service
- Create opportunities for young expectant parents to access strength based guidance and support for happier, effective parenting and family wellbeing – through partner services provision of comprehensive ante-natal programs
- Work with the media outlets in promoting child friendly communities - by arranging: Interviews with children and families, editorial comment on facilities and general needs of children within their particular community environment, and facilitate public debates.
- Negotiate with business and local government to include needs of children in policy and planning- eg; safe play areas in business houses, shopping centres, housing estates and safe public transport
- Create opportunities for children to participate in playgroups and programs which focus on strengths and abilities eg ‘Playing our Part’
- Partner with Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) on a major research action project from day one of operations, trialling all of ARACY’s proven early childhood development and intervention programs as a stacked intervention in one geographical area of critical need

B. HOW WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

- % of parents and families who report being more connected with their children and with their community (eg. Feed back / surveys).
- Service providers report increased numbers of children and families enjoying the interaction and learning process

- Service providers report increased numbers of disadvantaged children particularly Aboriginal children and families participating in programs
- Business centres and shopping centres introduce child friendly areas with reading nooks and play space on a year round basis (not restricted to holiday time)
- Parents and service providers report increased self worth and contentment in children
- Improvement in AEDI and NAPLAN and scores for children in our region
- Parents report confidence in their ability to care for their child/children

C. HOW WE KNOW WE ARE EFFECTIVELY DOING WHAT WAS PLANNED

- Children and their families attend early childhood programs on a regular basis
- Parent education conducted
- Increase in the number of Aboriginal children attending pre school and their families are happier- with parents more aware of their children's emotional, physical and nutritional needs
- Family celebration events with special activities for children attract maximum attendance and involvement
- Aboriginal and non Aboriginal children enjoy learning Aboriginal culture from visiting Aboriginal Elders and respond positively to mentoring
- Parents/carers report child friendly facilities in business centres and public places
- Studies show a marked improvement in education standards across the board

5. Sustainability and benefits to local economy.

First Steps Count child and family centre has ensured sustainability both financially and environmentally.

The Centre will receive rental fees from resident service providers (2 major organisations, one local and one national) offering a multiplicity of early childhood services all of which are funded by federal or state government.

Rental fees will also come from early childhood services, allied health and specialist services operating from the centre on a part time basis.

The Conference and community facilities will generate income for the Centre and for the local economy through provision of professional development and continuing education workshops, conferences and room rental. This is a best practice model for eco-friendly early childhood services, and the unique nature of the purpose built sustainable building will provide the region with a showcase project.

The building, design for which the architects have adopted the **Living Building Challenge**, has been described as an exemplar project locally, nationally and internationally and can be used within and beyond the community to educate on the positive benefits of environmentally friendly, cost effective sustainable buildings.

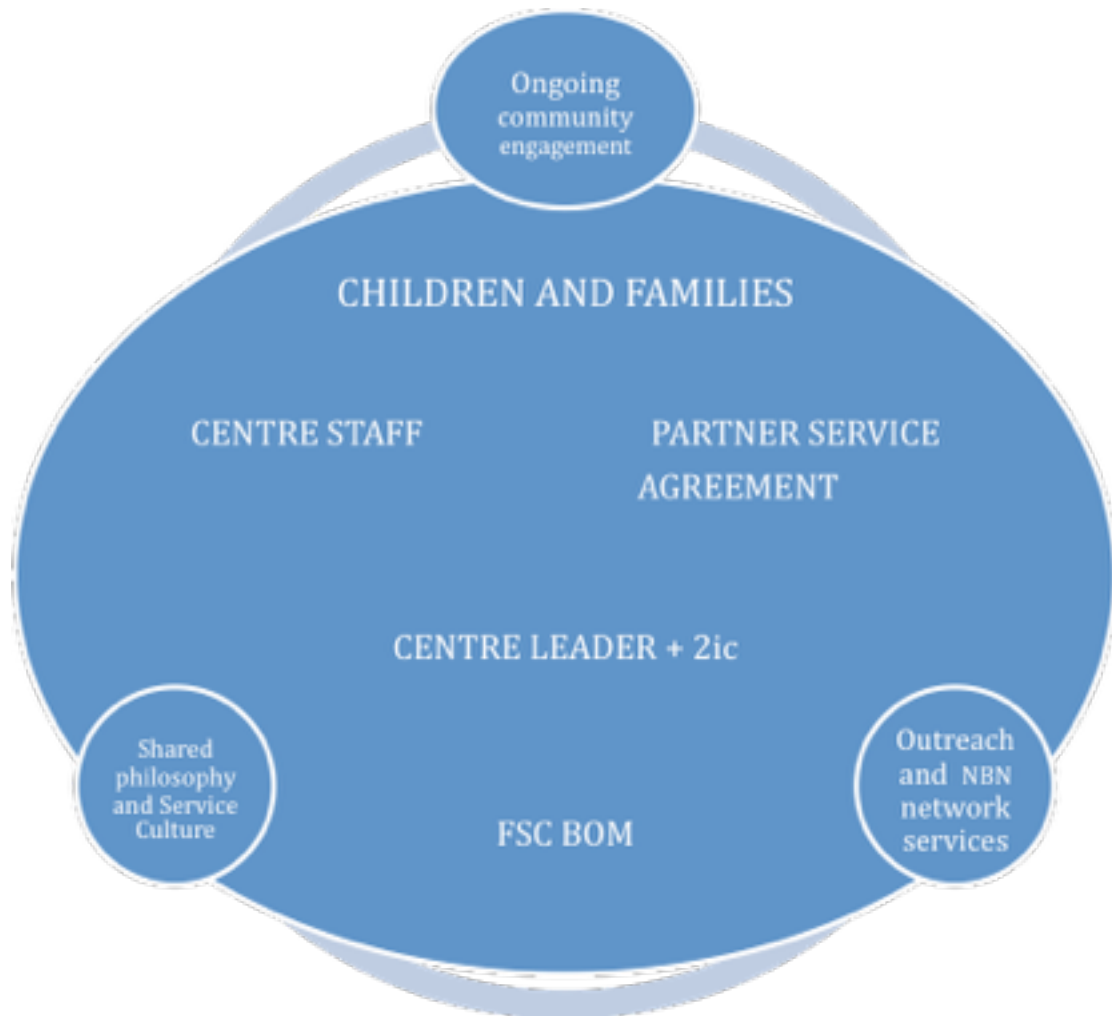
The Centre plans to host 25 workshops and 2 large conferences per annum for approximately 750 people. Each workshop/ conference participant will generate local income through fees, accommodation and meals- a total of approximately \$185,000 per annum generated into the local economy.

The Centre's facilities will attract new services to the region-including services currently located in large metropolitan centres- that wish to establish a presence in the mid North Coast region. This will provide faster, more accessible, more economic and more integrated child and family support for the community.

The Centre will enable existing service providers in the region to extend the reach and impact of their services in a cost effective way. The Centre will therefore leverage stronger outcomes from existing government spending in the region's education and child and family services.

Cost effectiveness of prevention and early intervention as opposed to late intervention and crisis responses is inarguable. Nobel prize winner James Heckman, an economist, is quoted as saying (2008)- *'interventions early in the life cycle of disadvantaged children have much higher economic returns than later interventions such as reduced pupil/teacher ratios, public job training, convict rehabilitation programs, adult literacy programs, tuition subsidies or expenditure on police'*.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN -



BUSINESS PLAN

b. Administration:

- Centre Staff (inclusive of resident services, casual services, maintenance services and volunteer workers) are responsible to the Centre Leader.
- The Centre Leader is responsible to the First Steps Count Inc. Board of Management (BOM).
- First Steps Count BOM is responsible for selection of the Administrative staff other than those employed by resident and casual/consultant service providers.
- The BOM will identify sub committees as may be required for particular operational aspects
- The Board of management will oversee fundraising/income reliability.
- First Steps Count Inc. will operate according to the rules and regulations in the Constitution.

c. Risk analysis and mitigating strategies:

1. Child protection

Children may be exposed to potential risk of harm

Mitigating strategy -

- Applicants will undergo a 'working with children' check prior to employment
- Child-safe Child-friendly policies and practices will be implemented and overseen by the Centre Leader.

2. Sustainability

Insecurity associated with insufficient funding would adversely affect all operations and affect staff morale.

Mitigating Strategy-

- Regular income from rented space both permanent and part time will ensure certainty of service operations
- The Board of Management will work to support a level of funding necessary to ensure ongoing viability

- Pro bono assistance with Council fees, transport, garden /landscaping, minor building repair tasks etc will contribute to sustainability

3. Leadership

Inadequate leadership could result from a less than thorough selection process and could take some time to manifest itself in any number of operational areas.

Mitigating strategy -

- The BOM must ensure that the criteria for selection and the job description are clear
- All applicant referees must be contacted during the selection process
- A probation period of 3 months will be required for the successful applicant/s

4. Management Structure

‘Power play,’ inattention to detail, inflexible attitudes and inadequate communication between BOM/staff/families/community would result in a breakdown of relationships and service provision.

Mitigating Strategy -

- BOM must be cognisant of risks and draw up an agreed operation plan to alleviate such risks- to include a Communications Plan

5. Evaluation process

Internal and external evaluation which focuses only on the performance of employers/facilitators will fail to give a clear and concise picture of the centre’s purpose, procedures and outcomes.

Mitigating Strategy –

- Ensure clear and concise directions for assessing/measuring operational outcomes
- Ensure appointment of ethical and unbiased evaluators

BUSINESS PLAN

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Raising the profile of children as valued members of the community and the importance of the early years in the development of children
- Greater value placed on the education of children from day one of a child's life and greater awareness of the importance of education and support for expectant parents and those caring for babies and young children
- Closing the gap towards reconciliation

d. Training:

Family Partnership Training and Every Parent Every Community (EPEC) training are considered as fundamental professional development for all practitioners.

The Common Approach (developed by ARACY in 2010) is essential training to build capacity in strength based, holistic and child focused partnerships with families

First Steps Count will provide the facilities and expertise for the provision of professional development for professionals working with vulnerable families in the region.

Skilled service providers, consultants and professional trainers employed by particular service providers will be invited to conduct training programs at the child and family centre.

This will encourage pooling of resources and support interagency relationships, avoiding duplication of services. This will in turn enhance the potential for the expansion of social/emotional, physical, and educational support services, thereby closing the gaps for families.

We also recognize the untapped skills of local community members and the empowering potential for individuals or groups sharing skills with others less fortunate.

Training philosophy:

First Steps Count has a continuing commitment to respond to the needs of the community in our region.

We will encourage professionals working with vulnerable families to adopt a model that forms strong partnerships with parents, rather than the ‘expert’ model that tends to alienate families.

We hold to a strength based perspective and are committed to offering and supporting training that meets the actual needs of children and families in our region.

“the underlying tenet of this perspective is that all families have strengths and capabilities. If practitioners take time to identify these qualities and build on them, rather than focusing on the correction of skills deficits or weaknesses, people are more likely to respond favourably to interventions and thus the likelihood of making a positive impact on the family unit is considerably enhanced” (Tomison, 1998)

e. Opportunities for Program Participation:

First Steps Count child and family centre has established partnerships with early childhood services and allied health services all committed to:

- Create a supportive environment for children and their families in the Manning Valley region
- A rich social capital by developing a child friendly community that places children, their parents and families as active partners in the journey
- Encourage individual and community resilience by providing opportunities to develop personal strengths, skills and abilities

Programs listed below will educate and empower families, communities and service providers to develop happy, healthy, confident and capable children.

We are providing opportunities for these to be accessed by the most vulnerable families.

Holistic health for families:

- First Aid
- Life skills programs: Budgeting, Nutrition/healthy eating/cooking demonstrations
- Antenatal programs
- Relaxation – yoga for adults and children
- Chemical free cleaning

Programs for Children:

- Kids Can –NAPCAN
- Supervised Playgroup
- Play Connect- autism specific

- Transition to school
- Community Gardens –vegetables /bush tucker/ sensory gardens
- Bike path- safe cycling
- Personal Development/Life skills

Programs for Parents:

- Newpin Intensive Family Support program –Uniting Care Burnside
- Bringing up Great Kids parenting course
- Bringing up Little Darlings – Aboriginal Specific
- Triple P
- 1,2,3 Magic & Emotion coaching
- One-on-one parenting assistance
- Women and Life
- Positive Partnerships – Autism
- Young Parent Early Intervention Parenting Program
- Dad’s program
- Speech Therapy- Hanen Learn to Talk program
- Physiotherapy/Occupational therapy
- Circle of Security

Professional/service providers available

- Parents in partnership
- Early Childhood Nurse support
- Allied health services – OT, Speech, Physiotherapy
- Trauma counselling
- Multidisciplinary approach – professional committees
- GP education and training
- Hanen Learn to Talk- Speech therapy training
- Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre
- Conference facilities in an environmentally sustainable building
- Participation in the Early Start Engagement Centre network for training and community education (University of Wollongong)
- NDIS consultant (Valley Industries Ltd)

NBN Network:

- Websites accessed by families through the NBN network
- Parent support sites such as:
 - Families NSW supporting families to raise children
 - Quiet parenting – Australia’ first ‘live’ online parent education program
 - Raising Children Network
- Ongoing training for professionals via video conferencing
- Counseling and therapist’s advice

7. STAKEHOLDERS

- **Our most important stakeholders are the children, families and community members.**
- **Partner/collaborative services are;**
- **ARACY** (Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth) – a major research project to commence simultaneously with commencement of Centre operations
- **Greater Taree City Council-**
- **University of Wollongong Early Start** project for participation in the Early Start Engagement Centre Network
 - **Uniting Care Burnside** – and possible co-location
 - **Valley Industries Ltd**– Community based disability service
 - **Snugglepott Day Care Centre** –adjacent
 - **Child Care Services Taree & Districts (CCST & D)**
 - **Burrun Dalai** (Aboriginal Out of Home Care)
 - **Manning Gardens Public School-** in the precinct
 - **Early Intervention Service-** school grounds
 - **Manning Gardens Pre School-** school grounds
 - **Girrawong Pre School** (Biripi)
 - **Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service**
 - ***Manning Support Services***
 - **Connected Communities Taree** (Department of Education)
 - **Newpin** Australia (Uniting Care Burnside Intensive Family Support Service)- working towards establishment of Newpin Taree
 - **Playgroups Australia**
 - **Intalink Therapy Solutions** (allied health services) – Valley Industries Ltd.
 - **Ability Links NSW (Aboriginal)-** (NSW FaCS)
 - **North Coast TAFE**
 - **Samaritans** (Early Childhood Team)
- **Philanthropic support/ Assistance in Kind**
 - **Local businesses, Service clubs, groups and community members**
 - **Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF)**
 - **Architects Without Frontiers (AWF)**
 - **NBN TV**
 - **Manning River Times**

BUSINESS PLAN

8. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

What we need to do

- Encourage the wider community across the Mid North Coast to appreciate the value of children and the importance of every child as an individual in his or her own right
- Communicate the message that every child has the right to be loved and nurtured and to feel safe in his or her own family and community
- Work towards general community awareness of the need to consider the best interests of children in all decision making
- Communicate to the broader Mid North Coast community the role of the Centre in facilitating /providing co-ordinated services-leading eventually to truly integrated service provision
- Maintain regular communications with all who have supported and are supporting the project with regular activity reports and invitations to visit

How we will do it

1. **REGULAR ACTIVITY REPORTS** to all involved in planning and support:

- Committees
- Local government
- State government (relevant ministers and departmental representatives)
- Federal government (relevant ministers and departmental representatives)
- Philanthropic organisations
- Businesses
- Service Clubs, Community organisations and community members
- Service providers
- Schools
- Donors
- Volunteers

- Media outlets
2. **INFORMATION BROCHURE/FACT SHEET AND POSTER** for:
- Display in and distribution through relevant outlets above plus hospitals, medical centres, airports and railway stations in the region
3. **OPEN DAYS**
- Annual open day to showcase First Steps Count environment.

