



Australian Centre for  
Child Protection

# Family by Family Evaluation: Child Protection Data Report



University of  
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Australian Centre for  
Child Protection

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FUNDING FOR THIS PROJECT WAS PROVIDED BY THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

THE AUTHORS WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE STAFF OF THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND FAMILY BY FAMILY FOR ALL OF THEIR ASSISTANCE IN THE PREPATION OF THIS REPORT.

THE AUTHORS ALSO WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE STAFF OF FAMILIES SA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE WITH THE EXTRACTION AND EXPLANATION OF THE CHILD PROTECTION DATA.

LASTLY, THE AUTHORS WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE COMMUNITY MATTERS TEAM, FOR THEIR WORK IN OBTAINING CONSENT FOR THE COLLECTION OF CHILD PROTECTION DATA DURING PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS AND FOR THEIR COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING OF PROCESS AND OUTCOME DATA IN THEIR COMPANION EVALUATION REPORT.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Family by Family (FbF) is a social program developed by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) intended to assist families to thrive and to see fewer families come into contact with child protection services. This report is one part of a larger evaluation involving interviews with families and analysis of the administrative data collected by FbF.

This report examines the child protection outcomes associated with family engagement in FbF. Two types of data were provided by SA and NSW Governments; aggregate and individual data. The aggregate data was provided in the form of monthly rates of notifications for the geographical regions served by FbF and a number of comparison sites in both NSW and SA. Analysis of the aggregate notification data was conducted using an interrupted time series methodology. The interrupted time series analysis showed promising results for a reduction in notifications to child protection services in the regions served by FbF. A reduction in the trend in notifications was noted in the northern metropolitan site in SA and in Mt. Druitt in NSW, and a trend towards a reduction was noted in the southern metropolitan site in SA. This analysis, however, cannot control for all of the extraneous variables that may influence the rates of notifications. The results presented in this report should therefore be interpreted alongside both the 2012 evaluation of FbF, and the reports from the other aspects of the current evaluation (analysis of the data collected by FbF and interviews with families) and other social programs in these regions.

The individual unit record data consisted of lifetime notification, care and protection order and out of home care placement data for the children in '*seeking families*'- families who want something in their lives to be different - who consented to the access to this data as part of the wider FbF program. Individual data could only be requested for consenting families who took part in the wider evaluation of the FbF program. A total of 42 families, 23 from SA sites and 19 from NSW, consented for their individual data to be accessed. The 23 families from SA had a total of 51 children, 31 (60.8%) of whom had records with child protection services. These 31 children accounted for a total of 241 notifications, ranging between 1 notification and 29 notifications over their lifetimes. The 19 families from NSW had a total of 44 children, 39 (88.6%) of whom had records with child protection services. The 39 children from NSW accounted for a total of 549 notifications, ranging between 1 notification and 41 notifications over their lifetimes.

Engaging with FbF tended to be associated with a reduction in notifications in the short term; however there was also evidence that over time the numbers of notifications to the child protection system started to increase. In SA these rates didn't reach the level of notifications occurring 12 month pre-FbF, but in NSW they did. Reanalysis of the NSW data with two families, and 10 children, who were placed into OOHc prior to FbF involvement revealed similar results in NSW as noted in SA. In NSW, however, due to the repeated link ups and long involvement, the increase in children being renotified is likely occurring while many families are still in link ups.

The promising results suggest that the program could be further expanded, with consideration of the types of families that will be coming into the service. However, there is a need to ensure that the families receiving FbF are those for who FbF was designed (i.e., families who have their children). Families who have had their children removed need services specifically designed for this target group. Additionally, there is a need to re-examine continuation of link ups well beyond the initial period as the effects seen at 6 months post-commencement of FbF are not maintained at 12, even when many families were still engaged in the programs.

Future research using matched comparison, wait-list control or randomized controlled trial methods will be useful in further exploration of the impact that FbF has upon the child protection outcomes for families who are engaged in the program.

## BACKGROUND

Family by Family (FbF) is a social program developed by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI). In the development of FbF, TACSI's brief was to "develop something to assist more families to thrive and fewer families to come into contact with crisis services including reducing the need for child protection interventions" (Community Matters, 2012, p.6). The basic premise of FbF is as follows:

*Family by Family links 'seeking families' – families who want something in their lives to be different – with 'sharing families' – families who are thriving despite having been through difficulties in the past. All families set goals for their involvement in the program. Pairs of seeking and sharing families then organise the things that they will do together, known as link-up activities. These are designed to assist the seeking families to achieve their goals for change. Sharing families are in turn supported by coaches employed by Family by Family".* (Community Matters, 2012, p. 6). For a full description of the FbF program, please see the evaluation reports produced by Community Matters (<http://www.tacsi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/TACSI-FbyF-Evaluation-Report-2012.pdf>).

The Australian Centre for Child Protection, together with Community Matters were contracted by TACSI to conduct an evaluation of the FbF program. Community Matters conducted interviews with seeking and sharing families engaged in the FbF program, various stakeholders, and analysed the data routinely collected by FbF<sup>1</sup>. The Australian Centre for Child Protection conducted the analysis of child protection outcomes for families engaged in the program. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports by Community Matters. The reports produced by Community Matters detail qualitative and quantitative data from families over the same period.

The purpose of this report is to present the data on the child protection outcomes of the FbF program. This report is divided into three major sections. The first part of the report describes the methodology of the evaluation. The second section describes the analysis of child protection aggregate data that has been provided for the SA and NSW FbF sites and comparison sites. The third section of the report examines the individual notification data for children and families who have participated in FbF in SA and NSW.

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<sup>1</sup> Final reports for the broader evaluation were unavailable at the time of writing (<http://www.communitymatters.com.au/index.html>)

## CHILD PROTECTION DATA

One of the stated aims of the FbF program is to have fewer families come into contact with child protection services. In addition to providing services to families not involved in child protection, FbF are also funded by both SA and NSW Governments to take referrals from the child protection services in these states.

In order to test the child protection outcomes for families engaged in the FbF program, child protection data was requested from Families SA (now the Department of Child Protection) in SA and from the Department of Family and Community Services in NSW. Two types of data were requested from each department: aggregate and individual (or unit record) data.

To ensure ethical conduct, the researchers sought to gain consent from families to request their unit data from the departments (as this was personally identifiable information). Consent was sought at the time of interviews or focus groups in which parents participated as another component of the evaluation. Consent was only sought for the individual record data. Consent was not necessary for the aggregate data as this is non-identifiable information (NHMRC National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007). Ethics approvals were sought from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee, the Families and Communities Research Ethics Committee (SA), the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee (SA) and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council Ethics Committee (NSW). In addition to the ethics approvals, approvals were also provided from both the Department of Education and Child Development (SA) and the Department of Family and Community Services (NSW) to access this data.

The aggregate data that was requested was the total number of notifications and substantiations for a defined region by month for two years before and after the date that FbF began linking seeking families with sharing families in that region. Data was also requested for the same time period for sites which had no FbF roll out during that time to serve as comparison sites. The selection of comparison sites is detailed below. An important caveat on the results of this analysis is that there will be other factors contributing to the rates of child protection involvement in these regions beyond FbF which are not accounted for in the analysis.

The individual data requested related to the lifetime child protection involvement for the children in families who were engaged in the FbF program. This data included all notification data (e.g., date notified, primary harm type, whether this was investigated and the outcomes of this investigation). Data on any periods of out of home care were also requested, as were any orders that the children were subject to (e.g., Guardianship of the Minister for 12 months, Guardianship of the Minister until the child attains 18 years of age, assessment and investigation orders). In addition to this data, FbF team members provided the details of the families' link up start and end dates to allow the researchers to construct a timeline of when any child protection involvement occurred, relative to their engagement with FbF. A number of families were still engaged in link ups at the time of data extraction and analysis. Once consent was obtained from families, FbF staff members provided the names and birthdates of children in each family to enable data to be extracted from the Government databases. The researchers consulted with the data managers to finalise the information to be extracted. Notification data in SA was split across two databases, and it was necessary to link the files prior to analysis.

Aggregate data methods and results are presented first for the two SA FbF sites and comparison sites and then the NSW site and comparison site. The individual data is addressed in a following section.

## AGGREGATE DATA

There were three FbF sites for which aggregate data was sought; the Southern and Northern sites in SA and the Mt. Druitt site in NSW. Aggregate data was requested by postcodes. In order to determine the postcodes to request, the research team examined the numbers of seeking families recruited from the postcodes around the FbF sites. On examination, there were a large number of postcodes where a small number of families had participated in FbF. It was decided to focus only on those suburbs where a greater number of families were engaged in the program. Additionally, while FbF has recently expanded into the western suburbs of Adelaide, insufficient time has passed since the commencement of FbF in that region to analyse the change over time in child protection involvement. This site was therefore not included in the child protection data analysis.

As previously described a number of comparison sites were included in the study. The comparison sites selected in South Australia were all in metropolitan areas. Advice was sought from Families SA (now the Department of Child Protection) for appropriate comparison sites in Adelaide where there has been no roll out of the Family by Family program. Three comparison sites were proposed; one inner western suburb, one north-eastern suburb, and one northern suburb. Adjacent postcodes were combined to create larger sites for analysis for both the FbF sites and the comparison sites (e.g., the postcodes 5112, 5113 and 5114 were combined into a “Northern FbF Site and the postcodes of 5085 and 5086 were combined for the North-Eastern comparison site). Similarly, adjacent postcodes were combined to represent the sites serviced by FbF.

In NSW, attempts were made to identify regions similar to Mt. Druitt , the FbF site, using census data on family composition, employment, cultural background, size of family and the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) data. A number of suburbs similar and adjacent to Mt. Druitt were identified, however, the families receiving FbF were not restricted to Mt. Druitt and a number were located in the adjacent suburbs. On the advice of the FbF team in NSW, the suburb of Wyong was selected as a comparison site.

A total of three FbF sites and four comparison sites were included in the analysis. Table 1 shows the sites and the postcodes that define each FbF and comparison site.

**Table 1:** Family by Family (FbF) site and comparison site postcodes

State	FbF sites	Comparison sites
SA	Southern 5043, 5046	North-Eastern 5085, 5086
		Inner-West 5031
	Northern 5112, 5113, 5114	Northern 5108
NSW	Mt Druitt 2770	Wyong 2259

Data was requested from Families SA in SA, and the Department of Family and Community Services in NSW. Two years of data prior to FbF roll out in each site was requested. Two years of data post roll out was requested for the SA sites, however as the NSW site had been rolled out later, only 18 months of post-roll out data was available at the time of data extraction.

The aggregate data requested for each of the geographical regions was:

- total number of notifications to the child protection helpline per month

- total number of investigations and substantiations per month

Investigation and substantiation data, while requested, does not appear in the following analysis as the numbers were too low to analyse meaningfully. Further, investigations are constrained by resourcing and not all notifications that may require investigation can be attended to, therefore they do not fluctuate in line with trends in notifications, making the data difficult to interpret (Child Protection Systems Royal Commission, 2016).

### Methodology

Data for South Australia and New South Wales were analysed using the same method. The total notifications per month for each site were graphed. Three graphs were plotted for each geographical region; one for all available data pre and post FbF, one for the trends pre-FbF and one for the trends post-FbF. Graphs were visually inspected for the trends pre- and post-FbF.

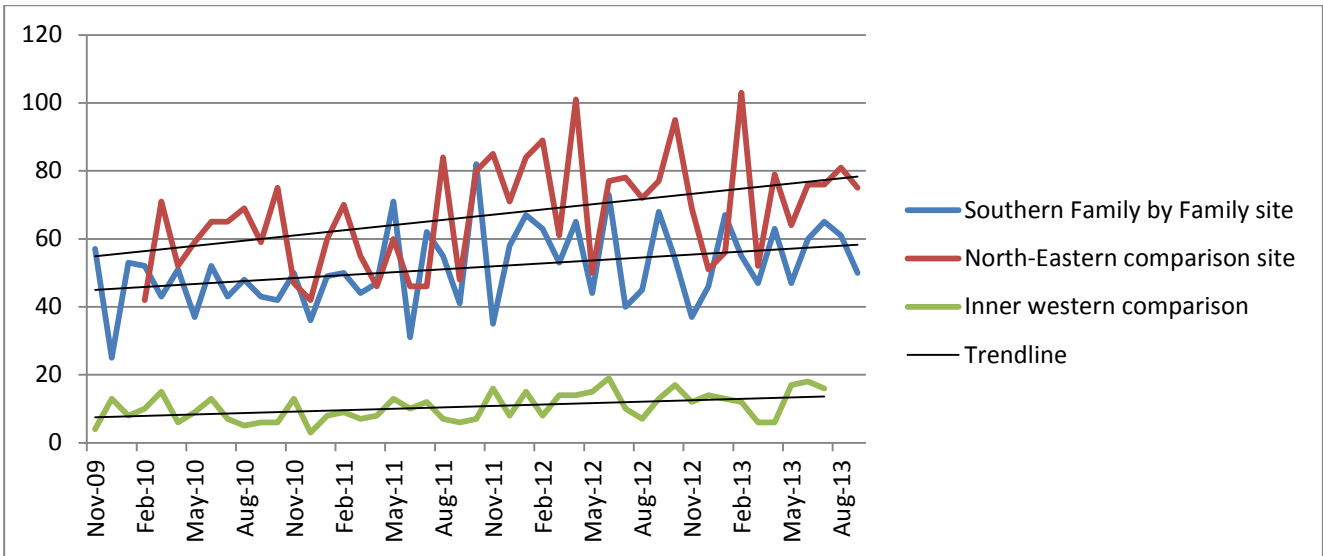
Further analysis of the aggregate data for geographical areas was then conducted using an interrupted time series analysis, following the procedure set out in the Effective Practice and Organization of Care (EPOC) Interrupted Time Series Analysis resource (EPOC, 2013). An “interrupted time series analysis” study is a study where data are collected at multiple time points before and after an intervention in order to detect whether or not the intervention was associated significantly with an outcome and whether this association was greater than any underlying trend. All interrupted time series analyses were conducted using SPSS 21. The date that FbF began their first link up with *seeking families* in each area was set as the time point for considering the data trends pre- and post-FbF .

### Results

#### *Southern Adelaide Family by Family site*

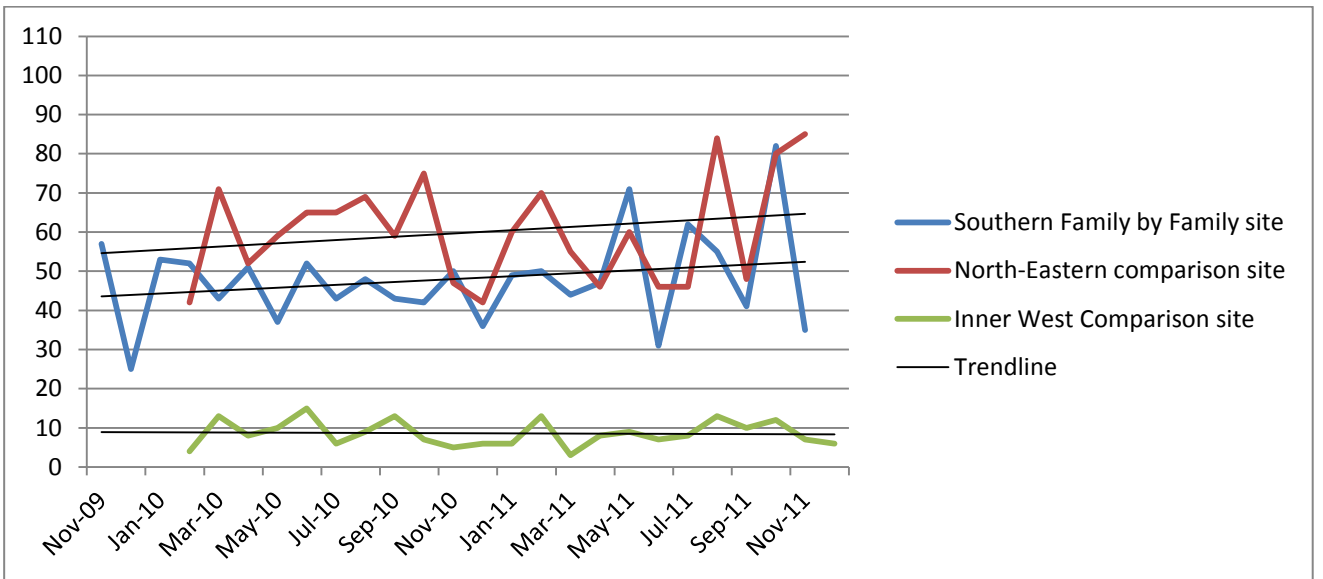
The Southern Adelaide FbF site postcodes (5043, 5046) were combined. For all analysis on the Southern FbF sites and the North-Eastern and Inner-West comparison sites, December 2011 was set as the date of the intervention. The graphs below show the trends in notifications for the Southern FbF site, the North-Eastern comparison site and the Inner West comparison site.

Figure 1 below shows the trends for notifications across the entire time period (November 2009 to November 2013). The trends for all sites indicate that the number of notifications appears to be increasing. The rate of increase, indicated by the steepness of the trendline, appears to be higher in the North-Eastern comparison site followed by the Southern FbF site. The Inner West comparison site shows only a small increase.



**Figure 1:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Southern Family by Family site and the North-Eastern and Inner West comparison sites, November 2009 to November 2013.

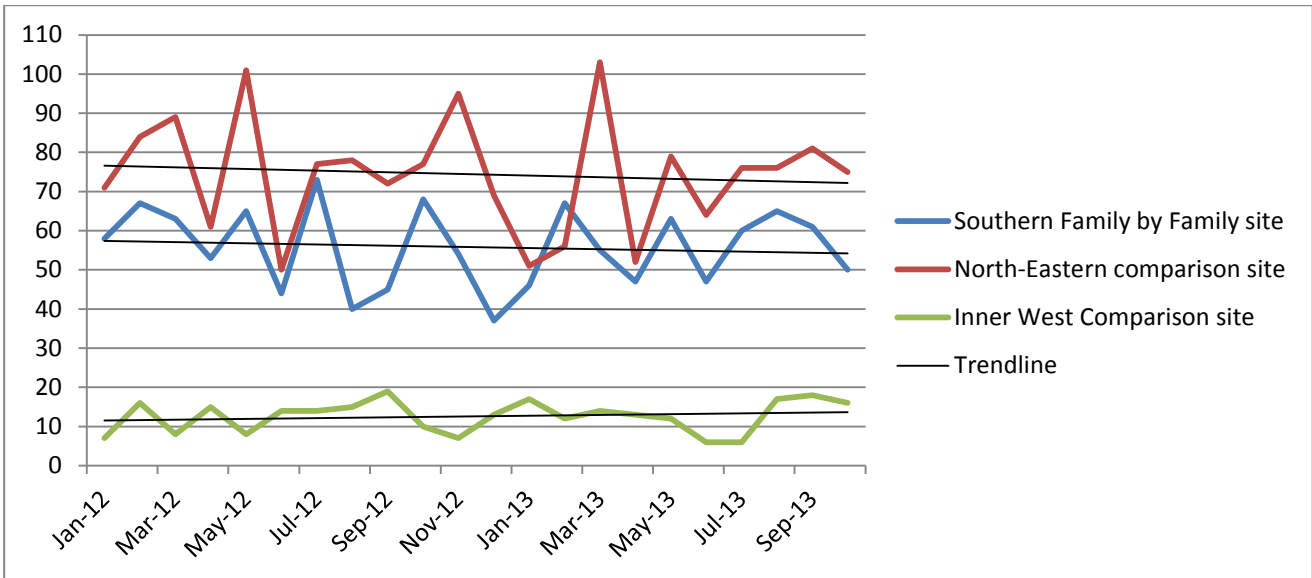
Figure 2 below shows the trends for notifications across the time period prior to the implementation of FbF (November 2009 to December 2011). The trends for both the Southern FbF site and the North-Eastern comparison site are increasing at a similar rate. The Inner West comparison site appears to be relatively flat between November 2009 and December 2011 with no discernible change in number of notifications.



**Figure 2:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Southern Family by Family site and the North-Eastern and Inner West comparison sites, November 2009 to December 2011.

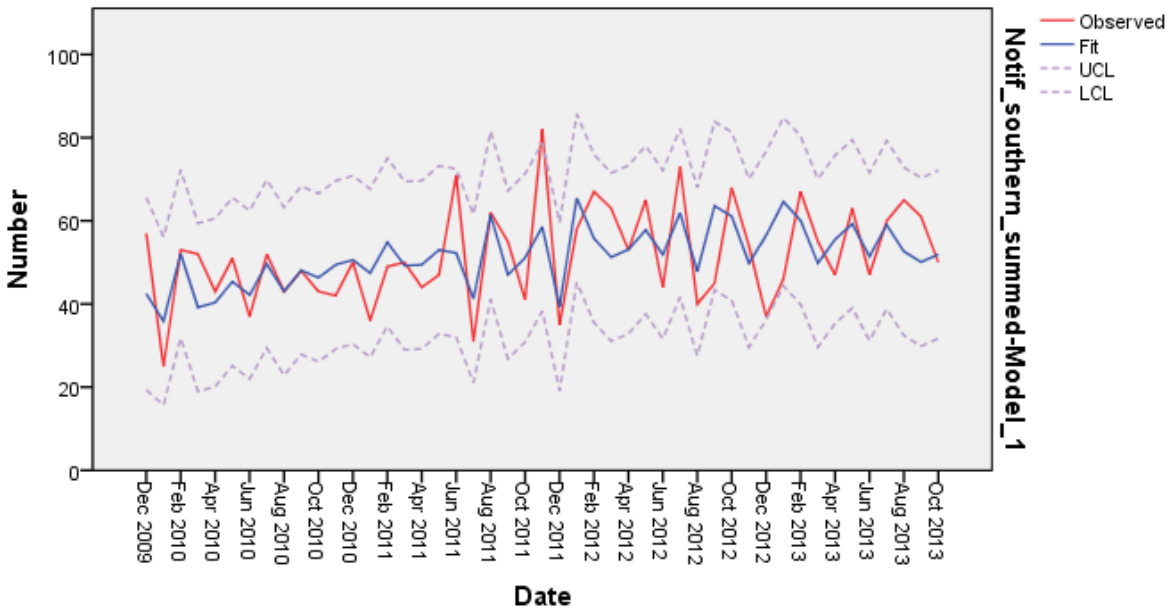
Figure 3 below shows the trends in notifications from January 2012 to November 2013. Both the Southern FbF site and the North-Eastern comparison site show a slight decrease in the numbers of notifications per month.





**Figure 3:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Southern Family by Family site and the North-Eastern and Inner West comparison sites, January 2012 to November 2013.

An interrupted time series analysis was conducted to further explore the trends noted in the figures above.



**Figure 4:** Interrupted time series analysis chart, Southern FbF site.

Figure 4 again shows the number of notifications and trends in the Southern FbF site. The results of the interrupted time series analysis showed that the trend in notifications per month was increasing at a low rate prior to the implementation of FbF in December 2011 ( $t=2.354, p=0.023$ ). The change in the slope of the trends pre- and post-December 2011 approached significance ( $t=-1.782, p=0.082$ ). The results indicate that notifications were increasing in the FbF site prior to the implementation of FbF and there was a trend, though not significant at  $p<.05$ , towards decreasing after FbF.

The model was also used to estimate the absolute effect of the intervention. This is the difference between the estimated outcome at a certain time after the intervention and the outcome at that time if the intervention had not taken place. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals for the estimate of the absolute effect at a number of time points were calculated. A 95% confidence interval is a range of values that you can be 95% certain contains

the true mean of the population. If both the upper and lower bound are above 0, this indicates that the number of notifications has increased, alternatively if both the upper and lower bound are below zero, this indicates a reduction in the notifications. If the upper and lower bounds fall either side of zero, as shown in table 2 below, we cannot be confident that there has been a reduction in notifications following the roll out of FbF.

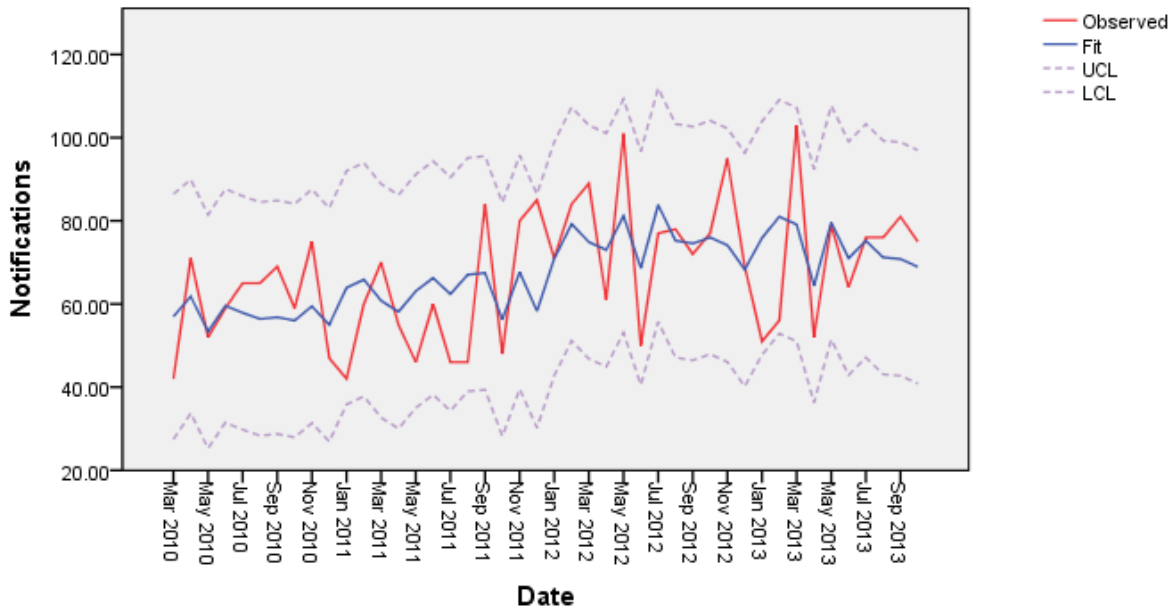
**Table 2:** Estimates of the absolute effect and 95% confidence intervals in the Southern Family by Family site.

<b>Months post- Family by Family implementation</b>	<b>Estimate of absolute effect</b>	<b>95% CI interval bounds</b>	
		<b>Lower bound</b>	<b>Upper bound</b>
3 Months	1.58	-6.74	9.90
6 Months	-0.03	-8.66	8.60
12 Months	-3.25	-13.49	6.99
18 Months	-6.47	-19.20	6.25
24 Months	-8.62	-23.27	6.03

While the estimate of the absolute effect is negative indicating a lessening in the rise of notifications (i.e., a trend that is lower/less than pre FbF), the upper and lower bounds of the 95% confidence interval are wide and fall on either side of 0. The results indicate that the possibility of no effect on the number of notifications cannot be ruled out and care should be taken when interpreting the results.

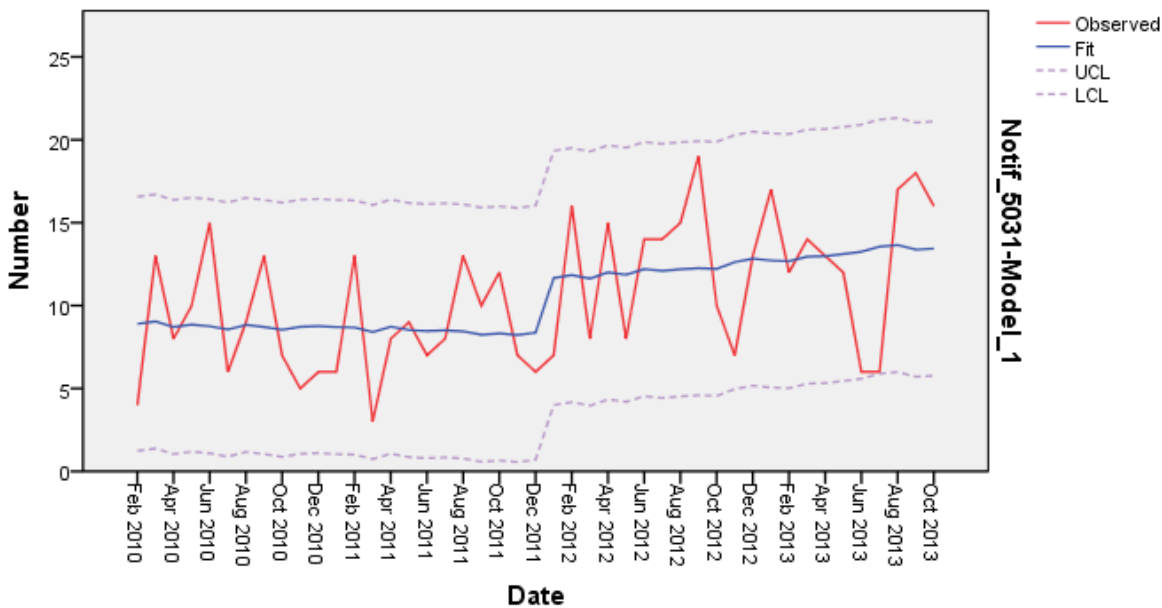
The estimate of the absolute effect is, however, demonstrating a larger decrease over time as would be expected with more families becoming involved in the FbF program.

In order to examine whether the comparison sites without FbF were experiencing the same changes in notifications (i.e., to determine if FbF may be associated with change), interrupted time series analyses were conducted for the comparison sites. The results of the interrupted time series analysis for the North-Eastern and Inner West comparison sites are presented below with figures 5 and 6 respectively.



**Figure 5:** Interrupted time series analysis chart, North-eastern comparison site.

The model statistics for the North Eastern comparison site indicate that the number of notifications was not increasing at a statistically significant rate prior to December 2011 ( $t= 0.309$ ,  $p=0.406$ ). Further, the model indicated that there was no change in the slope of the line after the time of the intervention ( $t= -0.586$ ,  $p=0.261$ ). The confidence intervals of the absolute effect were not calculated for the comparison site as no changes were noted.



**Figure 6:** Interrupted time series analysis chart, Inner-West comparison site.

The model statistics for the Inner-West comparison site indicate that the number of notifications was not changing at a statistically significant rate prior to December 2011 ( $t= 0.840$ ,  $p=0.406$ ). Further, the model indicated that there was no change in the slope of the line after the time of the intervention ( $t= 0.514$ ,  $p=0.261$ ). This supports the relatively stable trend in notifications observed in Figure 1. The confidence intervals of the absolute effect were not calculated for the comparison site as no changes were noted.

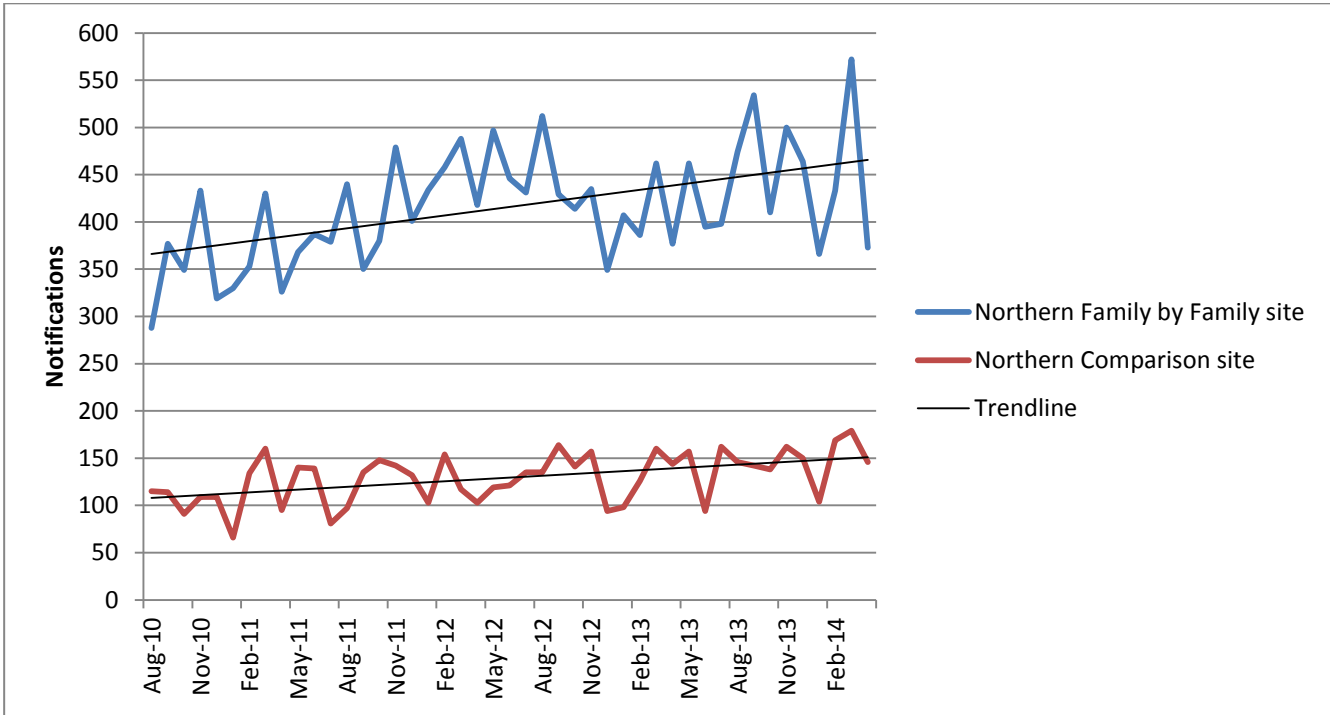
The time series analysis for the Southern site in SA indicated a decrease in the rising rate of notifications that approached significance - that is while it did not reach the conventional  $p < 0.05$  for indicating a result occurring due to something other than change - the results showed that the rate of notifications was trending in the expected direction. Further, the estimate of the absolute affect was trending in the expected direction. The numbers in this analysis are relatively small, and the Southern FbF site in SA had a much smaller number of notifications being made to the child protection system than in the Northern FbF site.

**Northern Adelaide Family by Family site**

The data on the aggregate number of notifications in the three northern suburbs from which the greatest numbers of FbF families came (5112, 5113, 5114) were combined into a Northern Site. May 2012 was designated as the date of the intervention for the graphs below and the following analysis. The graphs show the trends in notifications for the Northern FbF site and the Northern comparison site.

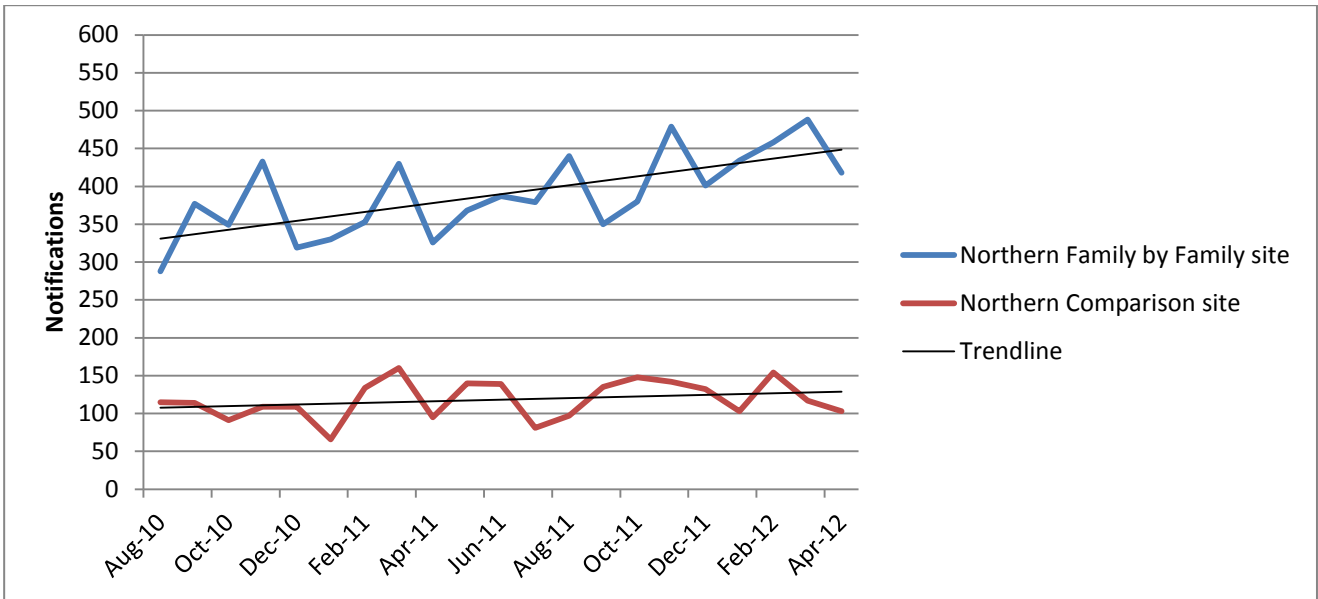
Please note that the comparison data was drawn from a single postcode whereas the data for the FbF site was drawn from three postcodes and collated - hence the large differences in the total number of notifications per month.

Figure 7 below shows the number of notifications and the trends for notifications across the entire time period from (August 2010 to April 2014) for the Northern FbF site and the Northern comparison site. The trends for both sites show an increase over time.



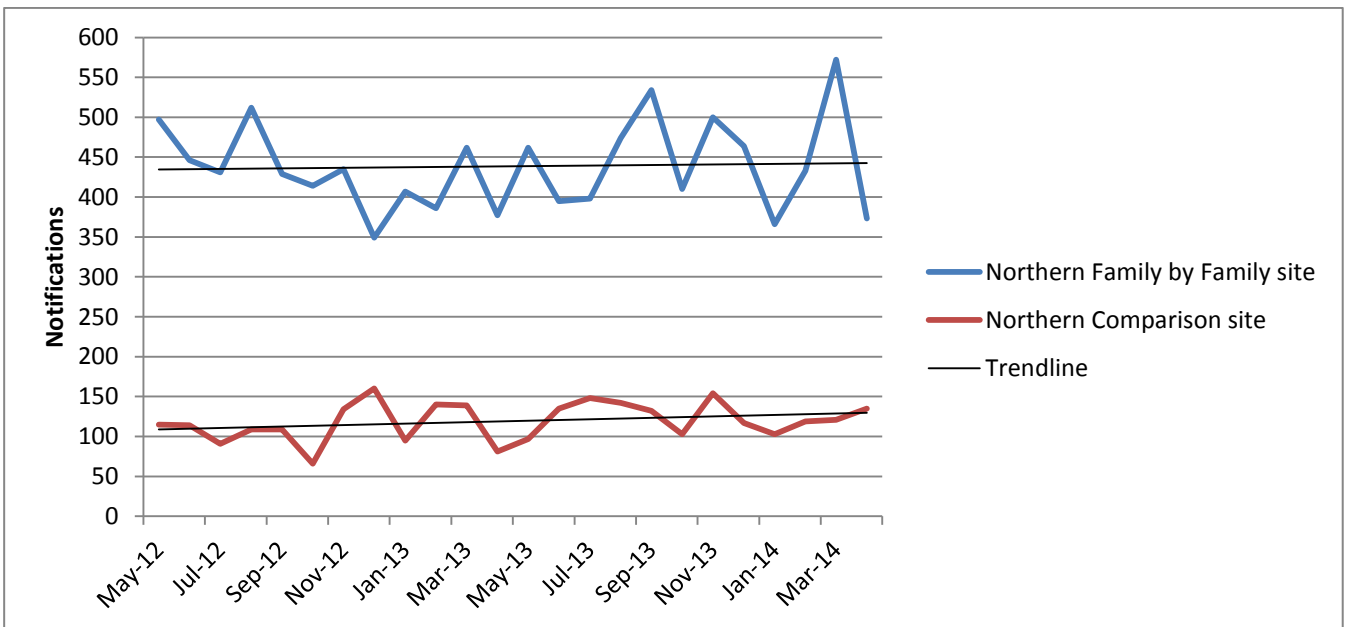
**Figure 7:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Northern Family by Family and comparison site, August 2010 to April 2014.

Figure 8 below shows the trends in notifications from August 2010 to April 2012. The trend, shown in black, indicates an increase in the numbers of notifications being received before the intervention date in the Northern FbF site compared to the comparison site, which also shows an increase, albeit at a lower rate.

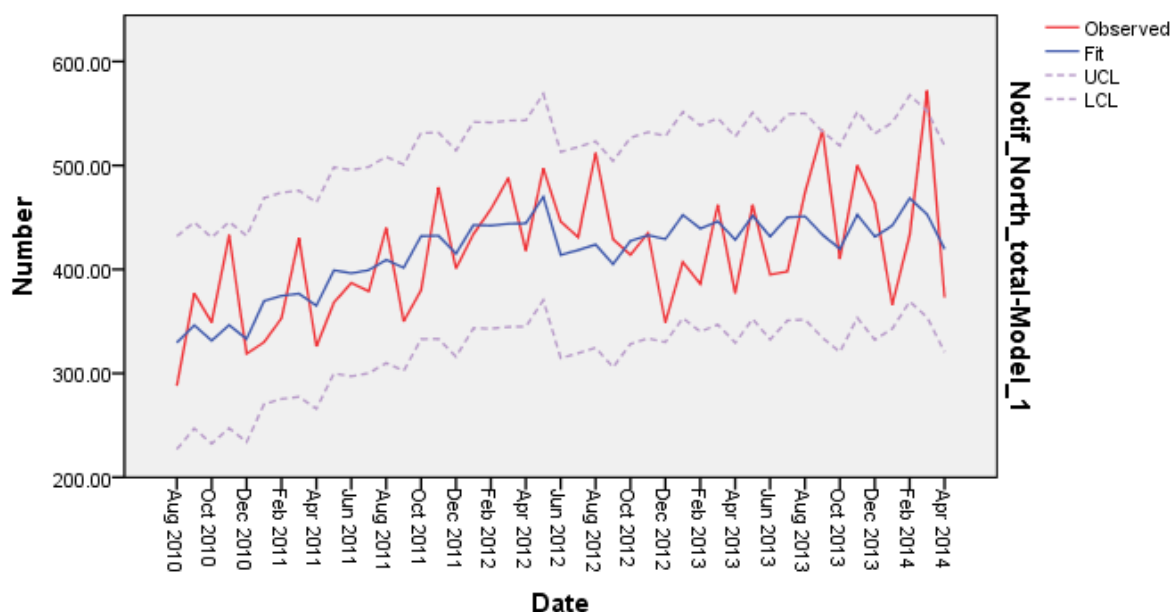


**Figure 8:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Northern Family by Family and comparison site, August 2010 to April 2012.

Figure 9 below shows the trends after the intervention date from May 2012 to April 2014. Link ups with seeking families began in the Northern site in May 2012. Figure 9 indicates that the rate of increase in the Northern FbF site appears to have plateaued with the trend in notifications appearing flat, if increasing slightly, over time. The comparison site shows a similar rate of increase as noted in Figure 8 and appears to be relatively stable both pre and post the implementation of FbF.



**Figure 9:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications (monthly), in the Northern Family by Family and comparison site, May 2012 to April 2014.



**Figure 10:** Interrupted time series analysis chart, Northern SA FbF site.

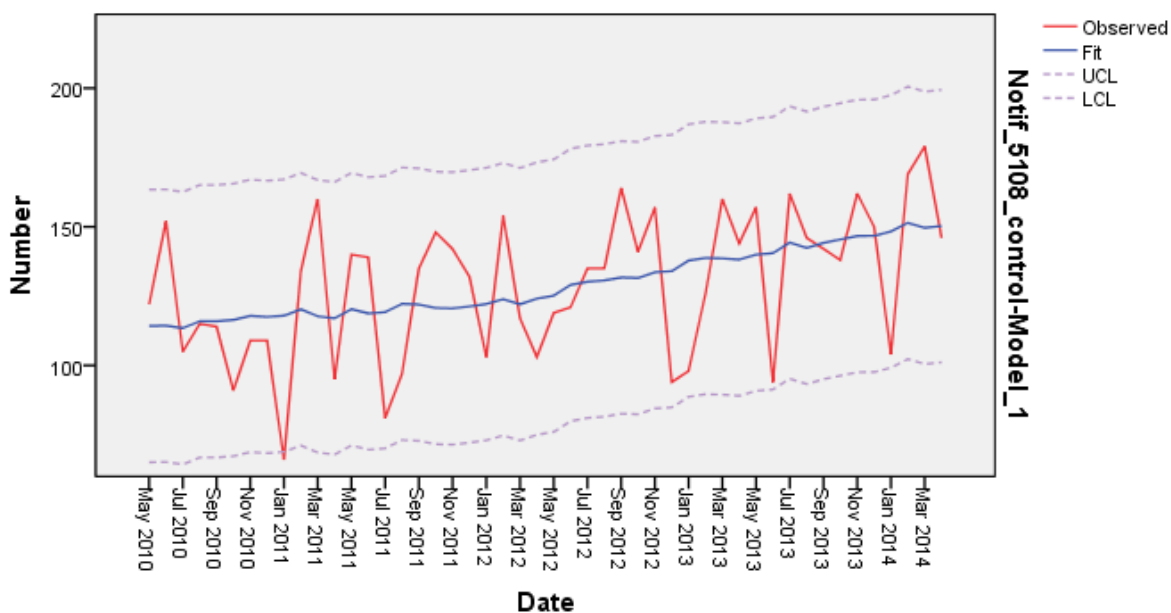
The model statistics (Figure 10) show that the number of notifications was increasing in the Northern FbF site prior to May 2012 (Estimate= 6.238,  $t=4.613$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, the model statistics indicated a significant change in slope at the time of the intervention ( $t=-2.722$ ,  $p= 0.01$ ). The slope of the trend in the Northern FbF site post-May 2012 whilst still positive, was much lower positive slope compared to the slope prior to May 2012 indicating a lower rate of increase.

The model was also used to estimate the absolute effect of the intervention. This is the difference between the estimated outcome at a certain time after the intervention and the outcome at that time if the intervention not taken place. The 95% confidence intervals for the estimate of the absolute effect at a number of time points was calculated and are shown below. The confidence intervals show the estimated effect of the reduction in notifications in the northern area compared to if there was no intervention and the notifications had continued to increase along the same trend that was observed prior to May 2012.

**Table 3:** Estimates of the absolute effect and 95% confidence intervals in the Northern FbF site.

Months post- Family by Family implementation	Estimate of absolute effect	95% CI interval bounds	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
3 Months	-53.634	-103.64	-3.62
6 Months	-68.606	-122.21	-15.01
12 Months	-98.549	-164.54	-32.56
18 Months	-128.494	-211.07	-45.92
24 Months	-153.45	-251.55	-55.35

The estimate of the absolute effect indicates that there has been a reduction in rate of increase. Further, the 95% confidence intervals are both negative, which supports the conclusion that there are fewer notifications in the FbF postcode compared to what was predicted had the trends prior to May 2012 continued. A caveat, however, is that the confidence intervals are wide and care should be taken in interpreting these results.



**Figure 11:** Interrupted time series analysis chart, Northern comparison site

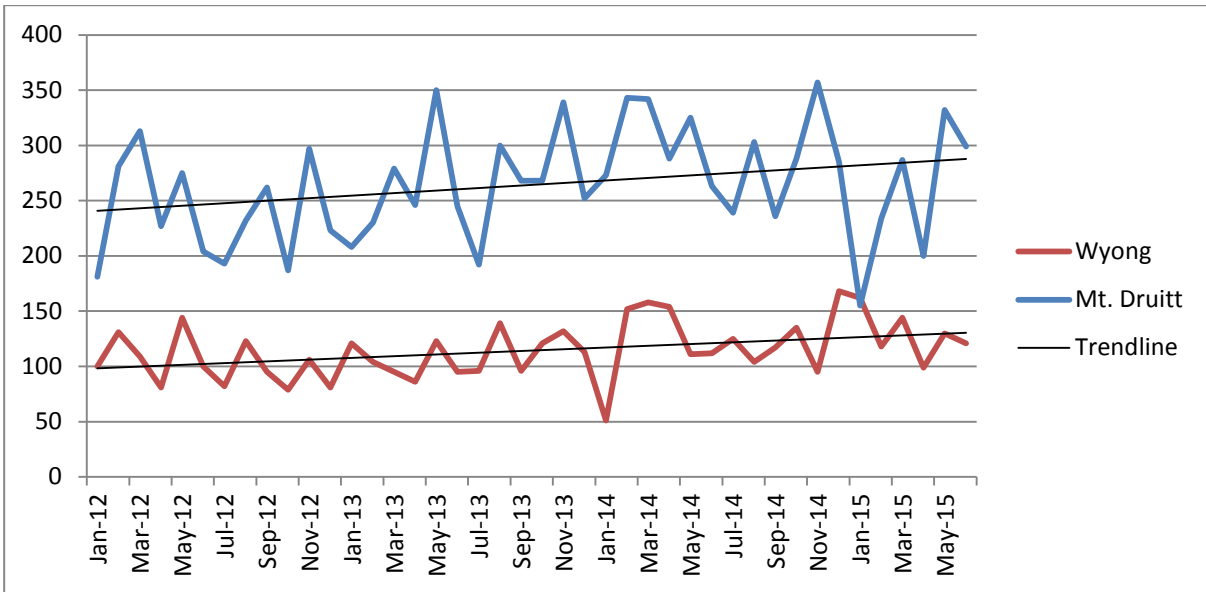
The model statistics for the comparison site (Figure 11) indicate that the number of notifications was not increasing at a statistically significant rate prior to the implementation of FbF ( $t= 0.641, p=0.525$ ). Further, the model indicated that there was no change in the slope of the line ( $t= 0.628, p=0.534$ ). This supports the relatively stable trend in notifications observed in Figures 7, 8 and 9. The confidence intervals of the absolute effect were not calculated for the comparison site as no significant changes were noted.

There was both a change in the trend in the rate of notifications per month in the Northern FbF site, and the confidence intervals provide an evidence of a reduction in notifications compared to the rate of notifications had the trend continued as it was prior to May 2012 and a similar change was not observed in the comparison site data. This analysis supports but does not confirm an association between the introduction of FbF in Northern Adelaide and a lessening in the rate of notifications. A limitation of this analysis is that the impact of other interventions or extraneous variables cannot be ruled out.

### *New South Wales*

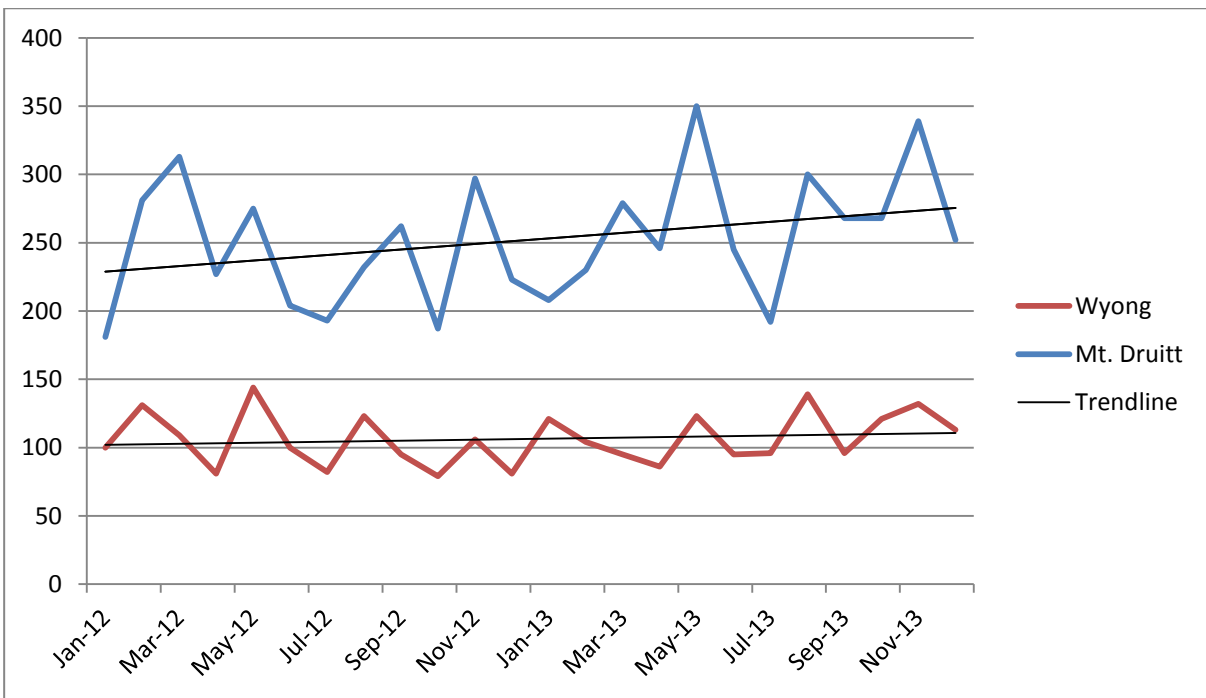
The data on the aggregate number of notifications was provided for two sites in New South Wales, the Mt. Druitt FbF site and the Wyong region which served as a comparison site. January 2014 has been designated as date of the intervention for the graphs below and the following analysis. The graphs below show the trends in notifications for the Mt. Druitt FbF site and the Wyong Comparison site.

Figure 12 below shows the number of notifications for the Mt. Druitt FbF site and the Wyong comparison site from January 2012 to June 2015. Only 18 months of data after the implementation of FbF was available at the time of data extraction. The numbers of notifications in both sites appears to be trending upwards from January 2012 to June 2015. The rate of increase appears marginally higher in Mt. Druitt.



**Figure 12:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Mt. Druitt and Wyong region, January 2012 to June 2015.

Figure 13 below shows the trends in notifications from January 2012 to December 2013. The rate of notifications shows only a marginal increase in the Wyong region, whereas Mt. Druitt shows a considerable increase - from approximately 225 notifications per month to 275 notifications per month.



**Figure 13:** Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Mt. Druitt and Wyong region, January 2012 to December 2013.

Figure 14 below shows the trends in notifications from January 2014 to June 2015. The rate of notifications in Wyong again appears to show a marginal increase across this time period. The trend in notifications in Mt. Druitt shows a decrease in the rate of notifications.



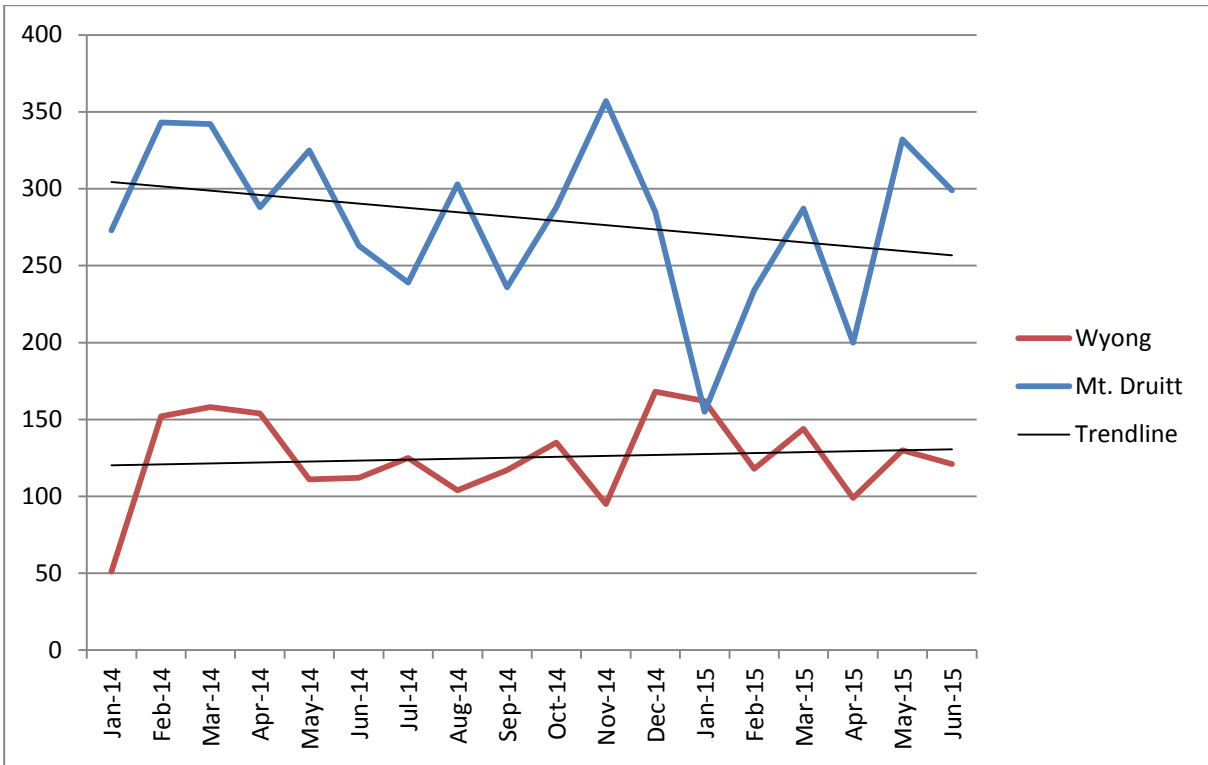


Figure 14: Number of notifications and trends in notifications, in the Mt. Druiitt and Wyong region, January 2014 to June 2015.

Figure 15 below shows the trends in notifications in Mt. Druiitt between January 2012 and June 2015. FbF began being delivered to seeking families in January 2014. Similar to the figures 13 and 14, figure 15 shows a gradual increase in the numbers of notifications per month leading up to January 2014 and a gradual decrease after this date.

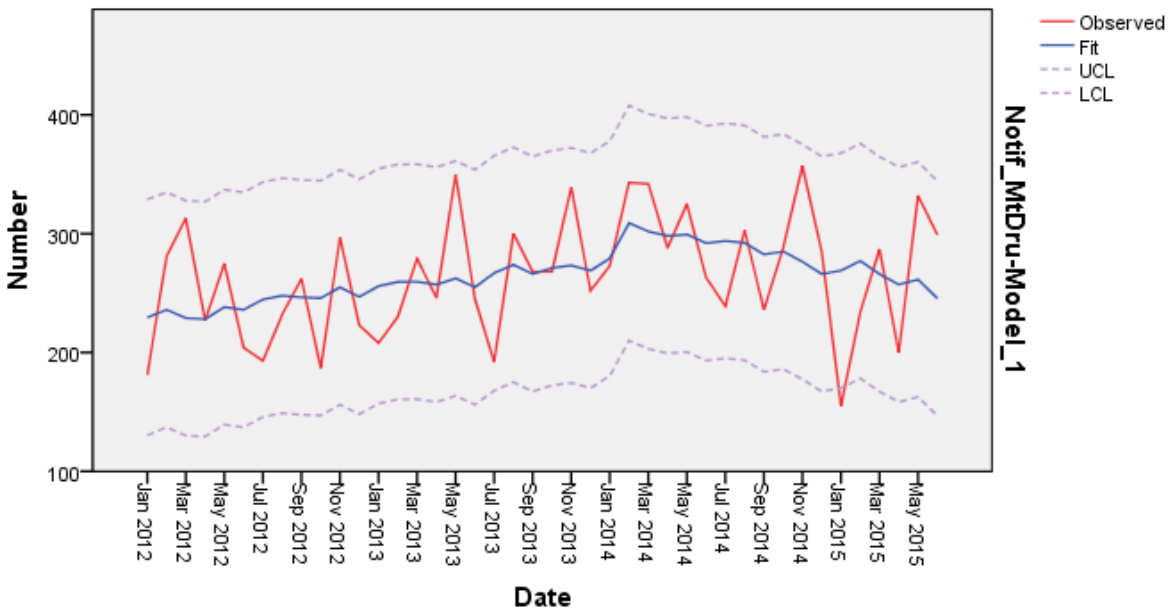


Figure 15: Interrupted time series analysis chart, Mt. Druiitt FbF site

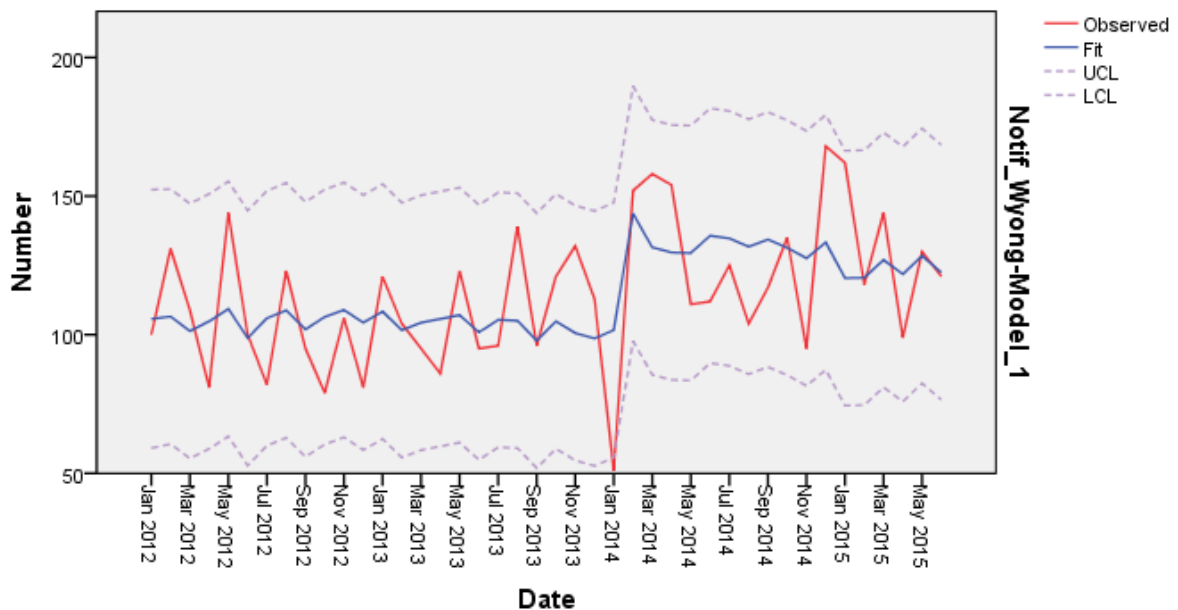
The results of the interrupted time series analysis showed that the increase in notifications per month prior to FbF in Mt. Druiitt was not statistically significant ( $t=1.581, p=0.122$ ). The difference between the pre-FbF trend and the post-FbF trend in Mt. Druiitt was statistically significant ( $t=-2.142, p= 0.039$ ) indicating a reduction in the rate of increase in notifications.

**Table 4:** Estimates of the absolute effect and 95% confidence intervals in the Mt. Druitt FbF site.

Months post- Family by Family implementation	Estimate of absolute effect	95% CI interval bounds	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
3 Months	18.63	-36.57	73.83
6 Months	2.17	-53.65	57.98
12 Months	-30.76	-99.36	37.84
15 Months	-47.22	-126.14	31.70
17 Months	-58.20	-144.87	28.48

The results in Mt. Druitt indicate that there was a change in the trend in notifications post-January 2014, with the notifications plateauing. Further investigation of the confidence intervals as shown in table 4 indicate that while the estimate of the absolute effect is negative indicating a lessening in the rate of notifications the upper and lower bounds of the 95% confidence interval are wide and fall on either side of 0. The results indicate that the possibility of no effect on the number of notifications cannot be ruled out and care should be taken when interpreting the results.

Figure 16 below shows the trends in notifications in Wyong between January 2012 and June 2015.



**Figure 16:** Interrupted time series analysis chart, Wyong comparison site

The rate of notifications in Wyong appears to be relatively stable pre and post January 2014. The ‘step’ observed in the blue fit line on the graph after January 2014 is an artefact of the statistical modelling conducted. Further, an abnormally low number of notifications was recorded for January 2014. The reasons for this aberration are unclear. The results of the analysis showed that the increase in notifications per month prior to January 2014 in Wyong was not statistically significant ( $t=-0.184, p=0.855$ ). The results for Wyong show that there was no change between the trend prior to January 2014 and the trend post January 2014 ( $t=-.555, p= 0.582$ ).

**Table 5:** Estimates of the absolute effect and 95% confidence intervals in the Wyong comparison site.

<b>Months post- Family by Family implementation</b>	<b>Estimate of absolute effect</b>	<b>95% CI interval bounds</b>	
		<b>Lower bound</b>	<b>Upper bound</b>
3 Months	30.61	5.98	55.25
6 Months	28.74	3.93	53.55
12 Months	25.01	-5.20	55.21
15 Months	23.14	-11.51	57.79
17 Months	21.89	-16.11	59.90

### Conclusions

The aggregate child protection notification data shows promising results. At the three FbF sites, there was a decrease in notifications, a slowing rate of notifications or a trend towards a reduction in notifications. The Northern FbF site in SA showed the strongest results, with a reduced rate of increase in the numbers of notifications. The Southern site in SA and Mt. Druitt showed a slowing of the rate of notifications post FbF and the estimate of the absolute effect was trending in the anticipated direction. Supporting the promising results, there were no significant changes noted in the trend of notifications in any of the comparison sites examined, who all experienced continued steady increase in the numbers of notifications. While the results are promising there are some caveats on the use of administrative data and the analysis that should be noted. As touched on above, one of the limitations is that we were not able to control for all the possible variables that may be influencing the rate of notifications in the geographical regions examined. Further, identification of a comparable metropolitan site in NSW wasn't possible and Wyong was selected to serve as a comparison site.

Limitations of interrupted time series analysis include situations where there is a slow, diffuse implementation – meaning that, while FbF began in these sites, it may take some time to engage a critical mass of individuals for outcomes to become clear.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN INDIVIDUAL DATA

The following section of the report addresses the analysis of and results of the individual data. Individual data refers to data about one particular child. In some cases we have analysed data at the family level. Individual data was only sought for seeking families who provided consent for their data to be collection from the statutory child protection authority.

### Results

Child protection data was extracted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015. Any notifications after this date are not included in the analysis.

#### *Child Protection Data*

Individual child protection data requests were made for 53 children from 23 seeking families who took part in the broader evaluation. The average age of children at the beginning of their link ups was 7.77 (SD=5.03) years old.

Of the 53 children, 31 children had records with Families SA and 22 children had no records with Families SA - indicating no notifications to the child protection report line. The 31 children with notifications came from 16 families- 12 in which all children were notified and 4 families in which only some children were notified. There were 7 families with no notifications to child protection.

Data relating to 241 notifications were extracted from the Families SA database for the 31 children with any history of notifications. The total number of notifications for each child ranged between 1 and 29 notifications over their lifetimes to 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, with an average of approximately 8 notifications per child.

At the family level, total notifications ranged from 1 to 72, approximately 15 notifications per family [(Mean (SD) = 15.06 (18.71), median= 8.5)]. A small number of families accounted for a very high proportion of the notifications; 3 families accounted for 60.2% (n=145) of all 241 notifications.

As shown in table 7 below, the primary harm type was not recorded for 104 notifications classified as notifier concern, adolescent at risk or other.. Of the 130 notifications with a primary alleged harm type recorded, 48.5% of notifications were classified as neglect, 27.7% as emotional abuse, 10% as physical abuse and 13.9% as sexual abuse. Data was missing for 7 notifications.

**Table 6:** Primary alleged harm type

Primary harm type	<i>N</i>
Neglect	63
Emotional abuse	36
Physical abuse	13
Sexual abuse	18
Notifier concern	86
Adolescent at risk	14
Other*	4
Missing	7
Total	241

\* Other includes report on unborn, general practice.

11.6% (n=28) of the notifications were investigated. Sixteen children received at least 1 investigation (Range 1 to 4, median= 1). Of the 28 investigations, 11 were substantiated, 13 were not substantiated, 3 were listed as in progress and there was missing data relating to 1 investigation.

This data shows that FbF is working with families with a range of child protection involvement - from no involvement (22 children from 7 families in the sample) through to extremely high level involvement of child protection (11 children from 3 families in the sample with a total of 145 notifications (60.2% of the total sample)). The seven families with no child protection involvement may be self-referred to the FbF program.

### *Link up length*

Families were recorded as link up on-going if they were engaged in a link up that was current as at the 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015. Families had different lengths of time or 'link up lengths' in the FbF program. Link up length was calculated at the family level and at the date of data extraction. Some of these families may have longer link ups as they may have been in on-going link ups at the time of data analysis. Three families were recorded as ongoing at the time of data extraction and analysis. The mean (SD) link up length was 33.74 (13.12) weeks and the median length was 34 weeks. Further, table 6 below shows that the majority of families are engaged in link ups exceeding the 30 weeks in length.

**Table 7:** Link up length

Link up length	N	%
10 weeks	1	4.35
Between 11 and 20 weeks	4	17.39
Between 21 and 30 weeks	3	13.04
More than 31 weeks	15	65.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.00</b>

While it is acknowledged that link ups may go over the 10, 20 or 30 week blocks prescribed in the model, this does not account for the majority of link ups exceeding 30 weeks. Examination of the link up length for families may provide useful insights into the patterns of link up length and clarify what may be driving longer link up lengths.

### *Comparisons pre and post link-up*

One individual in the sample turned 18 prior to their families' FbF link up. This individual accounted for 6 notifications and was excluded in subsequent analyses as pre-post comparison would not have been possible. A total of 52 children, 31 with notifications and 22 without notifications were included in the subsequent analysis of child protection involvement pre and post FbF link up (see table 8).

In order to provide a consistent comparison for each family, the patterns of notifications pre- and post- FbF were examined at 3 months, 6 months and 12 months. For the following analysis, post FbF refers to post the first day of the link up, not post the end programme involvement. As families all had different start dates and data was extracted at a single point in time, families varied by the length of follow up available. All families had at least 3 months of data available from the date they commenced FbF. Patterns of notifications were examined at 6 and 12 months for families with data available, however not all families had data available and were excluded from the 6 or 12 month analysis as appropriate.

Table 8 below displays the occurrence of child protection notifications relative to when families were involved with FbF. Most families appear to have extensive involvement with child protection prior to their engagement with FbF. As can be seen in the table, notifications appear to decrease during the link up and in the months post FbF. The total number of notifications in the 6 month period prior to FbyF was 23, (a rate of 0.44 per child) and for the 6 months post FbyF was 3 (a rate of 0.06 per child). Across the twelve months pre and post FbyF the number

of notifications prior to FbyF was 38 (a rate of 0.73 per child) and in the twelve months after was 12 (a rate of 0.23 per child). No notifications occurred in families initial 3 months of involvement with FbF.

A total of 45 children in this sample had their link-ups commence at least 6 months prior to data extraction, and 37 of these children had their link-ups commence at least 12 months prior to data extraction. Thus we are able to compare notifications 6 months prior to FbF and 6 months post initial involvement in FbF for 45 children, and 12 month periods pre FbF and post FbF can be compared for 37 children.

**Table 8:** Notification by time period pre and post FbF, SA

Months since FbF engagement	More than 12 pre	Between 6 and 12 pre	Between 3 and 6 pre	Less than 3 pre	Less than 3 post	Between 3 and 6 post	Between 6 and 12 post	More than 12 post	Total
Between 3 and 6 month	0								0
	11	1	1	1		1			15
	10	2	1						13
	12	1	1						14
	11	1	1	1					14
	9	1	1	1					11
	0	3	1	1					5
Between 6 and 12 months	4	0	0	1					5
	2	0	0	0					2
	0								0
	0		1						0
	4								1
	1								4
	1	3	0	3		0	1		8
	0								0
	0								0
	0								0
	0								0
	8	1	0	1					10
	10	0	0	1					11
	11	0	0	0					11
	3						1		4
	3						0		3
	2						1		3
	0						1		1
	0						0		0
	10	1	0	1					12
	0								0
	0								0
	0								0
	0								0
More than 12 months	25	0	0	0		1	1	2	29
	10	1	0	0		1	0	0	12
	0								0
	0								0
	2	0	1	0		0	1	1	5
	0								0
	0								0
	0								0
	0								0
	8	0	0	1					9
	2								2
	4	0	1	1					6
	0								0
	7	0	0	2					9
0								0	
0								0	
0								0	
4							1	5	
4							1	5	
4							1	5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>235</b>

The shaded cells in the table above indicate where families had insufficient time since their FbF involvement for inclusion in the analysis.

Tables 9 and 10 below show the pattern of notifications 6 months pre and post FbF commencement and 12 months pre and post FbF commencement at the child level. Only those children with at least 6 months of follow up data at the time of data extraction ( $n=45$ ) were included in table 9, and only those with at least 12 months follow up were included in table 12 ( $n= 37$ ). The total numbers differ across the tables as fewer families had 12 months post FbF. As can be seen in table 9 below, of the children notified in the 6 months pre FbF ( $n=10$ ), none were renotified to child protection in the 6 months post FbF. Of the children who weren't notified in the previous 6 months ( $n=35$ ), 2 (5.7%) were notified post-FbF.

**Table 9:** Six month pre- and post-Family by Family (FbF) comparisons

		Notified in the 6 months post FbF		
		Yes	No	Total
Notified in the 6 months prior to FbF	Yes	0	10	10
	No	2	33	35
	Total	2	43	45

As shown in table 10 below, at 12 months post FbF, 75% of children who had been notified to child protection in the 12 months pre-FbF were not renotified to child protection in the 12 months post FbF.. However, a notable increase is also shown amongst children who were not notified in the 12 months prior to FbF, (total  $n=29$ ) but have been notified in the 12 months post FbF ( $n=7$ . 24.14%).

**Table 10:** Twelve month pre- and post-Family by Family (FbF) comparisons

		Notified in the 12 months post to FbF		
		Yes	No	Total
Notified in the 12 months prior to FbF	Yes	2	6	8
	No	7	22	29
	Total	9	28	37

### *Out of home care*

There were few instances of children being placed on orders or into out of home care. Two families experienced reunifications with their children prior to engagement with FbF and one child was in a long term out of home care placement and had been placed prior to involvement in FbF. It is unclear from the data if this child had been fostered by a seeking family, or was a child of a seeking family placed in out of home care prior to engagement with FbF. There were no instances of placement into out of home care noted during link ups or after FbF involvement.

### *Limitations of unit record data*

There were few families who have a sufficiently long period of time since their link up to accurately gauge whether FbF had an impact upon notifications after the completion of the program. A further limitations is the the lack of a consistent follow up point for families both during link ups and after link ups have finished.

### *Conclusions*

The data indicated that FbF is being delivered to some families with very substantial child protection histories. Child protection data consent was obtained for 23 families totalling 53 children, 31 of whom had child protection records and a total of 241 notifications. The average number of lifetime notifications amongst this group was nearly 8 notifications per child, and ranged between 1 and 29. Further, there were few instances of out of home care, and reunification prior to families' engagement in FbF.



There appears to be a substantial reduction in notifications after engagement with the FbF program. This effect appears to be sustained; however, there was some evidence of a lack of maintenance effect which may indicate that families may struggle in the absence of the support when the link up ends or some of the families may have still been in link ups. This may indicate the need to re-examine the model for extended links. This may also be exacerbating the link up lengths noted in this sample, where the majority of the families had link ups lasting more than 30 weeks.

## Results

Child Protection data was extracted on the 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2016. Any notifications after this date are not included in the analysis.

### *Child protection data*

Individual child protection data requests were made for 44 children from 19 Seeking Families who took part in the broader evaluation and gave their consent for extraction of child protection data. Of the consenting families, 39 (88.64%) children from 15 families were matched with records held by FACS, a further 5 (11.36%) children from 4 families were not able to be matched with FACS records and had no child protection data. At the start of their link ups, the ages of children ranged between 9 months and 17.6 years old, and the average age was 6.9 years old. One child aged 17.6 at the start of the link up was excluded from the analysis.

Data relating to 549 notifications were extracted from the FACS database for the 39 children with child protection records. The total number of notifications for each child ranged between 1 and 41 notifications over their lifetimes to 15<sup>th</sup> May 2016, with an average of approximately 14 notifications per child. Compared to the SA sample, higher rates of notifications were noted for the NSW sample and a greater proportion of children in the study with child protection involvement.

At the family level, the notifications ranged from 1 to 106, with an average of approximately 37 notifications per family. A small number of families accounted for a very high proportion of the notifications; 5 families accounted for 77.6% of all 549 notifications.

NSW data provides a large number of field codes for the primary issue reported in notifications. The ten most commonly reported issues are presented in table 11 below.

**Table 11:** Most commonly reported primary harm types across all notifications

Physical abuse	104	26
Exposure to domestic violence	66	16.5
Emotional abuse	66	16.5
Neglect	108	27
Sexual abuse	56	14
Total (in most commonly reported)	400	72.8%

Further, data is available for 172 notifications which were subject to investigation (31.32% of all notifications). Following investigation, 86 (50%) of the notifications were substantiated, and 86 (50%) notifications were not substantiated.

### *Link up data*

The 19 families who consented to take part in the evaluation had a total of 38 recorded link ups. Families were recorded as link up on-going if they were engaged in a link up that was current as at the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Five families were engaged in link ups at this date. At the time of data analysis, most families (63.16%) had been involved in multiple link ups. The tables below examine the patterns of link ups and length of FbF involvement. Table 12 below shows the frequency of multiple link ups.

Number of link ups	Total	
	<i>n</i>	%
1	7	36.84
2	7	36.84
3	3	10.53
4	1	10.53
5	1	5.26
Total	19	100.00

The pattern of involvement in link ups was complex as shown in Appendix 1. Many second and subsequent link ups were not consecutive, with some being separated by weeks or months.

After the first link up, of the 12 families engaging in a second link up:

- 5 families commenced a second link up immediately;
- 2 families commenced a second link up within a week;
- 4 families commenced a second link up within a month and;
- 1 family commenced a second link up after three months.

After the second link up, of the 5 families engaging in a third link up:

- 1 family commenced a third link up immediately
- 1 family commenced a third link up within a week.
- 1 family commenced a third link up within 3 months
- 1 family commenced a third link up after 5 months
- 1 family commenced a third link up after 8 months

Two families engaged in a fourth link up. One family commenced their fourth within a week of finishing their third link up and then engaged in a fifth link up within a week of their fourth link up finishing. The other family commenced their fourth link up after approximately 9 months. Not only were families engaged in multiple link ups, the link ups tended to be long. Table 13 shows frequency of link ups by length. A small number of link ups shorter than 10 weeks were recorded.

Link up length	<i>n</i>	%
Up to 10 weeks	7	18.4%
Between 11 and 20 weeks	11	28.9%
Between 21 and 30 weeks	7	18.4%
More than 31 weeks	13	34.2%
Total	38	100

Most families are engaged with FbF for a length of time exceeding the 30 weeks described in the model. The average length of total involvement for families who consented to take part in the evaluation was 47.53 weeks. However this may be an underestimate as there may be future link ups for some families, and some families are still in link ups (*n*=5). In other words many families in the Post FbF analysis at 6 and 12 months may still be in FbF.

### *Out of home care data*

Unlike the SA data, a number of children in this sample had been placed into out of home care. Fifteen children from five families had periods of time in out of home care. Between these five families, two broad patterns were noted;

- 3 families had all their children placed into out of home care on long term orders,
- 2 families had a single child in emergency care for a short period.
  - o One family had a child placed in emergency care and an order was made for FACS supervision of parents, approximately 9 months after their link up had finished.
  - o One family had a child residing in emergency care post-FbF, with a co-occurring increase in notifications largely pertaining to the child engaging in risky behaviour.

The relationship between FbF engagement and placement into long-term out of home care was explored. Table 14 below shows the dates that children were placed into out of home care on long term orders, and the FbF link up start dates listed chronologically. As can be seen, there were two instances where children were placed into out of home on long term orders care prior to link ups commencing, and one instance where placement into out of home care occurred between link ups.

**Table 14:** Chronology of out-of-home care, legal orders and FbF link up for families where long term orders were in place

<b>Family 1</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
out of home care	10/06/2015	End date not recorded
Link up	11/06/2015	08/06/2016
Legal order	17/06/2015	14/04/2016

<b>Family 2</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
out of home care	02/04/2015	End date not recorded
Legal order	09/04/2015	Until 18
Link up	14/04/2015	02/02/2016

<b>Family 3</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
Link up 1	05/2014	04/2015
Legal order	02/06/2015	21/6/2016
Out of home care	2/06/2015	End date not recorded
Link up 2	07/09/2015	02/02/2016

A number of notifications were made relating to children who had been placed into out of home care. These notifications also coincide with the period of time that their parents were engaged in FbF link ups. The notifications may be historical and relate to events that occurred prior to placement in out of home care and have only been disclosed by the child recently, or may be about concerns in care.

### *Comparisons pre and post link up*

As with SA analysis the date that families commenced their first link up was used for establishing the numbers of notifications pre and post FbF. All children had at least 6 months of data available since their families' first link up commenced; only four children from two families did not have at least 12 months data post the commencement of their first link up (one family had 9 months, and one family had 11 months). Table 15 below shows the numbers of notifications per child relative to their family's involvement in their first FbF link up.

**Table 15:** Notifications by time period pre and post FbF, NSW

Months since FbF start	More than 12	Between 6 and 12	Between 3 and 6	Less than 3	Less than 3	Between 3 and 6	Between 6 and 12	More than 12	Notifications per child
Between 6 and 12 months since FbF Start	19 <sup>2</sup>	0	2	2	3	2	10		38
	16	1	2	2	2	1	10		34
	16	1	2	2	2	1	10		34
	21	2							23
	14	3		1			1		19
	5								5
	5			1					5
	2								1
	5		2			1		0	2
	5		2			1		2	8
	14			1	0	1	0		10
	12			1	0	1	0		16
	9			1	0	1	0		14
	9			1	5	0	1		11
	11			2	5	0	0		16
	2			1	0	0	1		18
	1			1	0	0	1		4
	15	2					0	2	3
	16	2					1	16	19
	10	2					1	1	35
	1	2					1	1	14
More than 12 months since FbF start	1	2					1	1	5
	6								5
	4								6
	3	1	1						4
	4	1	1						5
	3	1	1						6
	39						1	1	5
	33						1	1	41
	12						1	1	35
	3	2					1		14
	2	2					1		6
	0	2					1		5
	22	2	1				2		3
	22	2	1				2		27
	11	2	1				2		27
	9								16
									9
									0
									0
									0
									0
									0
									0
<b>Total notifications</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>548</b>
<b>Total minus children placed in out of home care prior to link ups</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>360</b>

<sup>2</sup> The highlighted sections indicate the families who had children removed into out of home care prior to the link ups commencing.

As evident in the table, one child accounts for a large proportion ( $n=16$ , 61.54%) of notifications occurring more than 12 months after the first link up commenced. These notifications primarily related to risky behaviours that the adolescent was engaging in (e.g., homeless/inadequate supervision, running away from home, risk to self and others).

While the total numbers of notifications appear to increase after families became engaged with FbF, further examination of the data revealed that two families whose children were placed into out of home care immediately prior to the link up commencing (highlighted in the table) accounted for a large proportion of the total notifications at 6 months post FbF ( $n=24$  of 26 notifications, or 92.3%) and 12 months post FbF ( $n= 57$  of 76 notifications, or 75%).

Analyses examining the pattern of notifications pre and post the first FbF link up commencing are calculated for all children, and then presented again excluding the ten children who were placed into out of home care before FbF involvement. This data was reanalysed as the children weren't living with parents during the FbF link-up, so the child protection data is reflecting something other than current concerns regarding parental care.

#### Pre and Post FbF comparisons for all children

The total number of notifications in the 6 month period prior to their first FbF link up was  $n=32$ , (a rate of 0.73 per child) and for the 6 months post FbF was  $n=26$  (a rate of 0.6 per child). Across the twelve months pre and post FbF, prior to FbF the total number of notifications was  $n=64$  (a rate of 1.45 per child) and in the twelve months after was  $n=76$  (a rate of 1.73 per child) representing an increase in the rate of notifications.

Tables 16 and 17 below show the pattern of notifications 6 months pre and post FbF and 12 months pre and post FbF respectively at the child level. The numbers differ between the 6 and 12 month comparisons as fewer families had sufficient follow up time. As can be seen in the tables, the numbers of children who are renotified to child protection increases between 6 and 12 months post FbF. Of the children notified in the 6 months pre FbF ( $n=20$ ), half were renotified to child protection in the 6 months post FbF. Of the children who weren't notified in the previous 6 months ( $n=23$ ), none were notified in the 6 months post.

**Table 16:** Six month pre- and post-FbF comparisons for all children

		Notified in the 6 months Post-FbF		
		Yes	No	Total
Notified in the 6 months prior to FbF	Yes	10	10	20
	No	0	23	23
	Total	10	33	43

As shown in table 17 below, of the 25 children notified in the 12 months pre-FbF ( $n=25$ ), 20 (80%) were renotified to child protection in the 12 months post FbF.

**Table 17:** 12 month pre- and post-FbF comparisons for all children

		Notified in the 12 months Post-FbF		
		Yes	No	Total
Notified in the 12 months prior to FbF	Yes	20	5	25
	No	3	11	14
	Total	23	16	39

#### Comparisons excluding the families with children placed in to out of home care

Two families with ten children who were placed into out of home care immediately prior to FbF were excluded from the tables below. The total number of notifications in the 6 month period prior to FbF, excluding children who were placed into out of home care prior to link ups, was  $n=12$ , (a rate of 0.35 per child) and for the 6 months post FbF was  $n=2$  (a rate of 0.06 per child). Across the twelve months pre and post FbF, the total number of notifications prior to FbF was  $n=42$  (a rate of 1.24 per child) and in the twelve months after FbF was  $n=19$  (a rate of 0.56 per child).

Tables 19 and 20 below show the pattern of notifications 6 months and 12 months pre and post FbF excluding the 10 children who were in out of home care during their link up. Of the children notified to child protection in the 6 months prior to FbF ( $n=10$ ), only 2 (20%) were renotified to child protection in the 6 months post FbF.

**Table 18:** Six month pre- and post-FbF comparisons excluding children placed into out of home care

		Notified in the 6 months Post-FbF		
		Yes	No	Total
Notified in the 6 months prior to FbF	Yes	2	8	10
	No	0	23	23
	Total	2	31	34

At 12 months post FbF, half of the children notified to child protection in the 12 months pre FbF ( $n=18$ ) had been renotified to child protection. Three ( $n=3$ , 21.42%) of children who had not been notified to child protection in the twelve months prior to FbF had been notified in the 12 months post FbF. Of the children notified in the 12 months pre FbF ( $n=18$ ), 9 (50%) were renotified to child protection in the 12 months post FbF.

**Table 19:** Twelve month pre- and post-FbF comparisons excluding children placed into out of home care

		Notified in the 12 months Post-FbF		
		Yes	No	Total
Notified in the 12 months prior to FbF	Yes	9	9	18
	No	3	11	14
	Total	12	20	33

#### Conclusions

Families engaged in the FbF program in NSW had high levels of child protection involvement. The average numbers of lifetime notifications amongst families taking part in the evaluation were higher than the families from SA. A number of similarities to the SA data were noted, including the small proportion of families who accounted for a large proportion of notifications. The pattern of notifications in NSW also indicated a lack of maintenance effect, with notifications showing an increase at 12 months post link up commencement. An increase, albeit smaller, in notifications was noted when the data reanalysed excluding the children who were removed into out of home care prior to FbF involvement.

Families were engaged with the FbF program for a considerable length of time- close to 1 year on average- and families showed a complex pattern of involvement with some families engaging in multiple link ups back to back, and others having extended periods of time between link ups. A consequence of this is that the increase seen in child protection involvement at 12 months is often happening when families are still engaged in FbF rather than post involvement.

Further, a number of children had been removed from their families care prior to link ups commencing. These groups account for a large number of notifications and add a layer of complexity to understanding the data. In these cases, families for whom FbF was not designed are receiving services.

## SUMMARY

Taken together the aggregate and individual data paint an interesting picture of the child protection histories and outcomes of the FbF program. The aggregate data analysis shows promising changes in the trends in notifications in the regions in which FbF is operating. The individual data was explored in more depth and showed that there are families engaged in the program with a significant history of child protection involvement. Engaging with FbF tended to be associated with a reduction in notifications in the short term; however there was also evidence that over time the numbers of notifications to the child protection system started to increase. In SA these rates didn't reach the level of notifications occurring 12 month pre-FbF, but in NSW they did. Reanalysis of the NSW data with two families, and 10 children, who were placed into OOHc prior to FbF involvement revealed similar results in NSW as noted in SA. In NSW, however, due to the repeated link ups and long involvement, the increase in children being renotified is likely occurring while many families are still in link ups.

The analysis of the aggregate and individual child protection data show promising results, however, some limitations must be noted. The interrupted time series analysis is unable to control for extraneous variables that may also be influencing the rate of notification beyond the FbF intervention. Further, as only a small proportion of the whole population of the postcode examined receive the FbF intervention, the impact on a broader geographic region may be more difficult to identify.

A number of families were still engaged in link ups at the time of the data extraction, or had insufficient time since FbF to allow for comparisons across the full sample. Continued extraction of the data for consenting families over time could better explore the long-term effects of engagement in FbF. Future evaluations could be strengthened with a consistent follow up period post FbF. Further, this data could be used to explore the possible maintenance effects noted in both the child protection data, and the qualitative and quantitative results reported by Community Matters.

Further exploration of the outcomes of the FbF trial through a controlled trial such as a matched comparison, a wait-list control trial or a randomised controlled trial may enable stronger conclusions to be drawn regarding the associations between engagement in FbF and a reduction in notifications.

The promising results suggest that the program could be further expanded, with consideration of the types of families that will be coming into the service. However, there is a need to ensure that the families receiving FbF are those for who FbF was designed (i.e., families who have their children). Families who have had their children removed need services specifically designed for this target group. Additionally, there is a need to re-examine continuation of link ups well beyond the initial period as the effects seen at 6 months post-commencement of FbF are not maintained at 12, even when many families were still engaged in the programs.



## REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 1.

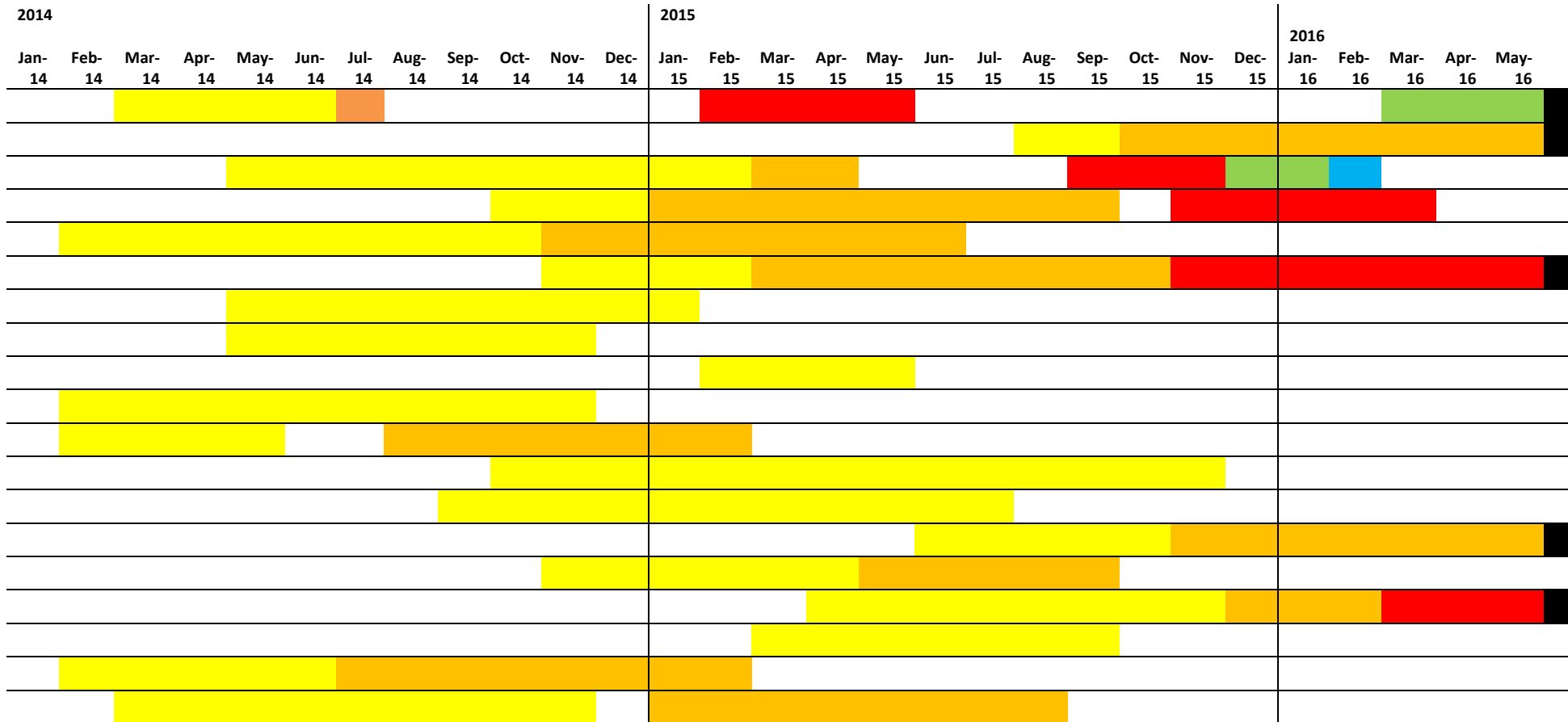


Figure 17: Link up length by Family. Instances where the time between link ups was less than 1 month are not highlighted.

Key	
Yellow	Link up 1
Orange	Link up 2
Red	Link up 3
Green	Link up 4
Blue	Link up 5
Black	Link up on going

