

**Family Reconciliation Mediation  
Program**

**12 month Report  
Of the  
Family Reconciliation Mediation  
Program.**

**Year 2: January 06 - December 06**



**Prepared by: The Family  
Reconciliation Mediation Program  
Team**



## **Key Points**

This report documents the period of January 2006 – December 2006 of the Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP) and includes information highlighting the following;

- ✓ Brokerage uptake and feedback
- ✓ Community capacity building initiatives that have been undertaken across the sector
- ✓ Key learnings from year one and future directions

The primary objectives of FRMP are to;

- 1) Support wherever possible young people to remain/return home where appropriate
- 2) Reconnect with family
- 3) Support young people to resolve within themselves issues relating to family conflict/breakdown.

The program has worked in partnership with a range of homelessness services across the State to achieve these objectives.

Brokerage applications increased significantly over this report period. A total of 337 cases were approved during 2006, compared to 143 applications approved in the last report period. In addition and as result from key learnings from the first year a further 21 group work applications were also approved in 2006. Whilst individual counseling was the most requested intervention a notable increase in the use of interventions such as family therapy and family mediation was evident. (A combined total of 73 interventions were implemented).

A key component of FRMP is to further integrate youth focused, family centered practice within the youth homelessness sector, and community development has been a key feature of implementation. A long with a host of smaller initiatives, significant initiatives have included the 1<sup>st</sup> FRMP Statewide forum hosted on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2006, the production of “Wanna talk about it” literature (counseling brochure and wallet size flyer for young people), a host of professional development forums that has included the Victorian SAAP family reconciliation network, group work initiatives for young people and the continuation of the quarterly FRMP newsletter.

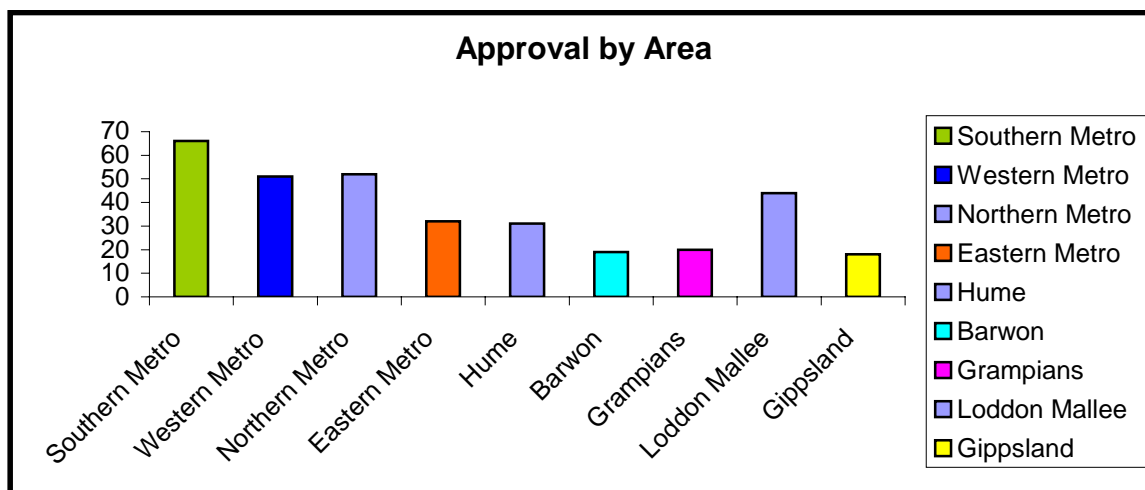
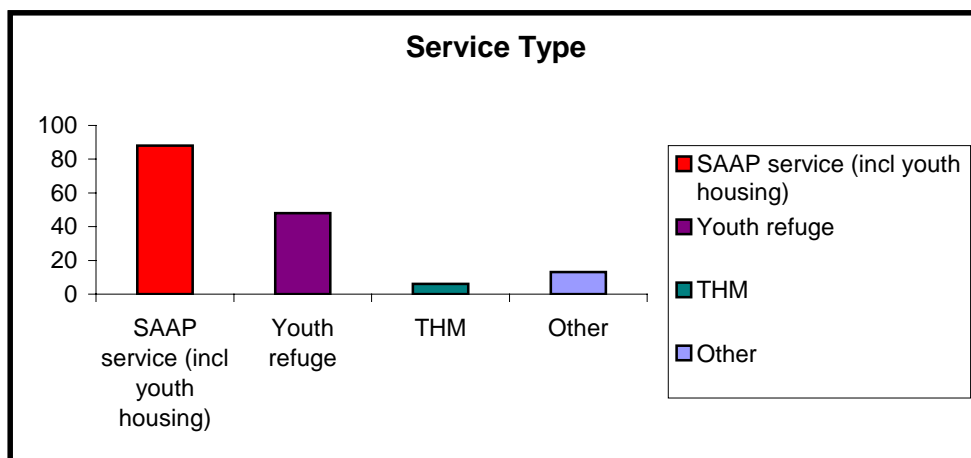
FRMP is committed to providing to the sector, training that supports youth focused family centered practice. The first part of 2006 FRMP worked in consultation with Regional Extended Family Services to deliver 7 training packages across the State. The package titled “The F word and homeless young people.” Combining youth centered and family focused approaches in assessment and interventions with homeless young people” consisted of 3 days of training. Training was made available in all DHS regions. A total of 115 participants from the youth homelessness sector participated.

FRMP is being independently evaluated by Research Fellow, David Mackenzie from Swinburne University; a final report will be completed by May 2007. FRMP will be at the completion of its 3 year funding in June 2007, it is anticipated the program will be rolled over for a further 3 years, yet we are cautious, whilst this report articulates how FRMP is an integrated part of the youth homelessness sector and has created sustainable outcomes. The political landscape can often change.

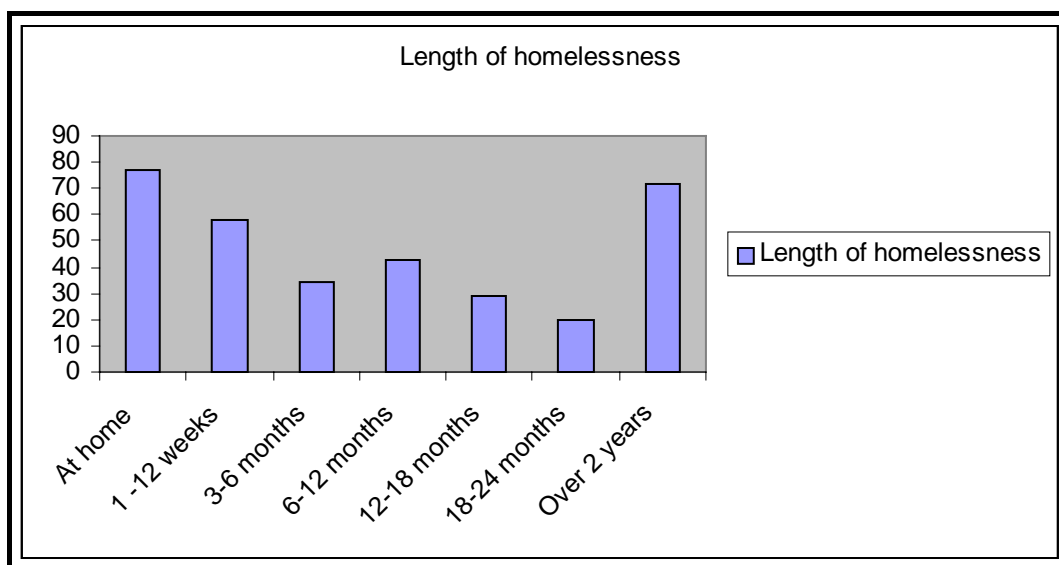
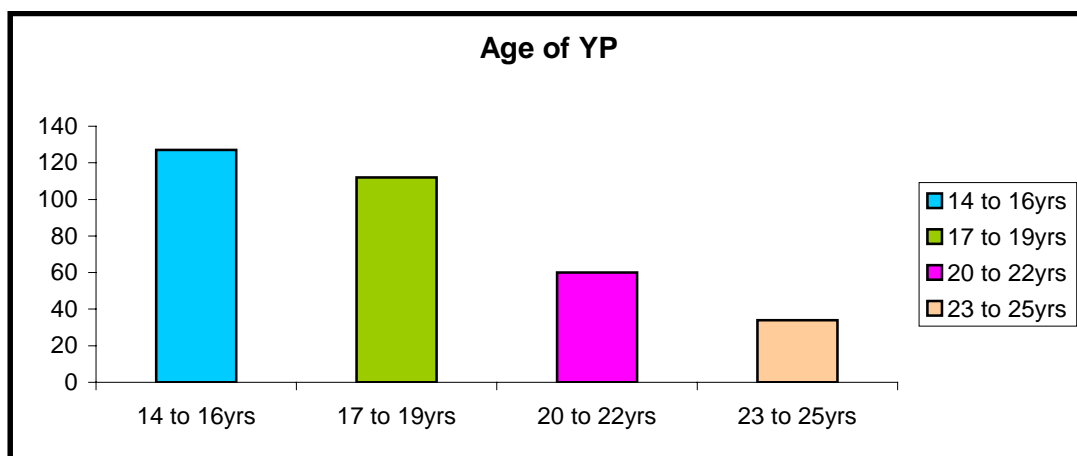
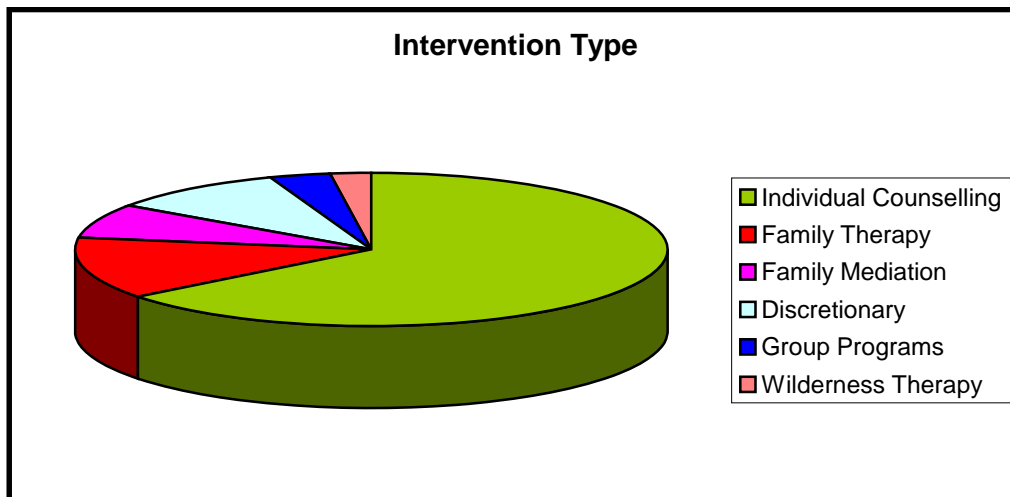
## Brokerage

### FRMP Statistics for the 2006 year (January 2006 – December 2006)

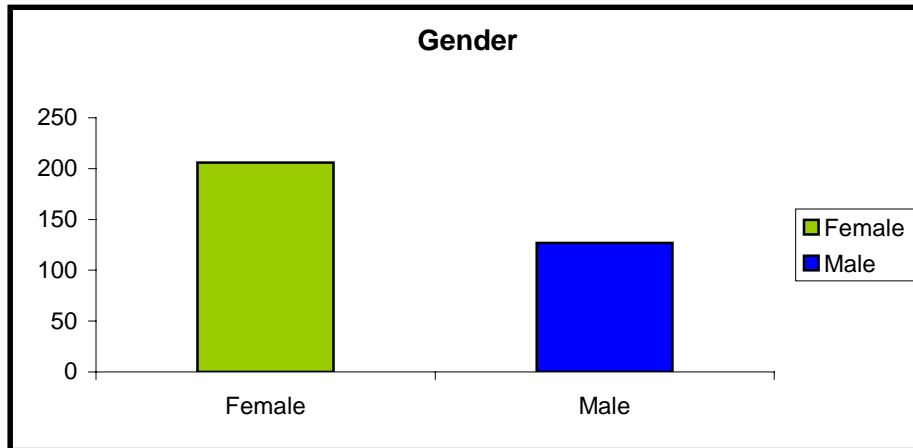
Applications Approved	337 individuals	
Services accessing funds	SAAP	276
	SAAP Refuge	35
	THM	13
	Other	13
Regional breakdowns of services accessing funds	Northern	52
	Eastern	32
	Western	53
	Southern	68
	Loddon Mallee	44
	Barwon	19
	Hume	31
	Grampians	20
	Gippsland	18
Interventions funded	Individual Counseling	233
	Discretionary	37
	Family Therapy	47
	Family Mediation	26
	Group	21
Age of young person	14-16	129
	17-19	114
	20-22	60
	23-25	34
Gender of young person	Female	208
	Male	128
Length of homelessness	At home	77
	1-12 weeks	58
	3-6 months	35
	6-12 months	46
	12-18 months	29
	18-24 months	20
	Over 2 years	72
Cultural identity	Aboriginal	12
	Australian	280
	African	8
	NZ	6
	Other	31



Metropolitan use: 62%  
 Rural use: 38%



Significant factors: We are as a sector working with a considerable number of “early intervention” type young people (22.8% in total applications were at home but at risk of homelessness), also notable; young people are seeking assistance through FRMP who have experienced longer periods of homelessness. (21.3% in total applications experienced homelessness 2 years and over)



### **Feedback from interventions**

A sample of 33 closed files were chosen at random to illustrate what effect brokered interventions were having on young people, this is a snapshot.

Once an intervention has been completed FRMP asks the referring support worker to complete a final feedback proforma. Below is a table of pre and post intervention feedback.

\* Question: On a scale of 1 – 6 how would you rate the level of relationship/communication between the young person and their family prior to and after the intervention?

FRMP Reference No.	Pre Intervention	Post Intervention
218	2	6
224	2	4
236	2	3
256	3	5
257	4	5
271	1	3
266	2	4
282	1	3
297	1	4
299	1	1
309	2	4
317	1	3
324	2	4
331	3	3
337	2	3
339	3	4

341	1	3
345	1	6
346	2	4
352	2	4
357	1	1
359	1	2
363	3	5
378	2	4
385	2	4
386	2	6
392	1	3
399	1	1
409	1	2
433	1	4
437	2	4
443	3	5
461	2	4

The table illustrates to us that on average young people's "relationship" with family had improved. (On average, post intervention scales were twice as high as pre intervention scales - 1.8 to 3.6). To reiterate this further, commentary from workers also included;

*"Young person has a history of heroin use which was the cause of family breakdown....as a result of counselling, the young person returned home"*

*"Allowed young person to move on from negative past experiences"*

*"...the opportunity to realise, through reflection, that although he could not return to live at home, he was able to keep in contact with his family"*

*"Removed geographic and financial barriers which renewed relationships with her siblings....catalyst for further strengthening connections with entire family"*

*"The counselling wasn't as much for reconciliation as it was for the young person to make sense of his family situation"*

*"To really understand the importance of this type of funding for refugees is to comprehend the chaotic life experiences many have had"*

*"Being in Tasmania, I stayed around lots of families and looking at the way they all get along, made me think how much more I'd get out of life if I just put more effort into trying to make a relationship with my family" (young person)*

*"It enabled the young person and his parents to explore issues re separation of parents, grief and loss surrounding this, and explore father's role in young person's life after violence and abuse"*

Discretionary funding enabled case work interventions around family reconciliation to stabilise. Funding in this area was used in a range of unique ways and included such things as travel fares to get to and from counselling to child care costs when young people and families were engaged in counselling/family interventions. A SAAP

worker reflects on the capacity to assist a young person to fly interstate to reunite with family;

*“The young person was able to re-establish a relationship with her sister in Canberra, whom she has had little contact with since sibling had moved interstate. Both siblings were unable to afford interstate travel to see each other. The entire family dynamic had previously been very strained between family members who are scattered in various states. This initial meeting opened doorways for the siblings to renew their relationship and resulted in the older sibling coming to Melbourne for the rest of the school holidays. It is hoped that this relationship will be the catalyst for further strengthening of connections with the entire family, with the older sibling being the link between other family members. “*

Late in 2005 FRMP included the capacity for services to access funds to either implement group work within their own services or support young people to access already existing group programs. This was a key learning from year one consultations and discussions with the homelessness sector. It recognised young people need a range of options to engage in the notion of family reconciliation. We also found that group work often led to young people requesting a more individualised therapeutic response; and post group work would engage with interventions such as counselling or family therapy/mediation. This is captured in the reflection of a worker, where group work enabled the young person to participate in a pilgrimage to Uluru. *“The young person has come away from the pilgrimage with a better understanding of who they are and also how their actions affect others around them. Since returning, the young person feels more comfortable to make contact with their family and is open to discussing issues with them.”*

Overall it is evident the use of brokerage across the homelessness service sector has been fundamental to providing a holistic response to assessment and casework. Reflections on this have included;

*“I was extremely impressed with the ease with which the funds were obtained and the speed with which FRMP responded to our application for this young person.”*

*“I find this an excellent resource providing young people with access to significant and timely responses, which would not otherwise be available to them.”*

*“The FRMP process is fantastic! It ensures we can access a practitioner very quickly due to the efficient process of FRMP brokerage.”*

### **Front End Family Mediation**

FRMP is responsible for delivering a family mediation service either via a brokered mediator or directly conducting the mediation. Of the 26 applications received from the sector for family mediation, FRMP mediators conducted 11 of these. There has been an obvious marked increase in the number of requests for family mediation. A total of 14 were approved in 2005.

## **Community Capacity Building**

The framework of FRMP is modelled on community development. The program aims to build upon and strengthen the homelessness sector's response to family reconciliation. A number of core initiatives have been implemented across the State during 2006 and have included;

- Eastern Region Family Reconciliation Peer Support Network – February, May, August, November.
- Involvement in Melbourne University Research Project - Young Mothers and Homelessness.
- Hosted FRMP Statewide Forum “Wanna Talk About It?” – May 12<sup>th</sup> 2006
- An Afternoon With FRMP Forums in Melbourne, Bendigo & Shepparton – August, November & December.
- Wanna Talk About It? Young person's flyer, sticker and magnet developed in collaboration with young people accessing Frontyard.
- Counselling flyer developed in collaboration with young people accessing Frontyard.
- Development of FRMP Information Kit.
- Continued development of FRMP Website.
- Continuation of FRMP Quarterly Newsletters – January, April, July & October.
- Continued development of FRMP Database of Private Practitioners.
- Collation of FRMP 12 month brokerage statistics into graph format.
- Presentation of FRMP 12 month brokerage statistics at Regional Homelessness Network Meetings.
- Direct support for services with Individual & Groupwork applications.

## **Networking / partnerships**

Integral to the role of capacity building within FRMP is an understanding and acknowledgement of the various contexts of youth homelessness across Victoria, and the dimensions of inter/intra agency collaboration that occurs. In general, the Youth SAAP sector is proficient at working together, in the interests of young people. In support of this, FRMP has been able to provide resources aimed at enhancing existing relationships between services, and creating linkages where gaps exist. By bringing together local and regional homelessness networks, local and regional family violence prevention networks, early intervention services, local government

youth networks, and various allied sector services accessed by young people, FRMP has been able to further consolidate healthy working relationships between services, promote shared family reconciliation practice, and allow smooth transitions for young people across services.

### **SAAP Family Reconciliation Network**

FRMP has been pivotal in bringing together all 13 SAAP funded family reconciliation workers across Victoria. FRMP is supportive of nurturing the continuation of the important and diverse work these positions bring to SAAP. During 2006 FRMP hosted 3 Statewide networks for this unique group of workers and centred on professional development and peer support. Below is a listing of the networks convened;

February	Constellation theory and Strengths based training
August	Working with Parents and a research paper presented on youth housing workers
November	Transformative mediation

The Community Development Team has been instrumental in the general promotion of these SAAP funded reconciliation workers available within regions across Victoria. Such promotion has included general advocacy regarding the existence of these roles. In one region FRMP assisted the SAAP reconciliation worker prepare a presentation at a regional homelessness network meeting. As a result of this exposure, referrals from youth SAAP and THM services have steadily increased. FRMP will continue to support regional SAAP reconciliation workers in this way, and further enhance their strategic placement within the youth homelessness service sector.

### **Enhancement of existing service collaboration**

A key objective of FRMP includes strengthening the wider homelessness sector, and supporting linked-up service delivery. In all regions FRMP has been able to assist in various collaborative processes. The Community Development Team has focussed on bringing together workers from across agencies and discussing service system pathways for young people, interagency practices and potentials for joint brokerage applications. Such collaborative approaches continue to be successful in both metropolitan and rural regions.

### **Training**

Training for the sector continued to be an important element for FRMP in 2006 and implemented a number of diverse training opportunities for the youth homelessness sector and included;

- “The F word and homeless young people”, 3 day training, 7 packages across Victoria (January - May 2006). Regional Extended Family Services were the registered training body to deliver this package

- SAAP Family Reconciliation Statewide Network. February, August, and November 2006.
- “Wanna talk about it”? FRMP Statewide forum, May 2006
- Metropolitan professional development forum. An evening with FRMP. “Reflections on Grief and Homelessness” August 2006.
- Loddon Mallee professional development forum. An afternoon with FRMP. “Understanding and responding to Conflict” November 2006.
- Metropolitan professional development forum. “Understanding and responding to Conflict”. November 2006.
- Hume professional development forum. Panel presentation. December 2006.

## **Future Directions**

### **Statewide FRMP Forum**

Our second youth focussed, family centred Statewide forum sponsored by FRMP will be hosted on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2007. “Wanna Talk About It Too?” aims to promote the further integrated use of youth focussed family centred practice within the youth homelessness service system, share key learning’s and understandings of providers, and provide participants with practical skill and tools.

### **Training**

To compliment the various training/professional development initiatives FRMP will provide a structured training program on the SAAP training calendar in 2007. “Youth Centred, Family Focused Interventions – what does it take?” will be held in early May 2007. The course aims to deliver specific training to workers in the homelessness service sector in order to provide a more substantial capacity for family focused interventions when working with young people who are newly or longer term homeless. At the end of the day participants will have a sound knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings relating to the integration of issues around family and relationships into assessment and service delivery in the homelessness sector. They will have explored ideas for including the social and emotional needs of clients in relation to family connectedness into their assessment processes and will have a range of practical strategies and tools for inclusion in this process.

### **Forums/Community Capacity Building Initiatives**

As part of the community capacity priority areas, a host of forums specifically catering for the youth homelessness sector across Victoria will continue to be a focus of the FRMP. This will run in parallel and compliment the training component of FRMP. Three such forums have already been hosted in late 2006.

## **Pilot Projects – Learnings from**

FRMP has developed a number of pilot initiatives that have directly resulted from key learnings from the use of brokerage, consultations with the sector and partnership work. Whilst work in these initiatives have already begun, their natural progression continues to expand to support notions of family reconciliation work within the youth homelessness sector.

## **Group Work**

Late 2005 FRMP expanded the boundaries of brokerage to include the capacity for workers to apply for group work interventions, whilst the same eligibility applied, this expansion acknowledged young people need to be able to access a diverse range of interventions that support them to stabilise. During the 2006 period a total of 21 applications were implemented or had been approved to begin. Applications ranged from behaviour change projects to wilderness therapy; all have included a framework of family focussed practice.

## **Information Kit**

As a result of FRMP consultations with the SAAP field in 2005/06, workers expressed a need to have a resource that could assist them to promote family focused work to their clients. The FRMP Community Development Team is therefore preparing a kit which will include information about youth homelessness including issues relating to family conflict and discussion of family inclusive practice as best practice. Included, there will be definitions of therapeutic interventions that may be useful in assisting family reconciliation (mediation, family therapy, individual counseling, family group conferencing). It is intended that there be sections which are written for workers and sections for young people to read. Therefore, a random sample of young people, parents and workers who have utilised FRMP funding, will be interviewed to gain an idea of what strategies are most effective in promoting family-centered practice, and to develop an appropriate language for the kit. It is intended to produce the kit in booklet form by early/mid 2007.

## **Training tools**

FRMP is currently working in partnership with St Lukes in the Loddon Mallee region to produce a Statewide training resource for the homelessness sector. The format of the resource will be a DVD that captures the thoughts and thinking of young people who use our services and seeks out from workers within our sector their opinions on what makes an effective worker. It is intended the outcome of this resource will create;

- Community awareness (to challenge stereotypes, promote positive community engagement.)

- Young people seeing stories of others (giving young people a voice, and hearing their experiences and opportunities that worked for them / got them through difficult times)
- Aid for other workers within the homelessness sector (Highlighting Good Practice)
- Highlight youth focused, family centered practice in the context of youth homelessness (relates to good practice)
- The DVD to be used as a professional development tool for the youth homelessness sector across Victoria that highlights through story and reflection from young people and workers what guides good practice

## Conclusion

Overall the homelessness service sector have identified the need to engage in reconciliation/ family mediation processes and the FRMP is one vehicle that can support the capacity to strengthen and enhance the response and use of these practices across the State. The very nature of the existence of a Statewide model has been able to establish a coherent response to youth focused family centered practice within the homelessness sector.

FRMP will continue its commitment to work in partnership with the sector to recognise and support good practice models within a family reconciliation context. These models will continually be used to share and part knowledge amongst the sector. FRMP will also continue to work with the sector to identify where gaps in service delivery occur and work in tandem to address these gaps and how these might be overcome.

FRMP continues to evolve as it is further integrated into the youth homelessness sector. What is clearly evident our policy and programmatic responses within a youth focused, family centered context play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes for many young people who seek assistance from our services. As a sector we must continue to frame family and issues pertaining to family and significant others as the central theme of assessment and casework in 2007 and beyond.

*“I still think about all the recommended strategies to tackle certain problems from our sessions and now everything seems to be going so sweet. I mean I really get along with my mum. We always have a good laugh... and it's amazing that we both haven't argued since my return home. I guess I must respect the fact that I was very lucky and that I really was never alone. It just felt that way sometimes...”* (Feedback received from a young person who had experienced homelessness for a period of 2 years)