

Report period: July 2005 – December 2005

**Family Reconciliation Mediation
Program**

**12 month Operational Report
of the
Family Reconciliation
Mediation Program.**

Year 1: July - December 05

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

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Key Points

This report documents the period of July 2005 – December 2005 of the Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP) and will include relevant information pertaining to the year. The report will highlight;

- ✓ Key issues,
- ✓ Emerging themes,
- ✓ A summary of brokerage,
- ✓ Detail community capacity initiatives that have been undertaken across the sector
- ✓ Outline future projects and planning.

The three core components to this report are;

- ✓ Brokerage – its use and uptake within regions and trends
- ✓ Community capacity building initiatives – projects implemented, summary of strengths and gaps in family reconciliation/mediation responses across the State
- ✓ Future directions

Within this report period significant additions were made to the FRMP that enhanced service delivery and these included; updated brokerage guidelines to which recognised the intervention of group work as a tool for intervention for young people. This gave the capacity for workers to apply for funds that supported young people to participate in group work interventions that supported the process of family reconciliation.

The program further defined its core three objectives to which funding would be granted if it was demonstrated that funds would;

- 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.

Brokerage applications steadily increased over this report period. A total of 143 cases were approved during 2005, this included a total of 171 interventions. 58 cases had been approved during the last report period. Reconciliation type interventions (counseling etc) were a significant area where funding was most sought, followed by family counseling/therapy, family mediation, discretionary funding and group work. (Group work was introduced in October 2005).

As our Statewide consultations concluded in August, a number of community capacity building initiatives have been implemented or are starting to emerge. One major initiative that was common across the State was to develop a comprehensive online guide to where “youth friendly” practitioners were located within regions. This directory is now available online at the FRMP website. The development and maintenance of this list will continue to be a document that is added to and is not meant to be a completed directory. Workers who are not currently connected to practitioners are able to access the directory to locate suitable youth counselors etc within their own region. The directory also contains a comprehensive list of the current SAAP sector, Reconnect providers, SAAP family reconciliation providers and family mediation services. Other initiatives to emerge have included the continuation of the Family Reconciliation SAAP providers forum, the development of peer support networks, established links with family violence prevention networks and Statewide School Focused Youth Service providers.

The FRMP is committed to providing to the sector, training that supports family focused practice. A theme prominent across the sector when asked what were their training needs, the general response was training that supported workers to identify effective ways to engage with family when working with young people who were at risk of homelessness or were homeless. It was also identified that it was not always appropriate for young people to return home or reconnect with family but what was important was to learn tools that supported or identified ways young people could reconcile within themselves issues of family conflict that contributed to their homelessness. The FRMP has successfully negotiated with a training provider to deliver a training package that will be available to the sector to begin in February 2006. This training will be delivered across the State.

The FRMP plans to deliver in conjunction with the sector numerous projects in 2006. This will include;

- ✓ A family focused forum aimed at the youth SAAP sector in May,
- ✓ Work more intensely with agencies to implement family focused policies and practice,
- ✓ Training and work with several nominated services to deliver programs that particularly supports those young people who have experienced homelessness on a longer term basis in relation to family reconciliation.

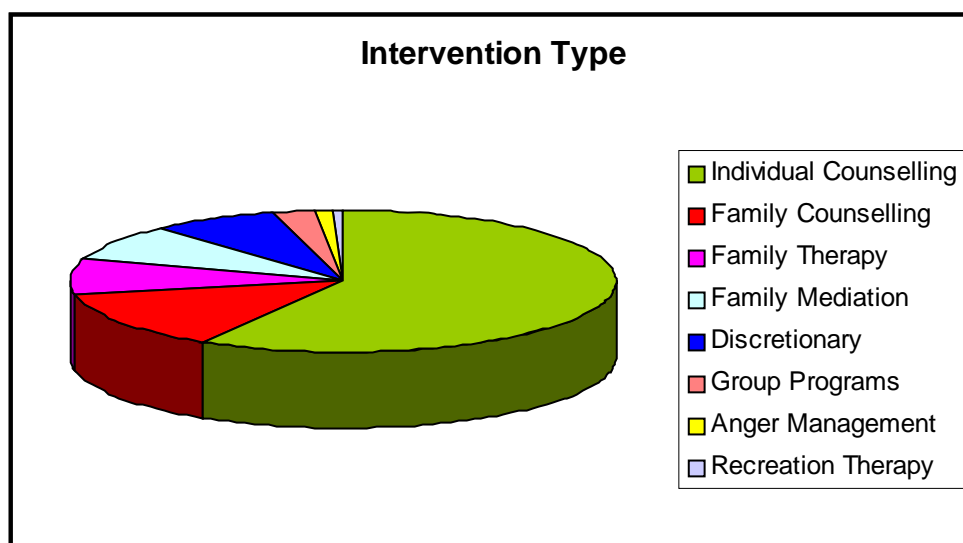
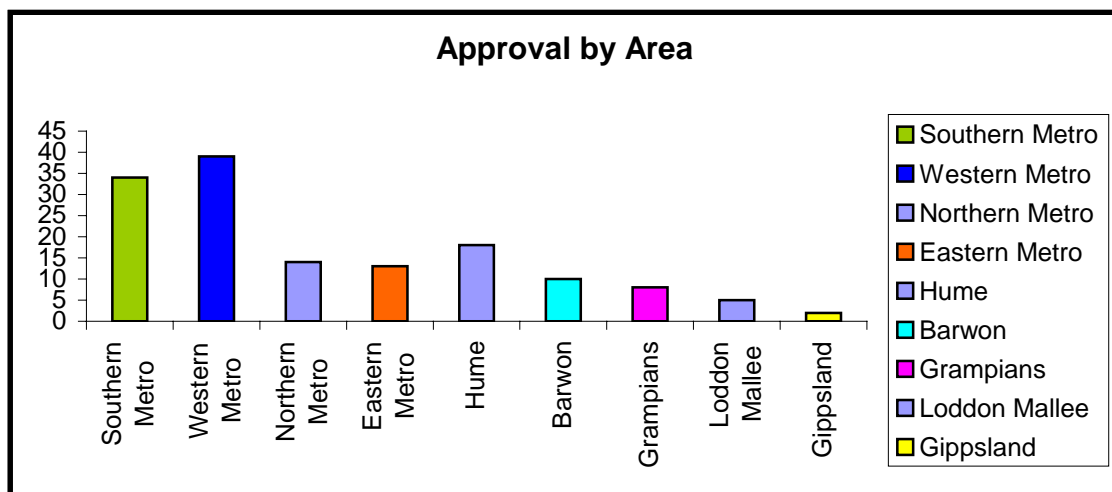
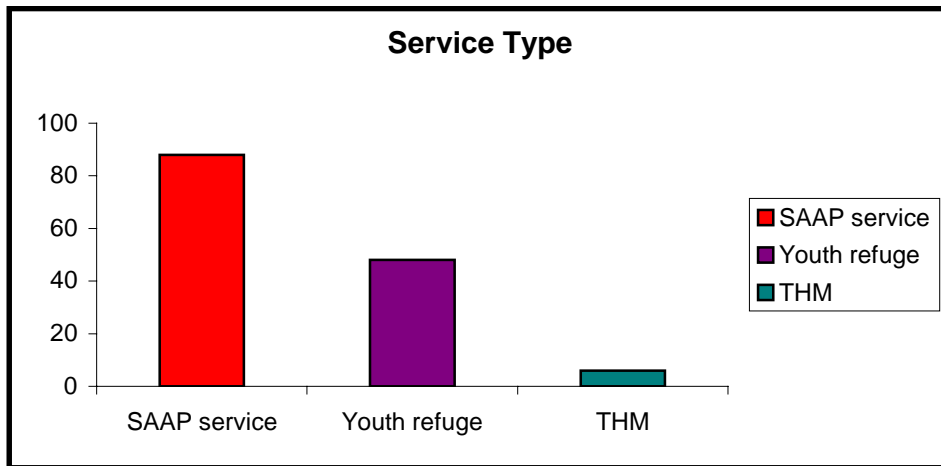
There is an independent evaluation of the FRMP being currently implemented by Research Fellow, David Mackenzie from Swinburne University; an interim report will be completed by April 2006.

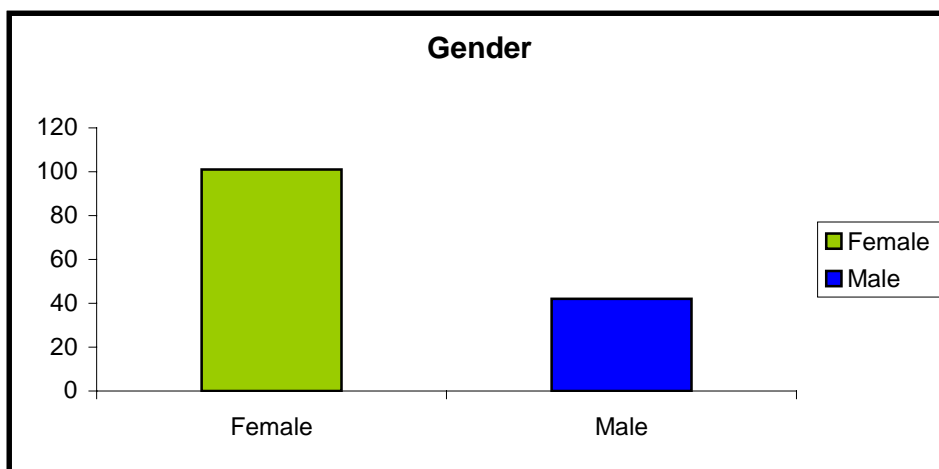
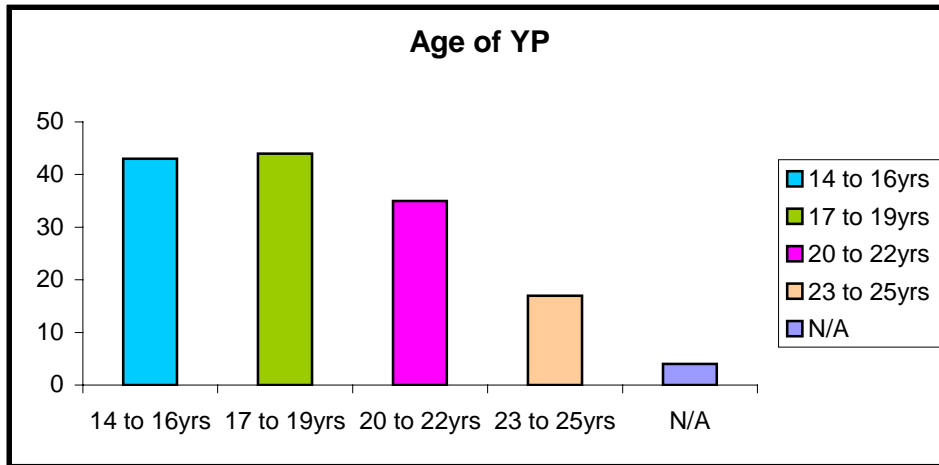
Overall what has been understood in the last 12 months is youth homelessness is a complex and varied paradigm, issues of family and family breakdown are key influences that often lead young people into homelessness. As a sector we must continue to seek out ways that support young people to successfully stay out of the homelessness cycle or help build pathways out of. This should include supports that assist young people to return home (if safe and appropriate), reconcile with family or supports that aid them to resolve issues within themselves that led to family breakdown and invariably contributed to their experience of homelessness; this in turn will support young people to develop into interdependent adults.

Brokerage

FRMP Statistics for the 2005 year (January 2005 – December 2005)

Applications Approved	143 young people accessed brokerage
Service accessing funds	SAAP Med/Long term support service– 88 SAAP Youth refuge – 48 THM - 6
Regional breakdown of services accessing funds	Southern Metro – 34 Western Metro – 39 Northern Metro – 14 Eastern Metro – 13 Hume – 18 Barwon – 10 Grampians – 8 Gippsland – 2 Loddon Mallee - 5
Interventions funded	Individual counseling – 100 Family counseling – 23 Anger management - 2 Mediation – 14 Discretionary funds – 13 Family Therapy - 14 Group interventions - 4 Recreational therapy - 1
Age of young person	14 to 16yrs – 44 17 to 19yrs – 45 20 to 22yrs – 36 23 to 25yrs – 18
Gender of young person	Female – 101 Male – 42





What does the brokerage use tell us?

143 cases were approved during 2005 (March – December). In some cases it proved beneficial for young people to engage in individual counselling prior to moving into family counselling or family mediation. Or in other cases a combination of brokerage funds supported the young person to engage in a range of interventions that may have included individual counselling, family counselling and discretionary funds (eg – a public transport ticket to get to and from counselling sessions). The capacity to access funds for a range of interventions proved to be beneficial for young people, it provided immediate, accessible support that is rarely available within the homelessness sector.

Of the 143 cases, 171 interventions were included. (Young people often engage in more than one “intervention”, they may engage in individual counselling and then move into family mediation) it is interesting to note 100 of the 171 interventions or 58.4% were for individual counselling. Interpreted this means, services accessed brokerage funds to support young people to enter into a therapeutic intervention with the main objective to support young people to resolve issues around family breakdown without necessarily making “physical” contact with family. When those figures are looked at more closely it also reveals that the majority of these

interventions were for young people who were older (20-22 and 23 – 25 years old) and had experienced homelessness for longer periods.

Regionally across Victoria, 30% of applications are from rural areas and 70% are from metropolitan Melbourne. The Western metropolitan area and the Hume region have the greatest amount of applications, whilst the Eastern metropolitan and the Gippsland region have the least amount of applications.

The Western metropolitan covers a large area which stretches from the CBD of Melbourne to Outer West. Given this large coverage and although there are 3 Reconnect programs based in this region, there is not a dedicated response for young people who would like to participate in family reconciliation who fall outside of Reconnect criteria. Neither is there a SAAP funded family reconciliation position in the Western region. Services in this area identify the need for a family reconciliation response when working with young people experiencing homelessness, this is evident in the uptake of brokerage, again this is largely directed towards individual counselling. Does this suggest that once young people are within the homelessness cycle and are significantly estranged from family, that individual counselling is a powerful tool to support young people to resolve issues relating to family breakdown?

Already feedback received from SAAP workers indicate that counselling is an important intervention to support young people to “heal” and move on and invariably at times this improves the relationship between the young person and “parent. A SAAP worker writes about individual counselling, “... it gave the young person an opportunity to express and discuss how he felt about the violence perpetrated by his father, and how this affected his relationship with his mother...the sessions meant the young person projected less anger towards his mother.”

The Eastern region has a built up response to family reconciliation (there are 5 services in the area that have a dedicated response to family type interventions). This may suggest why brokerage uptake is not as high in this area. The Gippsland area does not have a current SAAP family reconciliation funded position and again whilst there is a Reconnect service in Gippsland, this does not support those young people who fall out of the Reconnect age criteria or guidelines. Gippsland recorded 2 applications for funding during this report period. (At the completion of this report applications from this region had significantly increased)

Of the 14 family mediation interventions completed, 5 were performed by FRMP. These referrals primarily came from organisations that had attached to them a number of other programs. (Eg SAAP, JPET and Reconnect). The uptake in brokerage for family mediation will continue to be a focus for FRMP and how we can support services to identify when family mediation may be an option for a young person. We want to particularly focus on assisting youth refugees to identify when it is appropriate for young people to engage in family mediation.

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.

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, 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.

Eastern Family Reconciliation Peer Support Group

FRMP has been instrumental in the formation and facilitation of this peer support network within the Eastern Metropolitan Region. Membership is open to workers within the youth homelessness sector engaging with young people and/or their families. The group has been active in promoting itself within the network by presenting updates at monthly eastern network meetings and inviting workers to join. The purpose of this group specifically relates to the enhancement of youth-centred family-focussed interventions. The group provides an opportunity for workers to reflect on and enhance the incorporation of family reconciliation into case management practice, share information, explore relevant resources and foster interagency linkages within the region. The group has met 4 times since June 2005 and plans to meet on a quarterly basis.

Skills Audit/Private Practitioner Listing

Following the statewide FRMP consultations concluding August 2005, it was evident that thorough knowledge of sector resources relating to mediation and counselling was required. FRMP conducted a skills audit of existing SAAP workers in order to extract information about their qualifications relevant to mediation, therapy or groupwork. From this, information was gathered regarding private practitioners known to workers within their locality. In turn, these practitioners were contacted by FRMP and asked to submit their CV and other supporting information that may make them eligible to be added to the FRMP database. This process was particularly useful for identifying practitioners available in rural and regional areas of Victoria. By extracting this information, FRMP has made it possible for many services to

establish links with private practitioners within their region, and apply for brokerage in the process.

Group work

Groupwork has become an area within the parameters of FRMP brokerage that many workers within the sector have been keen to explore. The same eligibility criteria applies for groupwork as with individual brokerage applications. The FRMP Community Development Team has a capacity to explore groupwork possibilities with services, and support them in their process of accessing FRMP funding. To date, FRMP has also been able to assist in services applying collaboratively. Funded groupwork initiatives have included music and art therapy, outdoor adventure programs, and behaviour change programs to name a few.

Research collaborations

FRMP has also been actively involved in broader sector movements, particularly a number of collaborative research projects. FRMP is a member of the reference group for the Motherhood and Homelessness Project facilitated by The University of Melbourne, and builds upon previous work undertaken in Project I. The research project will investigate motherhood as a possible catalyst for change among young, newly parenting young women experiencing homelessness, with a view to developing targeted and timely interventions to assist young women and their children out of homelessness.

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. There have been two successful meetings facilitated this year for this network of workers, with another scheduled for late February 2006.

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 metro and rural regions.

Front Doors

FRMP continues to be actively involved in the progression of the Front Door Homeless Service System Development Project, a pilot initiative originating from the Victorian Homelessness Strategy. FRMP has advocated alongside Family Reconciliation services within the Eastern Metropolitan Region, for the inclusion of family focussed interventions within all intake and assessment processes conducted by Front Doors. This support has now spread to all regions across Victoria as the new Front Door system is rolled out across the state.

FRMP Quarterly Newsletter

The FRMP Quarterly Newsletter is a capacity building initiative with a focus on ensuring the homelessness Service Sector is kept informed about broad program developments. Information and sector news relating to youth homelessness and family reconciliation is included, and contributions from the sector are welcome. Newsletters are emailed on a quarterly basis across various sector networks.

FRMP promotional material

In response to suggestions by the Youth SAAP sector during FRMP statewide consultations, FRMP put together a package of information for young people accessing SAAP services. The intended aim of the information was to inform young people about the FRMP program, encouraging contact with their SAAP or housing worker if interested in talking about issues relating to their family and experience of family breakdown. After consulting with a number of young people accessing Frontyard Youth Service, the design and content for a wallet-sized flyer, sticker and magnet was produced.

FRMP Website

A number of developments have been added to the FRMP website, allowing the site to be a resource for workers requiring a breadth of up to date information about the program. Information about the various brokerage and community capacity building initiatives are easily accessed via www.frmp.org.au

Training

Sector Training is a complimentary component to the community development. The FRMP Training package will be rolled out beginning late February. This will involve specialised training in the area of family reconciliation when working with young people experiencing homelessness. In the first round of training, 7 packages will be delivered across the State, 2 in metropolitan Melbourne and 5 in rural areas.

Future Directions

Statewide FRMP Forum

A youth focussed, family centred Statewide forum sponsored by FRMP will be hosted on 12th May at Melbourne Town Hall. The aim of the forum is to restate the intentions of FRMP and forward directions relating the 2nd stage of the YHAP, promote the 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.

Pilot Projects

It is intended to utilise the learning's from the last year to pilot new practice models and tools that focus on supporting longer term homeless young people. We will shortly call for nominations from the SAAP sector that are interested in working with the FRMP to implement such projects.

Training

Sector wide training will be continue to be delivered across Victoria. The type of training to be delivered will be determined by the feedback received from the first round of training delivered over 2006. This round of training will conclude in June 2006.

Promotion of good practice

FRMP will shortly produce a publication that will detail how brokerage funds have been used within a group context. It is intended to share what works for young people and how group work can address issues of family within a youth homelessness framework.

Forums/Community Capacity Building Initiatives

As part of the community capacity priority areas, a host of forums specifically catering for the homelessness sector will continue to be a focus of the FRMP. This will run in parallel and compliment the training component of FRMP.

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.

FRMP will continue to work in partnership with the sector to recognise and support good practice models within a family reconciliation/mediation 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.

Family mediation/reconciliation within a youth homelessness framework in many ways is already occurring within the sector both on a micro and macro level. The challenge for us as a sector is to ensure we continue to increase our response to young people within a framework that views young people in the context of their connectedness with “family” regardless if this has been a positive or negative experience.

The FRMP would like to acknowledge and thank all those services, networks, peak bodies and the FRMP advisory group for working in partnership with us at strengthening and enhancing our response towards family reconciliation/mediation along the continuum of youth homelessness.

“...finally a program that is opening doors...” private practitioner, currently working with the SAAP sector, 2006.