



Family Reconciliation Mediation Program

Six Month Report

Year 3: July 2007 – December 2007

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January 2008**

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5.0 Summary

1.0 Introduction

The Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP) completed its third year of operation in December 2007 and continues to work to support family inclusive practice within the Youth Homelessness Service Sector (YHSS) through its brokerage component and community development initiatives across Victoria.

During this reporting period, July – December 2007, FRMP was operating within an interim funding period due to an external review of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan 1 (YHAP1) initiatives by Thomson Goodall Associates. During this period, FRMP received confirmation the program had been refunded for an additional eighteen months in its current form by the Office of Housing (OoH).

This report documents the period of July – December 2007 of FRMP and includes information that highlights:

- ⇒ Brokerage statistics and feedback,
- ⇒ Community development initiatives, and
- ⇒ Key learnings and future directions.

1.1 Key Points

Within this report period FRMP completed its first 3 year cycle of funding under the YHAP Stage One. It was also during this funding cycle FRMP underwent an extensive external evaluation by Thompson Goodall Associates. Based on this evaluation the OoH announced during this report period FRMP would continue to be funded until June 2009.

Whilst this report specifically relates to the July – December 2007 period, it also includes an overview of the profile of young people accessing brokerage funds.

145 young people accessed brokerage funds and 7 group work initiatives were funded. Typically as in the last report period we, as a sector are working with a significant number of young people who are residing at home but are experiencing significant family conflict enough to warrant support or they have recently left home.

For the first time brokerage funds were accessed by a significant number of youth refuges, 12 applications were made in the last report period compared to 33 applications in this report period. Applications from youth refuges made 22% of all applications.

FRMP continued to deliver and work in partnership with the sector to facilitate /support professional development opportunities. By the end of 2007 FRMP hosted mini professional development forums in all 7 OoH regions. Other significant events included presenting and participating at numerous forums such as the Statewide Indigenous Network. FRMP has worked with this network more closely to establish effective ways of working with Indigenous service providers, young people and their families to enable timely access to FRMP brokerage funds. At the time of writing this report several Indigenous

specific projects were in progress to ensure these targets were reached. The Indigenous Statewide Homelessness Networker during this report period also accepted to be a member of the FRMP Advisory Committee.

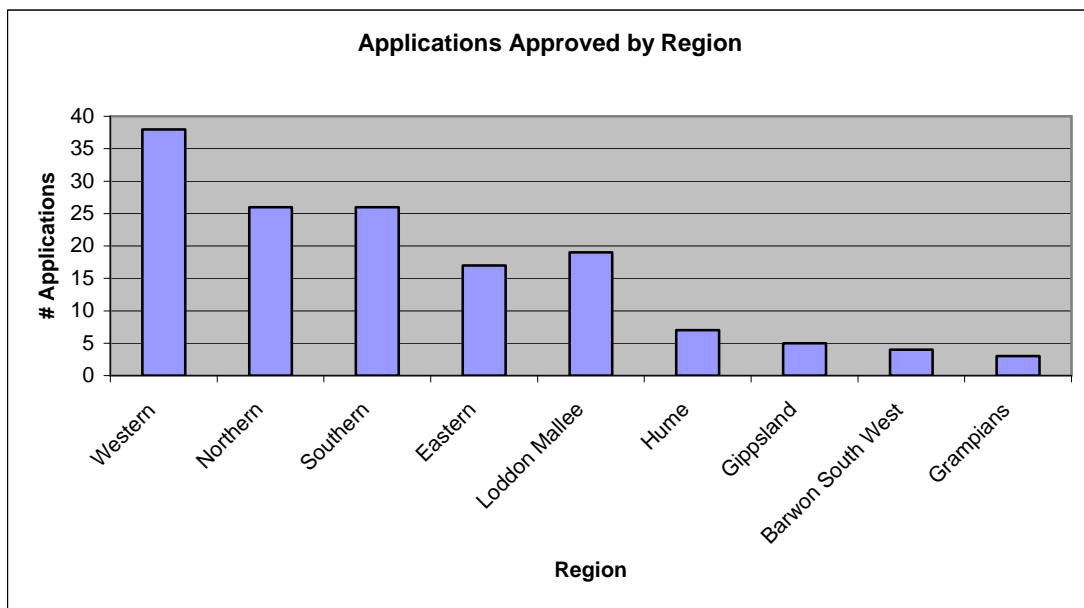
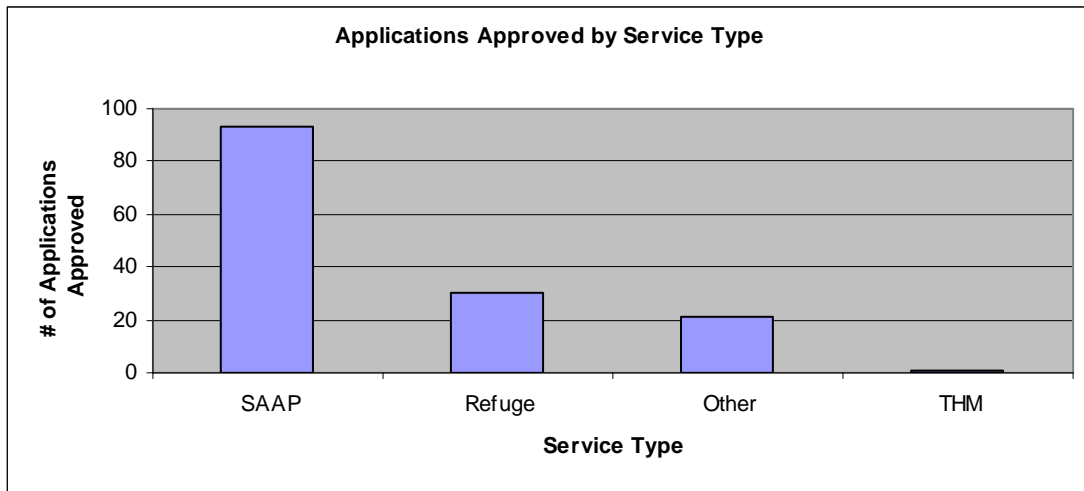
The Family Reconciliation SAAP workers continued to be an important focus for the FRMP program, these unique positions provide support to young people with reference to family reconciliation wherever possible and appropriate within the youth homelessness sector. During this report period FRMP hosted a number of network meetings that included professional development for these workers. The group is also currently in the process of drafting a “Statement of Purpose” which will detail agreed values and objectives of a Family Reconciliation SAAP worker.

2007 was clearly an important year for the FRMP program. The continuation of funding is a clear indicator of the achievements the program has been able to make. In a climate of consistent change within the youth homelessness sector the notion of family reconciliation further embeds itself within the way we work with young homeless people.

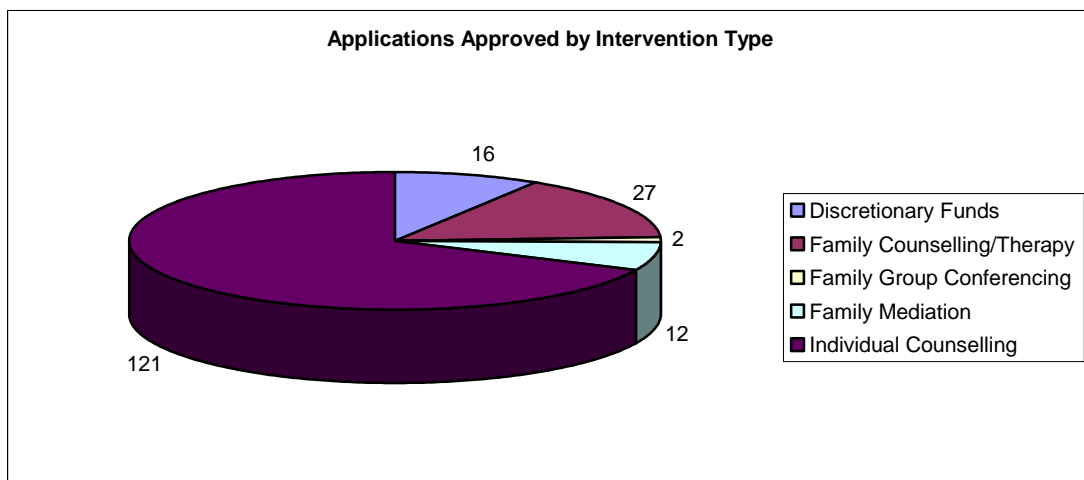
2.0 Brokerage Interventions

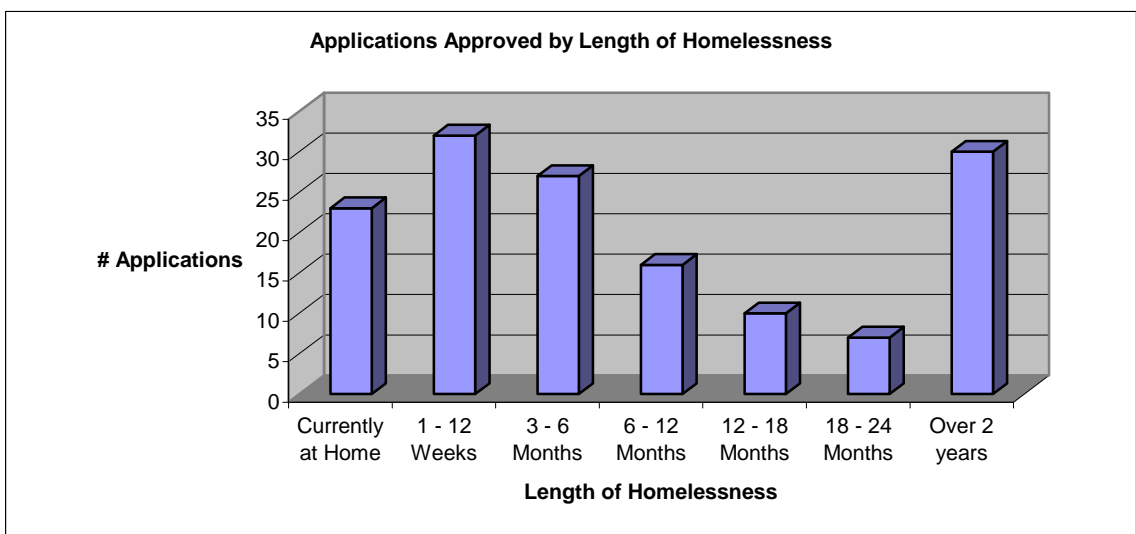
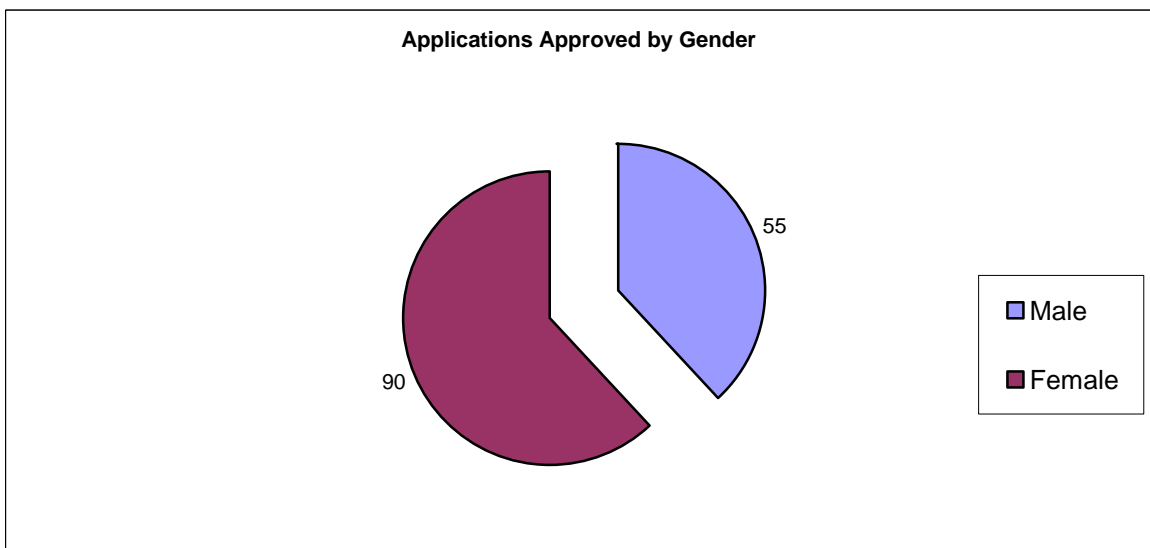
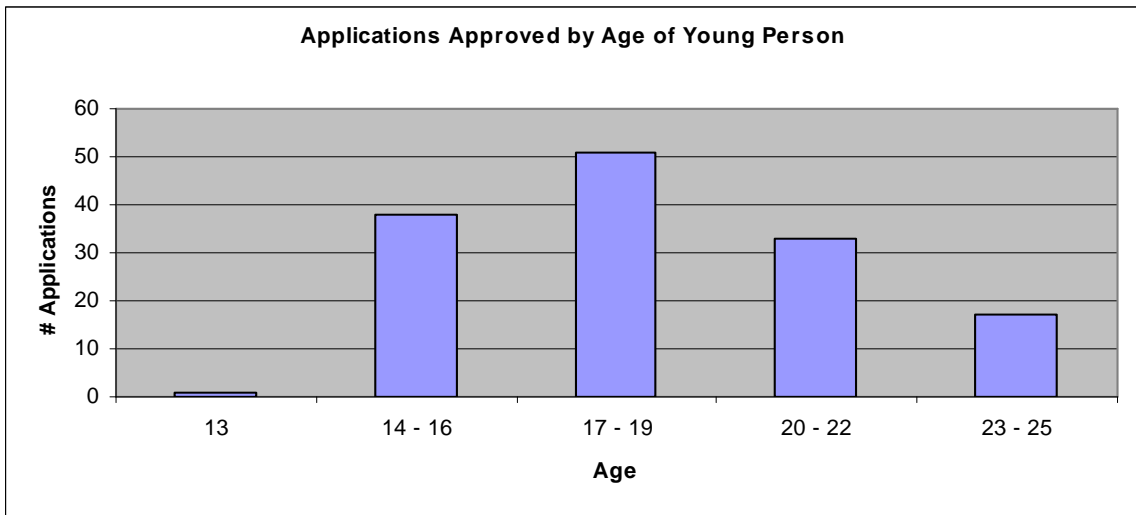
2.1 FRMP Statistics for Reporting Period (July – December 2007)

Applications approved	Individuals 145
Services Accessing funds	SAAP 93 SAAP Refuge 30 THM 1 Other 21
Regional breakdown of services accessing funds	Northern: 26 Western: 36 Eastern: 17 Southern: 23 Gippsland: 5 Hume: 7 Loddon Mallee: 19 Grampians: 3 Barwon South West: 4
Interventions funded	Family counselling/therapy: 26 Family Mediation: 12 Family Group Conference: 2 Individual counselling: 119 Discretionary: 14
Age of young person	13: 1 14 – 16: 38 17 – 19: 51 20 – 22: 33 23 – 25: 17
Gender of young person	Male: 52 Female: 88
Length of homelessness	At home: 23 1 – 12 week: 32 3 – 6 months: 25 6 – 12 months: 16 12 – 18 months: 10 18 – 24 months: 6 Over 2 years: 28
Cultural identity	Australian: 117 Indigenous: 7 Other cultural identity: 16



Metropolitan use: 74%
 Rural use: 26%





Significant factors:

As illustrated in the above tables and charts, as a sector we continue to facilitate a significant number of early intervention responses to young people (39% of young people accessing FRMP were either still at home and at-risk of homelessness or less than 12 weeks out of home). Another significant piece of information is that young people who have been experiencing long-term homelessness (for 2 years or more) made up 20% of the total applications in this period.

SAAP funded support workers continue to be the highest appliers for FRMP brokerage, however the number of applications decreased from 158 applications to 93 in this current 6-month period. Refuges have significantly increased their numbers of applications from 12 applications in the previous period to 33 applications in this 6-month period. Other services (where a young person is connected to a homelessness sector) accessing FRMP has also increased from 3 to 21.

2.2 Feedback from Interventions

A sample of 14 closed FRMP files were chosen to illustrate what effect brokered interventions were having for young people and their families; the following offers a snapshot.

Once a FRMP funded intervention has been completed FRMP requests that the referring support worker complete and submit a feedback form. Below is a table of pre and post intervention feedback.

Question: On a scale of 1-6 (1 being 'poor', 6 being 'excellent') how would you rate the level of relationship/communication between the young person and their family prior to and after intervention?

FRMP Reference Number	Pre Intervention	Post Intervention
810	2	4
815	2	4
821	3	4
832	2	3
839	2	5
861	3	5
871	1	3
875	2	3
877	3	4
879	1	5
882	2	4
887	2	2
896	1	3
926	1	3.5

The table above shows that in the majority of cases the level of relationship and communication increased. Only one of the cases above indicated that the level of relationship and communication remained the same. The average increase in the level of improvement in relationship and communication is 1.83 (pre intervention average 1.92, post intervention average 3.75).

Below is further evidence supporting the positive outcomes from FRMP funded interventions. Housing Support Workers who worked with the young people who accessed FRMP Brokerage provided these quotes:

“The mediation provided a safe place for the parent and young person to communicate openly; come to agreements and the young person was able to return home.”

“The reconciliation provided strategies to cope with family dynamics; resolving issues of grief and loss associated with family breakdown.”

“Clarification on situation which led to young person moving out of home; a commitment of both parties to start the process of rebuilding their relationships.”

“Allowed young person to begin the process of opening up re family conflict. Previously she refused to even address the issue.”

“Counselling has improved family relationships and ‘opened up communication’ between family members”

FRMP funded interventions often provide young people and their families with the opportunity to discuss “the hard stuff” in a safe space. This opportunity enables the family to move forward, and make plans to maintain contact:

“Young person and his family engaged well with practitioner. This allowed space for issues related to family conflict to be discussed. Young person is now having positive contact with family of origin. They are making plans for reunification. Young persons carer reported that counselling was very useful in bringing together family members, who historically would not speak, to explore issues and gain greater clarity of situation.”

“Provided the young person a safe place to discuss ongoing issues that he had been unable to express previously. The decisions he made as a result of counselling helped to improve his relationship with his family and move past the ‘stuck’ point he was at”

Family reconciliation for a young person is not necessarily about returning home, or remaining in the family home; the first steps instead may be around communicating clearly with each other and opening up the lines of communication:

“Assisted with clarification of issues; both parties recognised that they want the same thing; family now have future plans to maintain contact – previously had no contact.”

“YP has moved out of home but will maintain contact with parent / parent will also make effort and has spoken about activities that both can do together.”

The majority of FRMP brokerage applications are made as an early intervention (before leaving home or within 12 weeks of leaving home); in the hope the young person avoids entering the Homelessness Service System:

“Young person has decided to remain living at home at this stage. Fostered development of communication.”

Accessing counselling and mediation is a challenging experience. Information from funding FRMP interventions informs us that for a successful outcome both parties must be ready and willing to attend, and to commit to and make a change. Workers can offer appropriate support and provide resources, however change cannot be forced on unwilling participants, thus indicating that support workers need to ensure the readiness of a young person and their family to enter a mediation setting:

“Both thought mediator was great, but goals/plans not carried out at home. In this case (the mediation) did not work.”

Whilst FRMP has an expectation that a support worker maintains contact with both the young person and their family and the practitioner, the nature of the Youth Homelessness Service System means that some workers lose contact with the young people. Often losing contact can be concerning, especially if the person is disengaging from their supports, however sometimes lack of contact can indicate positive changes:

Regarding feedback received from the client: “no contact with family due to the client returning home.”

Feedback consistently indicates that young people who have been experiencing homelessness for less than 12 weeks are especially vulnerable, and often receptive to individual counselling sessions. This time and space they experience away from home, together with the opportunity to explore the reasons for family breakdown in a professional and supported environment often enables the young person to identify and face significant issues that can lead to reconciliation with family:

“Young Person has made link between anger issues and family relationships and substance use - and how this impacts current functioning and relationships. Young Person was staying in a rooming house, but has now returned home with both parents – relationships seem to have improved.”

Overview of FRMP “Client Profile”

FRMP has collected data over the past 3 years from young people who access brokerage. There are several common elements:

- The typical young person accessing FRMP is female – about 60% are female. Males also have a high level of access to the FRMP program (40%). This is an interesting revelation. Within the funding and service agreement it is a requirement of FRMP at a minimum to allocate funds to 30% towards male clients. The 40% uptake indicates both males and females are almost equally engaging *and* benefiting from these interventions
- The most common age of a FRMP young people is 15-17 (43% of young people)
- Most likely to have been born in Australia
- Most of the young people accessing FRMP are either still at home or out of home for less than 12 weeks (39%), or have been experiencing homelessness for over 2 years (21%)
- FRMP has recently started collecting data on whether the young person has had any involvement with the Department of Human Services and has found that of the 370 young people on which data has been collected, 131 have had some involvement with DHS – either current or previous

2.3 Feedback from Groupwork

During the reporting period FRMP has provided brokerage funding for a total of seven Groupwork projects. The participation of young people in FRMP funded group work projects continues to demonstrate the variety of interventions that can provide an avenue to explore and resolve issues relating to family conflict and/or breakdown.

Types of Groups Funded

Organisation	Type of Group	No. of Young People Involved
Melbourne Citymission – Melbourne Youth Support Services	“Going off Tap” Behaviour Change Group	9
St Lukes	Bendigo Parent Support Group	5
Salvation Army – Kardinia Women’s Service	Young Women’s Art Therapy Group	6
Moira – Southern Directions Youth Service	Young Men’s Group	10
Wesley Youth Services	Music Therapy Project	4
Family Life	“Going all Out” Young Women’s Peer Support Group	10
Melbourne Citymission	“Surfin’ Day” Workshop	7

An example of feedback from workers who facilitated or co-facilitated FRMP funded Groupwork included:

“(Young People) talked about confidence, a sense of achievement and the discovery of ability within themselves that they thought they didn’t have” - Melbourne Citymission

“Most of the young people told of their life at home and together as a group they used these experiences to combine their knowledge to resolve issues relating to family conflict” - Rob Hosking, Caseworker; Melbourne Citymission – Melbourne Youth Support Services

“The build up of trust amongst them and the connection because of their similar backgrounds allowed them to begin the healing process” - Ann Maree Darbyshire, Young Parents Outreach Worker; Salvation Army – Kardinia Women’s Service

FRMP also requests feedback from participants of FRMP funded Groupwork and while it can be difficult to receive this consistently, below is a snapshot from the Salvation Army – Kardinia Women’s Service Young Women’s Art Therapy Group:

“I realised how much I appreciate everyone in my family and I told them all” - Participant, Salvation Army - Kardinia Women’s Service

“(I learnt from the group) that it’s okay to express yourself” - Participant; Salvation Army – Kardinia Women’s Service

2.4 Front End Family Mediation

During the report period a total of 12 family mediation requests were recorded. As in the last report, services in which significant numbers of mediations occur appear to have an integrated mediation program as well as a youth centred family focused framework integrated into their service delivery. Some of the 12 mediations were requested within rural areas. FRMP plans to further build up its database of sessional family mediators to ensure a timely response is given when a family mediation referral is received.

3.0 Community Capacity Building

3.1 Community Development Initiatives

FRMP continues to use community development principles to increase the capacity of the Youth Homelessness Service Sector to respond to young people in a family inclusive way.

The program has continued to consolidate key initiatives as listed below:

- ⇒ Eastern Metropolitan Region Family Reconciliation Best Practice Group; FRMP continues to facilitate and maintain this peer support network – meeting held in August and November

- ⇒ SAAP Family Reconciliation Network; FRMP continues to facilitate and maintain this quarterly forum of State-wide SAAP Family Reconciliation Workers – July and November
- ⇒ “An Afternoon with FRMP”; Professional Development Forums held in Gippsland Region (November), Grampians Region (September) and Melbourne (November)
- ⇒ FRMP continues to distribute the FRMP Quarterly Newsletter – August and November
- ⇒ FRMP continues to develop the FRMP website
- ⇒ FRMP continues to develop the database of Private Practitioners; a new database form is being used with practitioners to provide more in-depth information for the database about the specialist areas and experience in working with diversity
- ⇒ FRMP continues to provide support for agencies for Individual and Groupwork brokerage applications

The program has also worked on new key initiatives over the last six months as listed below;

- ⇒ Membership of Statewide Indigenous Homelessness Network – Presentation at September meeting and workshop at December meeting to examine FRMP resources to make them more relevant to Indigenous young people
- ⇒ Groupwork Project; the project report has been completed and will be distributed in February 2008; the insert for *Melbourne Citymission’s FRMP Info Kit* is being finalised and will be ready for distribution in March 2008

3.2 Networking and Partnerships

An important part of capacity building within the community development roles within FRMP is continued networking and relationship building. This is effectively achieved by maintaining a ‘face’ of FRMP in membership and participation in homelessness network meetings, council youth services network meetings and allied health networks. FRMP continues to build working relationships with a variety of service providers to share learnings about family inclusive practice across the State. A key partnership that has been forged within the last six months is membership and participation in the State-wide Indigenous Homelessness Network.

3.3 SAAP Family Reconciliation Network

FRMP continues to resource the SAAP Family Reconciliation Network that is crucial in bringing together the range of SAAP funded workers across Victoria.

FRMP facilitates a quarterly professional development forum for the SAAP Family Reconciliation Network.

During the reporting period, FRMP facilitated two professional development forums for the SAAP Family Reconciliation Network on 30th July 2007 and 12th November 2007. During the July 2007 meeting, Alana O'Callaghan, Family Therapist; Meridian Youth and Family Counselling presented on "Working with Families where there are Issues of Adolescent Violence". Alana's presentation included examining the multiple perspectives useful to understanding adolescent violence.

In the November meeting, Steve Phillis, Youth Connections Team; St Lukes facilitated an interactive workshop "Choice Theory, Working with Cards and Revisiting Strength Based Practice". Steve's presentation included significant time for participants gaining 'hands on' experience using the St Lukes Innovation Resources 'cards'. The professional development forums also allow sufficient time for networking amongst attendees and information sharing.

As part of FRMP's support of this network of providers, FRMP assisted in drafting a "Statement of Purpose" with the network at the November meeting. This document, while still in draft form will assist in further consolidating the position of the SAAP Family Reconciliation workers as an integral part of the youth homelessness service sector.

3.4 Training

FRMP has continued to provide a range of varied training options for workers in Youth Homelessness Sector during the reporting period.

The training that FRMP has organised within the reporting period included;

- ⇒ **Homelessness Assistance and Community Housing – Training**
"Youth Centred Family Focused Interventions – What Does it Take?" 4th September 2007; One-day workshop facilitated by Sarah Marrinan, Psychologist; White Cat Psychology
- ⇒ **SAAP Family Reconciliation Network**
 - "Working with Families where there are Issues of Adolescent Violence"; Alana O'Callaghan, Meridian Youth and Family Counselling – 30th July 2007
 - "Choice Theory, Working with Cards and Revisiting Strength Based Practice"; Steve Phillis, St Lukes – 12th November 2007
- ⇒ **Professional Development Forums**
 - Grampians Region (September) "Young Women and Psychodrama"; Bronwyn McNaughton, Confident Counselling
 - Gippsland Region (November) Panel Presentation of Three Guest Speakers, Bobbi Tatlow, Quantum Support Services, Julie Hayes, Blackwood Centre for Adolescent Development and Debra Smith, Private Psychologist

- Melbourne (November) “Sitting with the Discomfort; reflective practices for working with young people at risk”

⇒ **Tertiary Training**

- Melbourne University – training for final year Social Work students “Young People, Homelessness and Family Inclusive Practice” (October 2007)

3.5 Service Gaps

As previously stated in FRMP’s Six Monthly Report, January – June 2007, FRMP is committed to access of the service to all young people and will take steps to ensure that FRMP is easily accessible for Indigenous and CLD young people. As such, FRMP has developed project briefs for increasing the number of applications from services that provide a service to Indigenous and CLD young people. These project briefs are expanded upon in Section 4.2 and Section 4.3. FRMP is also committed to continuing to examine service gaps and responding in an appropriate and meaningful way.

4.0 Future Directions

4.1 Groupwork Project

During the reporting period, FRMP has continued to work on the Groupwork Project and has completed a Project Report that will be distributed electronically in February 2008. The Groupwork Project included interviews with six service providers and main themes from the interviews on best practice in group work were collated and included in the report. FRMP is now working on an insert for *Melbourne Citymission’s FRMP Info Kit*.

In addition to distributing the Groupwork Project Report and insert for *Melbourne Citymission’s FRMP Info Kit*, FRMP will continue to support services in running group work to provide young people an alternative intervention to counselling, family mediation and family therapy.

4.2 Indigenous Project

During the reporting period FRMP has focussed on consolidating relationships with Indigenous SAAP providers. In October 2007, FRMP conducted Agency visits with Dan Laws, Statewide Indigenous Homelessness Networker in the Loddon Mallee Region. During these visits FRMP met with service providers to gain a greater understanding of the challenges these services experience. The Agency visits also assisted building linkages within the Indigenous Housing Network.

FRMP has presented at the Statewide Indigenous Housing Network in September to provide an overview of FRMP and how to apply for brokerage. In the December Statewide Indigenous Housing Network, FRMP facilitated a workshop to examine promotional materials such as brochures and wallet-sized flyers to elicit feedback regarding ways to make them more ‘Indigenous

friendly'. FRMP received valuable feedback about the promotional material and will be conducting a further focus group in the next reporting period.

FRMP aims to focus on supporting the Indigenous Housing Network in applying for FRMP brokerage to ensure that young Indigenous people in the youth homelessness system are also able to adequately the service as/if required.

4.3 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People Project

In the previous six-monthly report, FRMP identified CLD young people as a demographic who are not statistically represented as accessing FRMP in comparison to NDCA data. In order to address this imbalance, FRMP has completed a CLD Project Brief to begin increasing links with housing services that have a large proportion of CLD young people accessing their services.

FRMP has joined the CMYI Youth Issues Network and will commence attending these quarterly meetings to begin building relationships with service providers. FRMP is also planning to re-examine resources for the youth homelessness sector to ensure they are accessible for CLD young people.

4.4 Training/Professional Development Forums

FRMP has planned its training program for the next twelve months with a variety of metropolitan and regional professional development forums, inclusion on the SAAP Training Calender, SAAP Family Reconciliation Training and the FRMP State-wide Forum.

Over the next six months, FRMP will be conducting the following training;

- ⇒ Professional Development Forum – Loddon Mallee Region (6th March 2008)
- ⇒ Professional Development Forum – Hume Region (June - TBA)
- ⇒ Professional Development Forum – Barwon South West Region (July – TBA)
- ⇒ SAAP Training Calender – “Youth Centred Family Focussed Interventions – What does it take?” – Melbourne (6th March 2008)
- ⇒ FRMP State-wide Forum – Melbourne (9th May 2008)

4.5 Peer Support Groups Regionalised

FRMP has facilitated the Eastern Metro Region Family Reconciliation Best Practice Group since 2005 that has been used as a peer support group. FRMP will be mapping the different Metropolitan Regions over the next six months to assess support and interest from workers to create a family reconciliation peer support group in each region. Facilitating a peer support group in each region will enable a greater sharing of knowledge and insight

about family reconciliation as well as the opportunity for enhancement of youth centred family focussed service provision to young people experiencing homelessness.

5.0 Summary

FRMP has been refunded until June 2009. The last 3 years has allowed the program to establish itself within the youth homelessness sector. Family reconciliation interventions should be seen as a continuum of response to young people, a contributor to the “wrap around” services we give to young people, those newly homeless as well as those whose experience of homelessness has been more entrenched. The notion of family or significant other is an important piece to the make up of a young person regardless of whether their experience has been positive or negative. The learnings from FRMP indicate young people benefit from interventions that allow a space to “work things through” and this has often related back to the experience of family and/or significant other.

“When a young person is sitting with you & when asked about family, their response is ‘I don’t give a damn about my family’, that in itself is a loaded statement...our response as a worker is crucial”. FRMP private practitioner 2007