

# Family Reconciliation Mediation Program Quarterly Newsletter



Melbourne Citymission  
Building Inclusive Communities

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## FRMP news and developments

FRMP continues to build on the work done since we started in 2005. We continue to provide brokerage for Family Mediation and Counselling as well as a range of community building / sector development initiatives in our endeavours to support youth centred, family inclusive practice within the youth homelessness sector. This newsletter is one of those activities and is also designed to increase people's knowledge and understanding about FRMP.

This year we plan to run professional development forums in each of the 5 country regions and one for the metropolitan services. Whilst obviously structured around the FRMP objectives we value input from services to help us develop a program that meets real needs in the sector. We will also be running our annual FRMP Forum in the second half of the year.

Brokerage is still on the agenda and on 20<sup>th</sup> of March we will be running our training "Youth Focused, Family Centred Practice: what does it take?" for which a few seats are still available. Our other areas of work will involve a tracking project to monitor the medium to longer term effects of FRMP-funded interventions, increasing our role in the direct provision of Family Mediation, running peer support groups and a state-wide family reconciliation worker network. For more information on what we do and how we do it, give us a call or check out the website [here](#).

In other news Paul Atkinson started with FRMP in January and he (and that's me) has been out meeting people. He has experience working in Youth SAAP, HIR and LASNs as well as a bunch of other non-homelessness social work and public service positions. He's also from Perth and therefore pronounces words like reservoir and castle quite differently to the rest of you.

## Overview of FRMP Brokerage in the last 6 months

FRMP provides brokerage for young people (15-25) in the youth homelessness system to access: Family Mediation, Family and Individual Counselling, Group work Projects and discretionary costs required to support the above interventions.

In the last 6 months, FRMP has funded a total of 106 family reconciliation interventions with young people in the homelessness service system (HSS). The services were mostly split between SAAP (79) and Refuges (21).

### Client ages were split as follows:

14 – 16 yrs	36
17 – 19 yrs	40
20 – 22 yrs	19
23 – 25 yrs	10

### Funded interventions by type

Individual Counselling	82
Family Therapy/Counselling	24
Family Mediation	16

**Gender breakdown:** Male: 43 Female: 63

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy *in its own way*"  
Leo Tolstoy: Anna Karenina

For more information about FRMP Brokerage, please contact Yin, Brokerage Liaison Worker at FRMP on 8625 4479.



## Spotlight on Family Mediation

Family Mediation is an integral component to FRMP's objectives, particularly the goal of assisting young people experiencing homelessness to reconcile with their family. It is important to remember, however, that successful mediations aren't simply measured by the number of young people returning to the family home. This is obviously a great outcome and helps reduce homelessness, but FRMP also recognises that irrespective of how well a family has met a young person's needs in the past the family remains a presence (positive or negative, rarely indifferent) in people's lives. Re-establishing a relationship between family members can help strengthen a young person's support system or, at the very least, it can end or limit negative family interactions.

There are different models of Family Mediation (transformative, structured etc) but what they all have in common is an experienced and trained Mediator who can bring families together to work through communication blockages and facilitate the resolution of family conflict. The mediators don't take sides and, unlike counselling, they don't offer therapeutic interventions designed to resolve individual's internal psychological issues. What they offer is to help prepare people for, and then facilitate, a mediation session. In this sense it is an educative process with a clear and tangible goal. Undoubtedly, it can be therapeutic but isn't therapy driven or focused.

Family Mediation is an early intervention response, but this doesn't mean it needs to happen the moment a young person becomes homeless or within days of the initial break down in communication. What it does mean is that the intervention has to be timely; it has to target a 'window of opportunity' when the two parties are ready and willing to try to repair relationships. Identifying these moments, or facilitating the arrival of these opportunities, is where the support worker comes in.

Talking to young people about their family of origin isn't always easy and shouldn't be rushed, but support workers need to understand the role of the family as a significant part of the young person's biography. One of the best ways of facilitating a window of opportunity is to simply be conscious of the family. The family may be dangerously dysfunctional and we need to acknowledge a young person's lived experience of their family, but we should avoid comments that confirm or enhance animosity towards family (or foster victimhood in our clients).

As a SAAP worker there will be times where you negotiate between your client and other people (including family of origin) and a trained mediator or structured mediation is clearly not the only avenue to resolving interpersonal conflict. There are, however, times when an outsider (and non-advocate) is required to step in; to be, and appear, neutral and to assist both parties in reaching an understanding. This doesn't mean you can't, as the case-manager, be involved, and sometimes it is recommended that support workers sit in on the sessions and play the role of support and advocate for their clients.

What makes young people consider Family Mediation as an option is varied. Sometimes it will be at the early stages of homelessness and family breakdown and other times it will be after several years cycling through the housing sector or couch surfing at mates. Other triggers relate to life experiences such as having a child or the death of a loved one. The important thing is to keep Family Mediation on the table as an option; one that isn't right for everyone, but one that can have a huge impact on a person's life.

"Family quarrels have a total bitterness unmatched by others. Yet it sometimes happens that they also have a kind of *tang*, a pleasantness beneath the unpleasantness, based on the tacit understanding that this is not for keeps; that any limb you climb out on will still be there later for you to climb back."  
Mignon McLaughlin, *The Neurotic's Notebook*, 1960

### FRMP provides brokerage for young people with the aim of;

- **Supporting wherever possible and appropriate for young people to return home,**
- **Reconnecting with family, and/or**
- **Resolving issues within themselves issues relating to family conflict/breakdown.**

### FRMP TRAINING

#### **"Youth Centred Family Focused Interventions - What does it take?" Workshop on Friday 20th March 2009, Melbourne**

This one day workshop will explore key elements of family focused interventions with young people and learn strategies that support casework within a family inclusive framework. Please [download](#) the registration form and flyer or contact Amy on 8625 4477 for more information.





**Melbourne Citymission**  
Building Inclusive Communities

## Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP)

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FRMP supports Family Reconciliation Peer Support Groups that meet on a quarterly basis to discuss issues relating to working with young people and families within a family inclusive approach. These groups are a forum for workers to share information about regional trends, raise issues that impact on practice as well as providing an opportunity for peer support and sharing best practice within the sector.

FRMP has established these Peer Support Groups in all the Metropolitan Regions of Victoria and is also scoping the potential for the viability and interest in Family Reconciliation Peer Support Group's in regional areas and will be consulting with Regional Networkers shortly!

### Eastern Region

**Next Meeting** Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2009  
**Time** 10:00am – 11:30am  
**Where** Wesley Homelessness & Support Services; 291A Maroondah Hwy, Ringwood  
**Speaker** Shaunagh Reidy, ECASA – Eastern Health will be speaking about the services provided by ECASA and about working with young people who disclose sexual assault and how to support them to access counselling.  
**Contact** Amy at FRMP on 8625 4477 for more information

### Southern Region

**Next Meeting** Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2009  
**Time** 10:00am – 11:30am  
**Where** SDYS – Moira, 2a Station Street, Moorabbin  
**Speaker** TBC  
**Contact** Amy at FRMP on 8625 4477 for more information

### North & West Region

**Next Meeting** Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2009  
**Time** 2:00 – 3:30pm  
**Where** Berry Street (to be confirmed)  
**Speaker** (To be confirmed)  
**Contact** Paul at FRMP on 8625 4478 for more information

## News Items

### **Youth and Family Response Project (YFRP) – extended to Late February Early March**

In the last newsletter we announced that Melbourne Citymission had recently received a grant of funds through the Office of Youth for the Youth and Family Response Project (YFRP). This project has now been extended. The aim is to enable young people and their families to access therapeutic interventions such as family mediation, family counselling, individual counselling and family group conferencing to assist young people remain engaged with family and/or significant others and to prevent disconnection and homelessness.

The YFRP covers the outer North and West municipalities of Hume, Hobsons Bay, Brimbank, Wyndham, Melton and Moorabool. The YFRP can be accessed by a range of workers engaged with young people including school welfare co-ordinators, Reconnect workers, outreach workers and other youth specific workers. For more information about the YFRP or to receive a copy of the guidelines and application form, please contact Yin, Brokerage Liaison Worker on 8625 4479.

### **White Paper: Homeless? Naha!**

Well everyone's talking about the white paper, but with the lack of dollar and legislative detail the talk continues to be speculative. Whilst we all wait for budget allocations and program extensions, we can be fairly sure that there will be a focus on early intervention, in their attempt to "turn off the tap". The admittedly 'ambitious', but 'achievable', goals are to "halve overall homelessness" and "offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020" (p17). Especially welcome is the assertions that "homelessness will be considered unacceptable in Australia," this sounds at least like a serious policy shift.

There is a little bit in there for all the target groups with plans to increase support for people with substance use or mental health issues to remain in community housing, an effort to target private rental tenants at-risk of homelessness and a proposal to combat tenancy management regulation and practice. There is a commitment to reducing domestic violence, expanding assertive outreach and a scheme to enhance Centrelink's role in homelessness prevention through a focus on the needs of the young people and families.

“Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do. With no relatives, no support, we've put it in an impossible situation.”

Margaret Mead

The promise of no exits into homelessness from institutional settings has already raised the ire of the AMA and certainly poses a significant challenge, but remains a positive commitment for our sector. It will be interesting to see how the demand for “multiple entry points” where “any entry point will be the right entry point” sits with the Opening Doors model and how private corporations will benefit from the proposed increase in partnerships with government to deliver housing solutions.

Mainstream services, rural and remote areas, a work force strategy, accreditation and standards all get a mention, as does the [Foyer](#) model developed in France.

Reconnect has been identified as a positive model and there is a commitment to provide “additional services for up to 9,000 young people aged 12 to 18 years at risk of homelessness to remain connected with families, education, training and employment” (p30). The focus of these interventions will be on “assisting young people to reconcile with their families, where it is safe and appropriate” (p30). Not quite FRMP’s target group but an acknowledgement of the importance of linking young people back to their family of origin.

What we know in the HSS is that to really drastically limit homelessness we need more beds and more housing units as well as increasing our capacity to support young people and strengthen communities and families. Getting young people to return to the family home (whilst not always possible or appropriate) is one of the clear avenues for reducing housing demand and the central priority of FRMP. They even have a target to improve housing stability and engagement with family, school and education by 25 per cent (p18). Let’s keep our eyes on the detail as they roll-out and hope that the next decade sees a serious reduction in overall homelessness.

#### Recent Feedback from FRMP funded mediation and counselling sessions:

“The young person now has a strong bond with her sister and they keep in contact weekly which has assisted the young person gain confidence and become part of family again.” ----- Southern Directions Youth Service

“Counsellor assisted both mum and the young person to have some honest communication and learn new ways of resolving conflict. They now get along much better; the young person has remained living at home and they have a positive relationship and understand one another's needs now.” ----- St Lukes

“Her family (mum) were able to have an improved awareness and understanding of depression and anxiety and in turn this took the pressure of Mum and client, and helped to repair some of the disconnectedness and shame that both parties were feeling. The young person transitioned from not wanting to leave the house and face rental arrears, to leaving the house voluntarily and seeking assistance about paying back rental arrear and addressing other debt rather than leaving it to the point of no return; just hoping it will disappear” ----- Brophy

“Young person has recently returned home to live and the mediation gave both the opportunity to hear one another and make some positive plans for future to help get along better at home.” -- ---- St Lukes

Feedback from a young person that Brophy supported shows that the scale of communication between the young person and the family has improved from ‘1’ to ‘5’ during the counselling sessions. Young person assessed that “it [counselling sessions] helped, thanks.”

This is the first of four FRMP newsletters for 2009 – if you have suggestions or wish to contribute, we would love to hear from you! Otherwise, stay tuned. When we aren’t out and about, we are on the phone. If we haven’t met you yet hopefully we will soon.

- Team FRMP

