



FAMILY RECONCILIATION AND MEDIATION PROGRAM

NOTES FROM CONSULTATION WITH EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION 4TH MAY 2005

1. **Welcome**
2. **Summary of Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) First Stage Report, & Project i Research**
3. **Introduction of the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program (FRMP)**
 - i) **FRMP Team and their roles**
 - Mandy Baxter – Manager
 - Scott Dutton – Family Mediator & contact person for brokerage
 - Yasmin Thomas – Senior Community Development Worker
 - Linda Schwan – Community Development Worker
 - ii) **Overview of 3 Program objectives:**
 - a) To support the homelessness sector to assist young people, where possible and appropriate, to return home or to reconcile with family / significant others. Reconciliation options include:
 - semi therapeutic interventions, such as counselling to assist a young person to 'make sense of' their experience of homelessness and family breakdown'. These services will be brokered from existing local services and accredited private practitioners where possible.
 - Up to 10 sessions / \$150 per session
 - b) To provide a front-end family mediation service. Within metropolitan Melbourne, Scott Dutton will provide this service. In rural Victoria, local services will be utilised, or where gaps in service provision exist, services will be brokered-in.
 - c) To establish pilot programs to support those young people who have experienced episodes of chronic / longer- term homelessness. This objective relates to the first two objectives, and will come from the first year learnings.

3. **Group discussions regarding current use of Mediation within EMR:**

i) Mediation Successes

- Agency assessment process includes discussion of mediation as an option
- No waiting list – 24/48 hour response
- No cost to participants
- A structured process including co-mediation model in a neutral environment
- Mediation can sit within the SAAP case management process
- Outcomes from mediation include young people returning to family home, reconnecting to family, opening communication with family, understanding people's points of view, taking responsibility, and sticking to agreements
- Integrated on-site services
- Skill sharing between workers, capacity building between agencies

ii) Mediation Challenges

- Getting all parties to the table
- Parenting skills
- Power imbalances between parent and young person
- Breaking patterns within the family
- Cross program work within agencies
- Funding
- Consequences of participants not following through with agreements
- Difficulty in reaching a win/win situation

4. **Group discussions regarding current use of Reconciliation within EMR:**

i) Reconciliation Successes

- Development of parenting programs
- Counselling service available
- Focus within support work role includes advocacy and liaison between young people and their parents
- Exploration of extended family supports
- Adolescent support programs
- Mediation and Diversionary program
- A range of options are available to the sector that are client driven and holistic
- Young people being able to communicate with a significant other
- Starting process of making contact
- Starting process of reconciling different points of view, that some things are outside of your control, being able to accept this, and being able to 'move on'

ii) Reconciliation Challenges

- Non engagement
- Relationship dynamics existing between parents of young person
- Worker knowledge and understanding of resources
- Lack of funding

- Front door model places greater emphasis on assisting those clients weighted as more at-risk
- Maximising opportunities for change
- Lack of appropriate reconciliation services for young people at-risk
- It is a potentially long process requiring a level of commitment – no easy answer or quick fix
- Parents playing each other off & not being child/young person centred
- Difficulties of coping with change

5. Group discussions regarding Training needs within EMR:

- a) Specialist rather than generalist training including:
 1. Grief and loss
 2. Mediation & conflict resolution specific to young people
 3. Relationships
 4. Family Life Cycle
 5. Multi cultural awareness
 6. Same sex couples
- b) Inter-organisational training
- c) Overview of engaging with the young person and family
- d) Held quarterly and regionally

6. Actions to be followed up:

- a) The FRMP Team will follow up with Jane Harrop (Manager, Anchor) and Noelene Greene regarding the establishment of a peer support Network of Family Reconciliation and Mediation workers within the Eastern Region.
- b) The FRMP Team will follow up with Sue Carlile (Manager, FAN) and Kerry Williamson (Team Leader, REFS) regarding potential for partnerships between agencies within the Eastern Region. These partnerships may include secondary consultations, or skill sharing between SAAP workers from one agency, and Mediation /Reconciliation workers from another
- c) Family mediation and reconciliation services will commit to giving a presentation at a future EMR Homelessness Network Meeting.