



FAMILY RECONCILIATION AND MEDIATION PROGRAM

NOTES FROM CONSULTATION WITH NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION 24TH 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 counseling 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 utilized, 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 learning's.

4. **Brainstorming 'Reconciliation'**

- Acceptance
- Communication
- Understanding
- Moving-on
- forgiveness
- awareness (of where others sit)
- needs of both parties
- voluntary (not forced, must be ready)
- temporary (doesn't have to be permanent – moving back home can be a trial)
- compromise
- consideration
- developmental process (could be young person or within the context of their family)
- understanding family history / family of origin
- patience
- hard (any type of process requiring reflection is difficult, especially relating to past experiences)
- when 1 person is ready but not the other
- trust (many young people do not trust adults)

5. **Reconciliation interventions currently used by SAAP workers?**

- Giving young people an opportunity to tell their story, & workers acknowledging that history
- Giving young people respite / time out
- Asking about family contact during intake and assessment – incorporating family members into young persons homelessness experience (especially connections with siblings and extended family)
- Allowing young people to feel connected with previous supports (including other young people, support workers)
- Acting as a support person facilitating access arrangements between family members
- Actively assisting young person to make contact with family and work with family
- Negotiating with & explaining a young person's situation, to their family
- Interstate negotiations – eg holiday, phone contact with family
- Refer on to a specialist service eg counseling & support
- It's not just about housing because a lot of young people will not return home, it's about working toward reconciliation in an achievable and sustainable way (eg having lunch, telephone contact)

- During assessment, worker makes judgement regarding reconciliation: how achievable? what intervention is appropriate? Not just focused on 'outcomes'
- Holistic and flexible practices so that young people can sustain their housing

4. **Difficulties with reconciliation interventions / services**

- 3 month waiting list at local health centers and other adolescent specialists is a problem
- There is a hierarchy of needs. During initial crisis contact with young people it can be difficult to have a conversation about family. The focus is on young people's immediate needs (eg drug and alcohol, mental health, sexual assault). Family conflict is not worth bringing up during crisis, but rather needs to be followed up later
- Pressures on programs to perform according to targets / statistics
- Structural pressures - paper trail of services available for young people
- Lack of resources
- In crisis work, some parents don't want to discuss, they just want the young person "out"

5. **Brokerage**

- Examples of discretionary funding
- Examples of successful reconciliation applications

Suggestion that the word 'brokerage' is unclear – possible to use another word such as 'available funds', 'money', 'resourcing'

FRMP to follow up with required minimum qualifications of counselors & therapists

6. **How can the FRMP support the work of your agency and the NMR?**

- Produce a Directory / Database of adolescent specific counselors available to workers on FRMP website
- Need reputable and available workers – minimum qualifications of workers
- Stop gap / immediate counseling to support young people whilst waiting to access other services such as Reconnect, intra-agency counselors for individual and family
- Funding to assist with young person who has no idea about the history of their family but would like to trace their past (ie: young people who have been in foster care). Administration support to collate their history. Funding could come under discretionary funding?

7. **Training Needs**

- Blended families
- CALD
- Alcohol and other drugs – many young people ostracized from families because they won't have contact until they are 'clean'. Skills that assist workers working with young people re prejudices (for workers, and young people's families)
- Drugs and mental illness – dual diagnosis
- Grief and loss
- Same sex issues – families not accepting

Training modules may include certification

8. **Website**

All information available online

9. **Publicity Material**

Stickers, posters, fridge magnets

10. **Closing Summary**

- In the NMR there is a significant wait time for family workers, counselors etc
- Gap in knowledge of / availability of appropriate practitioners
- Stop gap / immediate counseling needed to support young people whilst waiting to access other services such as Reconnect, intra agency counselors for individual and family.
- It is important that these needs are documented and identified by the DHS

11. **Actions**

- FRMP Team to follow up with required minimum qualifications of counselors
- FRMP Team to look at application form regarding process of estimating the number of sessions that the client needs
- FRMP Team to talk to pilot program regarding training provided from same sex initiative
- Notes from today's session to be distributed to all participants and services within the NMR