



## **FAMILY RECONCILIATION AND MEDIATION PROGRAM**

### **NOTES FROM CONSULTATION WITH SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION 1<sup>ST</sup> JUNE 2005**

1. **Welcome**
2. **Apologies:** Susan Fallow (SMR Network Coordinator), Springvale Youth Housing Support Service, Sacred Heart Mission, Inner South Community Health Service,
3. **Summary of Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) First Stage Report, & Project i Research**
4. **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.

5. **Brainstorming 'Reconciliation'**

- Reconnecting
- Clients having a check on what's happening in their family
- Clients exploring where they've been - some may not have acknowledged why they are where they are
- Respect
- Readiness - voluntary, open and safe
- Client seeing an advantage or gain to the process (eg win/win situation)
- Client responsibility & ownership of what happened
- Recognizing what links you have with the community you came from
- Contact (eg: phone, face to face)
- Reframe the context of their life / past, so it is clearer to move forward, and within this, not push issues to the side, yet accept it
- Knowing it does not need to be a perfect situation
- A time for healing, peace and hope
- An opportunity to do things differently
- Be mindful of where it could lead, needs to be a process / be ready but also an understanding of this and how it's going to be – be with oneself (eg: through counseling)

6. **Reconciliation interventions currently used by SAAP workers**

- Reframing, challenging and questioning the perception that society and family is 'perfect'
- Allowing young people to feel safe to express themselves
- Identifying young people's emotional strengths
- Holistic approach and assessment
- Role modeling within the support relationship with the young person. Instilling values of trust, respect, equality & boundaries (eg: young people offering to do dishes so let them)
- Wilderness therapy in a temporary community. Young people told that they will be challenged during the wilderness trip, so it's not a holiday - everyday there is work
- Encouraging young people to write letters or keep a journal
- Try to get young people to call parent/s - for some this is a starting point for reconciling
- Encouraging and planning contact between client and their siblings who are still living at home – maintaining these links are important
- Connect young people to mentors re: employment issues and community connections
- Sometimes SAAP is the safest place where kids can learn to be inter-dependent
- Assess the timing of intervention

## 7. **Constraints with reconciliation interventions / services**

- During a period of crisis there is often no clarity regarding when it is an appropriate time to begin a journey toward reconciliation. For example, when a young person is living in crisis accommodation, there is only a 4 – 6 week period to build relationship with the young person, and establish why they are homeless. Reconciliation with family is not high on the priority scale
- SAAP workers are not funded to do reconciliation interventions.
- Domestic violence and sexual assault are common issues, which warrant priority when working with clients
- Confidentiality can be a constraint. To begin reconciliation, workers need to formal permission from the client (signed release of information form)
- It is important to gauge whether the young person's family is ready for reconciliation. Or are they too angry to work through issues?
- Rejection can be reinforced for young person if they are not ready (risk, strengths and timing again), so planning important
- Family can often see SAAP worker as siding with the young person - need another party involved to prevent this occurring
- Referrals to counselors – waiting list a constraint leaving young people to become ineligible (some move areas, for example)
- Difficult when young people is made to be too dependent on family and person does not know how to live on their own - sometimes the dependency transfers to SAAP

## 8. **What is Mediation?**

- Another tool that can be used within the context of reconciliation
- Symbolically better for all parties involved if the mediator is neutral

## 9. **Brokerage**

- Example of discretionary funding  
A rural youth refuge identified that they have access to a bush house, to be utilized by young people and their families working toward family reconciliation. Specialists, including family mediators, family therapists and individual counselors visit the young person and their family whilst staying at the house. The only cost that cannot be financed over these couple of days is food for the young person and their family. FRMP agrees that as the family are engaging in a reconciliation process, discretionary funds may be accessed to cover these costs.

➤ Examples of successful reconciliation applications

*Example 1*

- **Service accessing brokerage:** Youth Refuge
- **Funding requested:** Reconciliation – counseling
- **Details of young person:** 17 year old male living in a refuge. Requesting individual counseling around issues of grief and loss, and assistance with relationship with father and stepmother.
- **Gaps in services:** No services available
- **Own provider / assistance:** Worker has own contact to provide counselling
- **Funds used for:** Assessment & then family counselling with specialist
- **Sessions requested:** 10 (3 for assessment)
- **Cost:** \$150 / session

*Example 2*

- **Service accessing brokerage:** Youth Refuge
- **Funding requested:** Reconciliation – counseling
- **Details of young person:** 16 year old female living in a refuge. Requesting individual counseling to assist with dealing with issues related to her family, including trauma, protective services involvement, relationships with her siblings, refugee & CLD considerations.
- **Gaps in services:** No services currently available
- **Own provider / assistance:** Worker has own contact to provide counselling
- **Funds used for:** Individual and family counselling
- **Sessions requested:** 10
- **Cost:** \$150 / session

*Example 3*

- **Service accessing brokerage:** SAAP service
- **Funding requested:** Reconciliation – counseling
- **Details of young person:** 22 year old male supported by SAAP. Wanting to reconcile with family and siblings. Individual counseling requested, possibly followed by request for family mediation.
- **Gaps in services:** There are services but long waiting lists.
- **Own provider / assistance:** Worker has own contact – young person has had contact with the counsellor in the past.
- **Funds used for:** Family counselling
- **Sessions requested:** 10
- **Cost:** \$80 / session

*Question*

- How is FRMP assessing practitioners as appropriate?

The FRMP Team are currently investigating how counselors & private practitioners will be assessed as appropriate for working with young people. This process currently includes a combination of qualifications, work experience, and word-of-mouth.

It is acknowledged that some young women will require female counselors and mediators.

10. **How can you / your agency use this money to maintain or improve what you are currently doing with particular clients?**

- Discussions about reconciliation with clients will assist the process of engagement with young people. The importance of establishing why the young person is linked with SAAP is important to mention. Discussions about reconciliation early on may “plant the seed” for a time when they are ready (ie: maybe no one has said that before)
- Worker identified that one of her female clients has incorporated contact with her mum into her case plan. Young woman is not quite ready to begin this process, but may be able to engage in counseling before this occurs. Worker has links with a good psychologist who has worked predominantly with young people. Worker identified that she will access brokerage money for this intervention to occur.

*Question*

- Can FRMP be flexible with age range of clients (ie: those clients older than 25yrs)? One worker identified that their clients are more often ready to engage with reconciliation because they are heading toward the age of 30. For 25-30 year olds there is often reflection about their own parenting also.

FRMP acknowledges the difficulty of age restrictions, and will try to be as flexible as possible with all applications. FRMP will feed this information back to the Department. FRMP acknowledges the importance of this and will follow up.

11. **Training Needs**

- Assessment - there is currently no practice framework around reconciliation within SAAP. As a result, workers don't know how to approach this. The lack of assessment skills may result in potential re-traumatizing of clients. Training around intake and assessment is necessary.
- Regular (twice per year) and made available to each worker and not only one worker, (esp. if training is free of charge). This enables coordinators to encourage additional staff to attend.
- Venue not in city, keep in the region
- In-house
- Use website to broadcast updates regarding training

## **Training Tools**

- Perhaps a statewide family reconciliation proforma could be developed - to follow on from training around reconciliation practice frameworks
- Establishment of a practice kit that provides a basic / brief understanding of reconciliation models, including resources

### 12. **Website**

All information available online

### 13. **Publicity Material**

- Brochures, stickers, posters, fridge magnets, and flyers for young people will be available soon

#### *Question*

- Is there something available for parents? It would be good if workers could give parents something to read and take away in order to consider mediation.

FRMP Team to consider an information flyer that can be given to parents/family re mediation

### 14. **Closing Summary**

### 15. **Actions**

- FRMP Team to follow up with required minimum qualifications of counselors
- FRMP Team to investigate possibility of a statewide proforma for reconciliation as an assessment form
- FRMP Team to consider the possibility of a Reconciliation kit available to SAAP workers
- FRMP Team to consider an information flyer that can be given to parents/family re mediation
- Notes from today's session to be distributed to all participants and services within the SMR
- FRMP will feed this information back to the Department.