



Australian Government

Attorney-General's Department

Civil Justice Division

Questionnaire findings on services for children

At the Family Relationship Services Program conference held in Melbourne in July 2007, a questionnaire was distributed by the Attorney-General's Department. This was part of an information gathering exercise to gain a better understanding of support and counselling services for children whose parents have separated or who are in the process of separating.

The following information provides a snapshot of responses received. Fifty six questionnaires were received with 50 respondents indicating they provided services to children whose parents have separated. Of all responses received 36 services had the capacity to provide individual counselling and 29 services also provided a range of groups to support children.

Many respondents indicated that services for children in the younger age brackets (ages 0 to 5) were a highly specialised field and they had limited capacity to provide services to this age group. Some examples of services provided for younger children included play, art therapy and occasional inclusion, as part of a sibling group in family therapy.

Respondents provided a wider range of services for older children (from ages 5 to 18) including a range of individual counselling and group sessions to assist children with issues relating to loss and grief and coping with changes to their family. For this age group there were options of attending individual counselling or group sessions in a school or other service setting. Twenty nine respondents indicated they also offered child-inclusive practises as part of a wider intervention for families. Many respondents also indicated they used interactive websites and helplines as tools for this older age group.

The capacity of services to support children and the need for multi-skilled practitioners to provide a flexible and responsive service for families and children was noted in many responses. This capacity was linked to services being able to offer full-time employment to staff in regional areas. The need to support and train these staff to develop their skills across a range of areas was identified. This included skills specifically relating to children, such as child consultations, child inclusive practice and counselling specifically for children.

Training in child development, in addition to tertiary qualifications in the fields of social work or psychology, was identified as a base level of skill for working with children by most respondents. Suggestions included the importance of ongoing clinical supervision to ensure that clinical work with children is delivered within a developmental framework and the provision of professional training opportunities to support staff to further develop their specialist skills.

Suggestions of how to change organisational culture to be child-friendly were also included in many responses. Ideas on the provision of resources to create child-friendly premises, such as furniture, games and play equipment for children, were given and the consideration of how the building design and foyer areas could be made more welcoming for children were also made.

The Attorney-General's Department would like to thank the many people who took time to respond to the questionnaire as we gained some valuable insights into current service provision across Australia.