Primary Dispute Resolution

PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

A Report on Partnerships
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Contributions by
The Seven Partnership Pilot Projects

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Penter, C., Öther-Gee, B., Thompson, J & Gatley, L. (2001), Literature Review and Supplementary Paper for Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Regional Coordination as an Approach to Maximising Service Delivery in Domestic Violence, report commissioned by the West Australian Domestic Violence Prevention Unit.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY
This report describes the experiences of seven Partnership Projects funded for two years in 2001 by the Australian Government. The aim of the projects was to develop integrated and collaborative approaches for the early and effective use of Primary Dispute Resolution (PDR) services in the community. The focus of the partnership projects was on cooperation at the local level between the agencies and professions that deal with family law disputes. Funding was not available for ‘core’ service activities. However, projects were expected to lead to sustainable models of collaborative service delivery, which may guide future policy decisions.

The funding of these projects reflected the Government’s commitment to increasing the availability of alternatives to litigation for family law disputes, and to providing effective support to separating families.

The seven projects selected all had the potential:

1. to provide local solutions to gaps in post-separation service delivery
2. for application in other locations or contexts

The projects were conducted at:

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PDR is the terminology introduced in the 1995 amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 to emphasise the central importance of alternatives to litigation as a means of resolving family disputes. The Act does not, however, define ‘primary dispute resolution’ or ‘mediation’ or ‘counselling’ or other forms of dispute resolution used in the family law context. Within the field, alternative dispute resolution or ‘ADR’ is used to describe a wide range of dispute resolution services, generally involving third party neutral assistance to negotiations. In this paper, PDR refers to the wide range of processes people use to resolve conflicts and sort out differences when they wish to protect the relationship of the parties rather than become adversaries or pursue litigation. These processes range from everyday problem-solving approaches to resolving conflicting needs, views or desires, to more formal non-adversarial processes such as mediation. Definitions of ADR can be found at www.ag.gov.au/adr/Definitions.html.
Five of the projects proposed to develop and implement a centralised referral system for their region. The Hobart Project trialled a referral approach in which clients of the Child Support Agency were referred directly to the local office of Relationships Australia. The Melbourne Project involved the development of a new model of therapeutic mediation using clinicians from two different disciplines and two different agencies. Full details of each project, as provided by the lead agency, are also available in the Appendices.

The providers funded under this initiative were expected to report on the extent to which the project:

1. increased the extent and effectiveness of inter-agency and cross-disciplinary collaboration at a local or regional level and, as a result,
2. increased separated and separating families’ use of appropriate dispute resolution processes.

The partnership projects provided a series of reports over the length of their implementation that reflected their achievements and lessons learned along the way. These reports have provided a rich record of the steps and processes worked through by each partnership, as well as the challenges they encountered. The reports also describe issues that were identified with the benefit of hindsight. Some of the projects included in their project budgets an allocation for external evaluation and this has resulted in particularly comprehensive reports for those projects.

This report describes both the generic knowledge gained through these projects about the processes of forming collaborative partnerships and their specific experience of the value of collaboration in the family law system. In particular, it describes the various processes that could be undertaken by groups aiming for coordinated service delivery between agencies in a specific region that assist families during and after separation.

This is particularly relevant to the vision of an integrated family law system described in the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group Report (2001), *Out Of The Maze - Pathways to the Future for Families Experiencing Separation*, pp13-16. The Report recommends an investment in coordination mechanisms and system wide strategies. The Government Response in May 2003 to the Pathways Report supports the development of further local networks of post-separation service providers with the aim of more integrated service delivery and better referrals.

Collaboration can be regarded as a continuum and the partnership projects moved along this continuum as they developed, although some had more success in reaching a true level of collaboration than others. The ‘Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning’ model developed by Bruce Tuckerman (1965)* is a useful model for understanding and describing the dynamic nature of groups and the stages or phases in their ‘life cycle’. It has been used in this report to describe the developmental phases of the partnership projects.

In the forming phase, the seven partnership projects were challenged to propose and refine a common vision, and then determine how they would work together to achieve it. Individual and group roles and responsibilities were not always clear, so the initial tasks of the forming phase were focused on establishing these and defining and refining the group’s purpose, goals and objectives and clarifying any assumptions made during the earlier tendering phase. It was a time when there were also many questions to be asked and answered.

All the agencies involved agreed that consideration of context was extremely important in the forming phase. Some of the contextual factors identified were legislation, policy and organisational and systemic structure, the local or regional context and the professional and practice cultures of a particular sector. In this case the ‘sector’ was those services/individuals that respond to parents planning or experiencing separation, and the children affected by that separation. If a group fails to consider these contexts, it can risk not anticipating the possible effect on their ability to achieve the project outcomes.

As the partnerships entered the storming phase described by Tuckerman, the dynamics of conflict and competition began to emerge. The apparent clarity of the purpose of the forming phase came into question as a result of the changing dynamics and potentially divisive issues that arose during this storming phase.

One issue that emerged was the importance of clear communication. Most communication difficulties related to the many assumptions made, and the limited mechanisms in place for clarifying whether these assumptions were in fact correct. Another issue was that not all agencies could contribute to the partnership at the same level, often because the impact on staff resources varied between agencies. The prior ownership of particular resources such as group programs also created problems in some groups, as staff were not always as committed to the partnership processes as their managers and resented sharing what they saw as agency or even personal materials with ‘competitors’.

What is important during the storming phase is finding creative and effective mechanisms for managing conflict and tension as they arise. Developing formal structures such as clear dispute management processes or grievance procedures can assist partnerships to resolve any relationship tensions or difficult issues.

The norming phase is characterised by agreement and consensus being achieved in an environment that shows clear signs of commitment, unity and mutual support. Generally, conflicts and misunderstandings have been resolved and roles and responsibilities clarified. The mechanisms and processes developed during the storming phase are formalised and consolidated. This is when what may not have been clear before for partnership members now makes sense, and the ‘bigger picture’ has begun to unfold and become more visible and viable.
A major influence on the success of the norming phase is the establishment of effective leadership, which in turn affects both group dynamics and future direction. Good leadership will help partners focus on achieving the purpose of the partnership as effectively as possible.

A performing partnership has an established identity and a consolidated shared vision. Task-focused and constructive work has moved ahead and the partnerships have started to demonstrate results. The PDR partnership projects had developed visions that were goal-oriented and supported through sound problem solving that had allowed the partnerships to become increasingly productive. In this phase, there was evidence of collective pride in the successes of the partnership work.

Disagreements and conflict still occurred at times for some, but the partnerships had successfully used the dispute management processes established earlier. If those processes were not in place then the group had agreed to change structures and processes to accommodate unanticipated needs so that any new or unexpected challenges could be resolved constructively and positively and not interfere with productivity. An atmosphere of mutual respect and support had generally been created by this stage, and this was underpinned by a high motivation to achieve the partnership’s shared goals.

If the forming and storming phases were not successfully managed, then partners found that they needed to return to these phases in order to adequately perform as a partnership. Once the groups had moved through the earlier phases, it was easier to begin to achieve their desired outcomes. Successes that were features of the overall vision were generally achieved during this performing phase of the partnership projects.

There was a strong focus in the projects on the development of effective referral systems, which can be central to the development of an integrated system. Other activities included the development of a new therapeutic model, the development and distribution of resources and wide community consultation. Issues identified through these activities included information delivery, assessment issues, ongoing support and data bases. In particular, a number of projects reported that there had been significant numbers of clients presenting with issues of family violence and some of the projects had been unprepared for that event. Therefore, these partnerships acknowledged that it was critical for future partnership projects to have strategies in place for responding appropriately to the presence of violence.

The partner agencies demonstrated significant commitment and ability to evolve to the point of seeing their outcomes and goals realised. While the seven partnership projects described in this report have all completed the trial phase, some have moved into additional joint ventures, building on and further refining the strengths and systems developed during the initial project or extending the project network to include other relevant stakeholders. This ongoing collaborative work will contribute to further integration of the family law system in their region. The reports on each project demonstrated the value of the partnership experience and described the many lessons learned from participating in collaborative work.
In summary, the seven partnership projects demonstrated the complexities of interagency work recognised in the literature, and there was acknowledgement by the partners of the time and resource commitment required to ensure that collaborative efforts achieve the desired outcomes. The partnership projects have paved the way for other partnerships that may embark on similar collaborative enterprises and have contributed to improved outcomes for families by working towards an integrated family law system.

As part of this report, ‘Collaboration Worklists’ have been developed for use by groups entering new family pathways networks and developing integrated approaches to service delivery. These worklists have been informed by the literature and the lessons learned during the partnership projects. The aim of the worklists is to foster an environment of reflective practice and to assist emerging or ongoing groups with the processes of collaboration, the development of integration initiatives and the promotion of primary dispute resolution as an alternative to litigation.

In this report, reflections and comments from the projects are shown in italics and the worklists are featured both at the end of the section describing each phase and together at Appendix 8.
BACKGROUND

Many separated parents need assistance to meet their present and ongoing responsibilities to provide care and guidance to their children. For many parents, post-separation is a crisis that requires a holistic approach from service providers. The ‘family law system’, on the other hand, is made up of many discrete and disconnected services such as legal advice, financial or emotional support, or conflict resolution assistance.

The Australian Government, through the Attorney-General’s Department, funds community organisations to help separating families resolve legal problems without going to court. Separating families can access primary dispute resolution (PDR) services including family relationship counselling, mediation and conciliation services, children’s contact services and a contact orders program. This reflects the Government’s commitment to increasing the availability of alternatives to litigation for family law disputes, and to providing effective support to separating families, especially helping families with the care of their children.

THE REPORT

This report describes the experiences of seven Partnership Projects funded for two years in 2001 by the Australian Government. The aim of the projects was to develop integrated and collaborative approaches for the early and effective use of PDR services in the community. The focus of the partnership projects was on cooperation at the local level between the agencies and professions that deal with family law disputes. This was in line with the Report of the Family Pathways Advisory Group Report and the Government’s Response in May 2003, which supported the development of further local networks of post-separation service providers with the aim of more integrated service delivery and better referrals.

In addition to the contribution made by the projects to the development of an integrated family law system, a major focus of this report is the extent to which each partnership project moved towards a state of true collaboration. The development of groups and collaborative partnerships usually occurs through a sequence of relatively predictable ‘phases’ or ‘stages’. The ‘Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning’ model developed by Bruce Tuckerman (1965) is useful for understanding and describing the dynamic nature of groups and the ‘life cycle’ of their evolution. It has been used here as a framework to describe the seven partnership projects.
The conclusions have also been condensed into a set of ‘Collaboration Worklists’ for use by both newly formed partnerships entering the various developmental phases and established family pathways networks developing integrated approaches to service delivery.

It is intended that these worklists could guide processes of collaboration, development of integration initiatives, and the promotion of primary dispute resolution as an alternative to litigation. The worklists are also intended to stimulate discussion and reflection, and to assist the processes of partnership formation and future service delivery. Therefore, the worklists are presented and posed mainly as a series of questions that groups can use in relation to the tasks they may be undertaking. The information and examples provided throughout the report may also provide a useful resource that group members can consult when similar challenges are encountered in future work. Each worklist appears at the end of the section describing that phase of collaboration. In addition, the full set of worklists is repeated at Appendix 8.
A brief overview of each of the seven projects is provided here. More detailed information written by the lead agencies can be found in the attached Appendices.

THE ADELAIDE PROJECT

Anglicare South Australia, in partnership with Westside Legal Inc and Flinders University, used a casework model to provide greater assistance to separating families than had been the case until then. A practitioner-coordinator was employed to work with individuals and families and refer them to appropriate other services in the community or at Anglicare. In essence, the practitioner-coordinator helped to construct, together with parents and possibly children, a package of potential support, advice and intervention aimed at the multiplicity of issues and problems confronting family members.

The project also began with an agreement between Anglicare SA, Westside Community Lawyers (WCL) and The Australian Centre for Community Services Research (ACCSR) to work together to develop a program which could best meet the needs of separated families in their efforts to resolve conflict. The new program became known as: The Separated Persons Information and Assessment Service (SPIARS).

The proposed outcomes were to:

- establish collaboration between providers of primary dispute resolution and other post separation services through the use of protocols for inter-service referral processes
- improve family wellbeing of clients using a new case management system
- implement timely and appropriate service improvements in response to evaluation and feedback
- make relevant Internet and hard copy information available and accessible to post-separation families or individuals, and
- produce a “Handbook” containing clearly presented guidelines, protocols and explanation of how the model implemented for this Project could be replicated and adapted for other locations.

THE BALLARAT PROJECT

In partnership with Relationships Australia, Centacare and the Central Highlands Community Legal Centre and in collaboration with all actual and potential referral sources in the Ballarat region, Child & Family Services Ballarat (CAFS) established a no-cost, single point of entry for information and referral to services for people seeking assistance post-separation. Post separation services could still be accessed directly from agency providers or through the Separation Resource Service.
The Proposed outcomes were to:

- encourage people to use post-separation services by normalising their use and by demystifying issues such as cost for service, confidentiality and privacy, frequency and length of counselling sessions
- facilitate more informed choices by clients with regard to service options available, and ensure that clients feel free to access the service option/s of their choice
- guide or enable people to access the most appropriate available service for their needs post separation
- become more streamlined and effective by the use of referral protocols, including the transfer of basic information in a standard format
- individually tailor services to meet the specific needs of people with significant disability or disadvantage, and
- make recommendations for further development of the PDR service system.

For the purpose of tracking clients of the service, CAFS kept records of:

- referral source
- presenting main issue
- referral made
- results of follow-up client contact.

THE CANBERRA PROJECT

Centacare, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, was funded as the lead agency of the Partnerships Project in order to develop a collaborative partnership between Centacare, Relationships Australia, Marymead Child and Family Centre and the Family Court of Australia, Canberra Registry. The Canberra project was funded to improve client access to PDR services, and to increase awareness of PDR services particularly among PDR professionals and other agencies. The partnership project aimed to facilitate increased collaboration between PDR service providers in the ACT region.

\* The partnership was originally established with funding under the Rural and Regional PDR Program.
The proposed outcomes were to:

- develop and distribute educational and counselling resources that inform the community about PDR and raise awareness of the issues and options for separating families
- identify gaps in PDR service provision
- increase access to PDR methods and services
- establish a comprehensive and effective referral network (pathways between PDR service providers and major stakeholders), and
- develop protocols between PDR service providers and between major stakeholders and PDR service providers.

**THE COFFS HARBOUR PROJECT**

Interrelate Coffs Harbour developed and operated an Information, Referral and Support Service for Separating Families (IRSSSF) in the region, in partnership with the School of Law and Justice, Southern Cross University, the Family Court, Legal Aid, Centrelink, the Child Support Agency, Community Justice Centres, TAFE NSW, and a range of other relevant community based organisations (see appendices for the complete list).

The proposed outcomes were to:

- collaborate with dispute resolution services, points of first contact and other services relevant to the needs of separated/separating families in the region
- provide the clients of the project’s service with the information they needed to be better able to choose the most appropriate way to manage the conflict with their ex-partner
- refer the clients of the project’s service to the type of/particular service that was best able to help them manage their conflict with their ex-partner
- assist clients to access the service they needed as early as was practicable to help them manage the conflict with their ex-partner, and
- support those clients to make best use of the service to which they were referred.

The Coffs Harbour Project aimed to increase the use of PDR services by separated parents and develop a service delivery model for information, referral and support for families experiencing separation that may be suitable for sustainable and collaborative service delivery in similar centres around Australia. The project promoted early use of PDR services, increasing parents’ understanding of children’s needs during and after separation and facilitating early assistance to parents to manage difficulties in a child-focused way. The project has evaluated the protocols and referral mechanisms developed between the providers of PDR and other services to which clients were referred.
THE HOBART PROJECT

This partnerships project between Relationships Australia (RA) and the Child Support Agency (CSA) provided a unique opportunity to combine the expertise of a community service provider and a major gatekeeper for the family law system. The resulting collaboration helped increase the use of PDR services for separating and separated parents for the duration of the project through two different activities:

- a new service that identified an effective interface between CSA new client teams and local or regional RA offices and was known as the Direct Client Transfer Service (DCTS), and
- a new product in the form of a Self-Help Quiz (SHQ)

The new service worked as follows:

1. CSA clients identified at risk of conflictual behaviour were offered an opportunity by the CSA staff to talk to an RA intake counsellor, and their agreement obtained either to:
   - be immediately transferred/switched to the RA intake counsellor, or
   - have their telephone contact details forwarded to the RA intake counsellor within 24 hours.

2. Upon taking the referral the RA intake counsellor was to:
   - do a preliminary assessment and provide information about PDR services appropriate to client’s needs, and
   - make an appropriate appointment.

3. The client attended the appointment as agreed (these were tracked until end of project).

The aim of the Self-Help Quiz, presented in conjunction with information sheets, was to direct separated parents to seek support from appropriate PDR services.
THE MELBOURNE PROJECT

The Family Mediation Centre (FMC) was working in partnership with Relationships Australia Victoria (RA Vic) to develop a new service delivery model.

The Melbourne Project aimed to generate more opportunities for improved and more sustainable child-focused parenting agreements between separated or separating parents who accessed the services currently offered by FMC and RA, by:

- merging the existing processes of mediation and insight-oriented counselling to provide a seamless, integrated intervention, and
- developing collaborative systems between FMC and RA to provide and support that intervention.

The proposed outcomes were to:

- develop a new service delivery model which integrated both mediation and counselling interventions to better assist post-separation families achieve sustainable co-parenting arrangements, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of this inter-agency collaboration, making recommendations in relation to:
  - professional training
  - client outcomes
  - professional methodology
  - client intake and record systems
  - approaches to referral of clients, and
  - agency culture

The project had the dual aims of testing out a new model of service delivery while simultaneously establishing and maintaining a collaborative relationship and identifying the key features for the success of such a relationship. This second aspect was fully tested by the factors surrounding the establishment of the project. A review of the intervention model developed in this project can be found in Smyth, B. & Moloney, L. (2003) *Therapeutic divorce mediation: Strengths, limitations and future directions.* *Journal of family Studies*, 9 (2), 161-186.
THE PERTH PROJECT

Relationships Australia Western Australia [RAWA] developed partnerships with four Federal and State agencies that had outcomes in ‘the best interests of the child’ as a fundamental tenet of their mission statement. These agencies were Legal Aid WA, the Family Court of WA, the WA Department of Education and the Child Support Agency.

The purpose of the partnerships was to provide a seamless service for clients between each of the agencies and the PDR services of RAWA and in doing so to increase the availability, usage and range of PDR services for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict for separating and separated parents.

The partnerships project built upon a self-funded project, a pilot program known as Family Court Legal Referral Program (FCLRP). FCLRP provides prompt, professional, child-focused therapeutic interventions for separating families who may be referred by judges, legal representatives or Children’s Separate Representatives.

The proposed outcomes were to:

- develop interagency protocols
- exchange training between RAWA and each agency
- develop new tools to empower clients to participate further in selection of appropriate and timely PDR services
- increase the use of RAWA PDR services
- monitor and evaluate the Project through quantitative and qualitative data collection, and
- develop low maintenance partnerships.
Collaboration has been defined as a ‘mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organisations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone’. At the same time, there is a common view in the literature that collaboration is not only a relationship, but a process and that ‘multi-agency work can be understood as different points along a continuum or progression of relationships’.

The process of collaboration is challenging and its realities and complexities are not always well understood by those entering into partnerships. None of those closely associated with these partnerships projects would disagree. However, the very process of collaboration has given them a good understanding of the challenges and benefits and their experience will inform the developing ‘blueprints’ for this work.

A key feature of the literature is the recognition that interagency work is rarely straightforward. The literature increasingly acknowledges that interagency work is usually highly complicated, seldom predictable or static and is influenced by an array of policy, institutional, local, historical, agency and individual factors.

One model, proposed by Taylor-Powell, Rossing and Geran (1998), distinguishes between 5 processes, each involving higher levels of integration and more complex structures. The model suggests that each process requires a different structure and has a different purpose, as shown in the Table below:

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<th>Integration</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Informal, network, round table</td>
<td>Dialogue common understanding; information clearinghouse; explore common interest conflicting interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Informal relationships, support group</td>
<td>Mutual exchange to support each other’s efforts; build mutual trust</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>Taskforce, committee, forum, council, alliance</td>
<td>Match and coordinate needs, resources and activities; limit duplication of services; adjust current activities for more efficient and effective results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Partnership consortium, coalition</td>
<td>Link resources to help parties achieve joint goals; discover shared interests; build trust by working together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Develop shared vision; build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities, share resources</td>
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This principle of progression through the stages of a partnership is echoed by other writers:

Inter-organisational relationships become more sophisticated, complex, and effective for problem solving through progression from cooperation to coordination to collaboration. Arriving at the maximum commitment of collaboration can take considerable time to develop, particularly if there is no formal mandate, such as government support through formal policy and/or funding.

The development of groups and collaborative partnerships usually occurs through a sequence of relatively predictable ‘phases’ or ‘stages’. One of the most well known models for this is the ‘Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing’ model developed by Bruce Tuckerman (1965).” It is a useful framework for understanding and describing the dynamic nature of groups and the ‘life cycle’ of their evolution. This report uses the Tuckerman model to demonstrate and highlight the processes, as well as both the common and unique experiences, that the seven partnership project groups encountered as they moved through the ‘phases’ and ‘stages’ of this model, some more successfully than others. Below is a brief explanation that describes the key identifying features of each ‘phase’ of the Tuckerman group development model.

**FORMING**

Individual and group roles and responsibilities are not always clear when a partnership is forming. Members are becoming acquainted with one another in an environment that generally has a polite atmosphere. Sometimes this is accompanied by an underlying anxiety as members try to determine what behaviour and aims will be acceptable to the group.

The primary tasks of the forming phase are to establish the group’s purpose, goals and objectives. This is a time when there are lots of questions to be asked and answered, and it is during this ‘honeymoon’ phase that members tend to ignore processes. If a group leader has been appointed, the members tend to look to them for guidance and direction. Members may look to the leader and each other for clarity on what the rules and procedures will be, or they may fail to actually implement these during this initial formation phase. The forming phase is one where members tend to avoid conflict and controversy.”

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* Source for describing the Tuckerman Model, 1965: www.businessballs.com

Conflict and competition often arise during what is known as the storming stage and these dynamics replace the pleasant and comfortable earlier forming phase. Depending on the personality types within the group, interpersonal friction can result in conflict. However, if this phase is managed well, significant progress will be made towards developing a shared vision and approach and conflict should not become counterproductive to group processes.

Groups that do not enter into or experience a storming phase may become more divided and less creative in the long term, and miss an opportunity to deal with their differences. Avoidance of the storming phase can potentially create the risk that some members of the partnership will go along with the suggestions of the more dominant members. This is a period in the group’s development where things that may have not mattered before begin to matter, and the feasibility, value and aims of the group may be questioned. Decisions during this storming phase may not be made easily by the group.

The clarity of the group’s purpose may increase at this time, but at the same time members may be distracted from the vision and tasks by the interpersonal dynamics and issues that surface during this phase. Power struggles may ensue, and challenges to the leadership and other members may arise, with small cliques forming. The storming phase can be very productive if it is managed well by both the leader and the group itself, and if the energy can be channelled into important and useful tasks. These include deciding on the governing structures for the partnership, how conflict and disputes will be managed and resolved, and deciding who will be taking responsibility for the tasks that lie ahead. In order to facilitate progress during the storming phase, both the leader and members of the partnership will usually need to be willing to compromise, and commit more energy to the needs of the group than to the needs of the individual members.”

Gradually, signs of partnership cohesion and cooperation appear and are tangibly felt in the group and these signal that the group is entering the norming phase. Members have developed and built trust in their communication and there should be evidence of sharing, creativity and skill acquisition as the partnership dynamics are established. Generally, conflicts have been reconciled and resistances overcome.

There is some risk that the harmony in the group may create resistance to returning to any ‘storming’ dynamics and this may then foster the unhealthy potential for ‘group think’ to exist. At this point, clarity about roles and responsibilities would have emerged and communication and process ground rules would have been established; these may be formal or informal, written or unwritten. In addition, members’ views and feelings about key issues or concerns have become known. The norming phase is characterised by agreement and consensus being achieved, and mutual support flourishing in an atmosphere of solid commitment and unity.”


ibid.
PERFORMING

A performing partnership has usually established its identity and developed a shared vision. This is a vision that is goal oriented and is supported through sound problem solving and creative confrontation that allows the group to be increasingly productive and able to demonstrate results. Task focused and constructive work moves ahead and there is a collective pride in the successes of the partnership. Disagreements and conflicts may still occur but the partnership either successfully utilises the dispute management processes established earlier, or the group agrees to change structures and processes to accommodate unanticipated needs so that new or unexpected challenges can be resolved constructively and positively and not interfere with productivity. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and support that is underpinned by a high motivation to achieve the group’s prioritized and reality based outcomes. If the storming and norming phases had not been satisfactorily concluded previously, then the group members may find that they need to return to these phases in order to be able to adequately perform as a partnership.\(^\text{14}\)

ADJOURNING

A group set up to achieve a specific purpose has a finite life, so the adjourning phase is when the group is required to disband. For some groups/individuals it will be important to have the opportunity for some sort of closure ritual, or celebratory ceremony for what has been achieved. Moving on may be a critical phase of the life cycle of the partnership and it is useful and healthy for the group to find a meaningful way to end a partnership and acknowledge this phase and all the phases that went before it.\(^\text{15}\)

The next section of this report describes the ways in which the seven projects moved through the stages of a partnership described above.

\(^\text{14}\) ibid.

One of the major challenges that confronted partnerships from the outset was the development of a common vision, and then determining how they would work together to achieve that. The literature generally acknowledges that ‘multi-agency and interdisciplinary groups should develop and adopt a clear purpose for their work, clear guiding principles, clearly stated goals and objectives and action plans against which progress can be monitored.’

The Melbourne Project noted that significant time needs to be allocated to developing a partnership and ensuring a common level of understanding as this amount of time is often under-estimated by agencies. The need to be as clear as possible at the beginning of a collaborative project as to the time and costs involved for all parties was also viewed as important.

A number of the projects spent considerable time in the forming phase networking and communicating with their partner agencies. Those projects that didn’t spend a lot of time on the communication and development tasks of the forming phase reported in hindsight that they viewed this as an oversight. They recommended that this step is very important; particularly for building trust between the agencies and ensuring that there is clear communication and that everyone understands where they are headed and have begun developing a clearly defined and shared vision.

The Adelaide Project reported that although the aim of the service was to establish relationships with other services that could ensure a streamlined delivery of services to clients whenever possible, initial contact needed to focus on what you have to give rather than what you want. It is important that trust and validity has been established before discussions regarding formal collaborative processes and interagency protocols were initiated.

Another partnership project also commented that through their experience they felt that practical inter-agency arrangements needed to be agreed upon right down to the minutest detail, to ensure clarity and minimal conflict.

Projects advocated that it was important to obtain the commitment of the partner agencies/organisations and with staff that have decision making authority and are directly involved in the partnerships. Projects also identified that there needs to be time allowed for understanding the culture of each partner agency including the language they use to describe their services/work. This minimises misunderstandings and allows for the dispensing of ‘myths’ that may abound in relation to the varied professional cultures and work practices that will exist in multi-agency and multi-disciplinary partnerships. The projects also expressed the view that the agency members of the partnership need to foster the developing partnership further within their own agencies. This was in order to create ‘ownership’ of the project by other relevant stakeholders.

and with those who would be critical to the implementation of project strategies and ultimately the success of the project.

The Melbourne Project reported that on reflecting about the process of ‘buy-in’, whereby one partner agency took the main role in submitting the tender proposal, with the other partner having considerably less input – clearly, one could state that equal ownership and responsibility by both parties is crucial right at the beginning of a tender submission. In a sense, what may have been lacking was a definition of what the term ‘lead agency’ meant or implied, what level of responsibility and accountability went with such a role, and how that role would affect the partnership.

The above project had been initiated primarily by an individual worker at the lead agency. It seemed a fairly straightforward process and no one envisaged any significant problems. Given this expectation, it was unlikely that a risk assessment would have identified the nature of the difficulties which arose when the worker resigned, although the soundness of initiating an inter-agency collaboration with the input and interest of only one worker could be questioned. The evaluator of the project stated in the report on the Melbourne Project that: ‘credit, however, must be given to the project’s lead agency for their speedy action in re-establishing the project and to the new partner agency for their swift response and readiness to collaborate even though they had no previous involvement in the project.’

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES

‘Collaborative and coordinated interagency responses … take place within particular contexts, and are influenced significantly by contextual factors such as:’

- Legislative context
- Policy context
- Structural context
- Sector context, and
- Local context.

All the agencies involved agreed that consideration of context was important in the forming phase. The contextual factors identified included the legislative and policy context, organisational and systemic structures, the importance of the local or regional context, as well as the professional and practice cultures of a particular sector.

If a partnership or collaborative group fails to consider these contexts, it can risk not foreseeing or anticipating these influences, either positive or negative, that may either help or hinder the overall goals. Equally, any potential barriers, constraints, unspoken or differing agendas may not have been identified or considered, and further into the
process, these could undermine earlier steps undertaken. Below are some examples of contextual factors that were relevant to the Partnership projects or may be relevant to future partnership initiatives that aim to work towards a more integrated family law system in their region.

**LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT**

The family law system is underpinned by the *Family Law Act 1975* (the Act). The 1996 amendments to the Act put the interests of children as paramount and stated that the responsibility of both parents for their children continues after separation. The Act was changed to remove the terms ‘custody’ and ‘access’. The new language of ‘residency’ and ‘contact’ was implemented to shift the emphasis from the rights of parents to the responsibilities of the parents and the rights of the child. The Act encourages parents to reach agreement between themselves about matters concerning their children wherever possible. Thus the legislation raised the need for:

- the creation of more child-focused practices, and
- early assistance to separating families to enable them to resolve their differences in a child-focused way rather than becoming adversaries over the children or commencing litigation.

The lead agencies participating in the partnership projects are all approved agencies under section 13 of the Act, and their work was influenced by the requirements of the Act that are applicable to their work practices.

**POLICY CONTEXT**

The partnership projects were commissioned by the Attorney-General’s Department as part of the Attorney-General’s national strategy to promote best-practice dispute management services for separating parents that aimed to create an environment that is in the child’s best interests.

In order for ex-partners to be able to stay focused on the interests of the children, the Government’s policy for family law is to encourage the early use of problem solving methods and primary conflict resolution processes. The partnership projects were developed around these central policy directives.

The objectives of the partnership projects were consistent with the findings of the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group in its Report (2001), *Out of the Maze - Pathways to the Future for Families Experiencing Separation*. Among other things, the Advisory Group found that there is currently not enough emphasis on agreement and ongoing parenting or enough focus on the best interests of the children or on child-inclusive practices within the family law system.
STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

The partnership pilot projects were funded by a central government agency, in this case the Australian Government through the Attorney-General’s Department, that set out the terms of the proposed funding and identified the deliverables that were being purchased. The department also participated in the management of these projects. However, the partnerships were self-determining in shaping the projects to suit the local context, taking into account any unique features and needs relevant to each project’s area or region and client groups. Partnerships also decided how they would be structured to achieve this.

The partnership projects were structured in a variety of ways that were designed to suit their purpose, context and membership. In some partnerships the lead agency had more formal authority whereas in others that responsibility was shared by the partners.

‘Effective interagency and multi-agency work cannot be undertaken in the absence of some form of structure(s), or set of organisational arrangements, although these structures can vary in the level of formality.’

The relationship between central or higher level structures and local and lower level structures is significant in impacting on interagency and multi-agency processes like regional coordination [and integrating family law systems]. Many structural factors can have a significant impact on processes of interagency collaboration and coordination.

The Canberra Project reported there was no defined strategy for interagency collaboration for partner agencies. Through recognising difficulties with communication and understanding of the project, partner agencies reflected upon and developed a framework to enhance partnership work in the future. The Canberra Project commented that ongoing cooperation could be formalised by the development of Memoranda of Understanding between the partner agencies.

SECTOR CONTEXT

‘[Sectors] or fields … form, as agencies and individuals perceive that social problems can be addressed and resolved collectively.’

“As individuals and agencies come to share an appreciation of the problem they begin to acquire an identity as a unique field and they begin to produce mutually agreed ways of thinking and doing things. The development of a domain or [sector] enables stakeholders to communicate, to be identified and legitimated, for the problems they face to be acknowledged and for ways to be found for stakeholders to work together to find solutions. The particular nature of the [sector]… influences collaborative and coordinated

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19 Penter et al 2001, p 18.

20 Penter et al 2001, p 23.
approaches. Individuals and agencies bring to their collaborative relationships the ideas, experiences and ways of thinking and acting that are common and valued in a particular [sector]…"

One of the challenges for PDR practitioners is working with the differences in the work practice and professional cultures that usually exist between the legal profession and the human services.

The Canberra Project commented that early promotion work had been focused particularly on other primary dispute resolution and related services, as service providers began networking and learning about their own and other new services. The need for service providers to learn initially about each other became quickly apparent in the effort to dispel early confusion about who was providing what, when and how. The need to create consistent and multiple pathways to PDR and related services had been identified and the further development of the local PDR network had enabled this and other issues to be addressed.

Agencies will generally have developed a ‘mind set’ around the way they view their work and a set of ideologies that they adhere to in conducting that work. In addition they may use a prescribed language, model and/or framework that describes and identifies what they do and that is reflective of their ideology. It cannot be assumed that these agency/individual ideologies or philosophical/theoretical underpinnings will be representative of the collective one aimed for by a partnership. It is important for these distinctions to be made, and the differences worked through.

Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary work has the advantage of providing a forum in which agencies and workers can educate each other about the work they do, and the practices they espouse. This ‘cross fertilisation’ of disciplines that partnership projects can provide may also add further dimensions to how a problem is viewed, and identify a broader range of responses.

In their reports, some of the partnership projects referred to these benefits as well as the challenges mentioned above. For example:

The Melbourne Project said there were some clear signs of the project having a positive impact on the two agencies and the understanding that staff now have of each other’s work. Staff at both agencies reported that feedback from the staff member directly involved in the project has broadened the thinking and approaches of the other staff in their respective agencies and thus broadened their way of working with clients. There had also been increased informal contact between the two and a simplifying of cross-referral, at least in relation to this project.
LOCAL CONTEXT

‘The social, geographical, demographic, historical, cultural and service environment of the particular local context influences collaborative and coordinated approaches.’

For example, the size of an area or region and the distribution of its population will determine whether coordination or collaboration can occur across the whole area or only in a small part. The mobility of the population also has a significant effect. If there is a high turnover of service providers it is difficult to retain continuous and committed members. A community’s readiness for collaborative efforts will also be important. The area of social capital is also demonstrating the connection between community structures and beliefs and the success or failure of collaborative efforts.

The following example demonstrates where the local context had a significant impact on the project.

The Melbourne Project had the dual focus of testing out a new model of service delivery while simultaneously establishing and maintaining a collaborative relationship and identifying the key features for the success of such a relationship. This second aspect was fully tested by the factors surrounding the initial project setup.

Initially, the project was established as a collaborative relationship between the lead agency, and another partner agency, based in the same building in Carlton. However, when the principal worker from the lead agency resigned, the Board decided to close their Carlton office (at which the worker had been the sole staff member).

Subsequently, the partner agency decided to discontinue their involvement in the project. Soon after, however, the project was re-established at a different locality, between a new partner agency and the original lead agency. This was in a building where the two offices were literally across a corridor. Two workers who were willing to work on the project were then identified from those agencies.

‘Effective models of coordination and collaboration are those that are locality based and arise from an understanding and appreciation of local community needs.’

‘This requires models which emerge out of, or are sensitive to local circumstances and that are not solely imposed from on high. Models and structures need to develop differently depending on local conditions.’

The partnership projects were able to contextualise their projects to their local circumstances and environment.

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22 Penter et al 2001, p 22.
An important structural incentive, and/or disincentive, to local collaborative approaches is the extent to which central structures are willing to abandon ‘hands-on control’ and practice ‘hands-off control’. ‘Hands-off’ control occurs when a central structure establishes the broad framework or boundaries within which local or decentralised structures can work, and then allows those local structures to act as they see fit.\textsuperscript{26}

This in effect is what the Department set out to do in its management of the partnership projects, although feedback was provided by the Department on progress reports that were submitted by the lead agencies. At times these agencies may have been asked to consider further questions or issues that arose for the readers of those reports.

Successful interagency work can variously be attributed to a combination of local factors such as key individuals dedicated to the cause, a local history of informal or informal interagency structures, the critical role played by the key agency or agencies and other factors such as the capacity, continuity and commitment of the local membership. What works in one area may not work in another because of a very different set of local circumstances and factors.\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{The Melbourne Project} found that the process of initial agreement on the partnership, then a breaking up of the original relationship, led to much learning. In particular, it became obvious (with the benefit of hindsight) that the project had been established based on a number of varying assumptions in each agency, leading to problems at a later stage. What is important from this discussion is to learn how easily a breakdown in a relationship can occur even when there has been considerable goodwill in place, as was the case with this project. Even though considerable time and energy went into discussions following the resignation of the lead agency worker, there were nevertheless divergent views as to the possibility of the project continuing, and different understandings about the difficulties that physical distance would create after the closure of the Carlton branch.

Taken together, the partnership projects showed that the following local factors are important to successful partnerships:

- strong sense of purpose focused on community needs
- ability to operate effectively at the micro level
- capacity to connect and strategically work with others
- readiness of partners to work together
- investment in team building, and
- robust organisational arrangements that can evolve and be sustained over time.

These factors work together to build local partnership capacity and equip members to respond effectively to change.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Penter et al 2001, p 22.
\textsuperscript{27} Penter et al 2001, p 34.
\textsuperscript{28} Evans & Killoran 2000, in Penter et al 2001, p 34.
It can be useful for any future forming partnerships to consider undertaking some form of feasibility study or needs analysis in relation to what is relevant or required in their local context. Such information can assist in shaping strategic plans that may emerge as the driving force of the development of local integrated family law system initiatives. The strategies developed would then be specific to the needs of their area or region. Needs analysis could also assist more effective coordination, greater use by consumers of existing local services, and lead to the identification of any critical gaps in the ability of the family law system of that area or region to respond to those local needs.

THE MEMBERSHIP OF PARTNERSHIPS

‘Multi-agency groups [formed for the purpose of integrating the family law system in an area or region] are most effective when a wide range of agencies and professional groups are involved.’

‘Diverse membership ensures a multi-disciplinary approach in which a wide array of models and perspectives are brought to bear’. In the case of the partnership projects it was the common aim of promoting the effective use of primary dispute resolution through partnerships between service providers that was being addressed by the projects. The work of the projects also included finding local solutions to gaps in post separation service delivery, and increasing collaboration amongst the relevant service providers. Therefore, it was important that the pilots had a diverse membership.

It was also preferable that partners and stakeholders that form the partnerships were drawn from the agencies and relevant systems in contact with people affected by family breakdown and separation.

The Canberra Project stated that the criteria for identifying major stakeholders for their partnership included agencies with an expected high level of contact with separated families and therefore able to provide an opportunity for timely referral.

Potential partnership organisations and stakeholders were identified through the steering group and the PDR project officers. The list of stakeholders underwent a number of revisions resulting in additional inclusions. It was evident that there were many organisations and services in the ACT that potentially had contact with families experiencing difficulties.

The process of identification suggested that a broad community approach needed to be adopted in the dissemination of information on PDR. Twenty (20) organisations and groups (eg GPs) were identified overall as meeting the criteria as a stakeholder. Further decisions needed to be made on how to engage those stakeholders.


Penter et al 2001, p 36.
‘A difficulty facing multi-agency [groups] is that some interested agencies, particularly non-government agencies, are prevented from participating because they have neither the resources nor the capacity to attend.’

A suggested solution to this problem could be to develop membership criteria and provide additional funding for voluntary and non-government agencies to enable them to participate …. The involvement of senior management personnel within the interagency structure is critical to its effectiveness. Agency representatives need to hold sufficiently senior positions within their agencies to be able to make decisions regarding strategies and action and to commit resources. If senior personnel are not involved then clear access is required to the persons who can make such decisions.”

One of the non-government agencies represented on the Canberra Project identified that they were funded under thirteen different funding contracts and that none of these funding arrangements allowed for the costs associated with the agency participating in collaborative work.

A strategy to address some of the above experiences and one that any future partnerships could consider is for interagency partnership groups to form a ‘core’ group whose membership consists of agencies instrumental in family dispute resolution service delivery. This core group could take responsibility for ensuring that other relevant agencies and/or individual stakeholders are kept informed by developing network links to share information and enhance referral systems, but without requiring attendance by these stakeholders at every meeting held by the core group.

Penter et al 2001, p. 36.

CONCLUSION

Agencies involved in the various PDR partnership projects concluded that the process of forming partnerships or interagency groups to facilitate an integrated family law system in their community or region has some important initial tasks that need to be undertaken in order to establish a strong foundation on which the work can be built. The purpose, goals and vision of the group need to be clearly articulated and constantly reviewed to ensure that everyone is working with a common understanding, and not just acting on assumptions about what that understanding is.

Therefore, it can be helpful to the process if these groups consider some or all of the above contexts when initially forming and developing their project vision. This reflection on the contexts in which a partnership/inter-agency group is situated can provide critical information about the influences that currently exist. It may also be helpful for partnership groups to explore whether some form of contextual and historical research, needs analysis, feasibility study, and informal audits should be commissioned by the group.
COLLABORATION WORKLIST
THE FORMING PHASE

Examples of services or practitioners that may provide post separation assistance or family dispute resolution and could be included in a partnership: (in alphabetical order)

- Centrelink
- Community Education or Parenting Programs;
- Community Justice Centres;
- Crisis Services;
- Family & Children Services (State Officers)
- Information, Advocacy and Referral Services;
- Mediators & other Dispute Resolution Practitioners;
- Other Family Support Services;
- Self-Help Groups;
- Child Support Agency;
- Community Health Services;
- Counsellors and Social Workers;
- Ethno-Specific Organisations;
- Family Courts;
- Legal Practitioners;
- Outreach Services;
- State and Local Government Agencies;

Factors to be considered when developing the network or partnership:

- Which agencies will/should be included in the partnership?
- Why should these agencies be included?
- How will these networks benefit both the agency and the clients?
- How will the geographical and/or service delivery boundaries of the partnership be defined?
- What will be the level of representation from each agency?
- Who will attend the meetings? How often will these meetings occur?
- What capacity for decision making do these agency representatives need to have?
- How will trust be fostered and developed between the agencies?
- Does there need to be an agency/individual that will take a lead role in the partnership?

Links with other relevant Programs/Services:

- How will the agencies/individuals that are not included in the partnership but have some relevance to, and/or role in, an integrated family law system be kept informed about the partnership and its activities?
- How will the partnership engage those agencies/individuals interest and help them to understand the role they play in an integrated family law system?

Principles For Consideration In Interagency Collaborative Partnerships And The Development Of The Structural Processes For Integrated Family Law Systems

It is evident both from the literature and the experiences of the seven partnership projects that some thought needs to be given to the way a partnership group is structured, the shared vision and the principles and processes that will be used to define the work.

Structure

- Does there need to be several layers to the partnership? (eg core group or management committee, and then a broader networking group that can assist with the tasks managed by the core group)
- How will the activities of the partnership be resourced?
- Are there any opportunities for the ‘pooling’ or ‘sharing’ of resources?
- If the partnership receives funds, who will manage these funds?
Vision

- What are the underlying assumptions that may be adopted to underpin the partnership vision?
- Will the partnership focus on more effective coordination and integration of what currently exists, or on developing something new, or both?
- What is meant by the terms ‘integrated family law system’ and ‘primary dispute resolution’ in the context of this partnership?
- What is the overall national vision, and how will the partnership reflect this in the local context?
- What are the contextual influences such as legislative, structural, political, cultural, etc that have the ability to influence essential elements of an integrated system in either positive and/or negative ways?
- What are the theoretical, philosophical and practice viewpoints, policies and procedures of the agencies/workers involved in the partnership, and are these congruent and compatible with the collective vision of the partnership?

Principles

- What are the essential principles that the partnership may consider need to be linked to the vision to ensure its integrity?
- Will the principles include a focus on child-focused practice’?

Processes

- Does the partnership need to commission a needs analysis or feasibility study for their area to determine needs, priorities, and the ability of the partnership to be able to address those needs?
- Is an informal audit of what already exists needed to identify any gaps in service delivery?
- How will any of the above processes be initiated?
- What needs to be put in place to foster respectful and collaborative ways of working together?
- How will the relationships of the partnerships be managed?
- How will any disputes be managed and conflicts resolved?
- What information sharing, if any, will be required to successfully achieve both the vision and better outcomes for clients?
- Are there any safety issues for either clients and/or workers to be considered?
- How will differences be worked with?

Target Population of the Partnership:

- Who is the partnership for?
- How will others not in the target group be responded to?
- Are there any constraints in the partnership’s ability to respond to the target group?

How will the partnership respond to the following?

- Indigenous Australians
- Linguistic Difference
- People with Disabilities
- Rural and Remote People
- Children & Young People
- Cultural Diversity
- Literacy Difficulties
- Mental Health Issues
- Gay and Lesbian Clients
- Elderly Clients
This phase can be the most challenging, as most partnerships do not expect the conflict and competition which may arise after a positive and promising beginning. However, it is an important part of helping partnerships to work through difficulties and establish common directions and processes.

DEVELOPING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

A common problem for groups representing a number of agencies is that there may be differences in how they define or understand what is being addressed or delivered.

Different agencies use different definitions for their own purpose, and that reflects their own philosophy and mandate. However, successful interagency work requires an agreed definition/s for use in the interagency environment. An agreed definition can provide clarity and purpose to the interagency work. While it is essential to develop an agreed definition for interagency work, any different perceptions and views of participating agencies should be respected and not allowed to hinder practical measures to respond.

An early definitional task for the projects related to the use of ‘primary dispute resolution’ (PDR) to describe the range of counselling, mediation, conciliation and other services provided by partner agencies and other stakeholders. A lack of familiarity with the term PDR made it difficult for project partners to explain it, not just to agencies outside the PDR network funded by AGD and FaCS, but even to the agencies and practitioners already providing PDR services. Accordingly, a significant part of some of the projects was the dissemination of information about what constitutes primary dispute resolution.

The Canberra Project found that the development of brochures and posters on PDR presupposed a shared or agreed understanding of the definition of and language used to describe PDR and PDR services. While this may have been agreed and shared among some PDR service providers and stakeholders, consideration of meaning and language for other groups in the community was crucial in order to engage them in the process and to assist them to see their own relevance to PDR.

Of all the challenges facing interagency groups, the development of a shared understanding and philosophy and a common language is one of the most difficult. Agencies tend to view issues in different and often conflicting ways and are unlikely to share an understanding of what the problem is or what the aim of interagency coordination should be. The scope of effective interagency work can be severely undermined by differences in the definition of the problem together with differences in operational practices and organisational cultures. These differences are critical because they influence the types of change perceived as being required and the ways partnerships are structured and implemented.

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38 Penter et al 2001, p 25.
The Melbourne Project realised in hindsight that the establishment of their project was based on a number of assumptions which were to create problems later. They consider it critical to spend time on early communication and clarifying the direction, tasks and goals from the outset.

**LEADERSHIP**

The leadership and support roles of agency representatives involved in a multi-agency partnership are critical to the success of a joint project. A common problem faced by groups seeking to collaborate is that those who are delegated the leadership role may not necessarily have either the expertise and/or the skills to facilitate the process.

Commentary on collaboration states that:

“Some representatives in collaborative partnerships are not resourced or supported adequately by their agency to participate. This can be evident in a number of ways, including inadequate time allocated within an existing work schedule to participate, not having the authority to agree to new agency initiatives, not having any guidance or direction from the agency and a failure by the agency to monitor its own involvement. Some participating agency representatives are also prevented from speaking out publicly on certain matters.”

The *Canberra Project* discovered that, although they had shared language and values, some expectations and understandings between the partner agencies were different at the beginning of the project, although this issue was not recognised or acknowledged by the project team at the time. Later on in the project, an opportunity presented itself to reflect on some of the issues and the following were identified:

- There were some differences in knowledge and expectations in the early stages and some confusion arose from the project being attached to another funded project at the time.

- The delegation of responsibilities for the project within agencies did not always occur smoothly. In the beginning it was assumed in two of the agencies that the project would be managed at a senior level in all agencies and some resentment arose when the management seemed to be delegated to less senior staff in one of the agencies. In addition, it was recognised in hindsight that there had not been enough internal consultation with staff within partner agencies and this led to some resentment by staff about management involvement. This implied that it is important to bring each agency’s staff ‘on board’ very early into a collaborative partnership and foster collective ownership by

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highlighting the benefits of the partnership to individual staff, to the agency as a whole and to its clients.

Communication strategies and dispute management strategies between the agencies involved were not developed in the early stages of the project to address some of the issues mentioned above. Once again, the partner agencies of this project would recommend that these happen sooner rather than later.

Some of the partnership projects reported having difficulties with inconsistent attendance by some agencies. They identified that it was mostly government agencies that were inconsistent through either sending a different representative each time or providing only infrequent representation. In some cases the inconsistencies actually related to both of these issues.

Every interagency collaboration, requires a skilled person (or persons), to bring organisations together and to facilitate the shared negotiations that result in a shared vision and goals, and the ongoing implementation of those goals. Without such a person multi-agency groups are likely to make slow progress.  

In the case of the partnership projects, the agency that received the funding for the project was considered the lead agency, and generally a representative from that agency took a lead role within the partnership. Where project workers were employed, they were generally employed by the lead agency.

**The Coffs Harbour Project** recommended that projects like their own that require collaboration between partner agencies should consider including in their staff job descriptions a role for undertaking interagency collaboration. The Coffs Harbour Project considered that this would help to maintain good working relationships between agencies that are working on difficult social issues and would also assist in the dissemination of information on issues they had in common, as well as information about the PDR services available in their region.

The involvement of government agencies at both local and central levels has major implications for the process, dynamics, operations and effectiveness of multi-agency coordinating and collaborative structures …. There can also be an expectation that interagency … [groups, such as a family dispute resolution partnership], can achieve the sort of whole-of-government response that is seen to be desirable at the local level. [However], this can place unrealistic expectations and pressures on interagency and multi-agency structures. The work of multi-agency [groups] can be subsumed by the interplays of government and bureaucratic interests.  

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The Hobart Project demonstrated this at a practical level. The initial timeframe for the Child Support Agency (CSA) and Relationships Australia Tasmania project slipped for a variety of reasons. This resulted in the project clashing with other scheduled change initiatives within CSA relating to the use of telephony and the IT system. This meant that the approach for the project had to be modified and implemented more gradually than originally anticipated. It was only through the goodwill and commitment of all concerned that a successful project was achieved.

Another kind of dispute likely to arise in the storming phase is the issue of ownership of ideas or programs by individual agencies (or their staff). This can, in turn, be associated with a sense of an agency’s programs being better than those of the other partner agencies.

The Canberra Project noted that a working party consisting of representatives from the three organisations experienced these problems. The workers were asked to share with the other agencies their own agency’s group programs that they had been conducting in their respective organisations. The agency representatives were not overly keen to have their group programs appropriated, taken over, or altered, as they had put so much time and energy into their development. Workers saw these programs as theirs rather the organisation’s and still had some view of competition with partnering agencies.

The managers from the agencies of the Canberra Project had assumed that staff would easily see the benefits of collaboration, but they failed to engage their staff adequately, especially in the early stages of the project. The Canberra Project thought there would be gains from collaboration and that combining resources would result in a better program, but this was hampered by the attitudes of some of the staff members. The Canberra Project also realised that some of the agencies still had their own ‘parenting after separation’ group programs running that were the same as the Canberra Project program. They concluded that it would have been better to suspend all other group programs during the project’s group program.

From these experiences, the Canberra Project concluded that there was a need for better promotion internally as well as more consultation with staff. The project workers should have met with all staff as their participation and commitment was critical to establishing a successful partnership. It is important that a project does not operate just at the management levels.
GROUP DYNAMICS

How well the group dynamics are managed in a partnership will often determine the nature and extent of the storming phase. For example:

The leadership needs to consider the micro-dynamics of multi-agency work. In particular, attention needs to be paid to basic processes such as the quality of the chairing and facilitation of meetings, the design of meetings, management of the agenda, communication processes within and between meetings, and decision-making processes. These approaches can make or break interagency work.

The Coffs Harbour Project stated it had anticipated difficulty in gaining agreement between PDR service providers on referral protocols. This was because, in the past, there had been limited communication, leading at times to a competitive attitude to the provision of PDR services. This lack of communication was not due to a lack of diligence by PDR service providers, but rather a lack of time.

Given this, it has been suggested that there may be a role for someone to act as a link between PDR service providers, which might relieve potential mistrust. However, during the storming phase, some degree of conflict is necessary to avoid ‘group-think’ based on the views of the more dominant personalities or agencies.

[Some would] argue that conflict can play a positive role in effective multi-agency collaboration if parties have developed sufficient trust to recognise, learn from, and creatively resolve differences. The danger of conflict is in how it is managed. Poorly managed conflict can destroy trust and undermine relationships. Successful interagency [groups] are those who have developed constructive processes for managing conflict.

Without those processes being available and used by the partnership group, then conflicts can remain unresolved or can go ‘underground’ and therefore have the potential to keep the group stuck in the storming phase, unable to move forward towards their goals.

The Canberra Project report indicates that they entered the storming phase quite quickly. Accordingly, they recommend the following:

- set up a clear framework for communication and expectations about what needs to be communicated
- agree to a decision making process
- set up a mechanism for resolving disputes
- clarify more clearly the role of the lead agency and the other agencies


- seek more input and involvement from their own agency’s staff from the beginning
- have clear guidelines about how the various relationships might work, within and between agencies, and with the partnership staff
- ensure clear shared understanding of the project (and associated materials) much earlier
- undertake more consultation with staff aiming for ownership and commitment to the partnership
- ensure that workers share the ongoing vision of project partners by helping staff to understand that sharing and collaboration are the ways of the future
- ensure that group program experts and/or designers are ‘in on the ground floor’ and are committed to the aims of collaboration
- keep clarifying roles (eg how a researcher relates to project management) and checking that communication strategies are working
- meet more regularly at the manager level, and launch the partnership publicly.

MANAGING CONFLICT

What is important during the storming phase is finding creative and effective mechanisms for managing conflict and tension as they arise. Having formal structures in place such as clear dispute management processes or grievance procedures can assist the partnership to move through any relationship tensions or difficult issues. An effective partnership can sometimes be distinguished by its ability to manage the storming phase.

Conflict and tension in interagency forums often reflect clashes over professional cultures and competing goals. When different groups of service providers attempt to work together each group [may] view problems, clients and solutions from very different perspectives. This clash over professional ideas, cultures and goals can produce considerable tension and conflict, thereby hindering collaboration or leading to genuine collaborative efforts. This potential for conflict and tension is inherent in all collaborative interagency work. The issue is not how to prevent it but how to manage it. Successful collaborative efforts require service providers to set aside professional preconceptions and jealousies, develop a shared philosophy and shared language and focus on shared goals and outcomes."

The Canberra Project provided the following ‘tips’ for minimising the tensions that can arise in a collaborative partnership:

- Communication is critical.
- Partnership building takes time and the process must be nurtured on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure that staff from each agency know what the partnership and project is about and are as involved as possible from the beginning.
- Ask a lot of questions at the beginning and deal with all the practical issues of who does what, when, how and why, no matter how trivial they may seem.
- Have a clear understanding of what you are trying to achieve and what everyone’s role is, but don’t feel nervous if everything is not clear at first, and
- Ensure that the key players from each agency communicate and meet to process information from the staff of the project and staff from the individual agencies.

‘Successful interagency work requires a commitment from all stakeholders to open ended and ongoing relationships that keep sight of mutual goals and objectives.’

RESOURCES

Generally, collaborative and coordinated approaches are...‘reliant on the contribution of in-kind resources and infrastructure, and dependent on volunteer labour and considerable local goodwill.’ Even with the Commonwealth funding which made these projects possible, all the partner agencies made considerable contributions to their success in terms of time and resources.

Consideration of the time and costs involved led the Melbourne Project to conclude that, for the Conjoint Mediation and Therapy (CoMeT) model to continue or to be successfully replicated, it would need:

- Specific, direct funding.
- Its own facilities, timetable for appointments, resourcing.
- Experienced staff, especially in dealing with significant levels of family dysfunction and conflict, and
- Clear agreements from all parties as to their roles, responsibilities and anticipated costs.

They stated that, ‘while there seems to be a clear argument for this approach to saving money in relation to future litigation and conflict, money has to first be spent to enable these savings to occur. In other words money has to be spent in order to be saved.’ Nevertheless, the two agencies involved in the

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CoMeT project have developed the confidence to proceed with applications for other joint work. This level of confidence seems to be founded on:

- top management support
- goodwill from staff, and
- flexibility in terms of therapeutic approaches, agency protocols and working arrangements.

Overall, the CoMeT Pilot Project provided significant information about an effective approach to providing post-separation assistance for couples, based on an effective collaborative approach involving skilled professionals from different disciplines, with significant support from their agency.

The literature identifies a range of strategies and processes to use the power dynamics within each partnership to achieve the desired outcomes. Some of these are:

- scan [environmental] structures, roles and practices of relevant agencies critically and constructively
- consider the nature of relationships between agencies and the perceptual issues and expectations that are stated and unstated (e.g., the differences that exist between the work and practice cultures of the legal profession and the social science professions)
- deal with the principles and objectives of the intervention first
- create a vision of what alternative practice and an alternative system could look like
- work through implementation step by step
- acknowledge that implementation involves negotiating, and problem solving through different interests
- allow the process to reveal the needs and where new resources need to go
- do not impose structures and processes before local needs reveal what is required and relevant, and
- always keep in mind the end goal of improving outcomes for the target population of the interagency work.  

The *Canberra Project* also identified some of the ‘pitfalls’ that their group encountered as:

1. Some staff may resist change and sharing power and knowledge.
2. Delegation: it is important to get this right.
3. A partnership of three created a fourth entity: ensure the staff of this new entity get to know the individual agency partners in order to benefit from their skills and expertise and to continue the sense of this entity being a partnership. Without this there is the danger of the ‘project’ becoming a separate entity, and distancing itself and its processes and outcomes from the parent partners.
4. Policies and operational procedures of individual agencies may make it difficult to coordinate services, information and staff.
5. Differences in prior training can make it difficult for staff from different agencies to work together.
6. Differences in pay scale and agency culture may need to be addressed.
7. Lack of time for coordination and planning is an ongoing challenge.

The literature suggests that the agencies and individuals who generally have the most power in interagency collaborations are those who are seen to have real or perceived legitimacy and who have greater access to required resources or authority. An important task in the storming phase is to resolve any problems that may derive from power differentials within partnerships.
The partnership projects all reported experiencing what Tuckerman describes as the ‘storming’ phase. Accordingly, many of the projects suggested that there needs to be more time allocated to forming the partnerships. It takes time for the partners to establish the rapport and trust that is fundamental to success. The storming phase gives interagency groups the opportunity to understand the dynamics and develop strategies that will enhance their ability to manage these tensions and differences.

One theme that emerged for all seven partnerships was the importance of clear communication. Most problems that occurred as a result of communication difficulties arose from the many assumptions made, and the limited mechanisms in place for clarifying whether these assumptions were in fact correct. Sometimes there was also an expectation for partners (agency members) to be able to participate at the same rate, whereas the impact on staff resources varied from agency to agency. However, most would agree that there were many benefits from the collaborative partnerships, including some unexpected benefits that had resulted from the links made and networks established.
COLLABORATION WORKLIST
THE STORMING PHASE

Relationships With Other Service Providers – Within & Without

For partnerships to work it is critical that the relationships of the partnership are managed well, and continually nurtured and reviewed. Some of the following factors need to be considered:

Information dissemination

■ How will information be disseminated?
■ Who will take responsibility for disseminating it?

Dealing with assumptions and differences

■ How will group/individual assumptions be identified and addressed? (This could include a range of issues. For example, do members of a partnership and their staff have the same assumptions about what an integrated family law system means, or what they mean by the term primary dispute resolution?)
■ How will differences be identified and addressed? (This could include exploring differences in any ideological base that the agencies of the partnership operate from, and/or exploring the range of theoretical frameworks amongst the partnership members that inform the practice models that their agencies work from)

Dealing with conflict and inequities

■ How will problems/issues/concerns be identified and/or raised in the partnership?
■ How will disputes, conflict, power struggles or grievances be resolved?
■ Do all member agencies of the partnership have the ability to participate equally?
■ If not, what are the options for addressing this inequity?

Leadership

■ Who will chair or facilitate the meetings?
■ How will it be determined whether the person/s appointed to this role have the skills required to undertake this effectively? (eg what previous experience do they have in this type of role, and what type of leadership, management and conflict resolution skills do they have?)
■ Would it be helpful to have a role statement or job description created for both the leadership role and the role of partnership members to clarify responsibilities, and should these be developed jointly by the partnership?

Policies and Procedures

■ Do partnership protocols, policies and procedures need to be developed?
■ What will be addressed by any protocols, policies and procedures?
■ How will the protocols, policies and procedures be used to benefit both the agency and the clients linked to any projects undertaken by a partnership?
■ Who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating implementation, effectiveness, compliance etc?
■ What is the process for dealing with any issues that arise from the above processes?
One sign of a partnership entering the norming phase is that the group dynamics become more cohesive and cooperative. Generally, conflicts that may have arisen during the storming phase have been reconciled and resistances overcome and members will have developed and built trust in their communication. Roles and responsibilities have been clarified and ground rules (formal or informal, written or unwritten) have been established. In addition, members’ views and feelings about key issues or concerns have become known. The norming phase is characterised by agreement and consensus being achieved in a context of mutual support, commitment and unity.

The major tasks of this phase are to consolidate and formalise the arrangements and processes developed during the storming phase. Particular tasks will include:

- developing a shared philosophy…
- developing policies, protocols and guidelines for all agencies that are part of an initiative
- developing strong linkages and interagency protocols between agencies
- facilitating information exchange
- ensuring a supportive service infrastructure for clients, and
- ensuring that achieving the desired outcomes takes priority over the partnership processes.

The Melbourne Project identified the following features of a functioning collaborative partnership:

- agencies identify the costs involved and the potential impact on staff time
- contingency plans are in place in the event of the key worker leaving
- the possible impact of geographic proximity is taken into account
- significant time is allocated to developing the partnership, and ensuring that each partner agency has a good understanding of the work of the others and the purpose of the partnership, and
- reviews are built in to the arrangements

LEVELS OF COLLABORATION

A number of issues arose in these projects relating to how agencies were represented in partnerships.

A key challenge in multi-agency forums, like regional coordination structures, [integrated systems], and committees, is to develop a structure that is sustainable beyond individual agency and worker commitments. Structures need to be established to enable members to participate at a number of levels, including the strategic, tactical, operational, interpersonal and cultural levels.

The Hobart Project experienced a change in project managers at a critical time in the project development. The subsequent handover period meant that new strategies had to be implemented. One of the partner agencies also experienced technological changes during the pilot period. While these changes had been planned for some time, their impact on the project had not been sufficiently anticipated. This then resulted in the project period being extended.

From this experience, the Hobart Project recommended:
1. assessing the possible impact of existing change processes, and
2. flexibility around timing for project deliverables, along with a capacity to adjust the timing if needed

The Melbourne Project concluded that for effective collaboration to occur, the following needed to be articulated:

- the criteria by which effective collaboration between professionally and culturally disparate agencies may be measured
- the systems which need to be in place to ensure such effective collaboration between agencies (and hence the key features required for replication elsewhere in the service system), and
- the barriers which need to be overcome.

There are many governance structures that can be used by collaborative groups. When there are many stakeholders involved, it is sometimes more efficient to appoint a ‘core’ group which can deal with the day-to-day and minor governance issues. This allows time for policy and program development issues to be dealt with in meetings of the larger group.

Sometimes partnerships have a tiered structure. For example, senior managers may form a level that focuses on policy and strategy, while another level may consist of practitioners who focus on service delivery issues. If there are specific and discrete

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Walker 2000, in Penter et al 2001, p 34.
tasks that need to be addressed by a partnership, this may sometimes be achieved through the formation of working parties which bring back suggested solutions for identified problems, tasks or unexpected challenges. This is a useful way to ‘tap’ into specific skills or expertise that may exist in the group.

The Ballarat Project described its tiered structure this way:

The Separation Resource Service of the **Ballarat Project** aimed to provide a comprehensive, coordinated service system for people post separation through cooperation between relevant service providers. The Post Separation Resource Network effectively became the management group of the Separation Resource Service. Managers met to formally plan, discuss and review the operations of the Separation Resource Service on a monthly basis initially, extending to bi-monthly. Their main tasks were to plan the service and develop draft protocols.

The second level operated at the worker level. Workers met bi-monthly throughout the service delivery period. This provided the opportunity for networking and informal practice supervision to be undertaken. Workers expressed their commitment to these meetings and stated that they were able to engage in networking at a level they had not previously experienced, given the delineation between relationship counselling (offered solely by Relationships Australia) and family services (offered chiefly by Child & Family Services, Ballarat and Centacare).

The **Ballarat Project** also reported that networking at worker level developed as the service proceeded; conversely, the management team became less involved as time went on. Once the initial planning had been undertaken, the purpose of the management team meetings was not as clear as the meetings held for workers; workers had immediate, practical reasons for better informing themselves about partner agency operations and enhancing the Service in a direct, practice-based manner. The Service ran according to the protocols set by management and did not experience unforeseen difficulties that required management to resolve. In retrospect, more regular formal advice from workers on the ongoing operation of the Service may have been useful for managers to monitor and ensure the smooth running of the Service.

Research shows that:

These [varied] structures have the advantage of drawing more participants into interagency work, increasing the momentum for change through a larger network, and importantly facilitating communication between those agencies and service providers who most need to be talking to each other.\(^*\)

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RESOURCING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

‘An essential requirement for effective multi-agency work is adequate and secure resourcing…..’

The partnership projects were funded by the Attorney-General’s Department for the period of their implementation. Most of the partnerships have continued to function beyond the life of the funded project. In some cases, they have extended to include service providers not involved in the initial partnership. Some partnerships have received seed funding to support additional initiatives which will enable the partnership to become self-sustaining.

The most successful interagency groups are those with access to adequate resources, particularly staff. The employment of a coordinator or project officer … [can be helpful] for achieving and progressing interagency work. Coordinators/Project Officers can provide presence, focus and direction to interagency groups, particularly where participating members already have heavy workloads and limited time to undertake projects and activities.

Many of the partnership projects employed coordinators or project officers to assist with the management and coordination of the projects. Generally these staff were employed by the lead agency.

LEADING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Effective leadership for collaborative partnerships is vital and often affects the ongoing commitment of stakeholders. Members will look to a leader to shape and align a shared vision, to keep the group focused and on-task, to manage differences and conflict, to encourage the best use of resources, to require accountability, to foster ongoing inclusiveness and to keep the aims of the partnership relevant to all stakeholders, particularly the funding body.

‘Even with skilled and committed leaders, interagency approaches can falter because of impaired or conflicted working relationships between those people who share leadership responsibility.’ Leadership of the partnership projects generally fell to a representative from the lead agency. For some projects there were times when other agencies may have taken on an aspect of the leadership role or leadership responsibilities required.

In the case of the Perth Project, the lead agency, Relationships Australia Western Australia, made a decision to maintain and extend the internal PDR Partnership reference group as a permanent feature of the leadership of the agency.

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55 Penter et al 2001, p 40.
56 Penter et al 2001, p 45.
CONCLUSION

The norming phase is a time when most groups are feeling a lot more comfortable with the processes of collaboration. There is increasing clarity of purpose and formal and informal structures and processes designed to suit the specific needs of a partnership are developed.

It is evident that collaboration is a continuum and while all these partnership projects moved along this continuum, some had more success in reaching a true level of collaboration than others. Although all the partnerships faced challenges in the storming phase, all were able to report on enjoying the sense of stability and purpose typical of the norming phase.
Management of Collaborative Partnership Groups

This is a continuation of earlier processes. At this stage the collaborative partnership group may be moving towards more formalised structures and processes that would take into consideration the following:

- What will be the ongoing group structure?
- What will be the ongoing membership of the partnership and the formal management structure? (This may already be evident and in place at this point.)
- What mechanisms will be in place for reviewing the structure and membership at various points throughout the life of the partnership?

Legal Structure and Context

- Does the partnership need to be an incorporated body in order to achieve its vision and prescribed function?
- Does the partnership need to identify the current legislative and government policy directives that are relevant, and that will inform and support its vision?
- Does the partnership need to consider whether any policy or legislative constraints exist in relation to the work it has agreed to undertake, and does it need to explore how this may impact on its vision?

Roles & Responsibilities of Members

- Once roles and responsibilities of members have been clarified, should these be in writing so that the information is available to new members that may join the group during the partnership’s lifetime?
- Should the partnership group consider creating an induction package or resource manual? (To address the fact that members will come and go and therefore avoid having to use meeting time educating new members about the group’s purpose and their role.)

Model of Management and Accountability

- Should any interagency protocols and partnership policies and procedures created be compiled into a resource manual that can be distributed to members of the partnership?
- How would any non-compliance with agreed policies and procedures be addressed?

Operational Policies

- If the partnership is involved in any collaborative and coordinated service delivery that is facilitated through conjoint efforts should it have the operational policies formally written up and available in a partnership resource manual?
Rights of Service Users

- How will clients of partnership services be responded to if there are any complaints or grievances that are related to the activities of the partnership?
- How will the partnership protect the confidentiality of clients, and if any information sharing is necessary will it be conducted within protocol frameworks that are established to facilitate this appropriately?
- What joint protocols, policies and procedures will underpin issues/concerns that may present amongst clients referred to the services of the integrated system created by the partnership? (For example, this may include screening, assessing and responding to family violence, child abuse, suicidal ideation and threats to workers.)

Partnership Complaints and Grievance Procedures

- Have the processes for managing conflicts been established as agreed conflict and dispute management procedures? (Such conflicts may arise from misunderstandings in communication, members operating from a range of assumptions, or differences in opinion or ideology.)
- Do these procedures clearly articulate expectations of the group about the processes that need to be followed to address any conflict, and are these procedures likely to maximise the ability of members of the partnership to reach satisfactory outcomes?
- Will this information be in writing and included in a partnership resource manual or induction package?
The overall purpose of the partnership projects was to contribute to the creation of an integrated family law system. There was a wide range of activities undertaken by the partnership projects in the performing phase. These activities included:

- agency liaison and networking
- information sharing
- improving local service delivery
- coordinating local service responses to clients
- conducting training for agencies and workers
- developing resource material and resource directories
- public education and awareness raising
- establishing direct services
- conducting joint projects
- improving and monitoring policy and practice
- collaborative case review, and
- addressing referral and [assessment] systems.

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS

Monitoring and evaluation were important aspects of the partnership projects. All the projects provided regular progress reports and some also engaged external evaluators to review their processes and report on their difficulties and achievements. This meant that some of the reports were fairly substantial and comprehensive. Overall, the reports provided a rich source of information on the challenges and achievements of the partnership projects. These reports and the evaluations also provide an excellent resource for informing practice and for the development of policies that will facilitate ongoing efforts to integrate the family law system.

The Ballarat Project noted that the evaluation of their project had also been useful for identifying weaknesses and opportunities that could be addressed in the event of any future re-establishment of the service after the project period.

On the subject of evaluation, the Adelaide Project expressed the view that all programs should have a system of ongoing program evaluation in order to:

- ensure accountability to funding bodies and clients
- enable a program to make changes in line with client and community needs
- offer opinion regarding social policy development and
- be a contributor to social research.

An action research framework could ensure that all these elements are incorporated.

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57 Penter at al 2001, p 41.
The projects adopted various approaches to evaluation, with some more extensive than others. It is important to emphasise that improved communication and relationships may not necessarily translate into better service delivery or an integrated family law system. In these projects, however, evaluation dealt with both partnership processes and outcomes achieved for clients in the family law system. Below are a few examples of what projects discovered.

**The Ballarat Project** concluded that the promotion with PDR service providers had identified the need to separate management, advisory and networking functions of the PDR network. The intention was to divide these functions and so enable providers to fulfil their separate roles. An information-sharing session among service providers, and formal and informal meetings with other PDR service providers were also useful strategies.

A Stakeholder survey by the **Canberra Project** uncovered the following issues:

- a low level of knowledge in the community sector about the term primary dispute resolution (PDR), its purpose, what the different methods are, client appropriateness and the provision of PDR-specific services to separating families
- a high level of familiarity in the legal sector with the term PDR and its processes
- awareness among organisations involved in providing support or services to separating families of a wide range of options available to families, although possibly without knowledge of the term PDR
- “goodness of fit” between client and worker, client and service,
- the ability of poorer families to access appropriate PDR and legal services
- specific training for mediators and counsellors in family law principles and processes, and
- greater training in the area of PDR, as well as increased access to information on the separation process, including Family Court systems, for both service providers and consumers.

**The Perth Project** reported that the effectiveness of the protocols they developed was due to their relevance, clarity and breadth. In the Perth Project, the PDR principles explicitly formed the basis of the protocols and implicitly set the context for all interactions from meetings to e-mail communication.
A review of the marketing strategy in the Perth Project showed that by maintaining clear and frequent communication between RAWA and each partner, opportunities for informing clients of PDR services could be maximised. The review indicated that issues for separating people and their families are inextricably linked to both issues of society including justice, health, education and employment, and more specific family issues like violence and abuse. The provision of PDR has been shown to be most relevant at the time of need and therefore requires appropriate timing and approaches.

SPECIFIC AND PRACTICAL LESSONS

In addition to these general indicators, a number of specific and practical issues were identified by the projects. As with the Worklists, these reflections have the potential to inform any future groups undertaking similar service delivery partnerships.

REFERRAL SYSTEMS

The Adelaide Project found that referrals to other services needed to be well considered to ensure they were able to respond in a timely manner and appropriately to meet the needs of the client. One of the challenges that they faced was that available services were constantly changing. They preferred to make direct referrals for clients for the following reasons:

- client details could be exchanged so that the client was not required to repeat them
- the service offered was the best fit for the client
- the system provided feedback on the client’s progress if that was appropriate, and
- some personal connection was made with another service, further increasing interagency knowledge.

The Ballarat Project reported that the use of a single session service delivery framework worked well, offering clients a one-off information and referral consultation. A number of clients accessed a single session appointment and benefited from the longer consultation provided. The follow-up phone contact enabled valuable feedback as well as further consultation and referral opportunities for clients. A number of clients indicated finding the follow-up supportive, particularly if the separation was recent and clients were feeling uncertain about the future. In addition, this project felt that there was an advocacy role as well as a role in identifying service delivery gaps and providing that feedback to both service providers and funding bodies.

This project also identified problems with staff in provider agencies not always following referral procedures. They stated that while these procedures could be refined as a project develops, the initial process was important in terms of developing trust in referral services.
Service providers of the **Coffs Harbour Project** agreed that there was a need for a basic set of referral protocols between agencies. The consensus was that:

- referrals should be simple – either a telephone call or a faxed form containing basic information
- the actual content of the referral is not particularly relevant – service providers simply expressed the need for referral to appropriate agencies, and
- referral of clients was affected by concerns about client confidentiality

The **Hobart Project** structured its referral model in a way that didn’t wait for the client to self-identify as needing a service, but proactively offered clients a service through an active referral. However, the staff that had to implement this had mixed responses. Most of the staff felt it was a good option for clients, and would make their work easier in the long term. Others felt they needed more practice in making proactive referrals, as their preferred style was to wait until the client indicated they had a problem (reactive referral).

Specific feedback included:

- If the conversation with the client was negative, staff found it difficult to offer the service.
- There was a reluctance to make the offer to the client if they are not perceived to be in crisis.

Most staff reported that the Hobart Project’s requirement to offer the service did not add to their workload. However, it was felt there needed to be a clear system of feedback for when the system wasn’t working. There was overwhelming agreement that there were benefits for clients in making proactive referrals, even if the client did not accept the offer of the service.

For the purposes of the Hobart Project only one service was used for referral and concern was raised about the ‘ethics’ of only referring to one agency, particularly if that agency may have failed to meet a client’s needs in the past. Staff making the referrals also felt it was very important that they were well briefed and trained in relation to what services were provided, how to make a proactive referral successfully and what to do when they encountered particular problems. It was interesting to note that as the first session was free, clients were happy to take up the option but not many clients wanted to continue into a fee paying program, and some of them were not able to pay at all.
Some issues identified by the Hobart Project included the need for:

- coordinating and integrating any change to existing operations
- making available a “coach” to support the proposed change
- establishing agreed protocols for information exchange within boundaries of client confidentiality early in the project
- recognising the opportunities available for transferring the skills possessed by one partner agency to enhance the referral capacity of the other via coaching, mentoring, education and support
- recognising that strategies to maintain momentum of the project throughout its duration are necessary, including enlisting support at appropriate times
- regular debriefing of all staff involved
- recognising the importance of early intervention in the separation process
- quickly engaging these and arranging a timely initial assessment with a trained counsellor
- shifting the work culture from dispute reduction to dispute prevention
- being more directive with clients in order to refer to appropriate services
- providing more targeted information to partner agencies so referred clients are clearer about what to expect, and
- developing a more effective feedback process between agencies to ensure seamless transfer of clients.

**Information Delivery**

The **Hobart Project** chose as one of its information delivery strategies the provision of a Self-Help style quiz that could also be accessed via a website. On reflection, participants in the project reported that they were disappointed with the quiz because they had unrealistic expectations of its role which had been exacerbated by its title, “Self-Help Quiz”.

It was considered that the quiz may have been more successful with a different title and an introduction explaining what users might achieve by completing it, not answers to their problems, but directions to services that might assist them to resolve their problems. It was also noted that engaging statements about the circumstances the quiz users might find themselves in would have been more appropriate in the introduction than at the end.

**Assessment and Support Issues**

The **Adelaide Project** commented that, although the service had a definite target group of ‘separated persons’, it was important that they were not seen as a large group of people with identical needs but as individuals with particular specific needs.
The issue of assessment arose in a number of the projects. It was seen as important that clients do not have to “tell their story” over and over again, particularly to organisations that are working collaboratively. To avoid this, agencies need to have confidence in each other’s intake and assessment processes. This is not something that happens automatically, but takes time and experience as the partnership itself becomes more collaborative.

Similarly, agencies in a partnership need to have a good understanding of the extent to which each is able to provide ongoing support to clients. For example, it is inappropriate to refer clients with long-term needs to a crisis service or a service only able to provide a small number of sessions.

Databases

One of the tasks of the Coffs Harbour Project was to create a comprehensive database of providers of legal, financial, emotional and practical support to separating/separated families in the region. This database was being used in two ways:

- for referrals of clients, and
- for raising awareness of the project’s service.

This was achieved by the Coordinator, who created a database of over 700 relevant services. Another part of this process was continual updating of the database. Promotional material was posted every month and included a form that allowed service providers to amend their contact details for project’s database if necessary. The Coordinator also updated information when in personal contact with services.

While the Coordinator had no difficulty in maintaining up-to-date information on the major PDR service providers in the region (Family Court, Legal Aid Commission, Community Justice Centres and Interrelate) and government departments (as their contact details rarely changed), maintaining the database of smaller service providers was much more difficult. In particular, information in relation to private counsellors and mediators was constantly changing and difficult to track.

The task of updating was highly labour-intensive and, as the project’s service had no administrative support, was beyond the time capabilities of the Coordinator.
A number of projects identified that there were clients presenting with issues of family violence and that it was critical for partnership projects to have strategies for addressing this situation.

The Melbourne Project concluded that a recent history of violence in the form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, intimidation, threats of violence (such as a threat to take the children away) or stalking may be a contra-indicator for referral, with the main focus being on the safety of all parties involved. It was felt that appointed workers would need to be the final arbiters of the appropriateness of a referral.


The system does not deal well with violence…The division of Commonwealth and State jurisdiction currently complicates the resolution of family law matters where violence is an issue. The way in which the service providers in the family law system handle issues of violence, including untested allegations of violence and child abuse, is viewed by many as one of the system’s major failings…Family violence and allegations of violence affect other parenting issues in addition to residence and contact orders.

The Melbourne Project noted, that it is likely that referrals to PDR Interagency projects would include clients with a high rate of ‘litigation recidivism’, especially through breaches of orders. These constant breaches indicate unresolved issues between the separated couple, so that, while threats of violence may indeed be a contra-indicator for referral (as indicated above), these clients (and their children) may well need the service. However, the issue of safety and duty of care must always be the first priority. Further, it should be noted that, no matter how ‘strictly’ the criteria are applied, they cannot cover all eventualities.

The Melbourne Project also noted that with all their cases involving varying levels of domestic violence, knowledge, skills and expertise in this field are critical. If, this Conjoint Mediation and Therapy approach is of most value for high conflict, ‘revolving door’ clients with intractable disputes, then it is highly likely that these types of clients will have a history of emotional and/or physical abuse. Workers involved in these programs must, then, be able to assess and deal appropriately with abuse. The project found that literature related to levels of violence for this type of mediation was rather scanty, a possible reason why such patterns of violence were not so clearly anticipated at the outset of this Project.
The **Ballarat Project** commenced with the service always seeing separating couples individually rather than together to ensure more accurate identification and assessment of the differing needs of each individual. It also ensured that the safety needs of clients were addressed where family violence might be present. The service provider had a long history of working with family violence and their initial policy and procedures required that, where family violence was a concern, separating couples would be seen separately.

The **Melbourne Project** provided a number of examples which highlight the problems that can arise if the presence of family violence has not been identified before the first session. This can be a particular problem when clients are referred by another professional or agency who either has not identified or does not pass on information about family violence.

This relates to the issue of confidence in the intake and assessment processes of other agencies. While it was anticipated that safety concerns would be assessed at the intake and referral point, this was occasionally inadequate when relying on the assessment information of other professional groups. Further, it had not been anticipated that separating couples who chose to present together might have their needs addressed more adequately if seen separately. Community-based welfare agency clients may present individually, in couples or in family groups, sometimes with differing and competing needs. The early experiences of the project highlighted the need to see all clients individually as a component of the service delivery model, rather than as an assessment issue at the intake point.
BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION EXPERIENCED BY PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Many of the projects reported on the benefits of working collaboratively with other agencies.

Some of the benefits identified by the Adelaide Project were:

- replication of services is avoided
- services are better targeted to fit individual need and circumstances
- clients are not required to repeat information
- feedback is possible to clarify issues and hone service delivery
- best practice processes and procedures can be discussed and developed
- it is possible to offer a timely response to client needs
- services can assist each other to identify unique solutions for client issues
- resources can be combined to provide training and development programs across services
- client feedback across services can assist in program development
- information provided to clients is up to date and correct, and
- opportunities to divert clients away from the court system are increased.

The Canberra Project concluded that benefits gained from the project were as follows:

1. The most obvious was the actual work of the project and the benefits the project hoped it would bring to families going through separation.
2. The unexpected benefits included:

- the building of relationships with the multicultural community, the indigenous community, the legal/court community and the broader community
- the concrete plans being developed to consolidate those relationships
- the interagency forum that developed to look at a better referral system for clients
- discussion about a common intake process
- the court starting a dialogue with the multicultural community
- RA and Marymead agreeing to consult about a calendar of group programs
- Centacare re-focusing its Family Support Program to offer more services to families experiencing conflict and separation
- greater knowledge gained about each other’s agency and work
- working together in a difficult situation e.g. problems finding staff, the resulting awareness in the agencies that the project partners were exploring every option
- increased likelihood that the project partners would refer clients to the other agencies and make more accurate referrals in the future, and trust one another’s referral process
- a louder voice when the project partners chose to lobby or approach the community - each agency had its own contacts, but the partnership brought together players who had little or no contact before, and
- the project partners gaining the experience of a successful partnership (a good basis for forming other partnerships or for working together again).

CONCLUSION

Partner agencies had to invest considerable work and commitment to achieve a result by which the partnership projects could demonstrate success and be described as performing. Without that commitment and ability to surmount the various challenges, it is clear that these projects would have remained in the earlier phases of development, and would not have evolved to the point of seeing their outcomes and goals realised.

The experiences conveyed in the partnership reports clearly demonstrate that it is challenging work but very rewarding once strong foundations are laid. The partnership experiences and lessons learned have also provided comprehensive information and ideas about what does and what does not work and this will benefit those groups that may wish to follow.
COLLABORATION WORKLIST
THE PERFORMING PHASE

Working Together – Issues To Consider
(for some Partnerships this may also include a collaborative case management model)

Outcomes

- How will the partnership group monitor and track their progress in relation to specific outcomes that have been agreed?
- What flexibility is there for modifying outcomes along the way if necessary?
- What levels of accountability will partner agencies have to each other and to the agreed outcomes of collaborative work?
- How will lack of cooperation by a partner agency in performing their responsibilities to achieve agreed outcomes be addressed?
- How will the partnership group acknowledge and celebrate its successes and achievements?

Evaluation

- How will outcomes be measured?
- How will partnership data be collected and collated?
- How will the partnership group know it is performing well?
- What strategies will be used to measure this?
- Will progress towards achieving outcomes be measured at interim points?
- What strategies will be used to address signs that outcomes may not be achieved?
- How will evaluation reports be used to inform future work?
- What are the reporting requirements of the partnership?
- Is there information not required for formal reporting that may still be useful to record? (for example, the number of clients that may not have been able to receive a service due to higher than expected demand)

Case Management

If a partnership enters into any collaborative case management arrangements, the following are examples of issues that may need to be addressed:

- processes for informing clients on any partnership policies and procedures
- models for intervention
- philosophical differences amongst members of the partnership
- duty of care and ethical issues
- legal issues and/or implications
- information sharing protocols
- client referral processes
- data collection
- screening and intake procedures
- assessment processes
- disclosure of child abuse, family violence etc
- procedures for child protection and reporting
- management of case notes and report writing
- responsibility for external correspondence that is relevant to partnership work, and
- responsibility for monitoring the work of the partnership and for its evaluation
The seven partnership projects have all completed the trial phase of their projects and for some that is the end point of their joint efforts. For others, it has led to further joint ventures. These include:

- building on the strengths of the network developed by the initial project
- extending their network to include other relevant stakeholders.
- refining the referral systems developed during the project.

Other groups have successfully applied for additional funding that will support their partnership to develop other collaborative project work to contribute to further integration of the family law system in their region. Members of each project endorsed the value of the partnership experience and what they learned from participating in collaborative work.

**CONCLUSION**

The literature and research indicate that partnership strategies can be a useful approach for addressing social issues such as family breakdown and parenting after separation. However, the literature and research equally acknowledge the complexities of collaborative work in terms of time, resources and the demands that come with the development of working relationships in a multi-agency environment.

In summary, the seven partnership projects demonstrated these complexities of interagency work identified in the literature, as well as the time and resource commitment required of participating partners to ensure that collaborative efforts achieve the desired outcomes. In that respect, the projects generally achieved their goals, but all projects reported learning important lessons along the way.

These partnership projects are commended for their efforts in paving the way for other partnerships that may embark on similar enterprises of collaborative effort. Their efforts also contributed to improved outcomes for families by working towards integrating our complex, multifaceted and ever-evolving family law system.
These reports have been provided by the lead agencies of each partnership project. They provide a more personal account, overview and summary of the experiences and lessons learned during the projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>2. The Ballarat Project</td>
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<td>3. The Canberra Project</td>
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<td>7. The Perth Project</td>
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The purpose of this brief report is to highlight some lessons learned through the process of running the Separating Parents Information And Referral System (SPIARS) program. It is hoped that the experiences highlighted will be of benefit to others interested in replicating the SPIARS model.

The aim of the SPIARS program was to develop a service that would provide clients with an opportunity to work through family separation by providing a holistic analysis of needs and identifying ways to meet those needs (either through direct service delivery or through accessing other community resources). The program worked within a child-focused/child inclusive framework and aimed to direct people away from the Family Court System whenever possible. It was hoped that the program would work collaboratively with other services to enable clients access to a streamlined and timely response to needs.

For the most part, the program was able to meet its objectives and arguably our biggest difficulty was the short time frame in which to run the program. Although the program ran for 16 months, only 12 months of that time entailed direct service provision. Despite time spent informing other agencies of the program prior to initiating client service, it took some time for the concept to infiltrate services and for referrals to be made.

As we worked within an action research framework, we were able to develop the program in response to client needs rather than primarily in response to perceived service gaps as articulated by other agencies. This process allowed us to develop a service that was unique and responsive to client needs but it did mean that it took some time to be able to clearly articulate our service to others.

Our initial concept for SPIARS was that it would provide a case coordination service that would advise and refer out to targeted services to meet identified needs. What was clear very early was that service needs identified by clients were either not available or had long waiting lists. We responded to this by developing some direct service responses.

In particular, we worked with separated parents to negotiate unique co-parenting plans that took full account of the needs of the children. Our method of working with families borrowed much from mediation but was far more directive in that we explained that our perspective was unequivocally child-focused and we provided clients with information about children’s responses to ongoing conflict as part of the educative component of service delivery. Parents who chose to develop child-focused solutions ranged from the newly separated to those having endured long term conflicted arrangements. The key to success was that we were able to shift parents thinking from an adult perspective to one that focused on meeting the needs of their children as a primary responsibility.

In order to offer the best service to clients it is important to develop and maintain meaningful networks with other services. The service has to be marketed and sold to as many other services and agencies as possible and this process takes time, perseverance and initiative. Strategies such as getting involved in any established interagency special issue reference groups, creating opportunities to address staff meetings, getting included on mailing lists and visiting sites will all generate information sharing.
There are many systemic barriers to collaborative practice, not least of all that we operate services in a competitive paradigm set up by the system of competitive tendering and the constant requirement to seek support through grants and project funding. This paradigm encourages us to work from a narrow core service perspective that does not easily allow for a collaborative approach.

The challenge is to create a service which is unique and which supports and adds to those services that already cater to the client base. Over time, other agencies came to depend on SPIARS to offer expert advice to clients, to have up to date resource information regarding support groups and services and to work collaboratively with them to enable a holistic response to clients.

SPIARS worked to fill the gaps in the system rather than replicate existing responses and in order to maintain this fluidity it needed to operate within an action research framework and be subject to change based on client input. Our client base ranged from those contemplating separation and wanting to be proactive about planning and management, through those already involved in entrenched litigation and wanting options, to those who have never been near the court, and who don’t want to go there, but who are struggling to maintain arrangements.

It is important to be able to articulate the service framework and delivery model in order to gain the support of other services. Strong connections and networks lead to unique opportunities for collaborative practice. The program coordinator’s connection with the Pathways Group at the Family Court led to the development of a submission/paper which represents the collective opinion of a number of representatives from agencies who service this client base. It is only by active participation in groups and forums that change can happen.

The key to success for SPIARS was that it developed into a service that was unique, timely and relevant to clients and that it did not replicate existing services, but supported them.
The Separation Resource Service run by Child & Family Services Ballarat operated from 1 July 2001 to 30 December 2002 to provide separated people in the Central Highlands region with a no-cost service providing information and referrals to professional staff (counsellors/welfare workers/psychologists) when needed. Information and referral was provided during the intake process and was also available within counselling sessions.

The Service was offered in conjunction with partner agencies (Centacare, Relationships Australia, Central Highlands Community Legal Centre, together with Child & Family Services Ballarat) which provided referral services. To support this initiative, a Post Separation Resource Network involving partner agencies and the Central Highlands Community Legal Centre was established to help manage the program and devise and monitor referral protocols.

The Separation Resource Service adopted a model based on a single information, assessment and referral session within an ongoing supportive role. It did not itself offer ongoing relationship counselling, but in a supportive and confidential manner facilitated referral to such services as needed.

To establish awareness of the Separation Resource Service, promotional material was developed and distributed and information sessions were held with professionals involved in various aspects relating to the needs of people post separation.

Although not all contacts with clients were recorded in detail, records were kept for a total of 44 clients who attended an appointment beyond the intake process. Almost all clients attending one or more sessions were on low incomes or in other respects disadvantaged, rendering them eligible for brokerage funds to assist them in accessing the Service and offsetting costs for any referral services. In addition, an estimated 40 to 60 undergoing or considering separation telephoned Child & Family Services Ballarat and were provided with immediate assistance in the form of information and advice about the process of separation and services available in the region to support people experiencing separation. The actual numbers of people accessing the Service were well below the anticipated 240 estimated in the funding and service agreement. This reflects the fact that initial estimates were made from an uninformed base, given that it was a new service and was still in the process of establishing its service profile in the community.

The unknown nature of the client profile was also evident in the estimate in the funding and service agreement, that one quarter of those accessing the Service were likely to be eligible for assistance via brokerage funds on the basis of some disadvantage or disability. In the event, service users who chose to attend the Service were almost exclusively those experiencing some socio-economic disadvantage.

Meeting clients’ needs and expectations was a prominent goal of the Separation Resource Service and follow-up telephone contact was provided to ensure appropriate services were offered and accessed, and to monitor client satisfaction with the Service. In addition to the internal processes for obtaining client feedback, for the purposes of this evaluation a survey was conducted to ascertain the level of client satisfaction with the Service. Of the 44 surveys distributed, 8 were returned.
Strengths of the Service were identified by service users and staff as the accessibility of the service and the relevance of the information available in the focused consultation session. Within its period of operation, it gained a degree of respect and recognition in the community which has raised expectations that such a service will continue to be provided in the region.

Managers and workers surveyed and interviewed for the purposes of this evaluation attested to the experience gained through the operation of the Service and the value of the work of the Post Separation Resource Network in developing cross-agency knowledge and understanding of the services available in the region for families undergoing separation.

**Future provision of the Service could be enhanced by:**

- further development of measures to support and attract indigenous people, people with disabilities or of culturally and linguistically different backgrounds
- re-consideration of the value of promoting the Service as primarily a one-off consultation
- ongoing networking via the Post Separation Resource Network to facilitate appropriate referrals
- consideration of referral to relationship counselling as a favoured option open to all clients, and
- the development of simple, relevant data recording sheets for tracking all service use.
3. THE CANBERRA PROJECT

The ACT PDR Partnership consisted of Centacare, Relationships Australia (RA) and Marymead. The original partnership between these three organisations was formed in January 2001, to provide services under the Rural and Regional PDR funding administered by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. There was a joint steering committee for the PDR project and the Partnerships Project funded by the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department and the two projects informed each other. Centacare was the lead agency for both projects.

We achieved the following outcomes from the project:

- established an interagency forum in the ACT for a range of agencies and professionals involved with families at the time of separation
- conducted focus groups for different community groups to find out about how their access to PDR services could be improved, and
- developed resource materials for service providers and the wider community.

The added value that the partnership provided has been:

- More creativity – we broadened each other’s perspective, bounced ideas off each other, kept each other’s enthusiasm for the tasks high, kept each other on track and filled in the gaps if people were briefly absent.
- Overlapping, but different skills and knowledge were able to be brought to bear on the task.
- Increased knowledge of the three organisations meant better referrals.
- Our networks were expanded. For example, Marymead had connections particularly with separating fathers groups and local child protection agencies, while RA had more links with the legal system and Centacare had more connections with school counsellors.
- In conducting the community focus groups, we were able to draw on the community links that each organisation had, resulting in larger community participation. Therefore we were able to increase the awareness of a larger group of people.
- One lasting effect is the ongoing ACT PDR Interagency group that was established during this project. That Interagency group is a partnership comprising Government and community sectors. Not only is the partnership looking at an integrated service delivery model, but the Interagency group is laying the foundations for that model.
- Having the experience of a successful partnership encourages the agencies to work together again and to form other community – Government partnerships.
Learning how to form partnerships has been a significant benefit of the project. Overcoming obstacles has resulted in increased confidence to continue the existing partnership and for individual agencies to form new partnerships. These obstacles included:

- difficulties with inter-organisational and intra-organisational communication
- failure to consult key workers within each organisation and invite their participation from the beginning of the project
- recruitment of staff for project work
- failure to connect project workers to the three organisations – they ‘belonged’ to the lead agency, resulting in less support to the workers than could have been provided.
In April 2001, the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department (AGD) sought tenders from service providers who assist separating families and refer them to other types of post-separation support. These tenders were to “propose strategies for collaborative and co-operative service delivery in partnership with other agencies, organisations or individuals who may be in position to assist post-separation parents to resolve their differences constructively or to assist with any other practical or emotional problems arising from the separation.” In other words, AGD was trialling different methods of reducing the conflicts between separating/separated parents and, in particular, to “guide separating couples to use counselling, mediation and conferencing first rather than become adversaries and litigants by turning to the courts.” The purpose of this strategy was to “create, for the children of separated parents, an environment that is in the child’s best interests.”

Interrelate - Mid North Coast and Tablelands (Coffs Harbour region) was highly interested in this idea as its workers had first-hand experience of the issues created for children (and parents) by the conflicts that arose during or after separation. In particular, they had noticed that:

- There had been an increase in inquiries from separating/separated parents in the previous year.
- Many parents were in distress, with requests for someone to help them through the uncharted territory that comes with family breakdown - case management and support.
- The needs and distress of the parents often led to conflict that overwhelmed the needs of the children in the separation process.
- This distress made it difficult for parents to work their way through the Family Law system as it was not integrated at a community level.

Subsequently, Interrelate successfully applied for funds to set up an Information, Referral and Support Service for Separating Families (IRSSSF).

IRSSSF was to be implemented by Interrelate in partnership with The School of Law and Justice, Southern Cross University; and in collaboration with other service providers in the region, including:

- the Family Court
- Legal Aid Commission
- Child Support Agency
- Centrelink
- day-care centres
- schools
- respite carers
- health services and General Practitioners
- family support services, and
- Department of Housing.
Aims & Objectives/Goals of the IRSSSF

The original Aims/Goals of IRSSSF were:

To increase early use of primary dispute resolution processes (PDR) by separating families by providing a free centralised information, referral and support service that would:

- provide neutral contact early in the separation period for the purpose of assessment and referral to appropriate PDR services
- enable separated parents to use services that are part of an integrated system, so that service usage is appropriate over time and as family needs change
- make separated parents more aware of PDR processes and services
- establish baseline for usage of PDR in Coffs Harbour for family separation and identifying the factors that contribute to early and effective uptake of PDR services.

In particular, IRSSSF was to assist more separating parents to resolve their differences in a way that takes full account of their children’s post-separation and ongoing needs by:

- providing information to parents about what is normal for families to experience during and after separation so that
- parents understand the escalating effects of a lack of trust, the needs of children and necessity for communication between parents in making arrangements for children.

However, after a meeting with the Attorney-General’s Project Officer in November 2001, IRSSSF’s Objectives/Goals were changed to increasing early use of primary dispute resolution processes (PDR) by separating families by:

- providing a free, centralised information, referral and support service
- collaborating with dispute resolution services, points of first contact and other services relevant to the needs of separated/separating families in the region
- giving IRSSSF clients the information they need to be better able to choose the most appropriate way to manage the conflict with their ex-partner
- referring IRSSSF clients to the type of/particular service that is best able to help them manage their conflict with their ex-partner
- assisting clients to access the service they need as early as practicable to help them manage conflict, and
- supporting those clients to make best use of the service that they are referred to.

Project Outcomes

Expected Outcomes of this Project were that:

- A service (IRSSSF) for information, referral and support for families experiencing separation would be established in Coffs Harbour with outreach to other parts of the Coffs Harbour region.
- Parents (and other clients) who used IRSSSF would have an increased understanding of children’s needs during and after separation.
- Where possible and appropriate, parents who used IRSSSF would manage difficulties in a child-focused way and through agreement between themselves, rather than through litigation.
- Protocols and referral mechanisms to and between providers of PDR in the Coffs Harbour region would be established.
- Services used by separating families in the local community would be identified and evaluated.
- A service delivery model for information, referral and support for families experiencing separation would be evaluated in terms of its suitability for sustainable and collaborative service delivery in similar centres around Australia.
5. The Hobart Project

This Primary Dispute Resolution (PDR) Partnerships project between Relationships Australia (RA) and the Child Support Agency (CSA) provided a unique opportunity to combine the expertise of a community service provider and a gatekeeper within the family law system. The resulting collaboration helped increase the use of PDR services for separating and separated parents for the duration of the project.

**Two activities were undertaken during this project:**

(I) New Service - Direct Client Transfer Service (DCTS)
(II) New Product - Self-Help Quiz (SHQ)

In the DCTS, clients were offered an opportunity by CSA staff to talk to an RA clinician via direct telephone transfer (or if this was unsuitable RA returned the call to the client). 102 clients were offered this opportunity and 53 clients accepted, of whom 19 received face-to-face counselling, seven mediation and 27 received telephone counselling and support. The take up rate of 53 per cent for this type of service is particularly encouraging. Qualitative feedback indicated that a number of clients found this proactive intervention a positive experience. Such intervention early in the separation can encourage ‘dispute prevention’ which may help clients avoid becoming negatively entrenched in their interactions with their former partner.

The SHQ involved the development of a quiz to assist users identify the likely emotional implications of separation, increase awareness of support services and provide an opportunity to reflect on their perception of conflict with their former partner. A paper and an electronic version were developed. The feedback received from the quiz users provided an encouraging starting place for the further development of this type of product. Further development is required to assist parents understand more about the emotions felt during separation and in the provision of information regarding support services.

**With respect to the ongoing development of the activities undertaken in this project, we recommend that:**

(I) The Attorney-General’s Department fund further testing of proactive referral interventions, such as the one used in this project.

(II) This testing is broader than that undertaken in this project - in terms of geographical area and involvement of more than one service provider.

(III) RA undertakes further development and testing of the paper version of the SHQ.

(IV) CSA continue to refine and enhance the electronic version of the SHQ.

(V) There is further testing of the SHQ to ascertain reasons for the significant differences in feedback between RA and CSA clients.
In terms of the processes of forming partnerships, it is recommended that:

(VI) Face-to-face discussions between all parties are built into the project management of future collaborative partnerships.

(VII) Alternative funding arrangements are considered which allow for direct partnership relationships between all players within the family law system.

(VIII) When either trialling or integrating new practices into existing service delivery operations:
- research the impact of existing change processes
- ensure there is acknowledgment of the importance of flexible timing in the project deliverables, along with a capacity to adjust the timing if needed.

(IX) CSA consider the opportunities for transferring clients to community service providers on a wider basis and then as part of its ‘business as usual’ operations.

Many of the lessons of this project came as RA and CSA grappled with the provision of an integrated service to clients and worked through the issues of working as partners operating from two different sectors and cultures. The experience of the partnership assisted both services to realise some of the restraints of an integrated family law system. However, the primary lesson from the project partnership was that with cooperation, collaboration and goodwill, the achievements augur for a pathways vision where all service providers assist separating parents gain access to support and information.

*Relationships Australia Tasmania and the Child Support Agency wish to acknowledge the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department for providing the opportunity to experiment and succeed in discovering possibilities for PDR services of the future.*
The Conjoint Mediation and Therapy (CoMeT) Project

This project obtained its initial impetus from a ‘clinical’ concern felt by the original project manager. This mediator operated as the sole practitioner in the Carlton office of FMC Relationship Services, or the Family Mediation Centre (FMC) as it is better known. FMC was the lead agency in the project. FMC has been providing mediation services in family law disputes since about 1985, and now has several branch locations in Victoria. The worker’s chief concern was with the manner in which issues which were not part of the negotiations in post-separation mediation often led to impasses which the usual mediation process seemed unable to surmount. In particular, unresolved emotional issues around the separation, the relationship itself, past abuse, or childhood trauma, tended to block resolution of the identified issues. Sometimes these could sabotage child agreements with the usual fallout when such agreements are breached.

This part of the conflict was generally felt to be beyond the scope of typical family law mediation, which is a future-focused, rational, problem-solving process. In general, exploration of deep-seated emotional pain was outside the competencies of most mediators, and regarded as outside their role.

The Carlton office was co-located with Drummond Street Relationship Centre (DSRC) whose counsellors usually dealt with precisely those emotional issues not normally dealt with in mediation. The worker concerned envisioned at some future stage that a ‘seamless’ service between mediators and counsellors could assist these separated families more efficaciously, and lead to lasting agreements (and lasting peace!) more readily than the form of post-separation Primary Dispute Resolution (PDR) that was currently being delivered.

The Attorney-General’s Department’s offer of funds to explore collaborative ventures in post separation PDR provided the final impetus for a trial study in which a mediator and counsellor would work side-by-side with a family, providing different and complementary interventions and strategies as the need arose. Initial discussions between the Department and the two partner agencies began in early 2001.

Owing to some staff and administrative changes in both agencies, the location of the service and the partner agency shifted to FMC’s Narre Warren office and Relationships Australia (Narre Warren) (RA), respectively, in January 2002. A new project manager, a mediator from FMC and a counsellor from RA became the new clinical team, with delivery of the new service available between February 2002 and February 2003 inclusive (13 months).

Twelve separated families agreed to use the new service with its attendant pre- and post-evaluation research. Approximately another thirty families declined the offer of the service in favour of conventional mediation.
In most cases the insight-oriented counselling and therapy was only provided by the counsellor in the same room and session as the mediation. Occasionally, additional counselling outside the joint session was necessary to provide support to individuals in high distress. Many of the cases were augmented by children’s interviews to provide the parents with further insight into the impact of the conflict upon children.

In the joint sessions, provision of interventions was adapted to clients’ needs: sometimes a session focused on reaching a mediated agreement; other times on therapeutically exploring an underlying source of conflict (e.g., how the dynamic of present interactions opened ‘wounded-ness’ from the relationship itself, or from childhood, etc); and at other times the focus moved back and forth between mediation and counselling in the one session. The therapeutic strategies were many and varied, and included talking through past painful interactions, reflective listening, psychodrama, role plays and ‘body sculpture’ to depict feelings, to name a few.

**The principal clinical achievements were as follows:**

- Successful interventions were achieved in most of the participants’ conflict
- Development of a working model which could be replicated, and which extends the ambit of PDR mediation to families who would otherwise be stuck in a ‘revolving door’ of unresolved conflict
- An important feature of the model is its separation of the disciplines, or ‘discipline purity’ combined with a seamless ‘conjoint’ service.
- The report’s findings are quite detailed about the antecedents of much parental conflict and the necessary resources, training and precautions that need to be borne in mind when setting up such a program.

**The other key achievement of the project is a greater understanding of necessary ingredients for successful inter-agency collaboration, as follows:**

- proper resourcing in terms of funds, staff time and autonomy from the ‘parent’ organisations
- experienced staff
- clear ideas about how responsibilities and expenses will be shared, and
- thorough prior discussions and understanding (for all parties to the collaboration) of administrative and organisational issues likely to impinge on smooth service provision.

FMC has found that, from a clinical perspective, this pilot has clearly extended the ground that it can cover as a provider of post-separation PDR services. To that extent, FMC is cautiously examining the possibility of a similar ‘in house’ service using an experienced female mediator and experienced male counsellor from the Men and Family Relationships Program.

In relation to the collaboration aspects, FMC has entered into a second collaboration with RA at Traralgon under the Rural and Regional funding. However, from the perspective of the clinicians, the under-resourcing of the project (in that no additional funds were available for workers’ time etc) created excessive stress. The work itself is much more resource-intensive than conventional mediation and relationship counselling. It was exhausting for two part-time workers who still had other responsibilities to their own organisations.
Partnerships Pilot Project Overview Summary

Introduction

Relationships Australia Western Australia (RAWA) approached four organisations to form partnerships, with the purpose of reaching people at different entry points of separation pathways. Each of the organisations assists post separation parents to resolve their differences constructively through the use of PDR with particular emphasis on resolutions which meet the best interests of their children.

The four partnerships formed were:

Department of Education (DoE)
In many instances it is the school staff who are often the first people outside the immediate family who are told of the changes impending and/or occurring in the family structure. When school staff are aware of the PDR options many people are enabled to gain smoother access to PDR services before embarking on the legal processes.

Child Support Agency (CSA).
In most family separations the CSA is contacted within a week of separation regarding child support payments. When the CSA staff are aware of the PDR options, many people are enabled to gain smoother access to appropriate PDR services before embarking on the legal processes as well as during legal proceedings or after legal proceedings.

Legal Aid Western Australia (LAWA).
For many people, in particular low income people, LAWA is a starting point for legal advice. When the LAWA staff are aware of the PDR options many people have smoother access to PDR services beyond what is provided at LAWA at an early intervention through to a late intervention stage.

Family Court of Western Australia (FCWA).
For most people FCWA is the only place thought of when enquiring about how to separate, divorce, make contact arrangements and changes to consent orders. With the FCWA being aware of the PDR options many people have smoother access to PDR services, at different entry points and legal stages, to complement the legal structures in place.

What our partnership project set out to achieve

From the outset of the PDR Partnerships Project, RAWA was aiming to achieve a seamless referral process for clients. To achieve this RAWA developed, implemented and put in place strategies for collaborative and cooperative service delivery in partnership with DoE, CSA, LAWA and FCWA.

To develop partnerships with the four organisations and their stakeholders, RAWA needed to gain a clear understanding of:

- Who the partner organisations’ clients were
- How the clients accessed their services
- Why the clients accessed these services
- How the partners responded to clients needs
- What services partners offer
What were the expected timeframes of service delivery, and
How could RAWA interact with partners’ staff/services.

To achieve this, five reference groups were formed to provide leadership of the project:
- RAWA PDR Partnerships Internal
- RAWA – CSA
- RAWA – Legal Aid WA
- RAWA – Department of Education
- RAWA – Family Court of WA

These reference groups met separately and together. In addition, consultations with sections within each of the partner agencies were held and national discussions with PDR Partnerships Project Staff in other States were held face to face and by phone. The meetings, consultations and review of the process contributed to the development, implementation and maintenance of strategic direction and adaptation of the organisational culture to PDR.

What our partnerships project achieved

The RAWA PDR Partnerships Project has successfully provided strategic direction within the community of four partners and their stakeholders and achieved significantly increased interagency collaboration, increased cross-disciplinary collaboration and the provision of effective early assistance for separating families which focuses on best interests of children.

Strategic planning to improve best practice and professionalism were shared in dedicated training sessions and problem solving sessions. Procedures for clinical innovation and case management were designed collaboratively, at all times focusing on empowering and holistic client outcomes.

The project has successfully furthered the development of an understanding of the family law system and implemented the efficient development and application of resources among partners. Protocols describing principles, rights and responsibilities were developed with each partner. The client self assessment tool ‘quiz’ was adapted for Western Australian conditions based on partners contributions to the modifications. RAWA published a brochure ‘Reaching Fair and Practical Solutions Following Separation’ developed with input from all partners. Prompt sheets, also known as trigger sheets, were developed in collaboration with partners for front line staff.

Conclusion

Investing a large proportion of the PDR Partnerships Project time into developing clear communication and protocols with each other has formed a strong and stable base on which to take the collaborative steps for identifying client needs and how the clients access the organisations, what services/sections the clients enter/utilise and the gaps to be filled.

Developing the partnerships with each organisation in parallel, meant that in the early stages RAWA was the common link with the DoE, CSA, LAWA and FCWA. By the completion of the PDR Partnerships Project, RAWA and each of the partners had direct links with one another. The outcome of this is a seamless referral process for clients through the separation pathways. This network is still operating due to the commitment of staff to maintain links with each other via email, information forums and meetings to enable notification of changes occurring, new services/products developed and feedback from clients.
COLLABORATION WORKLIST
THE FORMING PHASE
APPENDIX 8

Examples of services or practitioners that may provide post separation assistance or family dispute resolution and could be included in a partnership: (in alphabetical order)

- Centrelink
- Community Education or Parenting Programs;
- Community Justice Centres;
- Crisis Services;
- Family & Children Services (State Officers)
- Information, Advocacy and Referral Services;
- Mediators & other Dispute Resolution Practitioners;
- Other Family Support Services;
- Self-Help Groups;
- Child Support Agency;
- Community Health Services;
- Counsellors and Social Workers;
- Ethno-Specific Organisations;
- Family Courts;
- Legal Practitioners;
- Outreach Services;
- State and Local Government Agencies;

Factors to be considered when developing the network or partnership:

- Which agencies will/should be included in the partnership?
- Why should these agencies be included?
- How will these networks benefit both the agency and the clients?
- How will the geographical and/or service delivery boundaries of the partnership be defined?
- What will be the level of representation from each agency?
- Who will attend the meetings? How often will these meetings occur?
- What capacity for decision making do these agency representatives need to have?
- How will trust be fostered and developed between the agencies?
- Does there need to be an agency/individual that will take a lead role in the partnership?

Links with other relevant Programs/Services:

- How will the agencies/individuals that are not included in the partnership but have some relevance to, and/or role in, an integrated family law system be kept informed about the partnership and its activities?
- How will the partnership engage those agencies/individuals interest and help them to understand the role they play in an integrated family law system?

Principles For Consideration In Interagency Collaborative Partnerships And The Development Of The Structural Processes For Integrated Family Law Systems

It is evident both from the literature and the experiences of the seven partnership projects that some thought needs to be given to the way a partnership group is structured, the shared vision and the principles and processes that will be used to define the work.

Structure

- Does there need to be several layers to the partnership? (eg core group or management committee, and then a broader networking group that can assist with the tasks managed by the core group)
- How will the activities of the partnership be resourced?
- Are there any opportunities for the ‘pooling’ or ‘sharing’ of resources?
- If the partnership receives funds, who will manage these funds?

* located in a variety of settings: private, community, workplace, schools, universities, family-focused interest groups, and Commonwealth agencies
* non accommodation – telephone & face to face
* in private, community, legal aid or academic settings
* located in community settings and in private practice
Vision

- What are the underlying assumptions that may be adopted to underpin the partnership vision?
- Will the partnership focus on more effective coordination and integration of what currently exists, or on developing something new, or both?
- What is meant by the terms ‘integrated family law system’ and ‘primary dispute resolution’ in the context of this partnership?
- What is the overall national vision, and how will the partnership reflect this in the local context?
- What are the contextual influences such as legislative, structural, political, cultural, etc that have the ability to influence essential elements of an integrated system in either positive and/or negative ways?
- What are the theoretical, philosophical and practice viewpoints, policies and procedures of the agencies/workers involved in the partnership, and are these congruent and compatible with the collective vision of the partnership?

Principles

- What are the essential principles that the partnership may consider need to be linked to the vision to ensure its integrity?
- Will the principles include a focus on ‘child inclusive practice’?

Processes

- Does the partnership need to commission a needs analysis or feasibility study for their area to determine needs, priorities, and the ability of the partnership to be able to address those needs?
- Is an informal audit of what already exists needed to identify any gaps in service delivery?
- How will any of the above processes be initiated?
- What needs to be put in place to foster respectful and collaborative ways of working together?
- How will the relationships of the partnerships be managed?
- How will any disputes be managed and conflicts resolved?
- What information sharing, if any, will be required to successfully achieve both the vision and better outcomes for clients?
- Are there any safety issues for either clients and/or workers to be considered?
- How will differences be worked with?

Target Population of the Partnership:

- Who is the partnership for?
- How will others not in the target group be responded to?
- Are there any constraints in the partnership’s ability to respond to the target group?

How will the partnership respond to the following?

- Indigenous Australians
- Linguistic Difference
- People with Disabilities
- Rural and Remote People
- Children & Young People
- Cultural Diversity
- Literacy Difficulties
- Mental Health Issues
- Gay and Lesbian Clients
- Elderly Clients
Relationships With Other Service Providers – Within & Without

For partnerships to work it is critical that the relationships of the partnership are managed well, and continually nurtured and reviewed. Some of the following factors need to be considered:

**Information dissemination**
- How will information be disseminated?
- Who will take responsibility for disseminating it?

**Dealing with assumptions and differences**
- How will group/individual assumptions be identified and addressed? (This could include a range of issues. For example, do members of a partnership and their staff have the same assumptions about what an integrated family law system means, or what they mean by the term primary dispute resolution?)
- How will differences be identified and addressed? (This could include exploring differences in any ideological base that the agencies of the partnership operate from, and/or exploring the range of theoretical frameworks amongst the partnership members that inform the practice models that their agencies work from)

**Dealing with conflict and inequities**
- How will problems/issues/concerns be identified and/or raised in the partnership?
- How will disputes, conflict, power struggles or grievances be resolved?
- Do all member agencies of the partnership have the ability to participate equally?
- If not, what are the options for addressing this inequity?

**Leadership**
- Who will chair or facilitate the meetings?
- How will it be determined whether the person/s appointed to this role have the skills required to undertake this effectively? (eg what previous experience do they have in this type of role, and what type of leadership, management and conflict resolution skills do they have?)
- Would it be helpful to have a role statement or job description created for both the leadership role and the role of partnership members to clarify responsibilities, and should these be developed jointly by the partnership?

**Policies and Procedures**
- Do partnership protocols, policies and procedures need to be developed?
- What will be addressed by any protocols, policies and procedures?
- How will the protocols, policies and procedures be used to benefit both the agency and the clients linked to any projects undertaken by a partnership?
- Who will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating implementation, effectiveness, compliance etc?
- What is the process for dealing with any issues that arise from the above processes?
COLLABORATION WORKLIST
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Management of Collaborative Partnership Groups
This is a continuation of earlier processes. At this stage the collaborative partnership group may be moving towards more formalised structures and processes that would take into consideration the following:

- What will be the ongoing group structure?
- What will be the ongoing membership of the partnership and the formal management structure? (This may already be evident and in place at this point.)
- What mechanisms will be in place for reviewing the structure and membership at various points throughout the life of the partnership?

Legal Structure and Context

- Does the partnership need to be an incorporated body in order to achieve its vision and prescribed function?
- Does the partnership need to identify the current legislative and government policy directives that are relevant, and that will inform and support its vision?
- Does the partnership need to consider whether any policy or legislative constraints exist in relation to the work it has agreed to undertake, and does it need to explore how this may impact on its vision?

Roles & Responsibilities of Members

- Once roles and responsibilities of members have been clarified, should these be in writing so that the information is available to new members that may join the group during the partnership’s lifetime?
- Should the partnership group consider creating an induction package or resource manual? (To address the fact that members will come and go and therefore avoid having to use meeting time educating new members about the group’s purpose and their role.)

Model of Management and Accountability

- Should any interagency protocols and partnership policies and procedures created be compiled into a resource manual that can be distributed to members of the partnership?
- How would any non-compliance with agreed policies and procedures be addressed?

Operational Policies

- If the partnership is involved in any collaborative and coordinated service delivery that is facilitated through conjoint efforts should it have the operational policies formally written up and available in a partnership resource manual?
Rights of Service Users

- How will clients of partnership services be responded to if there are any complaints or grievances that are related to the activities of the partnership?
- How will the partnership protect the confidentiality of clients, and if any information sharing is necessary will it be conducted within protocol frameworks that are established to facilitate this appropriately?
- What joint protocols, policies and procedures will underpin issues/concerns that may present amongst clients referred to the services of the integrated system created by the partnership? (For example, this may include screening, assessing and responding to family violence, child abuse, suicidal ideation and threats to workers.)

Partnership Complaints and Grievance Procedures

- Have the processes for managing conflicts been established as agreed conflict and dispute management procedures? (Such conflicts may arise from misunderstandings in communication, members operating from a range of assumptions, or differences in opinion or ideology.)
- Do these procedures clearly articulate expectations of the group about the processes that need to be followed to address any conflict, and are these procedures likely to maximise the ability of members of the partnership to reach satisfactory outcomes?
- Will this information be in writing and included in a partnership resource manual or induction package?
COLLABORATION WORKLIST
THE PERFORMING PHASE
APPENDIX 8

Working Together – Issues To Consider
(for some Partnerships this may also include a collaborative case management model)

Outcomes

- How will the partnership group monitor and track their progress in relation to specific outcomes that have been agreed?
- What flexibility is there for modifying outcomes along the way if necessary?
- What levels of accountability will partner agencies have to each other and to the agreed outcomes of collaborative work?
- How will lack of cooperation by a partner agency in performing their responsibilities to achieve agreed outcomes be addressed?
- How will the partnership group acknowledge and celebrate its successes and achievements?

Evaluation

- How will outcomes be measured?
- How will partnership data be collected and collated?
- How will the partnership group know it is performing well?
- What strategies will be used to measure this?
- Will progress towards achieving outcomes be measured at interim points?
- What strategies will be used to address signs that outcomes may not be achieved?
- How will evaluation reports be used to inform future work?
- What are the reporting requirements of the partnership?
- Is there information not required for formal reporting that may still be useful to record? (for example, the number of clients that may not have been able to receive a service due to higher than expected demand)

Case Management

If a partnership enters into any collaborative case management arrangements, the following are examples of issues that may need to be addressed:

- processes for informing clients on any partnership policies and procedures
- models for intervention
- philosophical differences amongst members of the partnership
- duty of care and ethical issues
- legal issues and/or implications
- information sharing protocols
- client referral processes
- data collection
- screening and intake procedures
- assessment processes
- disclosure of child abuse, family violence etc
- procedures for child protection and reporting
- management of case notes and report writing
- responsibility for external correspondence that is relevant to partnership work, and
- responsibility for monitoring the work of the partnership and for its evaluation
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIP PROJECT MEMBERS

The Partnership Project examples used in this report were sourced from the following documents:


The Attorney-General’s Department would like to acknowledge all the partners and advisers to the partnership projects who committed their time and expertise, that contributed to the success of the seven pilot projects.

These individuals are listed below:

**THE ADELAIDE PROJECT**

**Anglicare South Australia**

Dianne Halliday, Coordinator SPIARS Project
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**Partners to Anglicare SA SPIARS project:**

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Research Director
Australian Centre for Community Services Research (ACCSR)
Paul Kolarovich
Family Law Lawyer
Westside Legal Inc.

**APPENDIX 9**

**THE BALLARAT PROJECT**

**Major contributors to the Ballarat collaborative partnership in the pilot PDR partnerships project were:**

Child & Family Services Ballarat:
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Fiona White, Manager Family and Community Services
Jacinta Wainwright, Separation Resource Service Worker

**Relationships Australia:**

Heather Roche, Centre Manager Ballarat Office
Centacare Ballarat:
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Central Highlands Community Legal Centre:
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THE CANBERRA PROJECT

The Managers
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Shelley Atkins (Marymead)
Marian McCann (Centacare)

Project & Research Officers
Michelle Southgate and Sally Hughson - Project workers
Michelle Cullen - Project worker in the final 5 months
Barbara Knight - ACU - research officer
Morag McArthur - ACU - research supervisor

Steering Committee: All of the above, and
Kevin Percival and Luise Lang (Family Court)
Helen Geltch and Fiona Holihan (Marymead)
Gail Frank (Relationships Australia), and
Peter Camilleri (ACU)

THE COFFS HARBOUR PROJECT

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Roger Horton, Teacher, TAFE NSW Coffs Harbour Education Campus and Researcher, Interrelate Mid-north Coast PDR Partnerships Project
Marguerite Alexander, Coordinator, Coffs Harbour Children’s Contact Centre, Interrelate
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Janet Sutherland, Coordinator, Northern Community Justice Centres NSW (based at Newcastle)
Mid-north Coast Family Law Practitioners Association, Consisting of solicitors practising family law in Coffs Harbour, Grafton and Nambucca
Mr Tony Miller, Coordinator and Founder, DIDS (Dads In Distress)
Chris Heugel, Men’s Worker, Nambucca Valley Men’s Project (incl. Young Men)
Ruth Allen, Coordinator, Burnside Family Support Service, Coffs Harbour
Cliff Webeck, Clerk of the Local Court, Coffs Harbour Court House
The Social Work Team, Centrelink, Coffs Harbour
The Child Support Agency Team, Coffs Harbour (based at Centrelink)
Various staff of the Mental & General Wellbeing Division, Coffs Harbour Health Campus, Mid North Coast Health Service

Relationships Australia Tasmania
Susan Holmes, Executive Director
Debbie Evans, Deputy Director
Julian Watchorn, Project Officer
Dennis White, Project Officer
The Counselling Team, who received the patched-through calls from CSA clients

Child Support Agency - National Office
Mary O’Hanlon, Director, National Products and Services Unit
John Dalby, Project Manager, National Products and Services Unit
Margaret Anderson, Project Manager, National Products and Services Unit
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Child Support Agency - Victoria/Tasmania Region
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Brett Smart, Team Leader, New Clients Team, Hobart
Client Service Officers in the New Client Team in Hobart

A Reference Group was established to oversee the Project. Its members comprised:

Family Mediation Centre (FMC), Narre Warren, Victoria
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Anthony Grimes, FMC Mediator, Staff Member; Project Manager

Relationships Australia (RA), Kew, Victoria
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Walter Ibbs, PDR Practice Leader RA Kew
Leni Foster, RA Psychologist and Counsellor
La Trobe University

Associate Professor Lawrie Moloney, Psychologist Director, Department of Counselling and Psychological Health, La Trobe University

Centacare

Pat Boyhan, Psychologist & Family Therapist, Clinical Supervisor and Regional Manager, Centacare Catholic Family Services, Mitcham office

THE PERTH PROJECT

Relationships Australia Western Australia (RAWA) Internal Reference Group

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Mandy Flahavin, Coordinator PDR Partnerships Project

Family Court of Western Australia

Stephen Thackray, Principal Registrar
Stuart Jeffery, Manager Customer Services
Dawson Ruhl, Director of Counselling Service
Paul Kerin, Manager of Counselling Service

Legal Aid, Western Australia

Colleen Brown, Senior Solicitor
Joy Taylor, Child Representative

Department of Education

Robyn Oliver, Manager, Student Services
Mandy Stark, Primary School Psychologist
Deb Cuneen, High School Psychologist

Child Support Agency

Neil Dwyer, Senior Manager
Bev Collins, National Outreach Coordinator
Jeanette Harris, Complaints Officer
COMMENTS FROM CLIENTS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES IN THE SYSTEM

Referral to a PDR service

‘All people who separate should see a counsellor’

‘Couldn’t fault the system’

‘A lot of people wouldn’t know or think to seek help especially early in the separation process’

Comments about self-help material provided via a survey

‘Information about the support services was most helpful’

‘It made me think about the impact on the child’

‘Your survey doesn’t catch the full heartache of people who put up with abuse or alcohol which lead to family break-up and separation’

‘Where does the quiz explore emotions? It barely touches on emotions let alone explores the myriad of emotions you feel on separation’

‘Separation is a highly charged time that often extends over many months. It is not always easy to think straight or even make good decisions but your survey is an opportunity to allow parents to focus and look at more options’

‘Having separated over three years ago the site was of limited utility to me. However for a person undergoing separation it would be an invaluable resource’

‘Your survey is simplistic and does not address the real issues associated with family split up or the effect on children’

‘I believe that you need to have more links from the quiz so that parents can read other articles etc in regard to children and separation’

Gardiner, J 2000, Literature Review Models of Coordination and Integration of Service Delivery, commissioned by the Domestic Violence Prevention Unit of Western Australia.

Penter, C, Öther-Gee, B, Thompson, J & Gatley, L 2001, Literature Review and Supplementary Paper for Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Regional Coordination as an Approach to Maximising Service Delivery in Domestic Violence, commissioned by the West Australian Domestic Violence Prevention Unit.


**Additional Resources (provided by the partnership projects)**

Primary Dispute Resolution Partnership Pilot Projects 2003, The Seven Final Reports, commissioned by the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department.

NOTES:

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