


**IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

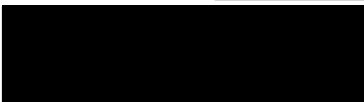
ATTACHMENT BA-3 TO STATEMENT OF BETH ALLEN

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This is the attachment marked '**BA-3**' produced and shown to **BETH ALLEN** at the time of signing her Statement on 13 July 2015.

Before me: 



**An Australian Legal Practitioner within
the meaning of the Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)**

Family services (including Child FIRST)

Date of Advice: **5 November 2012**

Advice no: **1081**

This advice is endorsed by the: Assistant Director, Child Protection Policy, Practice and Planning

This Advice is current **only** if the date of Advice in this document matches the date of Advice in the online version. Check the date of Advice on line before relying on this printed copy.

Introduction and purpose

This Advice provides an overview of integrated family services, including Child FIRST. It provides Child Protection practitioners with an understanding of the integrated family services system, the role of the community based child protection practitioner and to guide decision making regarding making a referral to integrated family services via Child FIRST. The integrated family services system is described, target group and prioritisation are outlined, practice issues are discussed and regional contacts for further advice are identified.

Family services provide an integrated family service system to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families.

The key elements of the model for family services are:

- differential and comprehensive range of family service approaches to support family functioning and children's development
- coordinated and integrated family services system at sub-regional catchment level with strong relationships and clear referral pathways to local/sub-regional health, education, family violence and other community services
- child and family services alliances, including key partners of Child FIRST, family services and Child Protection to share accountability, planning and operational responsibilities at sub-regional catchment level
- the functions of Child FIRST as the entry point into integrated family services sub-regional service system
- culturally competent services and practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- collaboration in practice, service development and planning with other sub-regional service systems and networks

Legislation

Note: Use the Legislation link on toolbar to access full-text versions of the legislation. Any sections of an Act noted in this Advice are partial references only and should not be relied on. Practitioners should refer to the Act for full details.

Legislative context

The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (CYFA) provides the legislative basis (s. 46) for services provided to vulnerable children, young people and families by providing for the registration of community services. It formally positions family services within the service continuum, and underpins the way services work with families, to enable better outcomes for children and young people.

The purposes of registered child and family services (s. 22), that is, Child FIRST and registered family service providers, are to:

- provide a point of entry into an integrated local service network that is readily accessible by families, that allows for early intervention in support of families and that provides child and family services
- receive referrals about vulnerable children and families where there are significant concerns about their wellbeing
- undertake assessments of needs and risks in relation to children and families to assist in the provision of services to them and in determining if a child is in need of protection
- actively support referral to other relevant agencies if this is necessary to assist vulnerable children and families
- promote and facilitate integrated local service networks working collaboratively to coordinate services and support to children and families
- provide ongoing services to support vulnerable children and families.

Section 31 of the Act provides for referral to registered child and family services (Child FIRST and integrated family services) where a person has a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child, or an unborn child.

For the purposes of assessing risk and determining which is the appropriate service to engage the family, child and family services are authorised to consult with a range of services including child protection, universal, adult and specialist services specified in section 36 of the CYFA.

The identity of a person referring to Child FIRST is confidential. However, the referrer is encouraged to consent to the disclosure of their identity and assist with engaging the family with family services. Legal and professional indemnities also apply to referrals made in good faith.

There are also specified responsibilities for registered child and family services (s. 61). A registered child and family service must:

- provide its services in relation to a child in a manner that is in the best interests of the child
- ensure that the services provided by the service are accessible to and made widely known to the public, recognising that prioritisation of provision of services will occur on need
- participate collaboratively with local service networks to promote the best interests of the child

Service description

The strategic framework incorporates the functions of Child FIRST as the consolidated intake service into integrated family services at sub-regional catchment level and spells out how integrated family services are to provide a quality family service system to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families.

Client group for Child FIRST and integrated family services

The CYFA requires integrated family services to prioritise services based on need and the impact on the child's development. The primary target group for integrated family services is children or young people who are vulnerable due to family circumstances and social isolation, aged 0 to 17 years and their families, or parents expecting a child - where there are significant concerns about a child or unborn child. This includes vulnerable families who are experiencing significant difficulties in providing a safe and stable environment to ensure the wellbeing and positive development of their children.

Families requiring the support of family services generally have complex needs, which can adversely impact on a child's development if appropriate supports and interventions are not provided in a timely manner. Significant concerns about the child's wellbeing and development are highlighted by how often issues are occurring, how serious the issues are and most importantly how the issues are affecting the child's development.

Consistent with the legislation, services should be prioritised to families on the basis of need, to prevent difficulties escalating to a level that will significantly impact on the child's development and consequently lead to the entry into Child Protection.

Child FIRST - intake for all integrated family services in sub/regional area

The twenty-four Child FIRST sites provide sub-regional intake into family services across the state. Refer to How to make a referral to Child FIRST for locations (see Related links).

Key functions

The functions of Child FIRST have been formulated on the basis that clearly visible and accessible entry into integrated family services in a designated sub-regional catchment to provide effective service responses for vulnerable children and families requires the following functions:

A clear entry point into family services within a sub-regional catchment, providing:

- a single telephone number
- provision of information and advice
- initial needs identification and assessment of risk, in consultation with Child Protection and other services
- identification of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children, young people and families
- identification of differentiated service responses for families related to the assessment of needs and underlying risks
- active engagement with the child, young person and their family
- determination of the priority of a response, and allocation of families to integrated family services, undertaken in consultation with family services and Child Protection (where required)
- timely responses through provision of or oversight of 'active holding strategies' involving active short term work with children and families, prior to allocation to family services

Community Based Child Protection

Community based child protection work is a key component of the Child FIRST and integrated family services system across the state.

Child Protection Advanced Practitioners (Community Based) are assigned to each Child FIRST site to undertake a range of key functions, including:

- facilitation of referrals from Child Protection to Child FIRST
- provision of consultation and advice on specific cases to Child FIRST and integrated family services in the sub-regional catchment, including safety planning to enable ongoing case management

- provision of advice to the Child FIRST catchment Child Protection staff regarding making referrals to Child FIRST
- participation in local professional and community education initiatives
- identification of cases within Child Protection requiring enhanced referral
- management of a caseload of cases transitioning to Child FIRST commensurate with their other duties and reporting to the Practice Leader.

Child Protection Advanced Practitioners (Community Based) spend part of each week in registered family services sites within the sub-regional catchment.

* See Child Protection and Integrated Family Services State-Wide Agreement (Shell Agreement) 2010 in the Related links section

Considerations for good practice

Note: Use the Practice Resources link on the toolbar to access further Practice Guidance and Research.

A referral to Child FIRST may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need, where families exhibit any of the following factors that may impact upon a child's safety, stability or development:

- significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child's development
- family conflict, including family breakdown
- families under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement
- young, isolated and/or unsupported families
- significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or development.

Factors to consider

What specifically has happened to the child that has caused your concerns and what is the impact on their safety, stability, health, wellbeing and development?

- How vulnerable is the child?
- Is there a history or pattern of significant concerns with this child or other children in the family?
- Are the parents aware of the concerns, capable and willing to take action to ensure the child's safety and stability, and promote their health, wellbeing, and development?
- Are the parents able and willing to use support services to promote the child's safety, stability, wellbeing and development?

A referral to Child FIRST should be considered if, after consideration of the available information you are, on balance, more inclined to form a view that:

- the concerns currently have a low to moderate impact on child, where the immediate safety of the child is not compromised.

On receiving a referral from a professional or community member the Child FIRST team will conduct further assessment of the family and may consult a Child Protection Advanced Practitioner (Community Based). This assessment may lead to the involvement of a local family services organisation. In most circumstances Child FIRST will inform you of the outcome of your referral.

Where a Child FIRST team or a registered family services organisation forms a view that a child or young person is in need of protection they must report the matter to Child Protection.

Contact for further procedural advice

- Child Protection Advanced Practitioner (Community Based)
- Practice Leader
- Family Services Program and Service Advisor

Related content and external links

Note: Advice, Protocols and Policy Documents directly related to this Advice are listed below. To access the full range of Protocols and Policy documents use the Protocol and Policy links on the Home Page.

Related Content:

1490 - Consultation with community-based child and family welfare services

External Links:

Shell Agreement - Child Protection and Family Services State-wide Agreement [Word, 2.7 MB]

Child FIRST Fact Sheet

How to make a referral to Child FIRST

Registration of community service organisations

A strategic framework for Family Services, 2006, Department of Human Services