

## Child FIRST

### Information for community service organisations

Child FIRST (Child and Family, Information, Referral and Support Teams) will be established in designated sub-regional catchments in a staged process across Victoria to provide a community based referral point into family services (including Family Support Innovation Projects).

In March 2007, nine Child FIRST sites will be established (see over for list of stage 1 sites). These stage 1 Child FIRST sites will build on and enhance the existing coordinated/centralised intake, and service delivery capacity established as part of the statewide expansion of Family Support Innovation Projects since 2002/2003.

Family Services practitioners, with experience in assessing the needs of these families, will staff Child FIRST. In addition, Community Based Child Protection will facilitate collaboration between these community based intake services and Child Protection, providing advice to Child FIRST and Family Services about the engagement of families with complex needs and the identification of significant risk indicators, and ensuring timely Child Protection involvement if a child is at risk of significant harm.

### When should I refer to Child FIRST?

A referral to Child FIRST may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they need to protect and promote their healthy development.

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.

### What happens when I make a referral to Child FIRST?

Child FIRST will discuss with you the initial needs of the child, young person and family that you have concerns for to determine the most appropriate response. Services will 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.

Some families may be assisted by the provision of information and advice only, however for most families referred to Child FIRST, a cycle of assessment, planning and action will commence. Child FIRST will engage with the child, young person and family to begin this process. Once a plan is in place for how best to support the child's healthy development and improve parenting capacity, Child FIRST will allocate the family to a Family Services agency. Part of the role of the Family Services agency is to facilitate connections with other appropriate services, e.g. universal services, drug & alcohol, mental health, housing or family violence services.

Where a Child FIRST team forms a view that a child or young person is in need of protection they must report the matter to Child Protection. This would be done in consultation with Community Based Child Protection. Child FIRST will inform you of the outcome of your referral and in most cases will invite you to be included in the assessment, planning and action to support the child and family.

### How to make a referral to Child FIRST

Each Child FIRST catchment will publicise its phone number. If you are unsure of whom to call, contact your local Family Service agency or the Department of Human Services Family Services Program Advisor.

## Will a referral to Child FIRST be confidential?

In most cases, better outcomes for the child, young person and family are achieved when a referral is made with their consent and participation. If making a referral to Child FIRST on behalf of a child, young person or family without their knowledge, you will be asked if you are willing to have your identity disclosed to the family if Child FIRST contacts them. You may choose to have your identity remain confidential, however you should consider the impact of this on the ongoing engagement with the family by Child FIRST and Family Services.

## Child and Family Services Alliances

To support the effective operation of Child FIRST, a Child and Family Services Alliance will be established in each Child FIRST catchment. These alliances will build on existing networks that have developed around existing Family Support Innovation Projects and will include links with other sectors for service coordination and planning.

The Child and Family Services Alliances will include partners from Child FIRST, all funded Family Services, (including Aboriginal Family Services), Child Protection and the Department of Human Services Family Services Partnerships. In catchments where an Aboriginal Family Service does not exist or does not have capacity to be actively involved in the Alliance, Alliances should demonstrate how it is consulting with the Aboriginal community on Alliance activities.

### Stage 1 Child FIRST sites to be established by March 2007 in the following catchments:

- Geelong, Queenscliffe and Surf Coast
- Colac-Otway and Corangamite
- Warrnambool, Moyne, Glenelg and Southern Grampians
- Northern Grampians, Horsham, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack and Hindmarsh

- Ararat, Pyrenees, Ballarat, Hepburn, Moorabool and Golden Plains
- Greater Shepparton, Moira and Strathbogie
- Yarra Ranges, Knox and Maroondah
- Nillumbik, Banyule, Yarra, Darebin and Whittlesea
- Casey, Cardinia and Greater Dandenong

Child FIRST will be operating across the state by March 2009. If you are not in an area that has a Child FIRST site, you can continue to make referrals directly to your local family service (including Family Support Innovation Projects) agency.

### More information:

For more information, fact sheets and supporting documents, see the every child every chance website: [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance)

### Supporting documents:

- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 Part 3.2 - Concern About Wellbeing of a Child*
- A Strategic Framework for Family Services 2006
- Guide for Professionals - Reporting Concerns About Children Or Young People
- Information sharing guidelines (forthcoming)
- Best Interests Principles: A conceptual overview
- Acting in the best interests of vulnerable children: A best interests framework for vulnerable children and youth
- Child FIRST and Child Protection State-wide shell agreement

You may also want to contact your Regional Community Partnerships Unit Manager or Family Services team for further information.

### Related fact sheets:

- Role of consultation at intake