



Midland FRC *in focus*

IN THIS ISSUE

December 2009

- ◆ Festive season
- ◆ Farewell from the Manager
- ◆ Imprisoned fathers
- ◆ Tips from the team
- ◆ Midland Indigenous Advisors
- ◆ Midland Business Support Plan
- ◆ FDRP profile
- ◆ Child Inclusive Practice, Melbourne
- ◆ Road to resilience
- ◆ Child consultancy at the Midland FRC
- ◆ Children in Focus Seminar
- ◆ Centrecare Training
- ◆ WA Family Dispute resolution practitioners forum

CONTACT US

MIDLAND FAMILY
RELATIONSHIP CENTRE
U17 / 53 The Crescent
Midland WA 6056
Phone: 9436 0600
Fax: 9436 0666

Festive Season Greetings from Midland

Christmas traditions and customs are different in every country, in every home, in every family. We have been fortunate to make a difference to many children's experience of Christmas by assisting parents to see Christmas through their children's eyes rather than the hurt felt by separation.

The staff at the Midland FRC would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

We look forward to making a difference with you in 2010.

One of the most glorious messes in the world is the mess created in the living room on Christmas day. Don't clean it up too quickly (Andy Rooney).



Stephen Clarke's new challenge

Former Midland FRC Manager, Stephen Clarke, writes his final article for this month's newsletter.

Stephen writes "I had a mixture of emotions when I decided to leave my position as manager of the Midland FRC in October to take up my new role as Manager of the WA State Attorney Generals Department Family Violence Intervention Services. I was appointed by Centrecare to recruit a new team for Midland in May 2007. In the rush to get the new Centre operational, in the space of two months, there was a need for a huge amount of team effort. I remember working tirelessly over a number of weekends to get everything in place, including the removal of furniture from storage and hanging pictures.

We opened the doors on 2 July 2007 at 9.00am sharp. I vividly recall the whole team, including the Executive Manager, Melissa Perry, anxiously awaiting the first telephone call from a client. It duly arrived and we were off to a flying start. In the absence of an electronic diary, we wrote the client's details into a large desk diary. It was a relief to get under way after weeks of preparation.

There are many stories to tell of the wonderful innovative practice we shared as a team; screening and assessment drafts, liaison with local agencies, developing a child inclusive practice model, writing and delivering the child in focus seminar, working with indigenous families and supporting colleagues in outreach locations. We learnt fast and we developed a service model based firmly in best practice. I am proud of the team I worked with who were willing to stretch themselves in meeting the needs of the thousands of clients we worked alongside. I was particularly proud of our international collaboration on child inclusive practice with our colleagues in the UK's Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass). This work will help practitioners learn from each other and may lead to an exchange of visits to explore models of practice. I am also pleased with the Legal Aid WA pilot we developed to target early intervention with the most vulnerable clients in the FRC.

I am now working in the field of family violence for the WA State Government. This was a new position created to develop practice in this challenging area of work. We have services located across the state and the Family Violence Service operates out of six Metropolitan Courts. A key feature of the program is the collaboration and active partnership with non government service providers who deliver family and domestic violence group programs for perpetrators. The service supports the victims, and partnership agencies monitor the progress of men in the groups in weekly case management meetings. Our key focus is the safety and wellbeing of the victims throughout the process. I am enjoying my new position, I left behind some great friends at Midland FRC but I am lucky to be able to keep in touch and learn of new developments.

Centrecare was a great organisation to work with and I shall remember the unwavering support I received from all of my colleagues. I trust Midland FRC will remain at the forefront of change designed to meet the needs of its clients long into the future.

Stephen Clarke
November 2009



Melissa Perry, Executive Manager Centrecare,
Anthony Douglas CEO of Cafcass, Stephen Clarke
catching up at Cafcass national office, London, August 2009.

Imprisoned father's experience of the family law changes and how FRC's can help them and their children.

Midland Family Relationship Centre has several prisons in its area, resulting in the establishment of an innovative collaboration between the Midland FRC and these prisons to address a major gap in service provision in the family law system. The program evolved in response to managing a high demand for FRC support from separated fathers. The Family Relationships program involves the delivery of an innovative psycho-educational group session: Family Relationships - Children in Focus, followed by individual intake and/or screening and assessment interviews and case management.

The prison-based program is designed to meet the specific needs of prisoners; fathers who in most cases have lost contact with their children, or may be seeking to make post-separation parenting arrangements for after their release. Feedback received from the men, has highlighted the important connection they are able to make with a range of external service providers that assisted them in reforming broken family relationships; gaining a better understanding of the family law system in relation to separated parents and children; and the impact of family violence on children. At the recent FRSA Conference in Sydney, Norma Williams, Team Leader and Senior Practitioner outlined her work, and other practitioners in the Midland FRC team, on this unique program and the ways in which it helps this hidden population of parents in a particular situation which increases the vulnerability of children.

Outcomes for imprisoned fathers and their children have included:

- Access to information about the family law system and reforms
- Psycho-educational information session: Family Relationship Seminars are well attended and men are responsive to information on the impact of family and domestic violence on children and families
- Father's proactive in initiating contact with ex-partners and children when safe to do so
- Men are well informed on other means of progressing their matter to the Family Court when FDR is not suitable
- Increased knowledge about VRO's
- Referrals to Legal Aid and Family Court (c60l's)
- Men at risk: depression and anxiety referred to prison support services
- Direct prison liaison with Family Court for registering of certificates
- Direct liaison with DCP through MFRC in relation to wards of state and fostered children
- Raised awareness of the importance of "building relationships" with children after prolonged separation, when seeking contact
- Children's views are considered through FDR sessions
- Father's more likely to initiate contact after release through Family Relationship Centre – reducing potential for direct conflict or breach of VRO



5 Tips from the Midland Team

Separate children's issues from property issues and focus on parenting arrangements when coming to the Midland FRC! Children should not be used as bargaining tools in FDR.

Encourage clients to seek legal advice, as practitioners are only able to give legal information, not legal advice. This will help clarify what your rights are in your particular situation.

Both parents should prepare a written reminder of what they want to discuss in Family Dispute Resolution. When both parents come prepared, they can focus on the important issues and are more likely to discuss items than just respond to the other parents dialogue/issues/requests.

Speak to your practitioner about a direct referral to a counsellor on the day of your Screening & Assessment appointment, if you are struggling and finding it hard to separate partner issues from parent issues with your ex-spouse. Remember your children will continue to love the other parent and they need to feel good about loving the other parent.

Keep a calendar of the times your children spend with each parent on the fridge, choose a colour for mum and a colour for dad, this will help make things predictable for children and also let them know that you as a parent are o.k. with it.

Midland Indigenous Advsiors

Indigenous Advisors at Midland FRC, Karen Kickett and Sunita Ridgeway have been working hard in the last few months to promote the Midland FRC in the community and what it has to offer. They have formed good working relationships with agencies such as Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) and Aboriginal Violence Services (AVS) as well at Bandyup Women's prison.

Karen and Sunita hope to be working closely with other agencies such as Derrible Yirrigan, Yorgum Counselling and various high-schools in the area. Both Karen and Sunita are pleased with the recent outcomes of their networking and look forward to further strengthening relationships within the community.



Midland FRC Indigenous Advisors at the White Ribbon Campaign

November 25th marks both the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against women and White Ribbon Day; this is the first day of the White Ribbon Campaign. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is also linked to the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, this is a Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights, running from 25 November to 10 December.

The White Ribbon Campaign is a campaign to address violence against women, men, in particular, are encouraged to take stand and say that violence towards women in any form, is never acceptable. As part of Midland Family Relationship Centre's commitment to working with families and strengthening family relationships, Sunita and Karen attended and showed their fantastic Artistic talents at White Ribbon Day 2009. The focus of the DVAN WRD event is very much on the local community and community agencies to raise awareness about family & domestic violence (FDV) and services that can assist people effected by FDV.

Public signatures for our pledge "**Never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women**" were collected. On the day hundreds of signatures were collected and sales of white ribbons were available to the public as donations to a good cause.

The event proved to be very successful!



Midland Business Support Team

The Business Support Team—Belinda, Paula, Laura & Julie (pictured below)

The Business Support Team at the Midland Family Relationship Centre consists of four Client Liaison Officers, who are available to assist with all service enquiries and scheduling of appointments. The Midland Centre continues to be in high demand and the Business Support Team is kept busy on a daily basis with intakes of new clients for FDR and have scheduled in excess of 500 intake and screening & assessment appointments over the past three months.



The centre can now offer counselling services for both children and adults, which is a service that is continuing to grow to meet the needs of the community. The Business Support Team is proud to be able to continue to provide a high standard of service delivery in assisting clients and the Midland staff.

FDRP Profile—Sam

Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner, Sam, has been a wonderful addition to our team. He has brought much knowledge and experience to our team through his prior counselling experience. Sam has worked therapeutically with families, particularly in the area of domestic violence and is also engaged in other areas of work such as Maori Healing.

On the 29th to 31st of August, Sam conducted Maori Healing Sessions in Munster, Perth. He invited and sponsored two international Maori Healers who came from New Zealand to share their whole body healing work with the community for the first time in Western Australia. Prior to moving to Perth in March 2009, Sam worked as a practitioner of Traditional Maori Healing Arts in New Zealand.

The basis of this model of healing is a full body approach rather than centred around the problem area. This is based on the belief that the body has its own intrinsic intelligence, buttons or pressure points which remind the self about healing itself. Given that the body is the vehicle for carrying all the functions of the human being. The Maori approach is different in that there are many modes whereby the mind is lifted of its seriousness to a relaxed state.

This is achieved through the use of song, laughter and traditional incantation. This therapy is not for the faint hearted, it can be challenging and at times painful (not to worry, not always).

Overall the weekend was an overwhelming success, with some very positive testimonials and requests for the Maori Healers to return. Sam states that in his experience there are always sceptics, however confidence in performing Traditional Maori Healing and witnessing the results keeps him focused on the bigger picture and focussed on the greater good for people. "Now that we have a set of people in Perth which have experienced it themselves, seen the change, hopefully this will lead to growth for this area of work in the future.



CHILD INCLUSIVE PRACTICE FORUM, MELBOURNE, OCTOBER 2009

Farida Lang and Bohdanka Vagner Child Consultants and Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners from Midland Family Relationship Centre, presented at the Second Annual Child Inclusive Practice Forum in Melbourne on the 27 and 28 October 2009. Centrecare was one of the principal sponsors of the forum. Child Consultants, as well as practitioners from around Australia, attended the Forum to highlight child inclusive practice in Family Relationship Centres and family dispute resolution.

The Forum was opened by Dr. Jennifer McIntosh, who presented her latest research findings. Farida and Bohdanka, from Centrecare, presented a paper on assessing parental capacity. The feedback was very positive and they were able to share their mapping and assessment tool.

The Midland FRC engages parents and builds capacity in preparation for child inclusive practice. Other agencies also shared their practice models and gave case examples of child inclusive work. The first day of the seminar was concluded with a panel discussion consisting of Jenn McIntosh, Francesca Gerner and Anthony Grimes, who are highly experienced family service practitioners. Questions were answered regarding practice parameters, ethical issues around consent from parents, screening and assessment and the importance of professional feedback to parents.

The second day of the Forum saw a presentation from Bill Hewlett a trainer and practitioner from Relationships Australia in NSW. Bill spoke about the connection between people's attachment strategies (interpersonal coping styles) and the ongoing conflict it may cause between parents. He also elaborated on strategies that he uses in Family Dispute Resolution to work through these issues and create alliance between parents.

Sunshine Family Relationship Centre presented a workshop on "Experiences of working with diverse communities" and the importance of employing practitioners from diverse backgrounds as well as enabling assistance through outreach to various communities.

Nicola Mason, child consultant at Hobart Family Relationship Centre, facilitated a session on the importance of feedback to parents after the child consultation. Challenging case studies were presented and discussed.

Two concurrent sessions took place in the afternoon; Bill Hewlett for family dispute resolution practitioners and the second for child consultants. The child consultant session was facilitated by Midland Family Relationship Centre child consultants and focused on practice parameters, tools and resources, experiences and case studies. The session was concluded with a DVD from the UK's Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass) which highlighted a consultation with over 200 children and young people concerning their experiences of being involved in the family law system in the UK. The DVD inspired participants on how we can learn from such large scale consultation exercises with young service users.

Please feel free to contact us for any further information regarding Power Points and other research from the Forum.



Bodanka



Farida

THE ROAD TO RESILIENCE - ENSURING CHILDREN ARE SEEN AND HEARD...

As Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners, we recognise that the journey of separation for parents is a very difficult and emotional one, fraught with hurt, anger, pain and a great sense of loss and grief. A key challenge practitioners face, amidst the parents' emotional turmoil, is enabling parents to shift their focus from their role as ex-partners to one of the parents. A key objective is to ensure that children's voices are heard and their needs are met.

Research findings indicate children's voices are often lost in cases involving high levels of parental conflict and acrimony. Children's emotional distress can often be demonstrated through anger, anxiety and acted out through various behaviours, such as aggression, withdrawal or overly compliant behaviour. Unresolved conflict and high levels of acrimony can lead to a fracture in the relationship between the child and his or her parents.

In response to these challenges, Midland Family Relationship Centre introduced its Child Inclusive Practice. Our model aims to enhance child wellbeing and resilience by allowing the child (sometimes for the very first time) to share their views with the child consultant, unburden themselves and talk about their feelings and changes to their family situation. In addition, the parents report that it helps them build resilient families by being able to hear their child's views, understand their child's needs and build better bridges of communication. Finally, engaging children and young people in decisions that affect them has resulted in better, child-focused outcomes in Family Dispute Resolution (FDR).

Living in a diverse society requires that practitioners and child consultants need to be attuned to the diverse cultural needs of all families. Providing FDR to culturally and linguistically diverse clients requires sensitivity, knowledge and understanding. It is important that practitioners and child consultants are able to reflect the diversity of their communities.



CHILD CONSULTANCY AT MIDLAND FRC—A MESSAGE FROM FARIDA AND BOHDANKA

We are pleased to say that our practice at Midland is moving towards child inclusive practices as the norm rather than the exception. The reason this pleases us is that children have expressed to us on many occasions their positive feelings of being un-burdened and heard through the child consultancy with us. For children just being able to talk about the journey of separation from their perspective, sometimes for the very first time allows the child to feel acknowledged and important.

So often children reflect and feel as if they are to blame and the process of CIP allows for the child to understand it is not their fault, they are not to blame and where appropriate also referred for counselling, to be assisted further. The feedback from the children has been very positive with children being thankful for the opportunity of speaking to someone other than mum or dad about their feelings regarding the separation.

CHILDREN IN FOCUS SEMINARS

The Child In Focus Seminar continually proves to be a helpful information-giving session with parents frequently stating they have found it very useful.

Attendance has been great with many parents coming along with their new partners and family members. Recognising that the journey of separation is often fraught with emotion, the team has a duty counsellor present at every seminar to assist parents who may be finding it difficult. This has assisted the preparation for the FDR process and we have had many examples of a shift in parents who begin looking at parent issues rather than focussing on partner issues. A difficult task indeed. However, one worth achieving for the kids!



CENTRECARE TRAINING - WORKING WITH CHILDREN

Three employees of the Midland FRC, Farida Lang, Aldine Pugh and Bohdanka Vagner had the opportunity of attending a "working with Children" workshop presented by Kevin Hanavan (child psyche) on behalf of Centrecare. All three ladies found the course thoroughly enjoyable and inspiring and would strongly recommend attending to others interested in this area of work. The workshop included the philosophies, concepts and therapeutic practices for working with children. Farida Lang, Child Consultant at the Midland FRC states 'Personally, I found the course extremely practical with new and innovative techniques and ways in which we could put into practice working with children at Midland FRC. I also found it useful to look at the impact of domestic violence on children and how children cope with the concerns and anxieties about what is happening from their perspective and the developmental load for them.'

WA FAMILY DISPUTE RESOLUTION PRACTITIONERS FORUM

Midland FRC with former Manager, Stephen Clarke taking the lead, initiated the WA FDRP Forum in early 2008. The forum aims to support practitioners working in the family law system through collegiality, networking, information sharing and professional development. This aim has been achieved through quarterly forums well attended by practitioners and other professionals from a range of FRC's, private practice and other organisations and services.

The forums always provide a great opportunity for networking and catching up with colleagues through general discussion, on issues impacting on family dispute resolution and the family relationships sector. The agenda is open to forum members for topic suggestions and this has greatly contributed to the success of the forum. Forum topics in 2009 have included:

- Preparing for accreditation and the new FDRP registration system
- Models of FDR practice
- Family Court processes
- Section 60I certificates
- Legal Aid and CLC's in the family law system
- CAFCASS and the UK Family Law system

Child Inclusive Practice

The FDRP forum hosted at Midland FRC on Friday 18th December was well attended and everyone enjoyed the opportunity for networking during a sumptuous festive morning tea. The forum agenda included the following topics;

Imprisoned Fathers and Access to the Family Law System

Norma Williams – Midland FRC

FDR Legal Service at the Gosnells Community Legal Centre.

Tracey George – FDR Legal Solicitor.

Child Inclusive Practice Forum – Melbourne 27th and 28th October 2009

Farida Lang – Child Consultant at Midland FRC

WA FDRP Group Reflections

Thank you to Norma Williams for stepping in at the last minute to present on the day due to a cancellation of a planned presentation.

Forward planning for 2010 FDRP Forums was discussed with enthusiasm.

Forum members came up with a range of hot topic suggestions for 2010.

Everyone is welcome to attend and I encourage colleagues to put **9.30 – 12.30 on 19th March** in your diary now for the first 2010 Forum. We look forward to another great year of information sharing and great networking. To RSVP, make topic suggestions or information please contact Norma Williams on (08) 9436 0600 or nwilliams@centrecare.com.au

Merry Christmas from the Midland FRC



Useful Contacts

Family Relationships Advice Line
1800 050 321
www.familyrelationships.gov.au

Legal Aid
(08) 9261 6222
www.legalaid.wa.gov.au

Child support Agency
(08)9338 2584
www.csa.gov.au

Centrecare Counselling Services
(08)9325 6644
www.centrecare.com.au

Law Society of WA
(08) 9322 7877
www.lawsocietywa.asn.au

Financial Counsellors Assoc WA
(08) 9325 1617
www.financialcounsellors.org