



NSW Department of
Community Services

FAMILY PRESERVATION / INTENSIVE SUPPORT MODEL

This service model has been developed by the NSW Department of Community Services Child Protection Policy and Service Reform Branch. The paper describes the key elements of intensive family preservation and support which are considered to reflect best practice. As such, the service model is not designed to be prescriptive but should be used to guide current service development priorities.

For inquiries, please contact

Service Funding Strategy Directorate
NSW Department of Community Services
(02) 9716 2222

FAMILY PRESERVATION / INTENSIVE SUPPORT MODEL (FP/IS)

Summary

This model proposes a spectrum of support services targeting intervention to children¹ and their families who are subject to ongoing child protection statutory intervention.

The focus of the FP/IS model will be family preservation i.e. to maintain children and young people within their own family, extended family or support networks and to prevent placement in out-of-home care.

The FP/IS model proposes services largely aimed at two target groups: children aged 0-15 years living with their families and those aged 12-15 years living independently of their families but not in an out-of-home care placement. The service types will vary to suit the needs of each age group.

The services will be provided to cases with an open case plan with DoCS at the time of referral and at least for a specified period thereafter, ranging in severity along the statutory pathway from moderate to imminent risk of placement in out-of-home care.

There is specific referral criteria for service eligibility to ensure that cases receiving an FP/IS service are primarily limited to those likely to be placed in out-of-home care without the FP/IS service intervention.

The model does not prescribe how FP/IS services should be structured to deliver the range of service activities outlined in this paper. This model provides opportunity for a flexible mix of services or a more specialised focus at the intensive end of the service spectrum, typically identified as 'Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS), or Intensive Family Preservation Services.

This model also encompasses intensive support services where the case plan goal is reunification of the child to the care of parents or family.

1. Introduction

This paper describes the key components of an FP/IS service. A number of intensive family support and preservation models currently in place in other state child protection jurisdictions across Australia were reviewed in developing the FP/IS model for DoCS. It primarily combines key aspects from the models in use in Queensland and Victoria, and includes a range of service intensity from the IFBS model with 24/7 short term intervention, to less intensive interventions delivered in a medium to longer term time-frame.

2. Current situation

There are a number of DoCS funded services that fall within the category of providing family preservation and family support services. These services are directly provided by DoCS or funded under the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) or the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Services combine a range of supports to children, young people and their families ranging in level of intensity and duration. Services funded under CSGP or SAAP are targeted at both statutory and non-

¹ Children is defined by the *Children and Young persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* as a person who is under the age of 16yrs.

statutory clients and include home visiting or home-based interventions, intensive counselling and case management, group work, vocational and recreational activities, and supported accommodation. DoCS commits significant funding to generalist Family Support Programs located in all Regions and funded under the CSGP. These are however not designed for intensive intervention, and accept referrals from families with less critical issues.

Within this umbrella of support services, DoCS currently funds 6 intensive family support services based on the United States Homebuilder's model, known as Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS). IFBS services are intensive 24 hours per day 7 days per week, time-limited, home-based programs for families whose children are at imminent risk of being placed in out-of-home care. Five of these services are Aboriginal specific services and one is a generalist service. Although not a main focus of these Programs, all offer services on a case by case basis, for families where reunification plans are in place.

However, there is a need for a comprehensive service model to bridge the gap in services for statutory clients with complex and high support needs who are at risk of entering out-of-home care. The research literature suggests that the IFBS may only work in a placement preventative way for families with particular characteristics in particular contexts (eg crisis situations) and fails to meet the medium to longer term needs of families with moderate to high risk of out of home care placement.

The proposed FP/IS model contains a suite of services that enables better targeting of the diversity within the group of moderate to high risk statutory cases by providing the necessary level and type of support that prevents them from escalating to an out-of-home placement and preserves the family unit. The FP/IS model incorporates the IFBS approach at one end of the spectrum, and preservation services with less intensive and longer term intervention at the other end.

The FP/IS model fits within an integrated continuum of DoCS services that follow on from the existing Early Intervention and Family Support Programs. It offers a flexible range of service options in order to facilitate family preservation, with the diversity and capacity to respond to a range of support needs of children, young people and families who are the subject of ongoing child protection intervention.

3. Research

The primary research resources relied on to develop the FP/IS model are listed in the research bibliography at the end of this paper.

4. Definition of Family Preservation / Intensive Support (FP/IS)

FP/IS encompasses a range of services varying in degrees of intensity designed to support children and their families who are subject to ongoing child protection intervention, with the aim of preventing imminent placement in out-of-home and building and preserving family connections.

5. Aims of FP/IS

FP/IS aims to:

- Enable children who are at imminent risk of being placed in out-of-home placements to remain with their families.
- Support families under severe stress or in crisis to resolve their immediate difficulties and create a safe, stable and nurturing home environment for children in their care.

- Assist families who are at risk of having their child/children placed in out-of-home care to enhance their capacity to parent their children effectively in the long term.
- Coordinate the range of support options a family needs to enhance the family's capacity to provide ongoing support.
- Teach effective individualised problem-solving skills that can be used by the family to respond to and manage family crises, abusive or neglectful situations.
- Actively and flexibly support older children (12-15 years) in alternative accommodation and to rebuild and maintain connections with their family, extended family and support networks where it is not practicable for them to live with their families.

6. Outcomes of FP/IS

The primary intended outcome of FP/IS services is that families under high stress and who are 'struggling' to manage, and whose child or children may be at risk of an out-of-home placement are supported to stay together in ways that are in the best interests of the child/children, as well as recognising the needs of all family members.

The secondary intended outcome of FP/IS services is that these families will have a reduced need for future protective statutory intervention.

The specific outcomes of FP/IS include:

- Families are better able to manage their current and any future stress and crisis situations with a reduced risk of the child or young person being placed in out-of-home care.
- Families using the service have an improved sense of wellbeing. This would include a more positive view of family circumstances, being more empowered and committed to the care and well-being of their children; having more sustainable household routines and recognising the needs of individual family members in all family functioning.
- Children living away from home have rebuilt connections with their immediate and extended family, and are able to independently access the supports they need to effectively manage any stressful or crisis situation.
- Families are able to independently identify and access the supports they need in the future at critical times.

To enable these outcomes FP/IS services will:

- Provide care and support options that meet the high and complex needs of children and their families with a view to preserving the family units, promoting family cohesion and competence.
- Efficiently manage and deliver services.
- Achieve case plan goals through a coordinated, multi-disciplinary case planning and case management process.
- Assist older children to gain stability in managing their personal circumstances and support them in building connections with their family and support networks, and establishing themselves in an appropriate living situation where necessary.

- Facilitate participation of the child and their family in decision-making.
- Be accessible and relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and address their personal, cultural and spiritual well-being, and
- Be accessible and relevant to children and their families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and address their personal and cultural circumstances and well-being.

7. Target Clients

The target clients are:

1. children aged 0 to 15 years living with their parents or other immediate family members who are direct carers and where the provision of services and support will enable to the children to continue to reside at home
2. and children aged 12-15 years living with their family or living independently of their family but not in an out-of-home care placement and where there is an assessed level of family dysfunction or breakdown that adds to a higher level of risk for the child.

8. Referral

Key criteria for referral

The clients will be referred exclusively by DoCS and at a minimum have an open case plan with DoCS at the time of referral, with the plan remaining open for at least a specified transitional period following the referral and the engagement of the family with the FP/IS.

DoCS will have determined that a level of risk is inherent and that without supports and services the children would formally enter the out of home care system. Children and families will need to consent to any intervention and commit to adhering to the agreed caseplan goals.

Cases are eligible for referral when intensive support is required:

- for the parent(s) with a child living at home and there is likelihood that the case will escalate to protective court action; or
- for the parent(s) with a child living under a Court Order (eg: a Supervision Order) and there is imminent risk of the child entering out-of-home care; or
- for a 12-15 year old living independently from their family who is at risk of entering out-of-home care; and

When all of the following criteria apply:

- At least one parent/carer is willing to work with the FP/IS service towards reaching the family preservation goals; and
- There are some family strengths, resources, or social supports available that can be utilised to increase safety; and
- Other services have been tried and failed, or other less intense services would not be sufficient to resolve the problems that will cause placement.

- The level of family dysfunction or breakdown is such that it heightens the level of risk to the child and requires intensive case management and support and in particular in the areas of education, health and clinical supports.

Referrals will not be made where:

- The potential for danger is so high that the program does not have the resources to adequately assure the client or worker's safety. This includes matters where risk of harm to the child or young person is so severe that placement is the only viable option remaining.
- Intrafamilial sexual abuse has been confirmed, or following report of sexual abuse, the secondary assessment stage 2 (SAS 2) confirms that the child is 'in need of care and protection' related to the report of sexual abuse.
- Children are not at risk of out-of-home care placement.
- A less intensive support service would be sufficient (eg: - referral for counselling, or services under a general Family Support Service), or
- Parents refuse services or are otherwise unavailable for the Program.

Characteristics of families suitable for referral

The complexity of individual family circumstances will vary considerably. Some of the social and personal characteristics of the families referred may include the following:

- The family is in severe crisis (presence of one or more of the following :- family or domestic violence is present, drug and alcohol or substance abuse, high and extreme levels of conflict and disruption between family members, financial stress including gambling addiction, high debt, low or, limited sources of income, unemployment or under-employment and/or poor and inappropriate housing for the needs of the family)
- Social, personal and cognitive impairment caused by mental health issues, or disability or disabling emotional stress. Note: other Government agencies should retain primary case management as the situation relates to identified issues within the current MOU arrangements.
- High, complex or extreme needs of the child impacting on the coping skills and personal resources of the family or parent(s).
- Serious and persistent disputation between separated partners/parents including significant legal matters eg:- family law disputes.
- Significant social isolation of the family from community services and other extended family supports.
- Previous personal history and involvement in the care and protection system of parents or other family members, characterised by high levels of resistance, fear, or misunderstanding/s about the system.
- Presence of inter-generational parenting difficulties and lack of effective parent role models within the family's immediate support and social structures.
- Poor and chronic health needs of children, parents and other family members.

- Limited access to reliable forms of transport.
- The child is experiencing conflict within their family and support is necessary to maintain the viability of continued care by parents.
- The child is likely to leave home or has recently left home.
- The child is homeless, in crisis and requires assistance in accessing and maintaining alternative accommodation and support.
- The child does not have access to other extended family supports.
- The child is involved in substance abuse.
- Additional support is required to maintain the child living with their parents or in alternative accommodation.

9. Types of Supports

The FP/IS service provider will work with the parents of the child, and the child or children concerned (whether living at home or independently) . The FP/IS service provider will include the whole family as appropriate eg: - extended family and kinship networks.

FP/IS services will adopt a range of service strategies including provision of information, practical parenting skills, case management, counselling for parents and/or children, intensive supervision, group work and referral as appropriate.

Generally the FP/IS service provider will offer interventions to address the most critical and priority needs of the family consistent with DoCS case planning process and information available from DoCS at the time of referral. Support is to be goal driven and result in definable and measurable improvements in parent strengths, attitudes, behaviour, values, skills knowledge and ability.

It is envisaged that the FP/IS service spectrum will encompass a range of intensive service options to suit the support needs of each individual case, ranging from the 24/7 short term support model, to less intensive longer term options combining in-home and community based intervention. Those cases accessing high intensity support services may later 'step down' to moderate intensity services as appropriate, in preparation for transitioning to access general family support services within the community.

Common service elements for both target groups: Children aged 0 -15 years living with their family and children aged 12-15 years living independently, and their parents.	
Operational Structure	Type of Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensity of support may range from 24 hour per day 7 days per week on call support, to 5-20 hours support per week for each family and the service operating during normal business hours. • Duration of support may range from 6 weeks to a maximum of 18 months • Case load may vary from 2-3 cases per worker to 10 -15 cases per worker at any one time • Service delivery may range from primarily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive case management including writing case plans and other agreements, goal setting, case conferencing. • Therapeutic and/or clinical work, e.g. intensive counselling to parents, family members and children. • Intensive supervision. • Mediation and support towards family reconciliation. • Assistance to manage challenging behaviours in young children through to early-mid adolescence.

Common service elements for both target groups: Children aged 0 -15 years living with their family and children aged 12-15 years living independently, and their parents.	
<p>home-based intervention, to a combination of community based and home based intervention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of specialist assessments (eg: - specialist health, AOD, domestic violence, and disability interventions). • Development of practical skills: parenting, managing the changing developmental needs, managing household tasks, budgeting and personal financial management skills, personal behaviour and anger management. • Access to targeted brokerage funds to assist family/ individual functioning, eg material goods, IT training course. • In a minority of specific cases input into the permanency planning process for a child or young person's restoration to their families from out-of-home care. • Provide or coordinate access to group work, referral to activities that promote personal development, health, recreation, and self-worth and community involvement of young people. • Coordination, referral and / or information about specialised services in the community. • Referrals to 'step down' services to support less intensive intervention, e.g. generalist family support services, play groups.
Specific service elements for 12-15 year olds living independently.	
Operational Structure	Type of Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same as above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in developing living skills for those children assessed as being unable to live with their families and require intensive case management support, including assistance in accessing and maintaining alternative accommodation • Assist with the development of interpersonal skills (e.g. regarding challenging behaviours) and practical living skills to equip for maintenance of family links/ independent living. • Assist with access to suitable educational/training and/or pre-employment opportunities. • Information, referrals and advocacy for children living independently to access a broad range of community services and income support • Assist in developing a family reconnection plan to support a positive re-integrating of the child and their family over time

10. Participation of children, young people, families

FP/IS services will:

- conduct genuine, ongoing consultation and facilitate participation of children and their families in the making of decisions that affect them; and
- provide children and their families with information (in a manner and language that they can understand) which facilitates their participation.

11. Promoting the rights of families and their children

FP/IS services will:

- inform children, young people, their families and extended family and kinship networks where appropriate (in a manner which is appropriate to their age, developmental capacity and cultural and linguistic background). This includes information about their rights under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and information about complaint and appeals processes;
- provide services consistent with the *Charter of Rights* and ensure the agency advances and complies with the principles of the Charter;
- ensure that the privacy of children, young people and their families is respected, confidentiality is maintained and information is collected and exchanged in accordance with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*; and
- have policies and procedures in place to appropriately process complaints and appeals families and their children within clearly stated timeframes.

APPENDIX: Research Bibliography

- Department of Human Services Victoria, *Families First Service Specification*, 'Accommodation and Support', Jan 1995.
- Department of Human Services Victoria, *Adolescent Support Services Program Document*, accommodation and Support, Nov 1993
- NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), *Keeping Families Together*, Framework for Supporting Families Care for Children and Young People with a Disability, December 2005.
- NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), *Keeping Families Together*, Intensive Family Support Initiative – Information Package and Application Form, December 2005
- Queensland Government Department of Child Safety, Funding Information Paper 2006/2007, Family Intervention Services
- Tully, Lucy (2007) *A Literature Review of Family Preservation Services (Draft)*, NSW Department of Community Services, March 2007.
- Valentine, Bruce (2007) *A Review of the Research Literature on Family Preservation Programs*, commissioned by NSW Department of Community Services February 2007.
- Westat (2002), James Bell Associates, Chapin Hall Centre for Children, *Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs: Final Report - Volume One*, Chapter 7 "State Policies on Referral citing " Behavioral Sciences Institute, "Key elements of an appropriate referral," Behavioral Sciences Institute, Federal Way, Washington, 1992.