

Regional Children and Families Partnership (Central Australia)

Collaborative Practice Guidelines

Preamble

These guidelines reflect the coalition's commitment to work together and to promote best practice in supporting the health and well being of children and young people, their families and community.

The underlying principles of these guidelines are to involve family and extended family; and to ensure the rights of the child are protected.

The focus will be on ensuring earlier coordinated support for vulnerable families with particular emphasis on strengthening the Aboriginal service sector and ensuring Aboriginal people are central to decision making about the well being and safety of children and young people.

It is acknowledged that the best place for children and young people is with their family, and partners will work as a priority to support families in providing care and protection for their children.

It is recognised that in order to ensure that safety is provided for all children and young people, strong community partnerships and inter-agency collaboration are essential.

Background

The Northern Territory Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 creates the legislative framework to ensure the safety and well being of children. The *Act* provides the legislative framework for promoting a partnership approach to child protection.

Through the Safe Children, Bright Futures Strategic Framework 2012 to 2015, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has identified a number of key priorities including 'working together' with a focus on ensuring earlier coordinated support for vulnerable families; 'keeping kids safe'; and healing, growing and walking together.

The Regional Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Non Government Organisation (NGO) Partnership contributes to the DCF commitment to improved engagement at the local level with the non-government sector to provide better care and protection service pathways for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

It is also acknowledged that there is a strong commitment within Central Australia to continue to work together to promote the safety and well being of children and strengthen and enhance their families and communities. This work builds on the partnership that was initially established in 2001 and then reviewed in 2006. To ensure this, strong community partnerships, strong respectful relationships and inter-agency collaboration are essential. The value of partnerships and collaboration are critical and need to be continually reviewed to ensure the overall safety and well being of children and young people.

Collaborative Practice

For this purpose collaborative practice for participating agencies is:

- Individuals and organisations 'working together' for a common aim or a set of compatible aims;
- Sharing resources and responsibilities and agreeing to work together in a cooperative and mutually supportive manner; and
- Collaboration requiring a conscious effort to create a way of working that is attentive, responsive and adaptive and promotes cooperation between different partners to achieve mutual goals.

Collaborative work between Government and Non Government Organisations will provide a service to improve outcomes for children & young people and their families and communities. Effective collaboration based on the principles of trust, respect & shared decision making contributes to the safety and well being of all children & young people, their families and communities.

Principles of Collaborative Practice

1. Communication

- Respectful and appropriate communication is fundamental for successful shared case management or collaborative practice.
- Meetings will encourage open communication between all providers.
- All stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure their specific contribution to collaborative practice i.e. understanding specific tasks and roles and being clear of the roles and responsibilities of others.

2. Info sharing

- Information sharing is a key element of collaborative practice to maximise the opportunity for effective and safe outcomes. New legislation makes it easy to share information to ensure the safety and well being of a child and young person in the Northern Territory (NT). Refer to www.informationsharing.nt.gov.au and www.ntcoss.org.au
- Case planning and/or conferences bring together a range of programs and providers that can contribute to the initial assessment and development of a case plan.
- Gaining, recognising and respecting the expertise and knowledge of relevant agencies in order to guide decision making.

3. Consultation

- A high level of transparency is required. Feedback and trust between partners based on agreed and shared principles of cooperation.
- Consultation needs to occur with the child, young person and family and agencies involved. Thereafter regular and timely communication between all partners will occur as defined in the current case plan.
- Any decision making needs to incorporate the child/young person and their family and community.
- The views of all parties will be respected even if consensus cannot be reached.

4 Engagement

- Engagement with relevant partners will occur at the earliest convenience unless otherwise stipulated in agency/organisation agreements.
- Engaging partners is necessary to strengthen the capacity of partners to identify, understand and solve complex problems and improve client outcomes.

Persistence, ongoing commitment and goodwill is required by all parties to ensure the application of these principles.

Child Protection

Statutory child protection services are delivered by Department of Children and Families staff. DCF and Non-Government funded agencies who provide services to children, youth and families are required to work collaboratively to enable the best services to be delivered to children, young people and their families.

Case Management

The National Society for Case Management defines case management as: "...a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation and advocacy for options and services to meet the individual's needs through communication and available resources to promote quality cost-effective outcomes".

The best interests of the child/young person will be central to all decision making. This includes ensuring that the planning and delivery of services focus upon the needs of the child/young person. It is paramount that the child, young person, their guardian and representatives from their community are actively engaged in the planning and delivery of services to meet the child's needs.

The objectives of case management are to ensure that clients receive services and support to reach their optimal potential and those services are delivered in a coordinated and effective manner. There are five key elements of the case management process:

- Assessment
- Planning
- Implementation
- Review
- Exit Planning

Case Planning and Practice

In many instances multiple services are involved with the child, family and community and referrals would be made for a specific service component to support the client case plan. In situations where Child Protection assessment and intervention is underway, other Government or Non Government partners will contribute to the protective assessment and the development of the case plan. This may include the delegation of specific tasks or responsibilities to respective partners. Relevant partners should be incorporated into a review of the case plan. In situations whereby Child Protection is involved, the CP case manager will coordinate the case plan/conference.

In instances where multiple services are involved in a family's life, a Child Protection case conference is appropriate for sharing of information. The family should be encouraged to attend the case conference & encouraged to participate in decision making. Additionally, in cases where a child or young person is in care, the carer will be encouraged to participate in decision making.

The *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* S12(1) states that in the case of Aboriginal children, kinship groups, representing organisations and communities of Aboriginal people have a major role, through self determination, in promoting the well being of Aboriginal children. Further S12 (2) states, in particular, a kinship group, or community of Aboriginal people nominated by an Aboriginal child's family should be able to participate in the making of decisions involving a child.

In situations where Child Protection is not involved with a child/family and multiple services are involved, a case conference would be recommended to develop a coordinated approach to service delivery.

Roles of the Case Manager

The primary role of the case manager is to coordinate the development and implementation of the case plan. This incorporates the following activities:

- undertaking assessment;
- engaging with other persons, including the child/young person, family and community in the development of a case plan;
- engaging with other relevant partners from the Government and Non-Government sector in the development, implementation and review of the case plan. It should be noted that in cases where another agency has a care/case plan e.g. Youth Justice, the case manager would coordinate the involvement of the specific agency to ensure a targeted service response to ensure the best outcomes for the client. This should avoid any issues associated with duplication of service;
- establishing realistic timeframes for intervention;
- planning and convening meetings and recording the meeting outcomes, ensuring that all parties receive a copy of the case plan and are kept updated regarding any change to the plan; and
- monitoring the overall progress of the tasks and strategies in the plan.

Role of Caseworker

Casework requires sound assessment, counselling and interpersonal skills to be able to effectively engage clients in a process of identifying risk and actioning change to reduce or resolve risk. Casework also requires a sound knowledge of community resources and services in order to refer clients to agencies that are most appropriate to meet their needs.

Case work involves the actual work in implementing the case plan. This can be undertaken by a case manager or case worker within one agency and/or shared between a number of different agencies.

Grievance Process

In a highly integrated system comprising both statutory and non statutory services, robust communication is encouraged and in fact is necessary, about the safety and well being of children. An important factor to building trusting relationships is a commitment to managing differences and resolving any conflict that arises through cooperation, collaboration, mutual respect, transparency, accountability, effective communication and a timely response.

The safety and well being of children and young people should be the paramount consideration in any grievance process. Every attempt should be made to deal with issues and/or differences of opinion between services at the 'ground level' i.e case workers. If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, issues will be referred to the appropriate line manager and in some instances a case meeting may need to be considered.

All grievance procedures are to be undertaken and completed within a timely manner.

Designation	Level	NGO	Child Protection
Case worker /Team leader	Level 1 Operational level	NGO case worker or Team leader	CP case worker or Team leader
Operational Program Manager	Level 2 If the matter cannot be resolved at operational level to proceed to level 3.	Co-ordinator or Program Manager of NGO	CP Unit Manager or Manager Community Partnerships & Engagement
Senior Program Manager	Level 3	NGO Senior Program/Agency Manager	CP Service Centre Manager

Key Strategies for the Implementation and Strengthening of Collaborative Practice

1. Induction
2. Shared Training
3. Case Reviews
4. Reflective Practice
5. Policy and Procedure
6. Review of Guidelines

Opportunity for shared training and practice

1. Induction

- A commitment by DCF and Non Government Child, Youth and Family services in Central Australia to support the attendance of new employees from their agencies to attend the Cross Sector Orientation program which has been developed. The purpose of the Cross Sector Orientation is to provide an opportunity for workers new to Central Australia to receive a broad introduction to the key services relevant for children and families. It will also provide an opportunity for new Child Protection, Youth, Child and Family service workers to meet each other and build relationships early in their work, thus supporting the development of collaborative practice.

2. Shared Training

- Cross sector orientation to the Collaborative Practice Guidelines.
- A commitment to sharing of training opportunities for cross sector training, skill development and educative forums within the Central region e.g. Women's Shelter Family & Domestic Violence Training, Mandatory Reporting, Child Protection training

3. Case reviews

- A commitment by DCF to regularly review open cases and to include the primary NGO agencies involved in the case in the review process.
- A commitment by DCF and NGO's to regularly review all child protection matters as identified in the case plan.

4. Reflective Practice

- Reflective practice provides a learning environment which enables all parties an opportunity to openly explore and discuss the processes implemented, the outcomes and the lessons learned in undertaking case work.
- All agencies are in accord that reflective practice contributes to best practice with clients. All parties are committed to undertaking reflective practice sessions at all practice levels.

5. Policy and Procedure

- Each Agency/organisation needs to ensure that the Collaborative Practice Guidelines are embedded in their policies and procedures.

6. Review of Guidelines

- These guidelines will be subject to annual review and evaluation utilising the Partnership Analysis Tool and may be subject to amendments following this process.

References

Care and Protection of Children Act 2007, Northern Territory Government, 2007

Case Management Society of Australia, <http://www.cmsa.org.au/definition.html>

Safe Children, Bright Futures Strategic Framework 2012 to 2015, Department of Children and Families, Northern Territory, Government.