

Aboriginal family preservation and restoration

This fact sheet is an introduction to the Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration programs currently being delivered by a range of local Aboriginal community service organisations throughout Victoria.

Aboriginal Family Preservation

Aboriginal Family Preservation programs were first established in five Victorian communities between 1998 and 2000. One new program was established in 2007. The program gives intensive support over a short period of time to either prevent the need for children to be placed away from home or enable children to return home.

Aboriginal Family Restoration

Aboriginal Family Restoration programs provide intensive support while offering the additional benefits of a residential based program for the whole family. Commencing in 2006-07 there are three Aboriginal Family Restoration programs in Victoria. One of these is an integrated family preservation and restoration model.

Working with Aboriginal children and families

Both programs work in partnership with Child Protection to enable families to retain or resume the care of their children. Protective concerns within the family will mean that the children are likely to be or have already been placed in out of home care. The safety, stability, development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children within their family, is the focus of the programs involvement. Protective concerns and their underlying causes are addressed through parent education, family therapy and case work, and establishing connections to ongoing support.

How do I make a referral?

All referrals are assessed against a set of criteria, which includes the willingness and the capacity of the family to address protective concerns and work toward the goals of safety and wellbeing.

Priority is given to referrals from Child Protection and referrals for contracted cases where there is a family reunification case plan. However, if a vacancy exists and there are no referrals pending from Child Protection, referrals from community service organisations and families themselves will be considered.

A family preservation or restoration plan is developed on the basis of the assessment, with the participation of the family and in line with the broader goals of the child or children's Best Interests plan.

How do the programs work?

Each family will have one primary case worker who also coordinates a team of services and supports to meet specific needs and goals. While the timelines and hours of direct involvement will vary from family to family, the approach is always goal specific and oriented toward significant change. Families will generally be involved with Family Preservation and or Family Restoration for a period up to 12 weeks.

Family strengthening All members of the family are encouraged and supported to participate in decision making about how protective concerns will be addressed and to draw on family, community and cultural strengths.

After hours availability

The Family Preservation program offers current client families after hours contact with program staff. Depending on family needs and circumstances Family Restoration staff are on site with the family for up to 24 hours a day.

Engaging with community

Both programs work actively to connect families with services, supports and resources within the local community.

Working with Child Protection and community service organisations

Child Protection retains case management responsibilities during the involvement of Family Preservation and Family Restoration services. Because there are often a number of services involved with a family it is important that Child Protection, Family Preservation and Restoration, other services and the family come together to discuss and reach agreement about goals, approaches and programs. Roles and responsibilities need to be clear in the family preservation or restoration plan.

The plan may identify services available to provide ongoing support after the family preservation or restoration intervention has ended.

Links with other Aboriginal Child Protection and Family Services programs.

ACSASS

The Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service was created specifically to work with Child Protection in the role described in the Protocol between Child Protection and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation (both of these agencies deliver the ACSASS program). ACSASS must be consulted by Child Protection in relation to all significant decisions and actions concerning Aboriginal children and young people. Consultation may include information and advice about referring a family to local services and support networks.

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information Referral and Support Teams)

Child FIRST is being established in sub-regional catchments across Victoria to provide a community based referral point into Family Services, and will be statewide by 2009. Child FIRST promotes outcomes for vulnerable children and families, and provides service interventions with a whole-of-family focus, to strengthen parent capability to provide basic care, ensure safety and promote their child's development and improve the family's community connections and access to community resources.

Integrated Family Services (IFS) Indigenous

Integrated Family Services (formerly Family Support Innovation Projects) offer a local area network of Family Services. The IFS network includes a Community Based Child Protection Practitioner to provide advice and ensure Child Protection involvement if a child is at risk of significant harm. Some IFS's include a dedicated Aboriginal worker to provide advice and facilitate links with services for Aboriginal families. Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration programs may be located within an Indigenous IFS network and or recommend a referral to services within the network as part of the closure plan for a family.

Aboriginal Family Decision Making (AFDM)

AFDM enables extended family and respected Elders to participate in decision making and Best Interests planning about the safety, stability and development of Aboriginal children within the Child Protection system. AFDM meetings are co-convened and facilitated by a Child Protection Best Interests case planner and a Community convenor from an Aboriginal organisation. AFDM may be a suitable approach to planning for families coming into the Family Preservation or Restoration program.

Local advisory groups

Aboriginal Family Preservation and Restoration programs may establish a specific local advisory group and or be a member of a similar group such as the Child and Family Services Alliance established in each Child FIRST area to ensure local engagement, coordination and responsiveness.

Contact details for Aboriginal Family Preservation Programs

Alice Clarke: The Mildura Aboriginal Corporation Family Preservation program services families in the Mildura Local Government Area. Phone: 5022 1852.

Muthi Miah: VACCA services families in the Swan Hill, Buloke and Gannawarra Local Government Area. Phone: 5032 4300.

Rumbalara: The Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative Family Services Family Preservation Program services families in the City of Greater Shepparton and Moira Shire. Phone: 5831 2370.

Wilka Kwe: The VACCA Wilka Kwe Family Preservation program is located in Dandenong and services families across the whole Southern region. Phone: 9706 9244.

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC): Provides a coordinated approach that links in-home support, Integrated Family Services and Indigenous Family Support Innovations. GEGAC is in Bairnsdale and services families across East Gippsland Phone: 5152 1922.

Contact details for Aboriginal Family Restoration Programs

Yakapna: The Njernda Aboriginal Corporation services families in the Campaspe Local Government Area. Phone: 5482 6566.

Wanjana Lidj: The Aboriginal Family Services Preservation and Restoration Program includes both in-home support and a residential program for families living within the Baw Baw Shire and Latrobe City. Phone: 5133 8200.

VACCA: The North West Metro Region Aboriginal Family Restoration Program includes intensive in-home support with an optional residential program. Phone: 8388 1855.

More information

Contact your local Aboriginal Family Preservation or Restoration program or Child Protection office for more information.

For fact sheets about associated topics see the every child every chance website
www.dhs.vic.gov.au/everychildeverychance