
MEDIA RELEASE

22 December 2008

INTEGRATE SYSTEMS TO BETTER PROTECT CHILDREN

FRSA welcomes moves to integrate Family Court and child protection systems.

“A closer alignment between the child protection and family law systems is long overdue”, said Samantha Page, Executive Director.

Joining a chorus of voices calling for integration earlier this year, it was a key recommendation of FRSA’s submission responding to the discussion paper ‘Australia’s Children Safe and Well: Towards a National Child Protection Framework’.

“Community organisations that work with families experiencing relationship difficulties and separation know first hand just how complicated these scenarios can get. The children and young people who are at risk of abuse or neglect are often affected by multiple factors such as high conflict between family members, past or current family violence, parental drug use or mental health issues, tenuous housing and/or disrupted education.”

The Family Court is in an invidious position when asked to determine where children should live without the capacity to have all relevant factors investigated by child protection agencies. Similarly, the work of child protection agencies and family support services can be complicated by Family Court proceedings and decisions.

Recent statements from the Attorney-General Robert McClelland suggest that the Federal Government is looking at ways to bring these two systems together to allow for more integrated responses.

“The changes required are structural and significant. This is not just a matter of asking agencies to cooperate – there is already a strong mutual commitment to the safety of children and many positive examples of how professionals across the court, protection and community sectors collaborate. Both the family law system and the state/territory child protection systems are complex service systems with limited resources responding to highly vulnerable families. There are many legal and practical limitations on each system which can be frustrating for families and the dedicated professionals working with them.”

“Family relationship services have a unique perspective on the potential benefits of integrating service systems and look forward to being involved in any process designed to identify and explore opportunities to bring these systems closer together.”