

Greater Sydney Family Law Pathways Network



Greater Sydney Family Law Pathways Network

Terms of Reference

1.0 Introduction

The Greater Sydney Family Law Pathways Network (the Network) is funded by the Australian Government as part of its commitment to assist separating or separated families by providing access to services they need as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

The Network is a coordinated network of professionals and agencies operating within the family law system which includes, but is not limited to:

- Family Court of Australia
- Federal Circuit Court of Australia
- Legal Aid Commissions
- Community Legal Centres
- Family Violence Prevention Legal Services
- Family and Domestic Violence Support Services
- Family Relationship Services (Family Relationship Centres, Children's Contact Services, Parenting Orders Programs, Family Dispute Resolution Services, Post Separation Cooperative Parenting Services, Supporting Children after Separation Programs, Counselling Services, Men and Family Relationships Services. Specialised Family Violence Services)
- Family Relationships Advice Line
- Family Law solicitors, barristers and The Law Society of NSW
- Department of Human Services, (incorporating Child Support, Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service, Centrelink and Medicare)

The success of this Network has been achieved through the ongoing and enthusiastic support of the voluntary Steering Committee and the General Committee Members who represent the major service provider groups of the family law sector. In addition, the in-kind support from the organisations represented by the Steering Committee has enabled the Network to move forward with an ambitious number of goals. Membership for the Network is open to all service providers and organisations that work with families engaged with the family law sector. The Network has kept the definition of 'member' deliberately broad so as to be as inclusive and collaborative as possible.

1.1 Aim

The overarching aim of the Network is to improve collaboration and cooperation between organisations and professionals operating in the family law system in order to help separating and separated families obtain appropriate services. By encouraging collaborative referrals and enhancing the understanding of available services, the Network represents an essential component of the Government's commitment to an accessible justice system that meets the needs of families and increases focus on the best interests of the child.

1.2 Network Objectives

- a. Establish and maintain strong links with:
 - i. Locally based providers
 - ii. Agencies working in areas associated with the family law system, in particular mental health, drug and alcohol services;
 - iii. Agencies working in areas associated with family violence or child protection;
 - iv. Aboriginal and CALD services, and
 - v. The Family Law Courts.
- b. Develop and maintain appropriate referral mechanisms between locally based organisations operating as part of or alongside the family law system;
- c. Develop and maintain shared understandings of the role of network members and key organisations in the family law system;
- d. Develop and maintain awareness of products, services and training available to members;
- e. Develop and maintain cross-sector training to help build stronger working relationships across the family law system;
- f. Develop and maintain ways to share information within the Network where appropriate;
- g. Coordinate meetings, events, conferences or training courses for networks on a State or regional basis;
- h. Provide court-related information to members on a state or regional basis;
- i. Provide support to members on a state or regional basis, which may include facilitating liaison with peak professional bodies, such as State/Territory law societies.

2.0 Network Governance and Membership

2.1 The Funding Recipient (Interrelate Family Centres) has responsibility under the funding agreement to:

- execute the Service Agreement with the Attorney General's Department, including all reporting requirements;
- liaise with the Department on behalf of the Network;
- provide the financial and day to day management and administrative support for the Network, and
- employ Network Staff.

2.2 Compliance with Laws and Policies

The Network, whilst carrying out its activities, must comply with all laws including:

- *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999;*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1984;*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984;*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992;*
- *Crimes Act 1914;*
- *Criminal Code Act 1995.*

2.3 Steering Committee

Under the Funding Agreement the Network will have a Steering Committee comprising of a minimum of six members, five of whom must be independent of the Funding Recipient.

The Network will be managed by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from each organisation deemed to be core family law providers or key entry points for separating and separated family members.

2.3.1 Steering Committee Roles and Responsibilities

- Act as a Steering Committee of the Network
- Assist and consult with the Funding Recipient in its role with the Attorney-General's Department
- Contribute to the recruitment and selection of Network staff
- Engage in strategic planning for the Network
- Support the collaborative and consultative ethos of the Network
- Ensure the development of an annual work plan by the Network which is consistent with the Network aims

- Approve the Network work plan
- Monitor, review and approve the Network projects and activities
- Monitor, review and approve the Network budget
- Accept consensus decisions
- Keep the General Committee informed of the Steering Committee's deliberations and decisions and ensure the Network has regular updates on projects / activities
- Work to maintain a broad and diverse membership of the Network
- Work to facilitate the collaborative and consultative ethos of the Network in the planning and implementation of the Network activities
- Will meet as and when required, at least twice a year
- The Steering Committee will elect a Chair or up to 2 Co-chairs and up to 2 Deputy Chairs and if required a treasurer from members of the Steering Committee and the Chair will also facilitate the Network meetings.

Steering Committee Meetings will be minuted by an employed Project Officer, and once affirmed these will be distributed to all General Committee members.

2.4 General Committee

The General Committee shall be comprised of the Steering Committee members plus representatives from government funded organisations, government organisations, Legal Aid NSW, The Law Society of NSW, peak bodies and other core family service providers as approved by the Steering Committee.

2.4.1 General Committee Members' Roles and Responsibilities

- Attend and participate in the Network meetings which will be held on a monthly basis
- Be informed on issues as a key stakeholder
- Contribute to and support the work of the Steering Committee
- Participate in discussions
- Accept consensus decisions
- Circulate relevant information to their wider networks
- Commit to participate in additional working parties and sub-committees
- Support the collaborative and consultative ethos of the Network
- Contribute to strategic planning for the Network
- Develop an annual work plan for the Network consistent with the Network's aims

2.5 Network Members

The Network will be inclusive of all agencies and providers of services working in areas closely associated with the family law system such as mental health, drug and alcohol, family violence, child protection, Indigenous and CALD services, and work towards having all providers of such services represented on the Network.

2.5.1 Network Members' Roles and Responsibilities

- Contribute to strategic planning for the Network
- Contribute time and resources to particular projects where possible
- Participate in project sub-committees consistent with the Network's annual work plan
- Support the collaborative and consultative ethos of the Network
- Exchange information and contribute resources to enhance partnerships with other Network members to support the Network outcomes

Network members will receive the Network e-bulletin and any other relevant information or updates. Network members will receive information on upcoming events coordinated by the Network.



Steering Committee

- The Chair or Co-Chairs and up to two Deputy Chairs can be elected by Steering Committee;
- Treasurer to monitor budget
- Develop a Strategic Work Plan in May of each year to progress the objectives of the Network (subject to funding renewal);
- Develop a budget/s for the financial year (subject to funding renewal).

General Committee Members

- Attend monthly meetings;
- Attend Annual Planning Day;
- Be informed on issues as a key stakeholder;
- Contribute to and support the work of the Steering Committee;
- Circulate relevant information to their wider networks;
- Commit to participating in additional working parties and sub-committees.

Members

- Receive e-Newsletter;
- Be informed on issues as a key stakeholder;
- Receive updates;
- Receive information on upcoming events;
- Attend events coordinated by the Greater Sydney FLPN.

2.6 The Role of Proxies

When unable to attend, the individual member may appoint a proxy from their organisation to attend the Steering Committee and/or General Committee on their behalf.

2.7 Observer Status

Regular observer status shall be granted to senior representatives of organisations deemed relevant by the Steering Committee. These may include the Department of Social Services.

Irregular observer status shall be formally requested through the Chair prior to the regular Steering Committee and/or General Committee meeting. Invitations to observe shall be included in all correspondence with the wider network members.

2.8 Conduct of Meetings

- i. Steering Committee and monthly General Committee meetings will be facilitated by the elected Chair, otherwise if the Chair is absent, the elected Deputy Chair will facilitate the meeting.
- ii. Steering Committee, General Committee and Sub-Committee minutes will be minuted by an employed Project Officer, acting as Secretary of the meetings.
- iii. Meeting apologies are to be provided to the Project Officer in advance of each meeting.

2.9 Quorum of a Steering Committee

The quorum will be half the Steering Committee members plus one.

2.10 Chair Roles and Responsibilities

The Chairs will ensure that Steering Committee and General Committee meetings are conducted in accordance with meeting principles including:

- Remaining impartial and facilitating consensus where possible;
- Welcoming and introducing new members;
- Ensuring there is a quorum;
- Keeping to timelines;
- Prioritising and adhering to the agenda;
- Encouraging and facilitating participation in discussion;
- Following correct procedure for decision making;
- Summarising discussion and making sure decisions are recorded properly;
- Demonstrating good leadership, fairness and respect;
- The Chair shall be responsible for orientation of new Steering Committee members;
- Representing the Steering Committee and the Network when required.

2.11 Deputy Chair Roles and Responsibilities

The Deputy Chairs will undertake the responsibilities of the Chair when the Chair is not available.

2.12 Treasurer Role and Responsibilities

The Treasurer will liaise with the Interrelate finance team and the project officer and/or chair/co-chairs on the budget as required and to present the budget or any updates at each monthly meeting.

3.0 Elections

3.1 Process for the Election of the Chair & Deputy Chair

Elections will be held annually for the position of Chair/Co-Chair and Deputy Chairs.

These positions shall be elected by the members of the Steering Committee. All Steering Committee members shall whenever possible be in attendance at the meeting at which the election is held. Where a committee member cannot attend they may supply a proxy. When a proxy is not supplied the ballot will continue as scheduled.

4.0 Review Dates

Terms of reference will be reviewed at the Annual Planning meeting held each year. Any suggested changes will need to be approved by the Steering Committee.