

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Output 1.1

Question No. 30

Senator Siewert asked the following question at the hearing on 12 February 2007:

- a) How is Government supporting providers to ensure that the safety and security requirements in Family Relationship Centres can be met?
- b) How is Government supporting providers to ensure that staff recruited within those Centres receive appropriate training and skills in identifying and responding to complex issues such as child protection, family violence, mental health and substance abuse?
- c) Does the Government know and can it advise how many calls received by the Family Relationships Advice Line are referred to Family Relationship Centres?
- d) What steps are taken in Family Relationship Centres when clients seeking family dispute resolution have presented with family violence issues?
- e) Are those clients given the option to seek legal advice?
- f) Does the Government know and can it advise how many clients are referred by (i) FRSP services, and (ii) Advice Line, to legal services?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a) The Government has set out requirements for safety and security in the Operational Framework for Family Relationship Centres, which forms part of the Funding Agreement. The Operational Framework also requires providers to satisfy the FRSP Approval Requirements about safety and security from commencement.

The Attorney-General's Department has briefed operators of the Family Relationship Centres about safety and security requirements, including through establishment meetings for organisations operating the Centres, and face to face and telephone discussions with Centre managers. These briefings are designed to support Centre operators and managers in implementing the Government's requirements, including safety and security.

Safety and security was also included in the orientation training provided to Centre staff by the Department.

- b) The Operational Framework sets out the Government's requirement for Centres to recruit staff with a high level of relevant skills. The Funding Agreement also requires providers to satisfy the FRSP Approval Requirements about training and support of staff.

The Department has provided a screening and assessment framework and guidelines for use by the Centres, which assist Centres to develop appropriate approaches to identifying and responding to complex issues such as child protection, family violence, mental health and substance abuse. The use of the framework and guidelines was included in the orientation training provided to Centre staff.

c) Not all referrals from the Advice Line have been recorded in its call management system, but of those recorded for the period 3 July 2006 – 31 January 2007, 14% were referred to a Family Relationship Centre.

d) and e) Under Family Law Regulation 62, family dispute resolution practitioners, including those at Centres, must be satisfied that an assessment has been conducted of the parties in dispute and that family dispute resolution is appropriate. This includes a consideration of whether the ability of any party to negotiate freely in the dispute is affected by a history of, or current threats of family violence, the likely safety of the parties, the risk of child abuse or other factors set out in the Regulation.

Centres are responsible for developing their own procedures within the Operational Framework and the Screening and Assessment Framework. If a Centre's screening and assessment procedures identifies a situation involving family violence or child abuse, the Centre will take appropriate steps to assist the client access appropriate services that can assist, including to legal advice, where appropriate.

f) i) This data is not available at this time. The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has advised that service providers commenced entering data into FRSP Online in December 2006 and have until 30 June 2007 to complete the backlog of data entry (back to 1 July 2006). This data should be available early in the 2007-08 financial year.

ii) Not all referrals from the Advice Line have been recorded in its call management system, but of those recorded for the period 3 July 2006 – 31 January 2007, 17% were referred to a legal service.