

Family Court of Australia and Child Support Agency projects

Family Court of Australia Project

The Family Court of Australia, in conjunction with the Federal Magistrates Court, has developed the Mental Health Support Project to: ensure the court's systems and processes are as supportive as possible of people's mental health; and assist staff of the court to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of clients by promoting awareness, providing skills and putting in place supporting infrastructure.

The court's approach to achieving these goals has been informed by a range of projects, initiatives, research papers and stakeholder input, as well as consultation with experts in the areas of depression, suicide and mental health. The project approach comprises:

- external referral service — appropriate referral to community-based and government organisations that provide mental health support services;
- protocols — development of clear guidelines for staff in dealing with clients who threaten harm to themselves or others;
- internal crisis response — development of internal emergency response protocols for high-risk crisis situations, such as immediate threats;
- mental health literacy — to improve client awareness and understanding of mental health and emotional wellbeing during separation; and
- staff training — providing the court's staff with the skills required to deal with clients who present with mental health or emotional wellbeing issues.

The Mental Health Support Project is being piloted at the court's Adelaide and Darwin locations. Further information about the Family Court of Australia is in Part 3.5.2: Families Experiencing Relationship Breakdown.

Child Support Agency Project

The Child Support Agency (CSA) conducted a pilot in Queensland called the Direct Telephone Support Service, which improved staff awareness of risk and prevention factors, as demonstrated in three areas:

- actively engaging with newly separated parents to identify risk factors for emotional wellbeing, including those at risk of suicide and self-harm;
- responding to separated parents presenting with risk factors; and
- making effective referrals to an appropriate, dedicated counselling service, which provided immediate counselling, follow up and further referral.

Parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the service, in particular with the relevance of issues discussed and the knowledge and helpful approach of the counsellors. CSA staff reported being well equipped to provide better support to parents through the availability of the referral service.

Education of clients and the community through *What about me?* and *Dealing with Separation* and the other sources of self-help (eg <http://www.bluepages.anu.edu.au> and <http://www.mhfa.com.au>) provided support service information to people affected by mental illness and their families and carers. CSA has continued to fund the service in Queensland. Further information about the CSA is in Part 3.5.3 Support for Children.