

Families and Communities Programme

Forced Adoption Support Services

Operational Guidelines

**June 2014**

Preface

On 21 March 2013, the Australian Government formally apologised to people affected by forced adoption practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, and which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering. The Government response to the Senate Inquiry into former forced adoption policies and practices was also announced.

As part of the national apology, the Government is investing $11.5 million over four years to 30 June 2017 to assist those affected by forced adoption practices.

The Forced Adoption appropriation includes funding for the following activities:

* $5 million for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to improve access to specialist support services, peer and professional counselling and records tracing for those affected by forced adoptions
* $5 million for the Department of Health for improved access to psychological services and the development of guidelines and training materials for mental health professionals to assist in the diagnosis, treatment and care of those affected by forced adoption practices and
* $1.5 million for the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to develop the Forced Adoption History Project, including a website and exhibition to record the experiences of those affected by forced adoptions and to increase awareness and understanding of these experiences in the community.

These Operational Guidelines for the Forced Adoption Support Services, funded by DSS, have been developed for service providers to work in a nationally-consistent, coordinated and cooperative way. They outline the key elements of service delivery, and seek to clarify policy and process questions that may arise during the implementation and delivery of the Forced Adoption Support services.

The Operational Guidelines are a living document. As additional issues arise and policy clarifications are developed, they will be circulated via email to all DSS Forced Adoption Support Services service providers. Every twelve months, all clarifications will be included in an updated version of these operational guidelines that will then be circulated to all service providers.

The Operational Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the:

* Families and Communities Programme, Families and Children Activity Guidelines Overview
* Grant Agreement and
* DSS Data Exchange Protocols

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# Forced Adoption Support Services

## Overview

Forced Adoption Support Services are part of the DSS’s Families and Communities Programme.

Forced Adoption Support Services are a component under the Adult Specialist Sub-Activity that sits under the Families and Children Activity.

## Objectives

The Forced Adoption Support Services will provide specialist support to people affected by forced adoptions through:

* Delivering a telephone information, referral and support service via a national 1800 number for calls originating in their jurisdiction
* Delivering these services face-to-face where appropriate/possible
* Developing Local Networks of service providers – mainstream, post-adoption specific, professionals and peer support and
* Administering Small Grants totalling between 5% - 10% of the funding through subcontracting arrangements to peer support and advocacy groups

## Principles

### Networking/Collaboration

Service providers must network and collaborate in accordance with Section 2.7 of the Families and Communities Programme Guidelines Overview.

Forced Adoption Support Service providers must work collaboratively with each other and with relevant government and non-government agencies that provide services to the target group. To ensure effective integration with appropriate services, Forced Adoption Support Service providers must build and maintain effective relationships with a broad network of relevant services, which may include:

* Peer support groups
* Counselling
* Mental health practitioners
* Advocacy groups
* Records tracing support.

### Client Diversity

Forced Adoption Support Services must provide flexible, culturally sensitive and accessible service delivery models and practices that ensure accessibility to any people who face a real or perceived barrier to receiving assistance, and have in place strategies to achieve this unless otherwise exempted by legislation. You must be able to provide evidence of these strategies on request. Forced Adoption Support Services must provide services equally, without bias or prejudgement about clients. Services must be accessible to all target groups, including Indigenous people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

### Design Principles

Forced Adoption Support Services will give a strategic focus to the delivery of specialist services for people affected by forced adoptions and will enhance access to existing support within each jurisdiction.

The following principles apply to all Forced Adoption Support Services:

* Services support and empower people affected by forced adoptions
* A system for feedback loops is provided including:
  + Consultation in groups and other accessible formats including for people living regionally and involved in support networks and activities:
  + Consumer reference groups where people affected by forced adoption are included in governance and planning mechanisms
  + Surveys and continuous feedback and
  + Options to inform and improve the service system.
* The way services are offered should include that:
  + Clients drive the type and direction of support
  + Service delivery is flexible and tailored to the individual needs of each person
  + Services are clear about what they do and how and
  + Clients are the expert of their own life.
* Services are respectful of the different histories and needs of people affected by forced adoptions and:
  + Promote self-determination, upholding client views that ‘nothing about us, without us’
  + Give options so that people can make informed choices such as to access support that is independent from past adoptions providers
  + Advocate for clients access to information past adoption organisations hold about them and
  + Make referrals and advocate to mainstream services to create a common approach and understanding in delivering support.
* The services employ specialist skilled staff to deliver services based on:
  + Developing trust and relationships and
  + Take time to notice relevant information about clients, are curious, ask questions, are invitational to clients and do not tell clients what to do.
* Where service providers are either past or current providers of adoption services, they must:
  + Make a strong and public commitment which acknowledges their past practices and
  + Have appropriate policies and practices in place to ensure t any client who may or may not be comfortable with accessing the service, is referred to another service, preferably through a warm referral.

## Promotion of Services

Service providers must help raise awareness of their service availability, including through networks.

Service providers must make the details of their service publically available on the [Family Relationships Online website](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/).

For assistance to complete this requirement, contact the Family Relationships Online helpline on 1800 654 724 or by email: [frohelp@dss.gov.au](mailto:frohelp@dss.gov.au).

## Safety

The safety of all adults who visit or work for the service is paramount. Service providers should adopt the following:

* Services should give their staff clear safety policies and procedures in writing and provide staff with adequate support, training and resources to comply with those policies and procedures and
* Report critical incidents to the Commonwealth.

# Service Delivery

## Model of Service Delivery

A Forced Adoption Support Service will be delivered in each state and territory. A National Coordination role will be provided by DSS. The service delivery model to assist people who have been affected by forced adoptions has two tiers.

Tier One – A National Coordination role provided by DSS that will:

* Coordinate the Forced Adoption Support Services providers in each state and territory
* Coordinate the delivery of a national 1800 telephone entry point service
* Develop and maintain a national web portal to provide a single entry point for web-based information and resources and with links to existing services (possibly on Family Relationships Online)
* Organise national meetings/training as required and
* Coordinate the development of standards for Forced Adoption Support Services.

Tier Two – A Forced Adoption Support Services in each state and territory that will:

* Deliver telephone information, referral and support via a national 1800 number for calls originating in their jurisdiction, including absorbing the cost of calls they receive with service delivery funds
* Operate between the hours of 9.00am – 5.00pm (local time) Monday to Friday
* Provide services to people affected by forced adoptions. The level of assistance may depend on the issues presented by the client, and could range from case management through to warm referrals to other relevant providers.
* Deliver information, referral and support service face-to-face, where appropriate and possible
* Develop Local Networks of service providers within their community area that includes mainstream, post-adoption specific, professionals and peer support services to enhance quality, coordination, flexibility and diversity of post-adoption support services
* Administer Small Grants, through subcontracting arrangements, to peer support and advocacy groups agreed by the Local Networks of service providers to build capacity and enhance support for people affected by forced adoptions. The Small Grant allocation will total between 5% - 10% of funding provided to the Forced Adoption Support Service provider and
* Collaborate with Forced Adoption Support Services in all states and territories to help provide ‘no wrong door’ assistance for clients, particularly for clients whose records may be located in a different state or territory to the one in which they reside.

## Peer Support

Forced Adoption Support Services are required and encouraged to work with peer support and advocacy groups who will be part of the planning and decision making regarding the allocation of Small Grants. This is further described in Section 4 ‘Governance’.

Peer support group activities for consideration of Small Grants funding can include, but are not limited to:

* Venue and group meeting costs
* Group facilitation costs
* Art therapy fees
* Retreats
* Production of memorials and
* Capacity building opportunities such as local or national training.

Small Grant recipients cannot use Small Grant funding for the employment of staff and/or provision of counselling services.

# Working with Clients

## Clients/Target Group

The target group for Forced Adoption Support Services is anyone who was affected by forced adoption policies and practices. Affected people include mothers, fathers, adopted people and extended family members. The priority for service delivery should be the people who were directly involved. Services to extended family members can also be achieved through effective warm referrals to other relevant providers.

## No Wrong Door Approach

Identifying the most appropriate service to respond to a client’s needs is the role of the Forced Adoption Support Services’ staff.

Generally, it is expected a client will receive supportfrom the Forced Adoption Support Service in the jurisdiction in which they reside. However, clients should be able to receive a prompt response no matter which service they first approach for assistance, where they currently reside or where the adoption took place.

If the client requires assistance, for example, with records access where records are held in another jurisdiction, the Forced Adoption Support Service should seek assistance from the Forced Adoption Support Service and/or other post-adoption providers in the other jurisdictions as appropriate.

## Family support

The primary focus of the Forced Adoption Support Service is people directly affected by forced adoptions. However, family may be a key support for the primary client. Therefore, family of the primary client may need to be included in the support and services offered to the primary client.

Forced Adoption Support Services will have the most relevant knowledge and skills to respond to the family member’s request as appropriate.

## Trauma Informed approach to service delivery

Clients should be assessed and supported based on need. Trauma Informed principles should be applied.

These websites provide information and resources on evidence-based best practice in Trauma Informed service delivery:

* [Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA)](http://www.asca.org.au/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=340)
* [The (US) National Centre for Trauma Informed Care](http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma.asp)

## Consent (verbal/ written) and verification

There are occasions when verbal client consent is sufficient and other times when written client consent is required.

Occasions when verbal consent is sufficient for Forced Adoption Support Service to respond to a client includes:

* When a duty of care response is required (someone’s wellbeing is at risk of harm) and
* When the Forced Adoption Support Service is undertaking a short-term piece of work for a client that is urgent (especially where distance is an issue) and or where there are barriers to receiving signed consent. When appropriate, the Forced Adoption Support Service staff will read out the consent form to the client and ask that they provide consent verbally. The time, date, purpose and duration of consent are clearly case noted on the client’s case file.

Forced Adoption Support Services must document efforts to obtain signed consent. Consent is necessary to:

* Deal with third parties who are acting on behalf of a client and
* To initiate direct contact with a client who has been referred to their service by a third party.

## Confidentiality

In order to maintain the trust of people affected by forced adoptions, Forced Adoption Support Services must carefully respect their clients’ information ensuring that identifying information about clients is only shared if consent is provided.

## Support for records searching

Searching for and releasing records will, in many situations, require the assistance of other support services. Forced Adoption Support Services are encouraged to seek advice and support from their colleagues in other services who are in closer proximity to where the records may exist or where the client lives as they prepare to search for interstate records and when providing a supported records release.

## Supported release of records

A client’s right to exercise self-determination in receiving their records must be considered, and support and information provided so the client can make an informed decision. Clients are to be offered a supported release of their records if appropriate.

It is important that clients are not denied their right to receive information about them, and this must be balanced with ensuring the client’s wellbeing is safeguarded (considering duty of care responsibilities).

A supported release of records might be assisting the client to plan their supports (having a partner, friend or family member with them) when they receive the records and how they will approach reading the records. Services could involve contracting with the client that they open records only when they next visit their therapist or it might involve a series of face-to-face meetings with the client to gradually read through the records according to the client’s needs and wishes. The level of support will vary among the Forced Adoption Support Services.

## Support for family searching and reconnecting

Forced Adoption Support Services may provide support to assist with family searching and reconnections. This support can be provided at all stages of the search and reunion process. However, Forced Adoption Support Services’ funding cannot be used to directly fund reunions.

# Governance and Support

DSS requires a collaborative relationship between all Forced Adoption Support Services. DSS will provide a national coordination role to facilitate this collaboration. Further details of DSS’s national coordination role can be found under the Model of Service Delivery at Section 2.1 of these Guidelines.

All Forced Adoption Support Services will be required to develop Local Networks. These Local Networks will bring together a broad range of service providers, including support/advocacy groups, mainstream providers, post-adoption specific providers and other professionals as appropriate. Appropriate governance structures will need to be established as part of these Local Networks. The Local Networks must be involved in the planning and governance of the Forced Adoption Support Service, including how the Small Grants programme will operate.

# Reporting

## DSS Data Exchange

Service providers must meet their data collection and reporting obligations and work in accordance with the requirements described in Sections 2.9 and 2.10 of the Families and Communities Programme, Families and Children Guidelines Overview.

## Hot Issues and Media

Demand for, and increased public, media or political interest/scrutiny will periodically spike due to Hot Issues, including:

* something that is of interest to the target group
* annual events such as the anniversary of the National Apology
* launches of new initiatives and
* parliamentary proceedings, including senate estimate hearings and question time.

Identifying these Hot Issues and sharing the information with DSS will enable more proactive service delivery responses.

Service providers must also alert DSS of any less urgent issues, particularly where they affect services to clients.

DSS must be informed if service providers are planning to engage with the media. It is important that DSS is made aware in advance of what issues will be raised as this will allow DSS time to prepare for any follow-up enquiries and/or to brief relevant stakeholders as necessary.

## Critical Incidents and Service Delivery Issues

Aside from the standard reporting, Forced Adoption Support Services providers must report critical incidents to DSS. DSS is also interested in hearing about any issues relating to the delivery of Forced Adoption Support Services and maintains an Issues Register to track, collate, consider and assist to resolve, where possible, service issues. This provides a system to understand where there are similar issues across the jurisdictions and where these Operational Guidelines need to be updated in order to provide clarity around the issues.

# Complaints

Service providers must have an ‘internal complaints procedure’ in place and it must be prominently displayed. The ‘internal complaints procedure’ can include the complaint being handled by the organisation running the service.

Section 6 of the Families and Communities Programme, Families and Children Guidelines Overview further outlines the process for dealing with complaints and escalation, including to DSS.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can also investigate complaints about the actions and decisions of Australian Government agencies to see if they are wrong, unjust, unlawful, discriminatory or just plain unfair.

# Grant Administration

Grant Agreement Managers (GAMs) are the first point of call for contact with the Department. They will provide assistance with queries relating to planning, data and reporting, or any new issues that arise under these Operational Guidelines.

# Glossary

**Adult Specialist Support** – provides specialist services and support to improve outcomes and enhance wellbeing for people adversely affected by past institutional and child-welfare practices and policies.

**Clients** – An individual who receives a service as part of the funded Activity / Sub-Activity that is expected to lead to a measureable individual outcome.

**DSS** – The Commonwealth Department of Social Services

**DSS Data Exchange** – The data exchange is a free web based portal which is being progressively implemented across all in-scope DSS programmes from 1 July 2014 to allow the capture and reporting of data.

**Families and Children Activity -** is delivered under the Families and Communities Programme and aims to support families, strengthen relationships, improve the wellbeing of children and young people and increase participation of people in community life to enhance family and community functioning.

**Families and Communities Programme** – provides a range of services, focused on strengthening relationships, and building parenting and financial management skills, providing support for better community connections, as well as services to help newly arrived migrants in their transition to life in Australia.

**Family Relationships Online –** [Family Relationships Online](http://www.familyrelationships.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx) is a resource managed by DSS.

**Forced Adoption Support Services** – The services delivered by NGOs funded to deliver Forced Adoption Support Services.

**GAMs –** Grant Administration Managers within DSS.

**Local Network –** Networks of service providers delivering services to people affected by forced adoptions. This may include post-adoption providers, mainstream health practitioners, counsellors, psychologists, peer support and advocacy groups.

**NGO –** Non-Government Organisation.

**Peer Support Groups** – Groups which have formed amongst people with a shared experience.

**Small Grants** – Each funded Forced Adoption Support Service is required to allocate a portion (between 5-10%) of their annual DSS funding to fund peer support and advocacy groups, including existing groups, to help build their capacity.

**Supportive / warm referral** – a ‘live’ three-way conversation in the presence of the client (whether face to face or by telephone) in which the referring organisation introduces the client, explains what has already been done to assist the client and why the client is being referred.

# Version Control

| **Version** | **Changes** | **Date** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1.0 | Approved Operational Guidelines | 2 June 2014 |