

MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt MP
Minister for Health

The Hon. Linda Burney MP
Minister for Community Services



16th March 2010

Keep Them Safe: Family Referral Services

NSW Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, Carmel Tebbutt, and the NSW Minister for Community Services, Linda Burney today announced the three organisations awarded the tender to pilot a Family Referral Service in Dubbo, Newcastle and Mt Druitt as part of the Government's *Keep Them Safe* action plan to improve the safety and wellbeing of children in NSW.

The *Keep Them Safe* initiative highlights the new unified approach towards child and family wellbeing, as advocated by Hon. James Wood AO QC in his Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection in NSW.

Minister Tebbutt said the NSW Government had committed \$38 million over five years for the staged implementation of Family Referral Services across NSW, with \$3.6 million allocated to pilot these three Family Referral Services for the first 12 months.

The Minister for Health welcomed NSW Health's leading role in the establishment of this new service.

"Family Referral Services aim to link vulnerable children, young people in need of assistance and their families with appropriate Commonwealth, State or Local Government funded support services so they receive appropriate help to address their individual circumstances close to home," Ms Tebbutt said.

"The ongoing partnership between the health and human service agencies and non-government organisations means that the needs of vulnerable children and young people and their families can be addressed in a holistic manner.

"This new service will assist families who fall below the threshold for statutory child protection intervention, yet would benefit from accessing support services to address their current circumstances and prevent escalation," Minister Tebbutt said.

Minister Burney said Justice Wood's report found the overwhelming number of reports received by Community Services meant families in less serious categories did not always receive the attention and support they needed.

"Serious cases will still be dealt with by Community Services, but these new Family Referral Services are part of a strong partnership with the non-government sector to get less urgent cases referred to community-based services that can provide support," she said.

"We are strengthening the overarching system's ability to help families before their problems reach crisis point. Our emphasis is on prevention and early intervention."

The organisations awarded the tender will trial two service delivery models over a 12 month period: a telephone referral service and an augmented referral service which will have the capacity to make face to face referrals, offer case management, and use brokerage funding to supplement client access to support services.

The Wood Inquiry highlighted the over-representation of Indigenous children and young people in the child protection system. Therefore, the Dubbo pilot will also identify appropriate referral pathways to link Indigenous children, young people and their families with culturally appropriate services responsive to their specific support needs.

NSW Health has engaged an external consultant to undertake an independent evaluation of the pilots and formulate recommendations for the most effective service model. The outcomes of the pilots will inform the NSW Government decision on the state-wide roll-out of this new service over the next four years.

Family Referral Services are a voluntary service. It is expected that some people will self-refer and some will be referred by government agencies where the circumstances of a child, young person and/or their families do not call for statutory intervention under the new threshold for intervention introduced with the amendment to the Child Protection Act that came into effect on 24 January 2010.

Ministers Tebbutt and Burney congratulate:

- UnitingCare Children, Young People, and Families for being awarded the tender to pilot an augmented Family Referral Service with an Indigenous focus in Dubbo
- The Benevolent Society for being awarded the tender to pilot an augmented Family Referral Service in Newcastle and
- Relationships Australia (NSW) for being awarded the tender to pilot a telephone Family Referral Service in Mount Druitt.

The catchment area of the UnitingCare FRS in Dubbo will include Wellington, Walgett, Narromine, Coonamble, Parkes, Bogan, Gilgandra, Warrumbungles, Brewarrina, Bourke, Cowra, Forbes, Condobolin, Warren, Orange, Cobar, Mudgee, Blayney. An augmented service will be provided from a Drop-in Centre in Dubbo and supplemented by home visiting and an outreach bus (the FRS Get Connected Bus) servicing remote and rural areas.

The Benevolent Society augmented FRS will service the Central Coast, Lake Macquarie, Lower and Upper Hunter areas, extending to Muswellbrook in the West, Newcastle to the East, Gosford in the South and including the localities of Cessnock, Dungog, Gloucester, Maitland, Port Stephens, Singleton and Wyong, with a telephone service based in Rutherford.

Relationships Australia NSW telephone FRS in Mount Druitt will service Whalan, Tregear, Lethbridge Park, Emerton, Blackett, Dharruk, Hebersham, Bidwill, Blackett, Shalvey, Willmot, Hassall Grove, Minchinbury, Oakhurst, Plumpton Glendenning and Rooty Hill (and includes suburbs bounded by the M4 motorway to the south, Ropes Creek to the West, Richmond Road to the North and Eastern Creek to the East).

For further information on the Keep Them Safe initiative go online to

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/initiatives/kts/index.asp>

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