



# Proposal

## 'No Wrong Door' Model

**For families accessing support services in the children services sector in the City of Greater Bendigo**

## **1. Summary of 'No Wrong Door' model**

The purpose of this paper is to promote discussion and exploration amongst early years' providers of a 'No Wrong Door' model for City of Greater Bendigo. From this discussion it is hoped that an in principle agreement is reached amongst early years providers to implement a 'No Wrong Door' model. The proposal for a 'No Wrong Door' model has grown out of discussions and forums conducted with early years providers in second half of 2013.

The focus of the proposed 'No Wrong Door' model is to ensure that children and their families in the City of Greater Bendigo who are experiencing challenges and vulnerability are able to access the supports and services they require. In particular the proposal aims is to ensure there is an early intervention response to children and families with complex and multiple needs who are not eligible for and/or are not able to access specialist services and supports.

The 'No Wrong Door' model is based on the following components:

- Linking current intake services for children (aged 0 to 12 years) and their families to enable a co-ordinated response and in doing so help eliminate children and families falling through the gaps of services. The linking of intake services will occur through the utilisation of a common screening tool, the development of a common web based platform across the intake services that can allow for the sharing and registration of the screening tool and joint planning between the intake services to enable families to receive the supports they require.
- The implementation of a 'warm referral' process that ensures families who present to any agency delivering services for children and families are supported and linked to the supports they require.
- An agreement between agencies, both those managing intake services and providing support services, which ensures all agencies, accept joint responsibility for all children and families seeking and/or requiring support regardless of current service criteria or scope.
- A commitment by agencies in the children services sector that all children and families seeking and/or requiring services will be supported and that all agencies are a vehicle for children and families to access the wider service system.

## **2. Background**

Over the past six months the Communities for Children project in partnership with agencies involved in the children services sector has embarked on a series of forums and actions to enhance how services and agencies can better respond to the needs of children and their families in the City of Greater Bendigo. This work has emerged as a result of agencies and workers expressing concern that children and their families experiencing challenges and vulnerability were falling through the gaps of services, and/or were not being reached by services. There was also concern that the service system does not have the capacity to meet current demand and need.

In particular the issues identified by agencies include:

- In the Bendigo area a number of children are entering mainstream services (childcare, kindergarten, school) with developmental delays and/or other significant disadvantages have not previously been identified or linked to early intervention or family support services.

- Some children and their families who may benefit from early intervention services are missing out because either they are not being identified at an early stage or have been identified but have not been able to access the required supports.
- Families who are experiencing challenges in relation to parenting and/or concerned about their children's wellbeing and emotional development often express frustration in accessing supports.
- Services seeking support for families often have difficulty navigating the service system particularly where the needs of families don't meet current service criteria.
- Agencies providing supports to children and families are concerned that they cannot meet current demand and/or cannot stretch their services to meet the needs of individual children and family due to funding and service constraints.

In light of these concerns Communities for Children in partnership with Noah's Ark and Bendigo Community Health Services arranged a series of forums for providers of children's services to discuss and agree upon steps to address the issues faced by children and families in accessing support. The forums were held in September and November 2013. From these forums the following agreed actions were agreed to:

#### **Action One**

- To develop and implement a 'No Wrong Door' warm referral process which would take the form of an agreement between all organisations working in the children services sector in Bendigo that ensures all families will be supported to access the supports they require.

#### **Action Two**

- To develop 'No Wrong Door' intake model across current intake services for children and families in the City of Greater Bendigo.

#### **Action Three**

- To develop a 'Go To' people model where agencies and workers can access people within the early years sector who have significant knowledge of the early years services and can provide secondary consultation and advice to workers seeking supports for families.
- Work on the development of this model is currently being undertaken by Communities for Children.

#### **Action Four**

- To focus on key outcomes for children and develop support strategies and actions to achieve these outcomes.
- It has been agreed that the focus of this work will be on addressing and enhancing children's literacy and language development. A project has been established with the aim of developing a community based and owned children's literacy plan for Bendigo.

Following the 2013 forums it was agreed by the participating agencies that a working group be established to draft the concept of a 'No Wrong Door' model that can be further discussed,

developed and endorsed by agencies through the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Leadership Group. The Working Group has comprised of workers from SCOPE, St Luke's, Communities for Children, Bendigo Community Health Services, Family Services Alliance and DHS Disability Services.

### **3. Outline of the 'No Wrong Door' model**

#### **3.1 Current situation**

There are currently a range of intake points within the City of Greater Bendigo that provide access to the service system in the early years. These key intake points include:

- Child FIRST (St Luke's)
- Disability Services Intake (Department of Human Services)
- Early Childhood Intervention Services Intake (Department of Education and Early Childhood Services)
- Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS)
- Child Protection (Department of Human Services)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

An outline of the function and purpose of these intake points are detailed in appendix 1

Each of these intake points is designed to provide a gateway to a specialist service(s) and /or other supports that may suit the needs of children and families. Intake services are under considerable pressure to meet the needs of children and families and often experience capacity issues in responding to presenting needs and demand. Intake services often don't have the capacity to provide a supported pathway to other support services for children and families particularly in circumstances where the family's needs are outside their scope and target group. A supported pathway incorporates an agency providing interim support and /or arranging interim support to a family whilst ongoing supports are arranged for the family.

In addition, due to service capacity issues, some agencies providing children and family services are also limited in their ability to provide a 'warm referral' process for families that ensures families are linked to the supports they need. A 'warm referral' involves an agency directing contacting a support agency or agencies (by phone or visit) and negotiating on behalf of the client a referral to the support agency. Due to these capacity issues intake services and support agencies can be limited to just providing service information to families which requires them to navigate the service system. Often this is difficult for families particularly when they are under stress and families give up trying to access support due to the challenges of navigating the service system.

There are also no formal arrangements between the intake services (except for Child FIRST and Child Protection) that can ensure a co-ordinated response to family's seeking support.

Given these limitations and challenges families and/or services seeking support on behalf of families can experience difficulties in gaining access to the supports needed. This can result in children and families falling through the gaps of services.

## 3.2 Proposed Model

### 3.2.1 Aim of the 'No Wrong Door' Model

The 'No Wrong Door' model aims to implement two key initiatives i.e. the co-ordination and linking of intake points for children and families requiring support and the implementation of a warm referral process.

- *Linking of intake services*

The 'No Wrong Door' model aims to bring together and co-ordinate key intake points in the City of Greater Bendigo for children and families and in doing ensure that all children and families seeking and/or requiring support are practically supported to access the services they require. In particular the focus is on families where there is not an available pathway to support that can be offered to a family by an intake service due to families not meeting service entry criteria and/or service capacity. The 'No Wrong Door' model will help support intake services to provide a co-ordinated gateway to the wider support system for these families.

- *Warm Referral Process*

The 'warm referral' process aims to ensure that every family who are seeking support through an agency will be supported and linked to the supports they require. Whilst it is recognised that many agencies currently utilise a 'warm referral' approach the aim of the 'No Wrong Door' model is to enhance current practice and to ensure that the 'warm referral' approach is sustained and supported.

### 3.2.2 Principles of the 'No Wrong Door' Model

The 'No Wrong Door' is based on the principle that all families should receive the support they require regardless of where they present (i.e. there is no wrong door). This 'no wrong door' principle ensures that the responsibility of providing and/or arranging support that addresses the needs of children and families is the responsibility of the service where the family presents.

The 'No Wrong Door' model requires services to provide support and/or facilitate access to services that falls beyond their specific service scope. It removes the onus of negotiating access to services from families to the service provider and thereby aims to reduce the incidence of families 'falling through the cracks' of the service delivery system.

The proposed 'No Wrong Door' model is based on the following principles:

- All children and families have a right to access the supports they require in a timely and respectful manner.
- No family is left unsupported.
- Services can be accessed from multiple entry points and that every door in the children services sector is the 'right door'.
- All agencies have a responsibility to address the range of children and family needs wherever and whenever a family presents seeking support.
- Agencies support each other to achieve the goal of ensuring no family is left unsupported.

The proposed 'No Wrong Door' model operates from the social model of health and in particular recognises the following:

- All services should address the broad range of needs of children and families regardless of service scope and criteria.
- Empowerment of families and communities is at the centre of our actions and processes.
- Interagency collaboration and partnership is crucial to achieving better outcomes for children and families.
- All agencies are committed to reducing social inequity.
- All agencies are committed to ensuring access to supports children and families require.

- **Rationale for the ‘No Wrong Door’ Model**

The rationale for the ‘No Wrong Door’ model is based on:

- The reflections and experiences of families that services have received and witnessed in their day to day work. Feedback from families in the Bendigo area highlight that accessing services for their children particularly in the early years sector can be difficult and complicated under the current system.
- The proposed ‘No Wrong Door’ model in Bendigo is supported by evidence gathered through the recent family consultation project in the Central Goldfields Shire by the Go Goldfields project. This consultation highlighted that families want agencies to work together to arrange the supports they require, and families strongly supported information sharing between services providing they were consulted first and that the purpose of information sharing was to gain further specialist support for their children and/or family.
- The recent Shergold Sector Reform report has highlighted the need for service design and response to fit a family needs not families having to fit into current service models. The Report has also emphasised the need for better access to services and more holistic approaches to the work with families.
- Practice evidence that shows that if thorough and sound responses are put in place earlier for families through coordinated, integrated work this will reduce the need for more intensive support at a later stage.

### **3.2.3 Features of the ‘No Wrong Door’ Model**

These include:

- A commitment by the agencies managing intake services and by agencies delivering children and family services to ensuring that every child or family will be supported to link with the services and supports they require.
- Joint and shared responsibility between agencies for all children and family seeking and/or requiring support and a belief that it is the responsibility of agencies to ensure children get access to the right supports at the right time.
- Joint problem solving between the intake services where services required by a child and family are not available and/or not available in the short term.
- Practical linking of intakes services through joint meetings and a common web based platform.

- Development of a warm referral process that highlights that it is responsibility of agencies for ensuring access to services for children and families.

- **Linking of intake services**

The linking 'No Wrong Door' model can be achieved through:

- The development of a common screening tool across the intake services that identifies the needs of children and families and the services they require.
- The common screening tool will include a brief outline of the family's needs, the type of services required and current capacity of the services to meet those needs.
- The common screening tool will **only** be used in situations where the intake service is not able to access the supports required for the child and family.
- The common screening tool will be shared across the intake services. This will allow other intake services to identify how they can respond to the needs of the child and family.
- The intake services will meet monthly to plan a joint response for families where a response has not been able to be developed by an intake service.
- The development and implementation of a common web based platform across the intake services that can allow for the sharing and registration of the screening tool. The web based platform being used for the implementation of the Bendigo Community Health Service "How can I help you' intake process will be used to build this common platform for the intake services.

- **Warm referral process**

The 'warm referral' process should include the following elements:

- A 'warm referral' will involve an agency directly contacting a support agency or agencies and negotiating on behalf of the client a referral to the support agency.
- A warm referral may take place by phone, in person or through email or other electronic means.
- Families have the warm referral process explained to them and they inform and guide the way this process unfolds. (Families also understand that the referring organisation will withdraw once an appropriate referral has been made, with the agreement of the family.)
- A warm referral includes information sharing between organisations (with consent) to ensure families don't have to repeat their story (unless they chose to do so)
- Staff take a holistic approach in the warm referral process, addressing the needs of the whole family and not just the nominated 'client'.
- The warm referral process applies not only to new families seeking support but also to families who are existing and ongoing clients of an organisation who need additional support.
- A warm referral process will be culturally safe, inclusive and respectful.
- Staff undertaking warm referrals are persistent, assertive and timely in their response.
- Staff making referrals will have a knowledge of the organisations they are referring to so they (1) don't raise expectations unrealistically (especially if the family is going to join a waiting list) and (2) ensure that the receiving agency is likely to accept the referral.

- Warm referrals should be individualised, taking into account the capacities of the family and their current situation. Staff will need to apply their professional judgement about when a warm referral is required as in some situations families have the capacity and skills to navigate the service system.

- **Practice underpinning the ‘No Wrong Door’ model**

A common practice approach is required across all agencies to successfully implement the ‘No Wrong Door’ model. This will help ensure families receive consistent responses from all agencies and also provide workers with the tools and frameworks to successfully implement the model.

The common practice approach underpinning both the linking of intake services and the warm referral process should ensure:

- Sharing of information between the intake services and also the warm referral process will always take place with the consent of the family.
- Family information will always be treated respectfully and families will remain in control of their information and how it is shared.
- Families will always be treated with empathy and respect.
- Families will always be kept informed of the progress in arranging supports.

The practice of the ‘No Wrong Door’ model is based on:

- Child centred family focused practice.
- A strength-based approach to supporting families seeking supports.
- A duty of care that ensures children safety issues and needs are paramount.

#### **4. Benefits of the ‘No Wrong Door’ model**

The benefits of the ‘No Wrong Door’ model include:

##### For families

- Families’ feeling that there is support available and/or will be sought despite their circumstances not meeting service entry criteria.
- Families’ feeling that supports are being sought by all the agencies even when services are at capacity.
- Families’ knowing that in seeking supports through an intake service and/or an agency that they are accessing a whole system not just an individual service.
- Families’ knowing that whilst their needs may not fit particular service criteria the service system is endeavouring to build supports around their individual circumstances and needs.
- Better outcomes for families through providing supports earlier and when they are required. This can help reduce the need for more intensive services ‘down the track’.

### For workers and agencies

- Building a shared responsibility for all families across all agencies through the 'warm referral' process has the potential to reduce pressure on intake services.
- Intake services and individual agencies not feeling they are 'on their own' or isolated in trying to arrange supports for children and families.
- Sharing knowledge of resources, available supports and the service system adds capacity to all services and agencies.
- Reduction in pressure on workers and agencies when they are experiencing high demand for their services.
- Workers and agencies experiencing as a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support in their work with children and families.

## **5. Requirements to implement the 'No Wrong Door' model**

To implement the 'No Wrong Door' model further work and collaboration between agencies is required. This work includes:

- Development of an agreed commitment to the 'No Wrong Door' model by agencies in the children and family sector.
- Development of agreed principles that will underpin the 'No Wrong Door' model.
- Development of an agreed practice approach to 'No Wrong Door' model across the intake services and agencies within the children and family services sector.
- Development of an MOU between the intake agencies that outlines the business rules and processes for the intake component of 'No Wrong Door' model.
- Development of a screening tool for the intake component of the model.
- Development and implementation of the web based platform that links the intake services.
- Training of staff across the intake services and wider children and family services sector.

## 6. Challenges

Implementing a 'No Wrong Door' as proposed presents a range of challenges and issues that will require considerable exploration and discussion by stakeholders within the early years sector. These issues include:

- Differing understandings and policies within the early years sector regarding client consent to sharing information and client privacy.
- The ability of agencies to implement a warm referral process with current service capacity issues and challenges.
- Integrating the range of intake systems and interagency referral processes given there are differing service guidelines and policies across agencies.
- Building common measuring and outcome tools for the model across all participating agencies.

Whilst a range of challenges and issues exist that require addressing the belief by all agencies in the need for a co-ordinated approach to supporting children and families can enable these issues to be addressed.

## 7. Next steps

Further development and final implementation of a 'No Wrong Door' model will require the endorsement and support of the City of Greater Bendigo 1st Quarter Leadership Group and individual agency commitment to the proposed model.

Steps required to implement the model include:

- Presentation of the proposed model to the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Early Years Coordination group for support and endorsement.
- Presentation of the proposed model by the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Early Years Coordination group to the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Leadership Group for support and endorsement.
- Establishment of a Working Group under the auspice and direction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Leadership Group to further develop the model and required implementation processes.
- Working Group to work on the development of the model, operational processes and implementation plan.
- Approval of the final model by the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Leadership Group.
- Staged implementation of the model and establishment of evaluation and review processes.

## Appendix 1

### Purpose and function of key intake points in the City of Greater Bendigo

- Child FIRST (St Luke's)

Child FIRST is the Child & Family Information Referral Support team based at St Luke's Hargreaves St site. The aim of Child FIRST is to support the safety and wellbeing and health of children, young people and their families. Child FIRST is the single entry point into Family Services providing intake and assessments, and referrals for families. The focus of Child FIRST is to link families into supports before their problems escalate to the point where Child Protection needs to have ongoing involvement or be involved at all.

- Disability Services Intake (Department of Human Services)

The DHS Disability Intake and Response Service provides information about supports and services and can also provide assistance with planning and short-term support to people with disabilities, their families and carers in their local area. People with a disability, their family or carers can request disability supports.

- Early Childhood Intervention Services Intake (Department of Education and Early Childhood Services)

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) are provided for children from birth to school entry who have a disability or developmental delay and their families. ECIS is provided by non-government early childhood intervention agencies and funded by DEECD. Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) have a regional central point of entry. Central Intake gathers information and determines whether the child meets eligibility criteria for ECIS. In the first instance referrals for ECIS must go to Central Intake who will work with the family to identify concerns, to plan next steps and to make a referral to an ECIS agency.

- Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS)

BCHS provides a centralised intake system through its 'How can I help you' screening tool and process in addition to individual service intake processes. The screening tool identifies the needs of person or family and the type of BCHS services including external services that can respond to the identified needs. This screening process ensures that all requests for support are responded to.

- Child Protection (Department of Human Services)

Child Protection provides a regional intake service. In the intake phase Child Protection practice involves receiving and recording reports from persons regarding:

- an unborn child, before the birth of the child, if the reporter has significant concerns for the child's wellbeing after his or her birth
- significant concern for a child's wellbeing
- children in need of protection (at risk of significant harm)

Child Protection intake conducts an assessment of the information related to the child's safety and wellbeing, which may involve contacting 'authorised' professionals. If the report meets the requirements of a protective intervention report a Child Protection investigation will be initiated.

Where a Child Protection investigation is not required but there are significant wellbeing concerns a referral is made to Child FIRST.

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

The focus of CAMHS on is on those children and adolescents experiencing more complex and severe mental health issues. CAMHS Intake is via Triage who will initially assess the level of risk to the child or young person and to determine the most appropriate immediate response. If a referral cannot be accepted, referrers will be assisted with information to help find an alternative response and to connect the child and adolescent, family or carers with services as appropriate.