

# Right support. Right time.

## Better Chances Forum

### Northern Rivers NSW, March 2019

Submission to the NSW Government  
Their Futures Matter reform (access system redesign discussion  
paper) [V1.1\_24 July 2019]

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#### Purpose of the Better Chances Forum

The Better Chances Forum (BCF) supports better chances for children and young people (C&YP) and their families by bringing together skills and expertise from organisations across the Northern Rivers to:

- explore service system challenges, gaps and opportunities
- identify and share information about what's working well and what's not in our services and communities
- consider how BCF members can work better alongside communities.

The BCF is working to reduce the number of C&YP in out of home care in our region.

#### BCF Members include:

- Bundjalung Tribal Society
- CASPA Services
- Clarence River Women's Refuge and Outreach Services Inc
- Coraki CWA Preschool
- CRANES Community Support Programs
- Family Services NSW (FAMS)
- Family Support Network Inc.
- Foundations Care
- House With No Steps Summerland Early Childhood Intervention and Enhanced Supports
- Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Jarjum Centre Inc.
- Juvenile Justice NSW
- Kids Caring for Country and the Guyahyn Aboriginal Early Childhood Project
- Momentum Collective
- Northcott
- Northern Rivers Child Care Services Inc.
- Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre
- Social Futures
- The Family Centre
- Tweed Byron Ballina Community Transport
- Tweed Coast Psychology and Educational Programs
- YWCA Australia, Northern NSW Region

Local and State Government agencies participate actively in Better Chances Forum projects and activities – including NSW Departments of Health, Education and Family and Community Services – supporting collaboration to achieve better results for children, young people and their families in the Northern Rivers.

Find more information about BCF at: [socialfutures.org.au/development/better-chances-forum/](https://socialfutures.org.au/development/better-chances-forum/)

## Recommendations for the new access system

1. Strengthen principles in the access system redesign discussion paper to acknowledge
  - how they apply in the context of collaboration and coordination required to deliver *the right support at the right time*.
  - culturally safe and accessible services for culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ C&YP and their families, families with people with disabilities and blended families, in addition to the reference in the principles to the system working for and being trusted by Aboriginal people.
2. Develop shared practice frameworks across the community services, health, education, employment support and justice sectors to support parties and stakeholders in the access system to understand what the principles underpinning the system mean in practice and how we can hold each other accountable for upholding them.
3. Prioritise and increase investment across portfolios in prevention and early intervention, including universal community strengthening activities and programs.
4. Establish a new Premier's priority focusing on early childhood development outcomes.
5. Facilitate universal training in trauma informed practice; supported by regular practice supervision and engagement across the access system to understand what support is needed to operate in a trauma sensitive way.
6. Establish a common data sharing platform with a coordinated, consistent intake, assessment and support system across government and non-government agencies so we can see the outcomes of our work across the system and providers are accountable for performance. There is scope to build on existing access elements including case coordination networks/meetings and the state-wide Family Referral Service network.
7. Review referral processes across community service and educational settings to identify improvements to facilitate consistent access to specialist paediatric services for diagnosis required to access appropriate supports.
8. Mandate engagement with coordination and collaboration processes across relevant government and non-government services.
9. Publish timely regional and local data demonstrating accountability for the results we are achieving at population level, supported by program performance measures that show what we are contributing to population-level results.
10. Enhance provision of legal and advocacy services that support C&YP and parents to engage with services and supports including:
  - early referral to legal services for families at entering or risk of entering the statutory child protection system
  - independent legal services for C&YP leaving out of home care.
11. Fund programs building on the linker model<sup>1</sup> to connect C&YP and their families with supports to participate in the community, economy and achieve their goals.
12. All parties working in the access system focus on building relationships and practice that will bring the broader service sector more supportively alongside Aboriginal workers, organisations and communities. It is important this occurs in ways that support self-determination for Aboriginal people, rather than being led by the needs of mainstream organisations and service systems.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abilitylinksnsw.org.au/>

13. Ensure program performance measures, guidelines and funding contracts acknowledge and provide for:
- the work required to build relationships across agencies and sectors, facilitate warm referrals and ensure C&YP and their families are connected rapidly with at least some form of support
  - flexibility and responsiveness required to put C&YP and their families and communities at the centre of how we operate – reflecting individual needs
  - accountability for cultural accessibility, including growing a more diverse workforce including more Aboriginal staff and management
  - agency and/or program level policies, procedures and practice regarding trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive work, coordinated and collaborative service delivery and information sharing provisions
  - consideration of how transport options and other access issues will impact the success of referrals.

## Regional context

The BCF is working to reduce the number of C&YP in out of home care (OOHC) in Northern NSW, which, following a decrease from over 1000 in 2014 to 877 in 2015, has increased again to 963 C&YP in OOHC in 2017.

In NSW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander C&YP are more than 10 times as likely as other children to be in statutory OOHC. In the 20 years since the Bringing Them Home Report, national representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children increased from one in every five children in OOHC to one in every three ([Family Matters Report 2017](#)<sup>2</sup>). In Northern NSW, 409 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were living in OOHC in 2017 (42.5 per cent of C&YP in OOHC).

This reform responds to findings and recommendations in the Tune Report (2015) released by the NSW Government in 2018, among other inputs. The Better Chances Forum notes [ABSEC's comments](#) on the report, including the following statement.

*Tune repeats what we already know to be true: that outcomes are particularly poor for Aboriginal children and families whose lives intersect with the child protection system. Aboriginal kids are the highest growing population in out-of-home care, while the number of Aboriginal children being restored to their families has dropped significantly (ABSEC 2018<sup>3</sup>).*

Detailed, current regional and local data to understand this picture within Northern Rivers is not available. In their comments on the Tune Report ABSEC also notes 'Aboriginal self-determination needs to be at the centre of a redesigned system'. To this end, the Better Chances Forum is focusing on building relationships and practice that will bring the broader service sector more supportively alongside Aboriginal workers, organisations and communities in the Northern Rivers.

Reform delivering whole-of-system change is critical. We must ensure children and families' needs are considered first, ahead of the needs of the service system, to determine the support they require and make it more effective. A consistent and accountable whole-of-government approach is critical to achieve this. In our region, for many children, young people and their families, we are a long way from getting *the right support at the right time*.

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<sup>2</sup> The Family Matters Report 2017: Measuring trends to turn the tide on over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.absec.org.au/news-the-tune-review.html> (accessed 22 March 2019).

## Reform design principles

The Better Chances Forum supports the design principles set out in the *Access System Redesign Discussion Paper*. However, they can be enhanced.

The principles relating to governance, accountability and building trust need to be strengthened to acknowledge how they apply in the context of the collaboration and coordination – within and between programs, organisations and service systems – that is essential to deliver *the right support at the right time*.

In order to put C&YP, families and communities at the centre, the access system needs to be easy to understand so:

- people know where they can go for support
- the person or agency they approach can support them to find the right support if unable to help directly
- families and communities understand the broader service system includes universal supports – that everyone needs to access support at some stage in their life.

The description relating to culturally safe and accessible services also needs to acknowledge culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ C&YP and their families, families with people with disabilities and blended families, in addition to the system working for and being trusted by Aboriginal people.

To affect change through this reform and rebuild a system that reflects these principles we need a shared understanding of what they mean in practice. For example, how will we know the system itself is 'culturally competent'? How will stakeholders and parties in the system hold each other accountable for their contribution to this? Shared practice frameworks and tools are essential to underpin this, with flexibility that acknowledges family, community and cultural contexts.

## Invest early

NSW Department of Family and Community Services was allocated \$1.85 billion in the 2016-2017 budget for the provision of child protection related services. Family Services NSW (2018) notes only 6.3 per cent of this amount – which was spent on family support services – comes close to prevention or early intervention expenditure<sup>4</sup>. Remaining funds were allocated to intensive family support services (9.8 per cent), child protection services (22.6 per cent) and OOH services (61.3 per cent)<sup>5</sup>.

Delivering *the right support at the right time* requires more investment across portfolios in prevention, and early connection and support – investment that gets results for children, young people and their families; and in-turn the service system by reducing need for more intensive interventions. NSW Health has chosen to focus on the first 2000 days of life in response to evidence that quality early education in the preschool years has a strong bearing on long term outcomes<sup>6</sup>. Establishing a new Premier's priority focusing on improving early childhood development outcomes would help to drive this focus across the human services sector and strengthen opportunities for universal access to services and supports. Relevant indicators include increasing participation in quality early childhood education, and Australian Early Development Census results.

The housing market in Northern Rivers is failing to meet the needs of many C&YP and their families. Over the 12 months to December 2018 we had the second-tightest private rental market in

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<sup>4</sup> [FAMS 2018, Investing in children and their families: The right support in the right place at the right time](#)

<sup>5</sup> 2017 NSW parliamentary inquiry into the role of FACS in relation to child protection, cited in FAMS 2018.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2019\\_008.pdf](https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2019_008.pdf) accessed 27 March 2019.

NSW with an average monthly vacancy rate of just 1.2 per cent<sup>7</sup>. Investing more in housing and related support is essential if C&YP and their families are to be able to engage successfully with *the right support at the right time*.

## Shared practice: frameworks, tools and consistency

Share frameworks and tools underpinning our practice across the community services, health, education, employment support and justice sectors are essential to achieve the **consistency** and **connection** needed to identify and build on strengths and respond to trauma in our families and communities. Key elements required are listed below and described further in the following sections.

- We need to **operate as a trauma responsive system**, where training in trauma informed practice is universal and supported by regular practice supervision and opportunities for reflection on how we are applying this in our work and what support we need – from reception staff through to executives and funding contracts – to do this well.
- Everyone working in the system needs to understand what success looks like and is **accountable** for their **performance**. This means having access to the tools we need to do this well, understanding the broader system, how it needs to work alongside families and community and our place and responsibilities within it.
- We see C&YP and their families slip through the gaps when the service or program they approach for support is not able to connect with them in at least some way. We know there is often only a narrow window of time to connect with an individual or family. Failing to make this connection can lead to the person or family disengaging from services all together. Existing program guidelines and contracts need to allow more **flexibility** in order **to be responsive and accessible** if we are to put children and families' needs at the centre of how we operate, coordinate and collaborate.
- **Connected, coordinated and collaborative services and supports** are essential for C&YP and their families to get *the right support at the right time*. This is a shared responsibility, but also requires leadership.
- Intensive and formal services are not the only place to find the right support. Strong, supportive communities help connect people with formal supports. They are essential to hold and support people and families during and after their interactions with formal services. These **community strengths** are found in families and through **universal services and supports** like early childhood education centres, community and neighbourhood centres, community groups and clubs, and schools, among others.

These practice elements are explained further below, along with observations from BCF member organisations about how they are working and not working in our current access system/s.

### Operating as a trauma sensitive and responsive system

- Training in trauma informed practice is universal and supported by regular practice supervision and opportunities for reflection on how we are applying this in our work and what support we need – from reception staff through to executives and funding contracts – to do this well.
- Trauma informed practice is particularly important for reception and other intake staff whose behaviour and practice in their interaction with people seeking support can often make the difference in whether the person or family connects with support.
- Trauma informed practice, policies and procedures are embedded across government and non-government services in the community services, health, education, employment services and justice sectors.

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<sup>7</sup> Vacancy Rate Survey Results December 2018 available at [https://www.reinsw.com.au/Web/Members/Property\\_data/Vacancy\\_Rates\\_Survey.aspx](https://www.reinsw.com.au/Web/Members/Property_data/Vacancy_Rates_Survey.aspx)

- Families and communities, workers, managers and commissioning agencies are all involved in informing and delivering system improvements to support everyone in the service system to operate in a trauma sensitive and responsive way. For example, time to properly facilitate warm referrals<sup>8</sup>, acknowledged in the deliverables/ performance measures of funded programs.
- Everyone working in the service system is skilled in understanding, recognising and/or responding (within their responsibilities) to:
  - indicators of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
  - intergenerational trauma
  - cultural perspectives on trauma
  - impacts of trauma on child development and long-term health outcomes
  - dynamics of domestic and family violence, impacts on children, families and communities and how to respond
  - child protection indicators and absence of protective factors.
- Longer-term support options for people with extensive trauma.

### Accountability for performance

Everyone working in the system needs to understand what success looks like and how they are accountable for their performance. An important part of how we work (practice) is understanding the broader system, how it needs to work alongside families and community, and our programs' place and responsibilities within it.

Within the current access system many agencies operate discretely. We can't get an overall view of performance across the system (what's working and what is not) in order to know if C&YP and their families are better off as a result of our work with them. The following tools, systems and support are important to do this well. This needs to be shared and connected across community services, health, education, employment services and justice sectors.

- A coordinated, consistent intake, assessment and support system for families, including those who require support outside the ROSH (risk of significant harm/ statutory) system, where robust strengths-based, trauma-informed assessment occurs.
- Common assessment and referral tools and forms for funded services; supporting families not to have to tell their story over and over and supporting a no-wrong-door approach. Sharing information with private sector primary health and allied health providers also requires consideration.
- Allowing C&YP and their families to exercise control over their information (noting this needs to be balanced with provision for responding to safety).
- Mandated engagement with coordination and collaboration processes within the broader service system to meet diverse and complex needs.
- A common data sharing platform – across government and non-government agencies – so we can see the outcomes of our work with families across the system and providers are accountable for performance.
- Skills to support data collection and analysis to understand our impact.
- Detailed local and regional data published to demonstrate accountability for the results we are achieving at population level. For example, # children in, entering and leaving out of home care.
- Program performance measures for funded programs across portfolios need to show how our work contributes to population level results. For example, early intervention activities that prevented – or failed to prevent – entry to OOHC. These data need to inform ongoing service

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<sup>8</sup> Rather than just giving the participant a phone number and sending them on their way, with permission, we call ahead, or make contact in some way to introduce the participant to the service receiving the referral. We make sure they can get there and that the service we are sending them to actually has something to offer them specifically.



design and investment, in consultation with communities and service providers (programs, organisations and the service system).

- Program performance measures and funding contracts recognise the work of facilitating warm referrals. Everyone in the service system is accountable for their contribution to this.
- Access to workforce and skills in regional and remote communities.

### **Accessible, flexible and responsive – children, young people, families and communities at the centre**

We see C&YP and their families slip through the gaps when the service or program they approach for support is not able to connect with them in at least some way. We know there is often only a narrow window of time to connect with an individual or family. Failing to make this connection can lead to the person or family disengaging from services all together.

Program guidelines and contracts need to allow more flexibility in order to be responsive and accessible if we are to put children and families' needs at the centre of how we operate, coordinate and collaborate. Practice elements the BCF considers are essential to provide an accessible, flexible and responsive access system are described below.

- C&YP and families are connected with at least some form of support, not left without support on a waiting list. Rapid support that responds to immediate needs is critical if families are to engage with services. It may not be the program or service a person or family approaches who provides the support directly, but anyone in the system needs to be able to make the connection. As mentioned in the previous section, this needs to be recognised in program performance measures and funding contracts.
- For many C&YP timely and affordable access to diagnosis – via clinical psychologists, paediatric psychiatrists and paediatricians – is essential to facilitate access to appropriate supports. Often workers have identified some cognitive and/or mental health issue but are not able to make a diagnosis. BCF members report without diagnosis and appropriate supports, students' unresolved cognitive or mental health issues, often present as poor behaviour, can lead to poor engagement in learning, low self-esteem, worsening mental health and behavioural challenges and in some cases contribute to the child or young person becoming involved in the justice system.

A successful access system needs everyone in the system – across the community service, health, education, employment service and justice sectors, and government and non-government agencies – to be able to support C&YP and their families to access diagnosis when it is required. Current public services and Medicare rebates are not adequate to meet the need for timely, affordable diagnosis in our region. Supporting families throughout during the process of seeking, receiving and responding to diagnosis is also important.

- Everyone in the access system needs to be accountable for how their practice contributes to culturally accessibility. Specific needs identified by BCF members include:
  - regular, consistent presence in smaller communities to build relationships, trust and heal trauma (program performance measures need to allow time for this)
  - understanding history and how it impacts on where services are provided, including housing
  - growing a more diverse workforce including more Aboriginal staff and management
  - facilitating easy access to interpreter services
  - flexibility to respond rapidly to basic needs
  - reflecting individual needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to access
  - accessible and culturally welcoming premises, particularly reception areas.

The new access system needs to reset the power imbalance so all people know they can ask questions in order to hold each other accountable for our contribution to improving cultural accessibility, and see action in response to concerns and opportunities.

- In regional areas transport is a major barrier to accessing services and supports. Performance measures and funding within service contracts need to respond to this challenge. In some cases, this should include facilitating or brokering access to transport to ensure people can get to appointments. At the very least, all services need to be required to ask how people will get there and consider how this will impact the success of the referral, and document gaps to improve service system and transport network development. Funding considerations need to consider additional staff time and travel costs often required to cover longer distances in regional areas.
- C&YP and their families need to be informed about complaints processes and their rights in relation to accessing services and supports, and supported to access resolution processes.
- An evidence-based long-term in-home support model is needed to support families in the home to strengthen parenting skills.

### Connected, coordinated and collaborative services and supports

Connected, coordinated and collaborative services and supports are essential for C&YP and their families to get *the right support at the right time*. This is a shared responsibility, but also requires leadership. Overwhelmed families frequently need support navigating the maze of services including some services they are already connected with. We sometimes over-service families to the point that families don't know who is doing what. There is often no lead service identified, just short-term services linking into various supports and no long-term case management service. Services frequently change the way they support families due to funding changes. BCF member input to this submission identifies increasing complexity and scale of challenges families are facing – requiring longer-term, consistent, coordinated support.

Practice elements, tools, supports and related issues are described below.

- Investing time in the relationships and coordination needed to deliver well-connected care and support needs to be acknowledged in program performance measures and funding contracts.
- Agencies and sectors need to strengthen our capacity and relationships further – to improve our understanding of when and how to call on each other. For example, mental health expertise may be required to support a young person to deal with trauma before they can engage in learning or successfully look for employment. This needs to occur within and between government and non-government agencies and sectors.
- A central platform to contact and discuss concerns re child safety, providing support to work through needs, concerns, processes and options; and advice on services and supports available in the community and how appropriate they are to meet the identified needs. The Family Referral Service (FRS) currently provides this. With additional resources, there is scope for greater utilisation of this service.
- Input from BCF members to this submission identifies integrated multi-agency responses are frequently restricted by funding constraints, differing referral processes and criteria, wait times, inconsistent application of information sharing provisions and/or under servicing by statutory child protection services.

Further education on application and merits of information sharing provisions is required to deliver successful multi-agency responses.

- Early referral to legal support for parents involved in the statutory child protection system has been shown in the Northern Rivers to support better results (see BCF case study 3). It enhances communication and active participation by parents in the assessment process within statutory child protection processes.



Success of this approach relies on good relationships with other services in the access system and education promoting early referral to early legal advice. The early intervention child protection legal service (Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre) has limited capacity and demand for the service is steadily increasing.

Many people currently rely on family, community members and poorly funded services to advocate for them in the access system. The new access system needs to consider how to build on, support and complement this work and resource the advocacy support needed for people to engage with services and supports.

- There is a gap in provision of independent legal services for C&YP leaving Out of Home Care (OOHC) to address the risk factors associated with exiting OOHC and support future access to justice services and referral to non-legal services and supports. Currently only one such service is funded in NSW (Level Up program, Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre).
- Support coordination meetings are currently operating in Northern Rivers including two Families in Focus groups and the Strengthening Children and Young People Interagency. They facilitate a multi-agency approach in responding to identified concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person that does not meet Risk of Significant Harm threshold, and facilitate integrated case management supported by the sharing of information through Chapter 16A. Success of this approach relies on consistent agency participation.
- Embedding a FACS child protection case worker in a community-based service is successfully supporting collaborative practice in Northern Rivers. This approach should be considered in the new access system.
- The NSW Ability Links Program supports people with a disability and their carers to connect with services and supports, participate in their community and the economy and meet their goals (BCF case study 1). We encourage building on this model in the new access system.
- BCF is focusing on building relationships and practice that will bring the broader service sector more supportively alongside Aboriginal workers, organisations and communities in the Northern Rivers. These relationships are supporting learning and capacity building, including cultural capability within mainstream organisations and collaboration on community engagement.

There is opportunity for collaboration on development of policy and procedures to improve service delivery alongside Aboriginal communities. Need to build capacity among Aboriginal organisations to deliver housing and out of home care services has been identified within Northern Rivers regional service provider forums. It is important this occurs in ways that support self-determination for Aboriginal people, rather than being led by the needs of mainstream organisations and service systems.

### Universal, socio-ecological approaches

Intensive and formal services are not the only place to find the right support. Strong, supportive communities help connect people with formal supports. They are essential to hold and support people and families during and after their interactions with formal services. These community strengths are found in families and through universal services and supports like early childhood education centres, community and neighbourhood centres, community groups and clubs, and schools, among others.

Everyone working in the service system has opportunity to contribute to building stronger communities and understanding how their program or service can work supportively alongside community.

The *Access System Redesign Discussion Paper* refers to socio-ecological approaches to supporting child and family wellbeing as an opportunity to recalibrate the system towards prevention and early intervention. It cites community hubs, co-located services and embedded roles (such as Family Referral Services in schools, which has been piloted successfully in numerous schools in the Northern Rivers and other parts of regional NSW). This universal, destigmatising approach is a very cost-effective way to facilitate access to the service system. However, in many locations, funds

have not been forthcoming to support this on an ongoing basis. Some schools have not been able to continue. This approach – embedding connecting services in schools – needs to be established within resource planning for schools and other universal services.

See BCF Case Studies 2, 4 and 5 for examples of successful universal activities in Northern Rivers.

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## Northern Rivers case studies from members of the Better Chances Forum

### BCF case study 1: Vulnerable people and families pilot project, Far North Coast Ability Links

On the Far North Coast, Social Futures undertook the Vulnerable People and Families Pilot; measuring outcomes for a total of 76 participants in the Ability Links program identifying life goals/challenges related to accommodation or family resilience between July and December 2018, including participants facing child safety and wellbeing challenges.

Across all domains, participants articulated a clear journey of increased capacity to sustain tenancies, engage positively with services to support their housing and child protection needs, and also documented a clearly increased sense of their child's wellbeing and their own confidence to provide for their family's needs. These results demonstrate the value of 'linking support' – connecting or linking vulnerable people with support services, and in their journey between services thereby connecting the service provision of agencies and programs across service systems.

### BCF case study 2: It Takes a Town, Murwillumbah in Northern NSW

This locally-driven project uses an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to getting the culture of community right – turning on protective factors and turning off risk factors at a community level. It does this through a collective impact approach utilizing residents, clubs, community groups, churches and business as key partners. Investing in this community development approach has allowed us to create linkages at a community level and generate a shared vision that people can connect to.

We go out and ask people if they have a skill, resource or passion that they are willing to share. We now have a database of 800 people who have identified a way in which they are willing to share with others in community. People want to be generous and they want to contribute in small and large ways. We link these people with families seeking change. The 2484 is growing a culture of generosity and responsiveness to **create opportunities and environments for children to thrive**. Government services and formal funded services are an important adjunct to community-based support and we refer to services where appropriate.

It Takes a Town is demonstrating what happens when you flip the ecological model and put community at the centre. Rather than relying on services to fix problems and then putting people back into a community that may not be well-placed to support them, we are strengthening links in our community so we can support each other before, during and after our interactions with formal services.

### BCF case study 3: Early referral to legal services

A client was referred to NRCLC's legal service by WDVCS for advice and assistance with both an ADVO matter and a Victims Support application. The client was experiencing family violence and had a three-year-old child in her care. Throughout the course of the client interview, the client disclosed that a FaCS caseworker had attended her home and had asked her to do a number of things, including engage in the early intervention program Brighter Futures and ensure her ex-partner does not come to the home. The client was reluctant to work with FaCS or Brighter Futures.

The Solicitor gave the client advice about her rights and the responsibilities of FaCS and explained to the client some steps she could take to avoid a care and protection application being made. The Solicitor encouraged the client to engage with support services, including Brighter Futures and counselling, and assisted the client to draft a parenting plan which provided for the child to spend

supervised time with the Father. The client successfully completed the Brighter Futures program and the child's case file was eventually closed.

Through fostering relationships with services working with families and providing education on the importance of early referral to independent legal advice, warm referrals were made, families accessed legal advice and advocacy that resulted in preventing children being removed.

#### **BCF case study 4: REALSkills**

Schools often find themselves working in isolation and unable to meet all the welfare needs of students. Service providers can find it difficult to access schools and many young people can miss out on timely support. REALskills creates connections with those young people who are without effective parenting support ensuring timely access to resources for optimal wellbeing and development. This holistic program has been delivered collaboratively by The Family Centre, local service providers, volunteers and school communities since 2001, supported by a mix of Australian Government and donor investment. It provides a suite of programs across the high school years, which address the relationship and life skills needs of students, parents/carers and school staff.

Activities are delivered in Tweed Shire in the 5 government high schools. A tailored program is also delivered in public primary schools in the 2484 postcode. REALskills builds a vital bridge between the school community and the wider community of social and health services, in a collaborative and integrated way, to ensure prevention and early intervention takes place before issues escalate.

The program works with over 1000 students every year. Ninety-six per cent of participants in 2018 reported they are better able to cope with and manage challenging life situations. Key elements of REALskills' success include:

- the whole school approach (including teachers, students and parents) and connecting in with schools' own student wellbeing strategies and curriculum
- building relationships with key school personnel including providing training for teachers, with a focus on panels of service providers to troubleshoot current issues, to develop their ability to intervene and refer young people early
- training of community service partners, volunteers, tertiary students, teachers and student peer leaders in the delivery of programs
- delivery of targeted groups programs for students identified by the schools as requiring intensive support, and ensuring linkages are made to outside services as required
- delivery of programs for parents and linking to services and supports
- universal delivery for every year 8 and year 10 student year-on-year (when funding is available) to ensure every student can explore issues and connect with services they may need at critical points in the life cycle.

#### **BCF case study 5: 'Working Together'**

'Working Together' is a joint initiative of the Better Chances Forum (BCF) and NSW Department of Education (Public Schools). The initiative started in 2017 with networking events responding to need to better connect wellbeing staff within the NSW Department of Education Schools Services team with Northern Rivers programs and services that schools can connect students and families with. Since the initiative began 206 staff from NSW Education and community and government service providers have participated.

In February 2019 the initiative brought 21 school principals from the Lennox Coast Schools District together to meet and connect with 23 local and regional services. Of those attending 94 per cent agreed it had a positive impact – that it will assist them in their work. Principals participating commented: 'communication is key and relationships are essential'; that they learned about contacts for external organisations including some they intended to follow up with particular students and families; and that they would love to participate in the initiative annually and involve other support staff from their schools.