

LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT UPDATE



Guiding those experiencing family violence and other safety risks through the family law system

Update to the Profession September 2021

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia's (FCFCOA's) core objective in providing a more expedient, efficient system of justice to clients within the Family Law system continues to align with the Lighthouse Project's focus on public health and safety.

Changes to Court Operations

With the introduction of the new Court forms, it is essential to note that from 1 September 2021 a 90 day grace period came into effect in respect of the use of previous Federal Circuit Court and Family Court of Australia court forms. Upon the conclusion of the 90 day grace period, all previous court forms will no longer be accepted for filing.

To ensure that there are no delays with providing litigants with the invitation to risk screen, it is vitally important that parties and legal representatives ensure that all mandatory documents are supplied when filing and that client's personal contact details are provided. This assists the Project team in reviewing matters for Lighthouse Project eligibility and inclusion and avoids delays in invitations sent to clients to screen. The Project emphasises that the earlier a client completes the risk screen, the better the Court is able to assist and direct the matter into the most appropriate case management pathway.

Further information on the changes can be found on the Court's website including the harmonisation of [family law rules](#), new [family law practice directions](#), enhanced changes to the [child expert reporting process](#), specialist court lists, an updated [website](#) and updated [Court forms](#).

Stakeholder meetings

The Project recently held meetings with representatives from each of the Pilot location and state agencies. The stakeholder meetings are an opportunity for the Project to provide updates on processes and changes, and are a forum of stakeholders to discuss concerns, suggestions for improvements and provide any feedback in relation to the Project.

The Project thanks everyone who attended and provides a short summary of the areas discussed in the meetings:

- Key data and observations for the Project to date, including risk screen invitations and observations by those working on and with Pilot matters;
- Recent data on the Evatt list – it was noted that the co-located officials and information through s69ZW Family Law Act 1975 orders have been vitally important for these matters;
- The commencement of the FCFCOA legislation has not resulted in any substantial changes to Lighthouse process, policy or underlying practices; and

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Lighthouse Pilot commenced on 7 December 2020 in Adelaide, and in Brisbane and Parramatta on 11 January 2021.

The pilot is a new approach to risk screening that focuses on public health and tailored case management for families involved in the family law system. It involves:

- Early risk screening through a secure online platform.
- Early identification and development of safety plans and referrals.
- Assessment, triage and support of cases by a specialised team of judges, court child experts, senior judicial registrars and judicial registrars.
- Tailored case management to suit the needs of each case.
- Referral of cases to a dedicated high-risk court list, known as the Evatt List.

- The Project also received positive feedback from the stakeholders regarding successful referrals to the Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS).

General observations

Following the Project's extension of the Family DOORS Triage access code expiry length from five days to ten days, the Project has observed an increase of clients completing the risk screen. It is vitally important that clients are encouraged to screen and screen at the earliest opportunity to assist the Court in placing the matter on the most appropriate case pathway. It should be noted that encouraging your client to screen assists in the development of safety plans and referrals and can assist in identifying previously unknown factors which can aid legal representatives in supporting their client through family law proceedings.

The Evatt List

The Evatt List highlights the benefits of tailored support and case management. Case Study #6 outlines the importance of early information gathering and continues to assist parties in identifying and addressing core issues in dispute at an early point in time, negating the need for lengthy litigation.

Case Study # 6

Facts:

The applicant filed an Initiating Application in April 2021 for the future parenting arrangements for the parties' young child. The applicant completed the Family DOORS Triage questionnaire and family violence issues were identified. The matter was recommended for the Evatt List within eight days of filing and was formally designated as an Evatt matter 15 days after filing.

The matter was managed by the Evatt Judicial Registrar and chambers orders were made requesting:

- Child Inclusive Conference
- Independent Children's Lawyer appointment
- Information from state police and child welfare authorities under s.69ZW
- Interim hearing date before a Senior Judicial Registrar

Outcome:

With the early information gathered through the Evatt List the parties were able to capture the key issues in dispute. With the assistance of the Court Child Expert at the Child Inclusive Conference the parties were able to take ownership of their dispute resulting in the parties reflecting and coming to a developmentally appropriate shared-care parenting arrangement. Within 4 months of filing and with the assistance of the Evatt List, the parties successfully settled their matter together. The parties avoided lengthy litigation, culminating in a safe, child focused long term agreement.

Further information

You can contact the Court for assistance in the following ways:

- Live Chat at <http://www.fcfcoa.gov.au/livechat>
- Email enquiries@fcfcoa.gov.au or
- Call [1300 352 000](tel:1300352000).