

Coffs Harbour Family Support Service

Contact details

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Mastracolas Road (PO Box 2058)
Coffs Harbour NSW 2450
Family Centre: 7 McLean Street, Coffs Harbour

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Hours of service: Monday to Friday: 9.00am - 5.00pm.

Manager: Ruth Allen

Manager Operations: Tony White

Director: Linda Mondy

About the program

The Coffs Harbour Family Support Service began in 1994 and supports families with children aged 0-12 years in the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area.

Being a parent can be the most rewarding and fulfilling time of an adult's life, but it also brings many challenges, stresses and difficulties. Sometimes caring for a family can be hard to cope with. There are many reasons why families may need extra support at certain times to assist them build on the strengths they already have and face the new and varied challenges of being a parent today.

Coffs Harbour Family Support provides a range of early intervention and preventative service options to families who aim to strengthen family functioning and enhance life opportunities for children.

These specific programs include Supported Playgroups (three groups operating), Parenting and Personal Development Groups, Pregnancy Support Group for young people and a family work program that offers additional support to families in greater need by visiting them for up to three months in their own home.

Family support can help by listening and talking to someone who cares, providing access to information and/or resources and linking people into other services, options and help available in the community. The service also provides support and advocacy and assists with parenting ideas, skill development and information.

All services are free of charge with transport provided if required.

Eligibility

Criteria for referral to Coffs Harbour Family Support service includes:

- permission must be obtained from family to refer to services
- families with children aged 0-12 years in the care of parent or guardian
- completion of referral form
- referrals to meet criteria of prevention and early intervention
- families must reside in the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area.

Objectives

The service works within a strengths-based model of support and intervention for families. The main aim of the service is to help families acknowledge and celebrate their strengths and to then build on these strengths to assist them to meet the challenges they may be currently facing in their parenting role.

The focus is to prevent child abuse by strengthening family functioning to enhance the wellbeing and life opportunities for children to assist them to grow in a healthy, happy and friendly family environment.

The service is aimed at vulnerable families experiencing disadvantage as a result of issues relating to:

- poverty
- social isolation
- cognitive disabilities (parent and child)
- domestic violence
- Mental Health
- access to information and/or resources
- Drug and alcohol
- current parenting practices.

Referral

Self-referrals and referrals from other government or non-government agencies.

Services

Programs provide early intervention and prevention support is offered through a range of program options including:

- Supported Playgroups – three playgroups held each day of the week for parents with children aged 0-5 years; which included two playgroups for young parents under 25 years
- Pregnancy Support Group – for young people under age 25 years or any parent with a developmental disability
- Family Work – worker visits families for up to three months in their homes to provide support, includes fathers work to support first-time dads;
- Group Work – this includes groups for both parents and children. They vary in content from parenting to personal development type groups. There is also a

wide range of options available from three-hour groups to groups that run for eight weeks

- Kids Can Group – for children aged 8-12 years who have previously lived in Domestic Violence
- Intake and Assessment – families who are referred to our service are generally contacted within 24 hours to provide telephone counselling, information, referral and support.

The service supports families by acknowledging and enhancing their strengths and working within a strengths-based framework and by supporting families through a range of these approaches. These approaches include solution-focused, cognitive therapy, and narrative therapy.

These models support people to identify the areas that they wish to change or to be different. By identifying the strengths and resources available, people are able to move ahead towards achieving the solution or the new story.

Home visits are provided for families or if this is unsuitable, visits can occur in the Family Centre, park or shopping centres. Flexibility to meet the diverse needs of families is given priority.

Supported Playgroups are held at the Family Centre. Free transport is provided to all playgroups with volunteers supporting families on these occasions.

After all referrals to this service, a worker will contact the family within 48 hours to provide them with any support they may need, if appropriate referrals to other services is made or follow up visit with the family can be organised with a suitable time for all parties.

Funding

NSW Community Services. EIPP (Child Youth and Family) and Families NSW Funding.

Key facts

The service is the only one in the region that offers a wide range of different service options – ‘all under the one roof’. It provides a ‘soft entry point’ for families to access services such as attending playgroups, and after they have developed trust and rapport with the service, to then decide to seek additional support for the issues related to child protection or domestic violence.

Two unique programs currently not available elsewhere in NSW are also offered:

1. Kids Can Program

A partnership program between Health Services (PANOC and Child and Family Counselling), Warrina Women’s Refuge and this service

It provides an eight-week group work program for children aged 8-12 years who are no longer living in domestic violence and a social program for these

- children who have completed the group work. The program was written and is co-led by workers from these other agencies.
2. Parents as Mentors: Mentor training for Coffs Harbour Family Support playgroup members to provide a TAFE accredited mentor training program for families who access playgroups. Accredited Mentors are providing support to their peers at Playgroup and many have used this educational accreditation to go onto further education.

Family perspective:

Dear Ruth and the Burnside staff,

I am writing to thank you for an opportunity to express how your organisation has helped me through the one of the toughest and trying times of my young adult years. This letter is merely to let the workers at Burnside know that the work they do every single day is greatly valued and is done with such immense passion by all the staff. And will also share with you my journey from being a client to being a worker at a place filled with such hope and inspiration.

Before being involved with Burnside as a client, I saw life as having no hope and felt myself sinking deeper and deeper into a very dark and lonely place. I was the type of person that thought very negative of myself and of my life. Unaware of seeing where my life was heading, I had spent a few months at a Playgroup of Burnside. And there I gained knowledge and awareness that my current living situations at home weren't mentally/physically healthy and how a normal family would function. Mind you after finding out that you're in a Domestic Violent situation the word 'normal' hits you like a ton of bricks. So I knew I had to do everything in my power to strive for a normal, safe life for me and my son. (Safe being the most important word)

So the past 4 years haven't been easy but with[out] the support of insightful and professional workers at Burnside, I wouldn't have the knowledge and awareness of DV that I can now use to help me get a career in Welfare and hopefully be a paid worker at a great organisation like Burnside. And help people who are experiencing the turmoil that can come with DV, and give them strength and guidance when they to feel as though there is no hope in their lives.

I can't express how much every one of you means to me but I hope I am showing you all by continuing being a very satisfied volunteer and enjoying the journey of raising my son into an adult. I look forward to working with you all in the near future.

Yours sincerely