

# 3

## Use and effectiveness of new and expanded family relationship services

The changes to the family law system involved changes to the family relationship services delivery system and included the establishment of 65 Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) throughout Australia, the Family Relationship Advice Line (FRAL) and Family Relationships Online (FRO), and funding for new services and additional funding for existing services. The changes were designed to create a more coordinated and more effective family law system (see Chapter 1). Families were to be encouraged to make appropriate use of both early intervention and post-separation services.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is relevant to all four policy objectives of the 2007 Evaluation Framework (see Appendix B) and addresses three key evaluation questions:

- What are the patterns of use of services?
- Have the patterns of service use changed since the 2006 changes to the family law system?
- How effective have the new and expanded services been?

Data collected from separated and non-separated parents, and Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) clients and staff are used to provide a comprehensive picture of the use and effectiveness of these services by parents and other adults.<sup>2</sup>

While the evaluation considers the new types of services (the FRCs and FRAL), it does not specifically compare and contrast the impacts of additional funding to existing services and the impact of funding for additional outlets of these services. The focus is on the use and effectiveness of the family relationship services system as a whole.

This chapter uses data from the:

- General Population of Parents Survey (GPPS) 2009;
- Longitudinal Study of Separated Families Wave 1 (LSSF W1) 2008;
- Looking Back Survey (LBS) 2009;
- Survey of Family Relationship Services Program (FRSP) Clients 2009;
- Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2008 and 2009;
- Qualitative Study of FRSP Staff 2007–08 and 2009; and
- FRSP Online database 2006–09.

The chapter includes an overview of FRSP services and the demographic characteristics of clients using them. It then examines data on service use by parents who have not separated but are seeking relationship support, as well as exploring the use of services both during and after separation. Service professionals' views on operational aspects of their services are also examined, as are issues arising from working with Indigenous clients. Finally, we consider the effectiveness of family relationship services in meeting clients' needs before presenting a series of concluding comments.

1 Chapter 4 evaluates family law system pathways and the extent to which clear and visible entry points to relevant services is occurring. Chapter 5 evaluates the operation of family dispute resolution (FDR) services.

2 Most data in this chapter are based on surveys of parents with at least one child under the age of 18 years. However, in the Survey of FRSP Clients, around a quarter of the respondents indicated that they did not have a child in this age group. Some of these respondents would not have been parents. See Appendix B for a more detailed description of the survey.

## 3.1 Clients using FRSP services

The FRSP's data collection system provides information on the number of clients using services, basic demographic characteristics and reasons for using the service. In the analysis of these data, individuals are represented only once within service types, to the extent that it is possible.<sup>3</sup> A client who attends multiple types of services appears separately in the data for each type of service they attend. Thus, the numbers relate to the number of clients using each service type, but the total number of clients summed across all service types will be greater than the total number of individuals using FRSP services.

### FRSP Online

The FRSP requires service providers to collect data relevant to their service delivery. Providers fulfil this requirement via the FRSP Online web-based application, administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). FRAL, Mensline and the Telephone Dispute Resolution Service (TDRS) have separate data collection systems.

FaHCSIA provided de-identified data collected through FRSP Online to AIFS for analysis as part of the Evaluation of the Family Law Reforms. The data comprised snapshots of several database tables as at October 2009. These tables included details of:

- individual registered clients in the system—a client “attached” to more than one organisation was included multiple times, once for each organisation;
- sessions or appointments when services were delivered to clients—details included service type, date, and fee charged per person;
- attendances of registered clients at sessions;
- activities that result in the delivery of services to (possibly multiple) clients—activities were classified as cases, courses or community development and could have one or more sessions; and
- client roles—details of a client in relation to a particular activity, including presenting needs, marital status, education and employment.

The results presented here are mainly distributions of registered clients aged 15 years and over. Some of the supplied client records were omitted from these distributions because:

- they were flagged as inactive;
- there were no matching session data in the 2006–07 to 2008–09 reference period;
- the service type was out of scope for the evaluation for all matching sessions;
- there were other mismatches between database tables;
- the age of the client (at first session) was under 15 years (some demographic fields were not applicable to those under 15); or
- the age of the client could not be determined.

FaHCSIA also provided the summary data in Table 3.3, which shows counts of clients from FRSP Online, regardless of age. This table includes both registered and unregistered clients, where unregistered clients are those who attend the service but do not have their personal details recorded on the FRSP Online database and do not have a unique identifier within the database. Therefore, the same person may be included more than once in unregistered clients counts.

Source: FRSP Online Training Manual, Version 1.0; FRSP Online system documentation; FRSP Online data extract, October 2009

The FRSP services noted below are categorised as early intervention services (EIS) and post-separation services (PSS).

The early intervention services included are:<sup>4</sup>

- Specialised Family Violence Services (SFVS);
- Men and Family Relationships Services (MFRS);

<sup>3</sup> While, in principle, each client has a unique ID that should relate to all of the services they use, in practice an individual may have more than one ID. This would occur if they registered multiple times, particularly if they registered with multiple organisations.

<sup>4</sup> The EIS clients include a proportion of separating or separated people.

- counselling;<sup>5</sup> and
- Education and Skills Training (EDST).

The post-separation services included are:

- Family Relationship Centres (FRCs);
- Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) (including Regional Family Dispute Resolution (RFDR));
- Children's Contact Services (CCS); and
- Parenting Orders Program (POP).

### 3.1.1 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of FRSP clients

Table 3.1 shows that, on average, clients in all early intervention and post-separation services types were in their 30s, with the average age ranging from 34 years (for EDST clients) to 39 years (for FDR and counselling clients).

**Table 3.1 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of registered FRSP clients aged 15 years or over, by type of service attended, 2008–09**

	EIS				PSS			
	SFVS	MFRS	Counseling	EDST	FRC	FDR	CCS	POP
Age (years)	37	38	39	34	37	39	36	37
	%				%			
ATSI	7.7	8.0	2.6	3.0	3.0	1.8	3.9	2.0
Gender								
Male	48.8	80.5	41.6	41.4	49.8	49.0	48.4	47.8
Female	51.2	19.5	58.4	58.6	50.2	51.0	51.6	52.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Country of birth								
Australia	83.7	83.9	80.8	81.9	83.5	83.5	85.7	83.0
Born outside of Australia	16.3	16.1	19.2	18.1	16.5	16.5	14.3	17.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Marital status								
Married or de facto	46.4	55.1	61.3	37.8	21.8	22.4	21.0	20.3
Divorced or separated	31.9	24.1	21.5	11.2	61.8	67.3	48.3	61.1
Never married and not de facto	18.3	18.2	14.4	49.3	14.0	8.5	27.4	15.3
Widowed	0.8	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.4
Other relationship	2.6	1.6	1.8	0.9	2.1	1.4	2.9	2.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	99.9	100.1	100.0

Notes: FDR includes RFDR clients. Registered clients without complete data (due to database mismatches) are excluded from this table. Clients with missing/not stated marital status are excluded from the distribution of that item. Age and marital status are as at the client's first session at the type of service during the reference year. Table is restricted to registered clients aged 15 years and over. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: FRSP Online data extract, October 2009

A much higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) clients made use of SFVS and MFRS (8% for both services) than other services. Rates of usage of other services by

<sup>5</sup> Some counselling programs are also funded under the PSS program. However, for the purpose of this report they have been grouped within the EIS only.

Indigenous clients ranged from 2% for FDR and POP services to 4% for CCS. Between 14% and 19% of clients of each service were born outside of Australia.

Marital status varied in understandable ways: those who used post-separation services were most commonly classified as divorced or separated, and those who used three of the four intervention service types (SFVS, MFRS and counselling) were most commonly recorded as partnered. The EDST clients (many of whom would be attending pre-marriage education programs), on the other hand, were most commonly classified as never married and not de facto.

For all of the post-separation services, about half the clients were male and half female. In terms of the early intervention services about half the clients of the SFVS were male and about 40% of the counselling service and EDST clients were male, while the majority (81%) of the MFRS clients were male.

Table 3.2 summarises education and employment data for services covered by the FRSP data collection system. The table suggests that parents with a higher level of educational attainment and employed parents were more likely to use EDST and counselling services and were less likely to use SFVS, MFRS or CCS. Those who used SFVS and CCS were the least likely to be employed, while EDST and FDR clients were the most likely to be employed.

**Table 3.2 Educational attainment and labour force status, by type of service attended, registered clients aged 15 years and over, 2008–09**

	EIS				PSS			
	SFVS	MFRS	Counsel- ling	EDST	FRC	FDR	CCS	POP
	%				%			
<b>Highest level of education</b>								
Primary or incomplete secondary	45.6	47.7	29.2	18.7	36.3	29.2	44.6	33.4
Year 12	21.9	20.8	21.3	19.0	22.6	24.1	24.2	22.8
Certificate/diploma	18.9	18.0	22.6	22.7	24.0	23.5	18.0	24.2
Degree or higher	13.6	13.5	27.0	39.6	17.1	23.2	13.3	19.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<b>Employment status</b>								
Employed	54.5	60.6	69.3	78.0	72.1	75.8	51.4	65.6
Unemployed	18.4	17.7	9.2	6.7	9.7	8.0	16.9	12.3
Not in the labour force	22.3	17.4	17.2	12.0	15.6	14.1	27.5	18.9
Student	4.9	4.3	4.3	3.3	2.6	2.1	4.2	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes: FDR includes RFDR clients. Registered clients without complete data (due to database mismatches) are excluded from this table. Clients with missing/not stated education or employment status are excluded from the respective distributions. Highest level of education and employment status are as at the client's first session at the type of service during the reference year. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: FRSP Online data extract, October 2009

### 3.1.2 Number of clients using FRSP services

Table 3.3 provides information on the number of clients using each of the FRSP services in 2006–07, 2007–08 and 2008–09. In 2008–09, the services with the largest number of clients were counselling services (101,214 clients), FRCs (60,199 clients) and EDST (49,593 clients). The services with the smallest number of clients were POPs (8,194 clients) and SFVS (6,906 clients).

There was an increase in the number of clients for all FRSP services types over the period 2006–07 to 2008–09. In percentage terms, the increase was greatest for FRCs (336% increase).

The growth in the number of clients accessing services was expected given that the number of services increased over the three years (including the FRCs).

**Table 3.3 Number of and percentage change in clients, by FRSP service type, 2006–07 to 2008–09**

	EIS				PSS			
	SFVS	MFRS	Counsel- ling	EDST	FRC	FDR	CCS	POP
	Number of clients				Number of clients			
<b>2006–07</b>								
Registered clients	2,217	8,269	60,841	21,477	11,883	13,787	7,895	2,669
Unregistered clients	1,266	15,557	2,680	10,397	1,940	512	3,110	447
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>3,483</b>	<b>23,826</b>	<b>63,521</b>	<b>31,874</b>	<b>13,823</b>	<b>14,299</b>	<b>11,005</b>	<b>3,116</b>
<b>2007–08</b>								
Registered clients	3,473	10,913	76,518	26,899	31,995	21,745	10,703	4,978
Unregistered clients	2,351	15,006	4,461	13,816	3,996	1,061	4,964	1,058
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>5,824</b>	<b>25,919</b>	<b>80,979</b>	<b>40,715</b>	<b>35,991</b>	<b>22,806</b>	<b>15,667</b>	<b>6,036</b>
<b>2008–09</b>								
Registered clients	3,464	12,317	78,177	24,629	45,352	17,511	13,003	5,200
Unregistered clients	3,442	15,612	23,037	24,964	14,847	4,936	10,293	2,994
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>6,906</b>	<b>27,929</b>	<b>101,214</b>	<b>49,593</b>	<b>60,199</b>	<b>22,447</b>	<b>23,296</b>	<b>8,194</b>
<b>% change from 2006–07 to 2008–09</b>								
Registered clients	56.2	49.0	28.5	14.7	281.7	27.0	64.7	94.8
Unregistered clients	171.9	0.4	759.6	140.1	665.3	864.1	231.0	569.8
<b>Total clients</b>	<b>98.3</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>59.3</b>	<b>55.6</b>	<b>335.5</b>	<b>57.0</b>	<b>111.7</b>	<b>163.0</b>

Notes: FDR includes RFDR. If a client used both FDR and RFDR then they were counted twice in the FDR figures. The number of such clients are very small. Table includes clients of all ages, including those aged under 15 years of age.

Source: FRSP Online Reporting Portal, 4 December 2009.

In contrast to the increased use of FRCs and FDR services, the number of calls handled by FRAL fell from 99,086 in 2006–07 to 81,878 in 2008–09, a decrease of 17% (Table 3.4). Nevertheless, the number of callers remains substantial. The decreases in the number of calls to FRAL is likely to be explained by several factors, including the fact that parents' understanding of the changes to the family law system has improved (which may reduce the need for initial information), and the fact that as services such as FRCs have become more established and better known, referral networks may have become more localised, resulting in fewer parents needing to call a national information and advice line.

**Table 3.4 Number of calls to FRAL, 2006–07 to 2008–09**

Period	Number calls
2006–07	99,086
2007–08	91,435
2008–09	81,878
<b>% change from 2006–07 to 2008–09</b>	<b>–17%</b>

Source: FaHCSIA, September 2009

The number of calls to Mensline was relatively stable over the period 2006–07 to 2008–09, at just under 40,000 calls per year (Table 3.5). Outbound calls are made to clients who have joined the Call Back Service (CBS) provided by Mensline. Under this service, callers can receive up to six telephone counselling sessions over a six-week period. The service is free and is suitable for people who have issues/concerns that are more long-term and require more than one telephone call to assist. Over the period investigated, the number of calls that Mensline staff made to clients increased by 45% (from 2,249 in 2006–07 to 3,262 in 2008–09).

**Table 3.5** Number of calls made to and by Mensline, 2006–07 to 2008–09

	Answered calls	Outbound calls (including CBS)
2006–07	39,736	2,249
2007–08	38,169	4,501
2008–09	37,837	3,262
% change from 2006–07 to 2008–09	–4.8%	45.0%

Source: Mensline Australia summary statistics

There was a large increase in the number of active referrals (warm transfers) from FRAL parenting advisors and FRCs to the TDRS.<sup>6</sup> The number of warm transfers from a FRAL parenting advisor to TDRS increased by around 300% (from 809 in 2007–08 to 3,263 in 2008–09). Over this period, the number of warm transfers from FRC to TDRS increased by 132%, from 537 to 1,245.

In 2008–09, there were 13,441 calls made to TDRS that were answered. About a quarter of these calls resulted in the caller undergoing an intake session, and just over one in twenty commenced FDR.

The Family Relationships Online website<sup>7</sup> provides information about family relationship issues, including how to access a range of services that can assist in managing relationship issues, such as agreeing on appropriate arrangements for children after parents separate. FRO also provides downloadable resources about a range of issues related to family relationships and family law.

In June 2009, there were 21,233 visits to the FRO, from 11,378 individual IP addresses. This suggests that many FRO users access the site more than once. In June 2009, the average time spent on the site was just under four minutes.<sup>8</sup>

In June 2009, the three most commonly downloaded resources were:

- *An Introduction to Parenting Plans* (FRO Factsheet)—536 visits;
- *Help for Parents After Separation: A Program to Make Parenting Orders Work* (AGD brochure)—211 visits; and
- *Questions and Answers About Separation for Children* (AGD booklet)—197 visits.

### 3.1.3 Reasons for attending the service

The Survey of FRSP Clients conducted in late 2009 provides information on the main reason why clients attended a service.<sup>9</sup>

Table 3.6 shows that for the early intervention services, there is some variation in the main reason given for attending a service. Two-thirds of respondents who used counselling services and

<sup>6</sup> Data from TDRS administrative data were provided to AIFS by FaHCSIA. The TDRS commenced operation in July 2007. Demographic data was not collected for the TDRS.

<sup>7</sup> Family Relationships Online, <www.familyrelationships.gov.au>.

<sup>8</sup> Data provided to AIFS by AGD.

<sup>9</sup> Respondents were asked for the main reason they attended the service. The reasons that the respondent could choose from were to: “sort out issues about [their] children after a relationship break-up or separation”; “sort out general family relationship issues [with their spouse, former spouse, children or other family members]”; “deal with personal problems”; “sort out issues about [their] grandchildren”; and “some other reason”. Clients who had attended CCS, POP and FDR services were not given the option of selecting the reasons to “deal with personal problems” and “some other reason” because these were not reasons for which the services could be used.

over half of those who had attended SFVS or MFRS (54–58%) indicated that their main reason for using these services was to sort out general family issues, while nearly one-fifth of these three groups (18–19%) went to the service mainly to deal with personal problems. In addition, one-fifth of MFRS clients, 14% of SFVS clients and only 9% of the clients of counselling services said that they mainly went to the service to sort out issues about their children after a relationship break-up or separation. Just over a quarter of the clients of EDST services indicated that the main reason for attending the service was to sort out general family relationship issues, but the majority (61%) went for reasons other than those listed in the table.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 3.6 Main reason indicated by client for attending early intervention service, by type of service attended, 2009**

	SFVS	MFRS	Counselling	EDST
	%			
Sort out issues about their children after a relationship break up or separation	14.0	19.5	9.0	7.4
Sort out general family relationship issues	57.9	53.7	66.0	26.0
Deal with personal problems	19.3	17.5	17.8	4.5
Sort out issues about their grandchildren	1.8	0.0	0.7	1.0
Some other reason	7.0	9.4	6.5	61.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>599</b>

Note: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: Survey of FRSP Clients 2009

Between 72% and 85% of respondents who used a post-separation service said that the main reason for attending the service was to sort out issues about their children after a relationship break-up or separation (Table 3.7). Clients who attended an FDR service were more likely than those who used other post-separation services to say that their main reason for attending the service was to sort out a general family relationship issue (26% of FDR respondents compared to 11–15%).

**Table 3.7 Main reason indicated by client for attending a post-separation service, by type of service attended, 2009**

	FRC	FDR <sup>a</sup>	CCS	POP
	%			
Sort out issues about their children after a relationship break-up or separation	77.5	72.2	79.6	85.2
Sort out general family relationship issues	12.3	26.3	15.4	11.4
Deal with personal problems	0.5	–	–	–
Sort out issues about their grandchildren	7.9	1.3	5.0	3.4
Some other reason	1.8	0.2	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>93</b>

Note: <sup>a</sup> Excludes TDRS clients.

Source: Survey of FRSP Clients 2009

Table 3.8 shows the main relationship focused upon by callers to Mensline during the three periods investigated. During each of these periods, information on this issue was not available for 33–39% of calls. Most of the calls made each year appeared to concern a previous relationship or current partner. Of all calls (including those for which no information about the issues discussed was available), approximately one-quarter concerned a previous relationship and just

<sup>10</sup> Many of these respondents, when asked to specify what the “other” reason was, indicated that they had attended a marriage or relationship education program.

over one-fifth concerned a current partner. Of the calls for which information about the issue discussed was available, close to 40% concerned a previous partner and around 35% concerned a current partner (data not shown in Table 3.8). That is, around three-quarters of all calls with known information about the issue discussed concerned either a current or previous partner.

**Table 3.8 Main relationship discussed by caller, Mensline, 2006–07 to 2008–09**

	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
	%		
Separated partner	26.4	25.8	23.3
Current partner	22.4	22.9	21.2
Children	6.3	7.1	6.4
Social or work relationship	1.8	5.8	5.1
Extended family member	2.2	2.6	2.4
Single	5.5	2.6	2.4
Data not available	35.1	33.3	39.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>
<b>Total number of answered calls</b>	<b>39,736</b>	<b>38,169</b>	<b>37,837</b>

Notes: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding. Information about relationships discussed may not have been collected where calls reflected a crisis situation.

Source: Mensline Australia summary statistics

Table 3.9 reveals that interpersonal issues were by far the most common issues recorded for each period (representing close to 40% of all calls, including calls for which the main issue discussed was not recorded). In total, 63–68% of all calls for which the main issue was recorded concerned interpersonal matters (data not shown in Table 3.9). The other main issues that were recorded covered legal/material/financial matters, physical/mental health matters, safety matters, issues relating to sex, and work issues.

**Table 3.9 Main issue discussed by caller, Mensline, 2006–07 to 2008–09**

	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
	%		
Interpersonal	43.6	42.2	38.1
Parenting	5.6	6.8	6.6
Legal/material/financial	5.2	5.5	4.3
Physical/mental health	4.7	5.4	5.5
Safety	3.5	4.2	3.6
Sexual	1.2	1.9	1.9
Work	0.6	0.7	0.7
Data not available	35.5	33.3	39.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total number of answered calls</b>	<b>39,736</b>	<b>38,169</b>	<b>37,837</b>

Notes: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding. Information about relationships discussed may not have been collected where calls reflected a crisis situation.

Source: Mensline Australian summary statistics

Consistent with the trends in the nature of calls to Mensline, Table 3.10 indicates that easily the most prominent presenting needs from callers to FRAL were issues concerned with separation and relationships. Many of the other needs listed in the table—court/legal, violence/abuse, finances, miscellaneous abuse, mental health, emergency/crisis, child abduction, dispute resolution and accommodation—are likely to be subcategories of this dominant one. The percentage of these needs remained relatively stable over time, with a modest increase in needs about separation between 2006–07 and 2007–08 and a small reduction in the need for assistance in the court/legal area.

**Table 3.10 Caller presenting needs, FRAL, 2006–07 to 2008–09**

	2006–07	2007–08	2008–09
	%		
Separation	52.1	58.1	58.9
Relationship	35.2	35.5	33.4
Court/legal	21.2	20.5	18.3
Violence/abuse	7.9	8.6	8.2
Finances	5.6	5.0	4.2
Miscellaneous abuse	3.1	3.3	3.0
Mental health	2.4	2.5	2.5
Emergency/crisis	1.2	1.1	0.9
Child abduction	0.9	0.9	0.8
Dispute resolution	0.8	2.2	1.6
Accommodation	0.7	0.5	0.4
Presenting needs not recorded	21.4	18.0	19.3

Note: Percentages may total to more than 100.0% as more than one presenting need could be recorded.

Source: FRAL call management system data

The FRSP Online database provides information on clients' number of presenting needs.<sup>11</sup> As Table 3.11 indicates, the majority of clients across all service types had either one or two presenting needs. Among early intervention services, in 2008–09, 61% of SFVS clients, 56% of MFRS clients, 70% of counselling clients and 92% of EDST clients had either one or two presenting needs. Clients of SFVS and MFRS were the most likely to have multiple presenting needs (23% in both services had five or more presenting needs respectively) in 2008–09, while EDST clients

**Table 3.11 Number of presenting needs recorded, individual registered clients aged over 15 years, 2006–07 and 2008–09**

	EIS				PSS			
	SFVS	MFRS	Counselling	EDST	FRC	FDR	CCS	POP
<b>2006–07</b>								
1	45.3	35.6	50.7	85.3	48.6	56.6	49.0	60.4
2	15.3	20.1	18.9	6.7	19.3	21.8	25.3	16.3
3	12.3	14.4	12.3	2.9	11.4	9.8	11.7	8.6
4	9.4	10.9	7.3	1.5	7.7	5.1	8.6	5.9
5+	17.8	19.1	10.8	3.8	13.1	6.8	5.5	8.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.2</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>2008–09</b>								
1	51.8	38.9	41.5	81.4	43.5	54.6	49.6	63.4
2	12.2	16.8	17.7	7.1	13.0	18.9	18.4	12.4
3	7.9	12.8	12.5	3.2	11.2	8.8	11.0	6.7
4	5.6	8.8	8.6	2.4	8.6	5.8	6.6	6.6
5+	22.6	22.7	19.6	6.1	23.7	11.9	14.4	11.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>100.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.1</b>

Notes: FRSP Online records presenting needs as an attribute of a client's role in a particular client activity. For a given client and type of service, a presenting need is included in the count of needs if the need was recorded for the client in relation to any activity that included a session at that type of service during the reference year. Totals include a very small number of clients (fewer than 0.05%) with no recorded presenting needs. FDR includes RFDR clients. Registered clients without complete data (due to database mismatches) are excluded from this table. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: FRSP Online data extract, October 2009

<sup>11</sup> The FRSP Online presenting needs classification lists over 60 needs. The broad areas covered by the list of presenting needs includes: relationships, parenting, family violence/abuse, children, health, drug and alcohol issues, legal issues and communication issues.

were the least likely to have multiple presenting needs (6% had 5 or more). For post-separation services, in 2008–09, 57% of FRC clients, 74% of FDR clients, 68% of CCS and 76% of POPs had either one or two presenting needs. Only a minority of clients had five or more presenting needs, varying from 24% for FRCs, 12% for FDR, 14% for CCS to 11% for POPs. While it is unclear exactly why the number of presenting needs is lower for the service types that are typically attended later in family law pathways, it is possible that the greater specialisation of services such as FDR, CCS and POP mean that a narrower set of needs is focused on and hence recorded.

There was an increase in the proportion of clients with five or more presenting needs for all early intervention and post-separation service types over the period 2006–07 to 2008–09. The increase was particularly pronounced for counselling (increase from 11% to 20%), FRCs (13% to 24%), FDR (7% to 12%) and CCS (6% to 14%). The increase in the number of presenting needs that clients had may reflect an increase in the “complexity” of the issues facing families attending services, better assessment and screening practices by services, better recording of this presenting needs data by services, and/or an increase in the number of categories for recording client needs in FRSP Online.

## 3.2 Service use by parents who are not separated

### 3.2.1 Use of services and types of services used

This section provides information on the use of services by parents with a partner for “relationship support” or because they thought that their relationship might be “in real trouble”. The types of services used are described and the characteristics distinguishing between parents who use and do not use services are examined.

The data in this section are from the General Population of Parents Survey (GPPS) 2009.<sup>12</sup> The information collected from parents in this survey was about the use of services since their current relationship started and therefore includes information on service use prior to the 2006 changes to the family law system.

Parents participating in the GPPS 2009 who had a partner were asked whether they had thought at any stage that their current relationship might be “in real trouble”. The answer to this question determined the nature of the question about service use. A series of prompts was provided if respondents did not mention use of certain services.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, 27% of parents living with a partner said that they thought at some stage that their relationship might be in real trouble (including that it was currently in real trouble) and 73% said that they had never thought that their relationship might be in real trouble.

The parents who said that their relationship had never been in real trouble were asked if they had nonetheless used any services to support their relationship. About 13% of mothers and fathers who said that their relationship had never been in real trouble had used services to “support their relationship” (Table 3.12). Just under half (45%) of fathers and just over half of mothers (55%) whose relationship had been in real trouble at some stage had used relationship services.

<sup>12</sup> In a small number of cases in the GPPS 2009, the parents’ partner was not the other parent of their children.

<sup>13</sup> In the GPPS 2009, parents were asked: “At any stage, have you thought your relationship might be in real trouble?” Those who answered “no” are classified as having not experienced relationship difficulties and those who answered “yes” as having experienced relationship difficulties. Parents who had not experienced relationship difficulties were asked whether they had nevertheless sought help or advice or used any services to support their relationship (other than from friends or family members) and, if so, which types of services they had used. Respondents who had experienced relationship difficulties were asked whether they had ever sought any help or advice or used any services to resolve problems in their relationship (other than from friends or family members) and were then probed whether they had used a range of services. Interviewers classified respondents’ answers to either question using the same set of pre-determined categories. Specific attention was given to seven services that may have been used: (a) Family Relationship Centres, (b) other counsellors (marriage guidance or similar professional), (c) family violence or services, (d) other relationship services, (e) general practitioners or other health professionals, (f) lawyers, and (g) religious leaders or elders. Interviewers asked respondents about whether they had used each of these services if they had not already mentioned using them. These “prompt questions” were also asked of respondents who said that they had not sought help or advice. The proportion of respondents who had used services was then readjusted to include those who, through this prompting, indicated that they had used a service.

**Table 3.12 Use of services to support relationships or resolve problems, parents living with a partner, fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Support relationship			Resolve problems		
	Fathers	Mothers	All	Fathers	Mothers	All
	%			%		
Had sought help with relationship issues	12.5	12.6	12.6	45.3	54.9	50.7
Type of service (if used)						
FRC <sup>a</sup>	13.8	11.8	12.8	19.4	22.4	21.2
Marriage and relationship counsellor <sup>a</sup>	34.9	50.7	43.1	62.5	62.7	62.6
Family violence service <sup>a</sup>	0.5	1.0	0.8	1.7	2.2	2.0
Other relationship service <sup>a</sup>	5.3	4.9	5.1	4.3	9.7	7.6
GP or other health professional <sup>a</sup>	27.5	34.0	30.9	36.6	38.4	37.7
Lawyer <sup>a</sup>	0.5	2.5	1.5	3.5	4.1	3.9
Religious leader/elder <sup>a</sup>	32.3	24.6	28.3	16.4	11.6	13.5
Welfare agency/community support service	2.1	3.0	2.6	3.9	3.3	3.5
Telephone service (e.g., FRAL, Lifeline, MensLine)	1.6	0.0	0.8	1.7	1.9	1.8
Internet, TV, newspaper, magazine or self-help book	3.2	0.5	1.8	1.7	2.8	2.4
Other	0.0	0.5	0.3	0.9	1.1	1.0
Use of two or more services (if used)	20.6	24.1	22.4	37.9	44.7	42.1
Number of respondents	1,537	1,648	3,185	512	660	1,172

Notes: Respondents could report having used more than one type of service and therefore column percentages may sum to more than 100.0%. <sup>a</sup> Respondents were prompted about use of these services if they did not initially mention using them. Includes pre- and post-reform respondents.

Source: GPPS 2009

The services used most frequently by parents who had used services to support their relationship were marriage and relationship counsellors (43%), general practitioners (GPs) or other health professionals (31%), religious leaders/elders (28%) and FRCs (13%). The proportion of parents using other services to support their relationship was much smaller. It should be remembered, however, that the respondents were specifically asked about whether they had used each of the services listed in Table 3.12, with the exception of a welfare agency/community support service, telephone service, or Internet, media or self-help book.

Overall, there was a similar pattern in the types of services used by parents to assist in resolving relationship problems (i.e., who thought their relationship might be in trouble), with 63% of those who had used services having used marriage and relationship counsellors, 38% a GP or other health professional, 21% an FRC, and 14% a religious leader/elder. Parents who had used services to help deal with a relationship problem were more likely to have used two or more services than those who had used services to support a relationship (42% and 22% respectively).

### 3.2.2 Characteristics associated with the use of services

The extent to which parents who used services differed from those who did not use services was examined in relation to: their age, educational attainment level and current marital status, and two aspects of their residential location—remoteness from service centres, and level of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage. The results of this analysis are set out in Table 3.13 (for service use to support the relationship) and Table 3.14 (for service use to resolve difficulties in the relationship).

In general, use of services was more likely for: older parents compared with younger parents (a difference that was most marked among mothers who had experienced relationship difficulties); those with higher rather than lower levels of education; fathers who were married, compared with fathers who were cohabiting; parents who lived in a more geographically accessible area (especially among mothers who experienced relationship difficulties); and those who lived

in a more socio-economically advantaged area (especially among parents who experienced relationship difficulties).<sup>14</sup>

**Table 3.13 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of parents, by whether services used to support relationship, partnered fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Didn't use services	Used services	Didn't use services	Used services
Age of parents (years)	42.7	43.1	38.8	39.2
	%		%	
<b>Highest level of education</b>				
Degree or higher	41.2	49.7	40.2	44.6 **
Other post-secondary qualification	27.7	27.0	24.2	33.7
Year 12 (no post-secondary qualification)	15.4	11.6	18.9	10.4
Year 11 or lower	15.8	11.6	16.7	11.4
<b>Current relationship status</b>				
Married	88.5	95.2 **	88.1	86.7
Cohabiting	11.5	4.8	11.9	13.3
<b>Accessibility remoteness index for postcode (higher score = less accessible)</b>				
Mean	1.01	0.91	1.28	1.24
<b>SEIFA socio-economic advantage and disadvantage for postcode (lower score = relatively disadvantaged)</b>				
Mean	1,025.80	1,031.40	1,012.70	1,019.40
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>1,320</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>1,403</b>	<b>203</b>

Notes: SEIFA = Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas. Other post-secondary qualifications include trades, certificates and diplomas. Includes pre- and post-reform respondents. Differences between the used and not-used groups for fathers and mothers were separately tested using the chi-squared test for categorical variables and t-test for continuous variables. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Source: GPPS 2009

**Table 3.14 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of parents, by whether services used to resolve relationship problems, partnered fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Didn't use services	Used services	Didn't use services	Used services
Age of parent (years)	42.7	44.2	39.1	49.9 *
	%		%	
<b>Highest level of education</b>				
Degree or higher qualification	34.2	41.7	32.2	34.0
Other post-secondary qualification	31.7	30.9	29.9	33.2
Year 12 (no post-secondary qualification)	14.4	14.8	17.1	16.6
Year 11 or lower	19.8	12.6	20.8	16.3
<b>Current relationship status</b>				
Married	81.8	87.9	82.2	86.7
Cohabiting	18.2	12.1	17.8	13.3
<b>Accessibility remoteness index for postcode (higher score = less accessible)</b>				
Mean	1.09	0.78	1.29	0.92 *
<b>SEIFA socio-economic advantage and disadvantage for postcode (lower score = relatively disadvantaged)</b>				
Mean	1,009.20	1,026.7 *	1,001.40	1,022.8 **
<b>Number of parents</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>362</b>

Notes: SEIFA = Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas. Includes pre- and post-reform respondents. Differences between the used and not-used groups for fathers and mothers were separately tested using the chi-squared test for categorical variables and t-test for continuous variables. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Source: GPPS 2009

<sup>14</sup> Some of these trends did not reach statistical significance for both sets of analysis, although the overall direction of relevant results across the two sets of analysis was consistent.

### 3.3 Service use by parents who separate

The first set of analyses in this section focus on use of services prior to separation, as reported by parents in the GPPS 2009. The second set of analyses focus on contact with or use of services after separation among parents who separated after the July 2006 reforms were introduced. Attention is then directed to changes in contact with or use of services

#### 3.3.1 Service use by parents in the GPPS 2009 prior to separation

Respondents in the GPPS 2009 who had separated from the other parent of at least one of their children were asked the same question regarding service use that was asked of those who said they had experienced “real trouble” in their relationship but had not separated.<sup>15</sup>

#### 3.3.2 Characteristics of parents in the GPPS 2009 who used services prior to separation

Among separated parents in the GPPS 2009, the socio-economic and demographic characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of having used a relationship service prior to separation were: being slightly older; having a higher level of educational attainment (especially among mothers); and being married rather than cohabiting (especially among mothers) (Table 3.15).

**Table 3.15 Socio-economic and demographic characteristics, by whether used services to resolve relationship problems before separation, separated fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Didn't use services	Used services	Didn't use services	Used services
Age of parent (years)	42.8	45.9 ***	39.2	40.8 *
	%		%	
<b>Education</b>				
Degree or higher qualification	25.4	30.7	20.2	27.1 **
Other post-secondary qualification	32.4	40.2	26.2	36.5
Year 12 (no post-secondary qualification)	19.0	15.3	21.1	13.4
Year 11 or lower	23.2	13.9	32.6	23.1
<b>Relationship status at separation</b>				
Married	68.5	73.7	44.5	72.1 ***
Cohabiting	24.5	23.4	38.1	21.8
Other (separated before child was born)	7.0	2.9	17.4	6.1
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>280</b>

Notes: Includes pre- and post-reform respondents. Differences between the used and not-used groups for fathers and mothers were separately tested using the chi-squared test for categorical variables and t-test for continuous variables. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Source: GPPS 2009

<sup>15</sup> Respondents in the GPPS 2009 who had separated from the other parent of at least one of their children were asked: “Before you separated from [child’s] other parent, other than from family or friends, did you ever seek any help or advice or use any services, to resolve problems in your relationship?” If two or more children were born of different relationships that ended in separation, then the question focused on the most recent of these relationships. Just over half of the parents (54%) sought help before separating from a relationship in which a child was born. Mothers were more likely than fathers to have reported using services prior to separation (56% and 49% respectively). Currently separated parents were only slightly more likely to seek help at this time than those who had difficulties in the relationship but stayed together. Among parents who had experienced relationship difficulties, 54% of the fathers and 75% of the mothers who had sought help to deal with these difficulties subsequently separated.

### 3.3.3 Contact with or use of services during and after separation: The post-reform sample

Parents in the LSSF W1 2008, all of whom had separated post-reform, were asked three questions that identified whether they had contacted or used services during or after the separation.<sup>16</sup>

These post-reform separated parents either contacted or made use of one or more services before or after the separation (Table 3.16), that is about one-third made no use of services. Forty-four per cent of parents had used one or two services and a just under a quarter of parents had used three or more services. Mothers were a little more likely than fathers to have used three or more services (28% and 21% respectively).

**Table 3.16 Number of services used during or after separation, fathers and mothers, 2008**

	Fathers	Mothers	All
	%	%	%
None	33.8	30.4	32.1
One	23.4	21.3	22.4
Two	21.3	20.8	21.1
Three or more	21.4	27.5	24.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>4,983</b>	<b>5,019</b>	<b>10,002</b>

Note: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: LSSF W1 2008

### 3.3.4 Characteristics of post-reform separated parents who contacted or used services

Table 3.17, which is based on the post-reform sample from the LSSF W1 2008, outlines the characteristics of those separated parents who did and did not contact or use services. Compared with the post-reform separated mothers and fathers who did not contact services, those who did so were somewhat older and significantly more likely to be married rather than cohabiting, and better educated. They also had a higher personal annual income than those who did not contact or use services. They were considerably less likely to have very young children (0–2 years) and were more likely to have children in the middle years (5–11 years).

Parents who contacted services were also much more likely to have reported the experience of some form of family violence, mental health problems or alcohol and drug issues or other addictions before the separation, as well as distant, highly conflicted and even fearful relationships. In addition, they were much less likely to report their post-separation relationship as being friendly. In other words, although the previously married parents and the better educated parents were more likely than others to have contacted services, those who had contacted services were more likely than other parents to have experienced significant problems and needs.

<sup>16</sup> Parents in the LSSF W1 2008 were classified as having either contacted or used a service if any of the following applied: (a) their answer to the following question confirmed that they had contacted a service other than family members or friends during or after separation: “At the time of, or after the separation, did you contact any of the following: a counselling, mediation or dispute resolution service; a domestic violence service; a lawyer; a legal service (including legal advice line, private or legal aid); the courts; family; other [specify]?”; (b) they indicated that they had mainly used formal services (as outlined in the first three response options) when answering the following question: “Which best describes how arrangements for [child] were mainly reached? Did you mainly use: counselling, mediation or dispute resolution services; a lawyer; the courts; discussions with [other parent]; nothing specific, it just happened; something else [specify]?” (the present tense was used for parents who said that they were in the process of sorting out their arrangements); and (c) they indicated that they had attempted FDR or mediation either alone or with the other parent when answering the following question: “Can I just check, have you and [other parent] attempted family dispute resolution or mediation?”

**Table 3.17 Socio-economic, demographic and relationship characteristics of post-reform parents, by whether used services during or after separation, separated fathers and mothers, 2008**

	Fathers		Mothers	
	Didn't use services	Used services	Didn't use services	Used services
Age of parent (years)	32.6	36.5***	29.1	34.0***
	%		%	
<b>Age of child</b>				
0–2 years	54.9	29.7 ***	62.0	32.6 ***
3–4 years	14.9	20.0	14.0	18.6
5–11 years	21.6	36.2	17.7	34.4
12–14 years	4.3	7.8	3.4	8.3
15–17 years	4.3	6.3	2.9	6.1
<b>Education</b>				
Degree or higher	7.3	16.2 ***	5.8	17.5 ***
Other post-secondary qualification	35.3	41.5	27.8	35.5
Year 12 (no post-secondary qualification)	18.0	14.7	21.5	19.1
Year 11 or lower	39.4	27.5	44.9	27.9
<b>Marital status at separation</b>				
Married	33.5	62.7 ***	24.8	59.5 ***
Cohabiting	45.1	30.7	46	31.4
Other	21.4	6.6	29.2	9.2
<b>Experience of family violence</b>				
Physical hurt	6.9	21.8 ***	11.8	32.1 ***
Emotional abuse alone	24.5	42.5	28.2	43.8
No violence reported	68.6	35.7	60	24.1
<b>Mental health problems or alcohol/drug issues</b>				
Yes	21.7	42.2 ***	31	58.5 ***
<b>Quality of relationship with other parent</b>				
Friendly	54.7	25.9 ***	55.9	24.7 ***
Cooperative	28.0	27.7	27.3	27.6
Distant	11.8	23.0	11.7	21.9
Lots of conflict	4.3	18.9	4.2	17.0
Fearful	1.3	4.5	0.9	8.9
<b>Country of birth</b>				
Australia-born	81.0	81.6	84.9	84.4
Born outside of Australia	19.0	18.4	15.1	15.6
<b>Indigenous status</b>				
Indigenous	5.5	2.8 ***	6.3	3.3 ***
Non-Indigenous	94.5	97.2	93.7	96.7
<b>Personal annual income</b>				
Mean	\$49,160	\$61,270***	\$27,058	\$33,291***
SD	\$56,539	\$73,109	\$14,956	\$37,655
Median	\$40,000	\$48,000	\$24,784	\$26,500
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>1,504</b>	<b>3,479</b>	<b>1,379</b>	<b>3,640</b>

Notes: Fewer than 10% of fathers and mothers did not report their personal income. Parents were classified as having used any services if any of the following applied: (a) they confirmed that they had contacted any services other than family members or friends during or after separation; (b) they indicated that "counselling, family dispute resolution", "a lawyer" or "the courts" was the best way to describe how arrangements for the focus child were reached; or (c) they had attempted FDR or mediation themselves or with the other parent. Data have been weighted. Differences between the used and not-used groups for fathers and mothers were separately tested using the chi-squared test for categorical variables and t-test for continuous variables. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Source: LSSFW1 2008

### 3.3.5 Changes in types of services contacted or used since the 2006 reforms

This section examines whether the pattern of service use changed following the 2006 reforms to the family law system. Two sources of data were used:

- the LSSF W1 2008, which provides data on parents separating after 1 July 2006; and
- the Looking Back Survey (LBS) 2009, which provides data on parents separating before 1 July 2006.

Data from the LBS 2009 and the LSSF W1 2008 were used to examine the extent to which there were changes in the types of services contacted or used by parents who separated in 2004 or 2005 (pre-reform) and those who separated after 1 July 2006 (post-reform).<sup>17</sup> As Table 3.18 indicates, gender differences were notable for both pre- and post-reform groups with respect to domestic violence services contacted or used, but post-reform separated parents were also somewhat more likely to make contact with or use domestic violence services, possibly reflecting a greater awareness of these services and/or their greater availability. Differences between men and women were also prominent with respect to the use of legal services in the pre-reform sample, with over half the mothers nominating this service compared to a little under two-fifths of the fathers. But gender differences with respect to contact with or use of legal services evened out considerably in the post-reform sample.

**Table 3.18 Types of services contacted or used during or after separation, fathers and mothers, pre- and post-reform**

	Pre-reform			Post-reform		
	Fathers	Mothers	All	Fathers	Mothers	All
	%			%		
Counselling, mediation or dispute resolution service <sup>a</sup>	68.6	65.7	67.1	75.4	71.3	73.3
Lawyer	75.0	72.6	73.8	66.7	66.9	66.8
The courts	40.7	40.0	40.3	29.2	29.2	29.2
Legal service (advice line, private or legal aid)	37.8	53.0	45.5	26.0	31.7	28.9
Domestic violence service	4.8	17.3	11.1	6.0	21.9	14.2
Child Support Agency	1.6	3.6	2.6	1.2	2.3	1.7
Centrelink	0.4	4.2	2.3	0.6	2.3	1.4
Police	0.9	2.0	1.5	0.9	1.9	1.4
Other	4.3	6.7	5.5	4.8	5.3	5.1
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>1,605</b>	<b>3,479</b>	<b>3,640</b>	<b>7,119</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Includes parents in the "other" category who said they went to a counsellor, psychologist or mental health professional (less than 2%). Multiple responses were allowed and therefore percentages sum to more than 100%.

Source: LSSF W1 2008 and LBS 2009

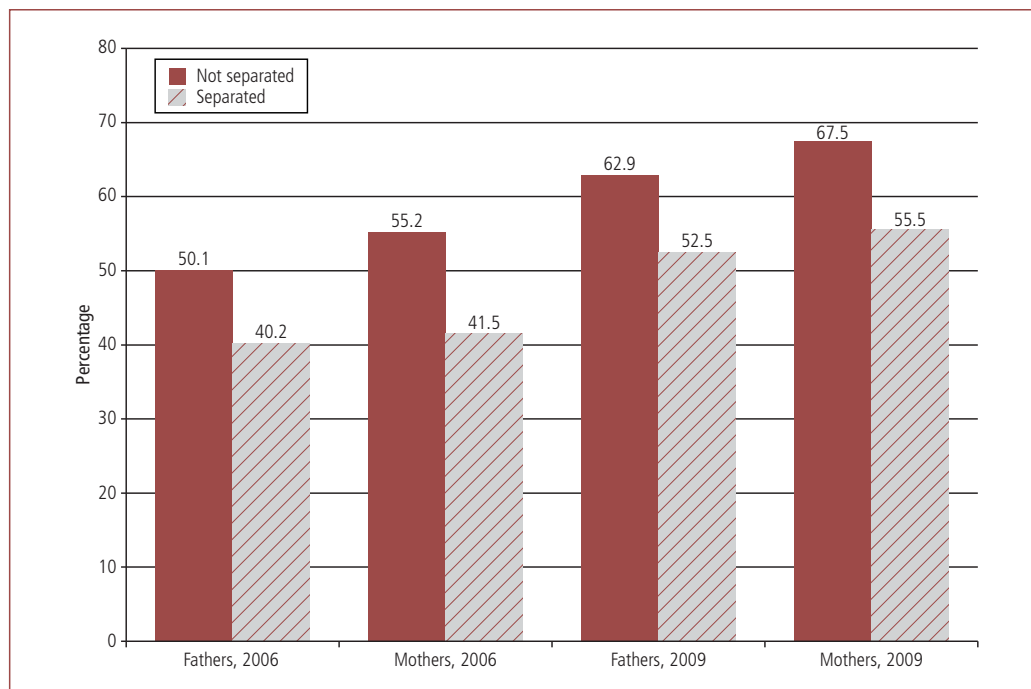
Post-reform separated parents who contacted or used services were somewhat more likely to nominate counselling, mediation and dispute resolution and somewhat less likely to mention lawyers than their pre-reform counterparts. While substantial proportions in both groups contacted or used courts and legal services, pre-reform separated parents were considerably more likely to do so than their post-reform counterparts.

These data point in the direction of addressing policy objective 3 (2007 Evaluation Framework, Appendix B). Some caution needs to be exercised in making such a claim, however, as the differential service use might to some extent reflect the differing amounts of time that had passed. It might be, for example, that as time passes, the more difficult and entrenched cases increasingly "drift" towards legal services and courts.

17 In the LSSF W1 2008, use of services was derived from the questions described in footnote 16. In the LBS 2009, respondents were first asked: "At the time of, or after your separation in [year], did you contact any of the following: [list of services]?" Second: "Now, I'd like to ask a few questions about some of the things that you might have used to sort out the parenting arrangements for [focus child] in [year]. Which of the following best describes how you mainly decided on the arrangements? Was it through: [list of main pathways]?" Third: "Just to check, when you were deciding the parenting arrangements for [focus child], did you and [focus parent] attempt some form of mediation or dispute resolution?"

### 3.3.6 Parental expectations concerning use of lawyers regarding separation

Figure 3.1 shows that there was an increase between 2006 and 2009 in the proportion of parents (separated and not separated) agreeing that it was important to consult a lawyer if thinking of separating. However, separated parents in each survey were less likely than non-separated parents to endorse the statement.<sup>18</sup>



Source: GPPS 2006 and 2009

**Figure 3.1** Agreement with the statement: “If you are thinking of separating, it is important to consult a lawyer”, by separation status, fathers and mothers, 2006 and 2009.

The increase in the proportion of parents saying that it was important to consult a lawyer is not consistent with the decrease in the proportion of separating parents who actually used lawyers (based on analysis of data from the LSSF W1 2008 and the LSB 2009 (Table 3.18)). When attempting to reconcile these apparently conflicting findings, it is important to keep in mind that the question in the GPPS surveys was about what the respondent *thought* they would do and the responses are therefore hypothetical. In addition, uncertainties surrounding the precise nature of the changes in legislation that were encouraging parents to make use of non-legal services, may have led many of those who were asked the question to suggest that they would probably need to seek legal advice in order to be clear about these changes. Media attention around issues such as the “shared parenting presumption” (as it was frequently portrayed) may have further added to the uncertainty. Furthermore, as noted above, the lower apparent use of lawyers among the post-reform sample compared with the pre-reform sample may have resulted from their shorter interval between separation and interview.

## 3.4 Staff assessments of their service’s operation

This section provides information on the assessment by FRSP staff of a range of aspects of the service in which they work. This information was collected as part of the Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Parents in both the GPPS 2006 and GPPS 2009 were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement: “If you are thinking of separating, it is important to consult a lawyer”. Response options were: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “mixed feelings”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”. A few respondents (1–3% in each survey) volunteered that they were too uncertain to answer this question. These responses have been combined with expressions of “mixed feelings”.

More particularly, some of the issues considered are the service professionals' views about:

- the accessibility of their service; and
- the operational aspects of their service, including whether:
  - their service helps clients in conflict to reduce or overcome their problems;
  - the service successfully engages men;
  - the intake process is effective in identifying the needs of clients;
  - staff have the skills required to meet clients' needs;
  - limited resources restrict their service's capacity to meet the needs of clients; and
  - the waiting list is too long.

### 3.4.1 Accessibility of FRSP services

Table 3.19 summarises data on service professionals' views about various dimensions of the accessibility of their services. A requirement of FRCs is that they be accessible by public transport. A large majority of relevant service professionals—especially those in FRCs—agreed or strongly agreed that their services were accessible by public transport. A substantial majority of staff thought that opening times were adequate, and even larger majorities (ranging from 88% for EIS to 98% for FRCs) rated the fee structures as being appropriate. The high level of agreement by FRC staff with the statement that the fee structure for the service makes it affordable for most clients is almost certainly a reflection of the fact that FRCs offer three free hours of dispute resolution and other services for clients. Fewer respondents (though still a substantial majority) were prepared to give a good rating to parking facilities for FRCs and EIS.

**Table 3.19 Agreement (agree or strongly agree) with statements about the accessibility of their service, service professionals' perceptions, by type of service, 2009**

	FRCs	FRAL	All EIS	All PSS	All services
	%				
This service is easily accessed by public transport. <sup>a</sup>	94.7	–	82.9	81.1	86.3
There is adequate parking at this service. <sup>a</sup>	68.1	–	70.4	81.3	72.4
The fee structure for the service makes it affordable for most clients. <sup>a</sup>	98.4	–	88.2	92.4	92.6
The hours of operation of the service are appropriate for the target client/caller groups.	94.0	88.9	83.5	81.8	86.6
Adequate outreach is provided by the service for the target client groups. <sup>a</sup>	78.4	–	63.1	56.9	66.9
There has been sufficient advertising and promotion of this service.	68.8	59.3	63.4	59.0	63.6
There are language barriers for some groups in the catchment area to use this service.	50.0	65.4	45.8	41.1	47.9
There are cultural barriers for some groups in the catchment area to use this service.	65.5	63.0	53.5	48.9	56.8
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>854</b>

Notes: The response categories were: "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree", "can't say/don't know" and "not applicable". "Strongly agree" and "agree" categories are reported together. The sample size differs between items because of exclusion of cases with "not applicable" responses and missing information for individual items. Percentages exclude "not applicable" responses and missing data. <sup>a</sup> FRAL respondents were not asked to respond to this statement.

Source: Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009

Relatively high numbers of FRC staff agreed or strongly agreed that outreach was being provided to the target groups. Smaller majorities in other services may reflect differing priorities and different service models with regard to this aspect of service delivery.

Language and cultural barriers were seen to be a problem by large minorities or small majorities of staff. This is likely to reflect the reality that many services are simply unable to cover the range of languages in their area except through interpreter services, which is inevitably a compromise.

### 3.4.2 Operational aspects of FRSP service delivery

Table 3.20 reports on service professionals' assessments of a range of operational aspects of service delivery: helping clients in conflict to significantly reduce or overcome their problems, engaging men, having an effective intake, and having an appropriate skill base.

A high proportion of service professionals provided a positive rating of the operational aspects of the service delivery in the service for which they work. Waiting lists and limited resources were a particular concern for staff in some FRCs and PSS. Generally, staff pointed out that the effectiveness of the service they offered could be significantly blunted if clients had to wait weeks and sometimes months before they were able to access help. Limited resources were also of concern to a large minority of EIS.

**Table 3.20 Agreement (agree or strongly agree) with statements about operational aspects of service delivery, service professionals' perceptions, by types of service, 2009**

	FRCs	FRAL	All EIS	All PSS	All services
	%				
This service helps clients in conflict to significantly reduce or overcome their problems. <sup>a</sup>	92.3	81.1	95.7	92.9	92.7
This service successfully engages men.	97.5	92.5	92.8	93.6	94.4
The intake process at this service is effective in identifying the needs of clients. <sup>b</sup>	98.0	–	91.9	94.7	94.5
The staff at this service have the skills required to meet clients' needs.	97.5	91.4	97.3	98.4	97.0
Limited resources at this service restrict our capacity to meet the needs of clients.	43.8	24.7	45.0	55.7	45.1
The waiting list at this service is too long. <sup>b</sup>	40.2	–	27.3	42.3	35.1
Number of respondents	248	81	335	190	854

Notes: The response categories were: "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree", "can't say/don't know" and "not applicable". "Strongly agree" and "agree" categories are reported together. Percentages exclude "not applicable" responses and missing data. The sample size differs between items because of exclusion of cases with "not applicable" responses and missing information for individual items. With the exception of the items detailed below (<sup>a</sup> & <sup>b</sup>), the exclusion for most items is less than 3%. <sup>a</sup> The highest proportion of missing cases occurred from FRAL respondents (8.6%) about their ability to help clients reduce or overcome their problems. <sup>b</sup> FRAL respondents were not asked this statement.

Source: Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009

### 3.4.3 Effectiveness of FRSP service delivery

Table 3.21 considers service professionals' views on how their service meets key aspects of service delivery referred to in the policy objectives. Generally speaking, positive responses were made by a large majority of staff with respect to almost all aspects of service delivery. The highest percentage of positive responses came from the early intervention services, the main focus of which is on the prevention of relationship breakdown. FRAL's relatively low rate of "favourable" responses for some issues and possible concerns with respect to strategies to increase father engagement may simply reflect the fact that the brief of the majority of FRAL workers, other than those providing TDRS, is essentially one of information provision and referral. The qualitative data derived from the Qualitative Study of FRSP Staff 2007–08 and 2009, suggest that FRAL workers felt comfortable with respect to their interpersonal engagement with men.

**Table 3.21 Agreement (agree or strongly agree) that service can meet different aspects of service delivery, service professionals' perceptions, by type of service, 2009**

	FRCs	FRAL	All EIS	All PSS	All services
	%				
This service employs specific strategies to increase father engagement in the service. <sup>a</sup>	74.2	54.1	81.0	77.2	75.6
This service is child-focused.	97.9	96.3	94.1	98.9	96.5
Clients have unrealistic expectations about how this service can assist them.	56.1	61.7	32.1	59.0	47.9
This service is able to assist clients seeking a reconciliation after separation. <sup>b</sup>	76.6	74.3	85.8	73.9	79.4
This service assists clients to improve their parenting skills.	89.2	76.0	97.2	94.5	92.4
This service assists clients to improve their relationships with extended family members. <sup>c</sup>	73.9	76.0	93.5	80.7	83.7
This service assists clients to improve their relationship with their partners. <sup>c</sup>	70.7	72.6	97.8	75.5	83.4
This service assists clients to improve their relationship with their former partners.	90.3	81.8	90.4	91.3	89.7
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>854</b>

Notes: The response categories were: "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree", "can't say/don't know" and "not applicable". "Strongly agree" and "agree" categories are combined in this table. Percentages exclude "not applicable" responses and missing data. The highest proportion of missing cases was for All PSS respondents (25%) for cases where clients were seeking a reconciliation after separation.

Source: Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009

A majority of staff members in all services except the early intervention services felt that clients had unrealistic expectations about the help their service could provide. The fact that the main work of these services covers post-separation issues may account for this observation. Yet despite this perception, there was strong endorsement among EIS respondents for the services' capacity to assist in issues that have an impact on separation—relationships with former partners, parenting skills and remaining child-focused.

Table 3.22 provides information on the views of FRSP staff about their service's capacity to work effectively with differing types of clients. The table shows the proportion of staff members who assessed their service's capacity in this area as "excellent" or "good". The families with whom respondents were least likely to feel confident in engaging were those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous backgrounds, and for FRAL in particular, people with a disability. In addition, a relatively low proportion of respondents expressed confidence about working with clients from rural or remote areas and those with mental health issues. Relatively high percentages felt they had the capacity to work well with a range of family types and situations that might have traditionally been thought of as potentially challenging (such as same-sex couples and families who reported violence or child abuse). For almost every family type, FRAL staff members were less likely to rate their skill levels as highly as those in the other services.

### 3.5 Family relationship services and Indigenous clients

Providing appropriate services to Indigenous people has been identified as one of the priorities for the FRSP (FaCSIA, 2006). Various strategies have been used to promote the use of family relationship services by Indigenous families. These include outreach programs in remote areas, the employment of Indigenous advisors and practitioners within services and the development of programs within services that are specifically framed around the needs of local Indigenous communities (Armstrong, 2009, FaCSIA, 2007). Similar strategies have been employed in the courts

**Table 3.22 Positive rating (good or excellent) of service's capacity to work well with different types of clients, service professionals' perceptions, by type of service, 2009**

	FRCs	FRAL	All EIS	All PSS
	%			
Carers of people with a disability	56.3	40.3	65.0	66.7
Indigenous families	59.3	46.9	56.0	63.1
CALD families	62.9	38.3	53.6	59.6
People with a disability	66.7	46.3	62.0	69.7
Clients/callers from rural or remote areas	69.7	61.7	66.3	58.7
Low-income earners	98.3	86.4	88.8	91.4
Same-sex couples/families	84.9	69.1	81.8	85.1
Families experiencing child abuse and/or neglect	85.2	79.0	85.1	87.4
Families experiencing family violence	91.8	82.7	87.7	91.3
Men/fathers	92.5	87.7	89.0	93.6
Grandparents	86.6	87.7	84.3	88.7
Step-parents	74.0	85.2	88.2	87.4
Clients with mental health issues	69.9	61.7	68.1	73.2
Women/mothers	97.5	92.6	90.5	95.7
Children	91.9	74.1	83.0	91.7
Adolescents	80.9	74.1	76.5	83.4
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>190</b>

Notes: The response categories were: "excellent", "good", "average", "poor", "very poor", "can't say/don't know" and "not applicable". "Good" and "excellent" categories are reported together. Percentages exclude "not applicable" responses and missing data.

Source: Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009

around Indigenous engagement (Akee, 2006; Family Court of Australia & Federal Magistrates Court, n.d.; Ralph, 2006).

This section considers the progress that has been made during the course of the evaluation of family relationship service delivery for Indigenous clients, using data from the:

- FRSP Online database 2006–09;
- Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009; and
- Qualitative Study of FRSP Staff 2007–08 and 2009.

The section begins with an overview of the extent to which Indigenous people have made use of FRSP services and then focuses on service professionals' views about the factors that affect Indigenous clients' use of their services.

While the data presented in this section provide some information on the use of the family law system by Indigenous Australians, it is important to recognise that the numbers of Indigenous respondents in the surveys is often too small to allow detailed analyses of Indigenous people's experiences of the family law system.

### 3.5.1 Change in use of FRSP services by Indigenous clients

Section 3.1.1 outlined the proportion of all clients in each of the EIS and PSS types who were Indigenous. The present section, on the other hand, provides information on the extent to which the proportion of FRSP clients who were Indigenous changed over the period 2006–07 to 2008–09.<sup>19</sup> Table 3.23 shows that the proportion of registered FRSP Online clients aged 15 years or over who identified as being of Indigenous origin increased slightly for all service types

<sup>19</sup> This information is derived from FRSP Online administrative data. In order to determine whether a client was of Indigenous origin, they were identified on the database as being from either an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background or both. The data presented here are based on registered clients aged 15 years or over.

between 2006–07 and 2008–09, with the exception of FRCs, where the proportion of clients who were Indigenous remained relatively constant across the three years. Over the period investigated, the number of Indigenous people using FRSP services increased by 3,047, from 2,259 in 2006–07 to 5,306 in 2008–09.

As discussed in Section 3.1.1, larger proportions of Indigenous clients were recorded as making use of MFRS and SFVS (8% for both in 2008–09) than other service types. This trend was consistent across the three years of the evaluation. These services also experienced a much greater increase in use by Indigenous clients compared to other services.

**Table 3.23 Proportion of FRSP clients identifying as being Indigenous, by type of service, registered clients aged 15 years or over, 2006–07 to 2008–09**

	EIS				PSS			
	SFVS	MFRS	Counselling	EDST	FRC	FDR	CCS	POP
	%				%			
2006–07	4.4	5.4	1.5	1.4	2.9	1.4	3.6	1.2
2007–08	6.7	5.8	2.2	2.4	2.6	1.9	3.6	1.6
2008–09	7.7	8.0	2.6	3.0	3.0	1.8	3.9	2.0

Notes: FDR includes RFDR clients. Registered clients without complete data (due to database mismatches) are excluded from this table.

Source: FRSP Online database

### 3.5.2 FRSP professionals' capacity to work with Indigenous families

As discussed in Section 3.4.3, service professionals who participated in the Online Survey of FRSP Staff 2009 were asked to assess their service's ability to work with Indigenous families. While close to half or more assessed their service's capacity to work with Indigenous clients as good or excellent, respondents were more inclined to provide favourable assessments regarding other groups (Table 3.22). Fifty-six per cent of EIS professionals 63% of PSS professionals and believed they had good or excellent capacity to work with Indigenous families. This view was expressed by 59% of FRC professionals and 47% of FRAL professionals.

### 3.5.3 FRSP professionals' engagement of Indigenous clients

Data from the Qualitative Study of FRSP Staff 2007–08 and 2009 suggest that many services have been actively working to engage Indigenous clients with their services since the reforms. This was particularly the case for FRCs and other new services. Service professionals interviewed for these qualitative studies described a variety of approaches to engaging Indigenous clients, from inviting Indigenous community leaders to be part of their reference groups and hiring Indigenous advisors and practitioners, to visiting remote Indigenous communities in order to provide outreach services. Active engagement of Indigenous clients was most frequently described by those in services that had received funding for Indigenous outreach and workers.

Perhaps reflecting the relatively small increase in the proportions of clients attending FRSP services, most service professionals spoke of the engagement of Indigenous clients as being a slow process that could not be hurried along or forced. While many of the 2009 interviewees felt that progress had been made in engaging ATSI clients with their service, they believed that there was still much work to be done and that time was needed for trust to develop.

In order to promote the use of their services among Indigenous communities, service professionals consistently spoke of the importance of spending time finding out what support their local Indigenous community may need rather than imposing their own ideas. This approach was not just based on a sense of what is "right", but was also strongly seen as the only approach that works:

We're finding that at the moment for us, we're working on disseminating information, rather than ... well, getting our name out there rather than pushing the service as such,

so that our community is starting to know more about us and starting to be more comfortable about what we do. (FRC manager, 2009)

It's all around relationship stuff, but I guess what's happened in the past, and what's going to have to happen in the future is just building up that rapport with those communities, and putting it back on them to let them tell us how they'd like us to work. (FRC Indigenous advisor, 2007)

According to several participants in the qualitative studies, a significant barrier to Indigenous clients' involvement, particularly in post-separation services, is the perceived lack of relevance of the family law system by much of the Indigenous community:

I mean, I think it's great to try and keep the dispute out of court, but I think it's largely irrelevant for Aboriginal people, particularly in some communities where surviving life itself is a priority. (FRC manager, 2009)

Conventional approaches to FDR were not seen as being particularly relevant to some Indigenous people, where ideas about family and the responsibility for the care of children are quite different from those assumed within conventional FDR processes:

Aboriginal people's uptake of FDR services is generally less than non-Indigenous people. I always say this quote: "An FDR practitioner was talking to an older Aboriginal man in [a remote area], and the man said to him, 'I didn't get married in a whitefella way, why would I get divorced in a whitefella way?'" I think that sums up lots of Aboriginal people who live in remote areas involvement with the program—that it's not seen as particularly relevant, the FDR service. Again, the conventional family dispute resolution service. (FRC manager, 2009)

Service professionals also reported that family breakdown and family relationships were also seen to be private matters by many members of their local Indigenous communities:

[The perspective of many Indigenous clients is:] "It's family business and we keep it internally and we deal with it ourselves, we don't actually go to other people to ask for help". (FRC manager, 2009)

While employing Indigenous workers was seen as a positive strategy in terms of engaging and working with Indigenous clients, it was also noted by some services that not all Indigenous clients wished to work with an Indigenous worker, particularly in small communities where they may be related:

Some people, even if they don't know [the Indigenous workers], they worry that their business becomes everybody's business ... And to be fair, I mean we get that from other clients as well, you know: small town, worried about who will say what. I mean you've got to de-sensitise people to that ... But yeah, it is interesting because the kind of thing that we're putting Indigenous advisors in place to provide a culturally appropriate service to Indigenous people, and yet Indigenous people choose not to. (FRC senior practitioner, 2009)

The [Indigenous] worker does some work in the counselling program just with everyday clients, whoever walks through the door, and some of our other counsellors and staff also work with Aboriginal clients. We don't just say, "Righteo, Aboriginal client, go stand over there with the Aboriginal worker", but we make them aware that we have that option. Some people select that because we have it. Some people deliberately don't select it ... Some people who see themselves as Aboriginal don't want to access the Aboriginal worker. But then there's a lot of cultural factors in those communities where, you know, just as there are different subgroups, different services are seen to be aligned with different subgroups. (Counselling manager, 2009)

Service professionals also noted that it was important to make sure their practice was appropriate to the needs and sensitivities of Indigenous clients:

We always screen for violence. But the thing is, initially we used the forms that were developed by [name of FRC]. But there was a lot of feedback from Aboriginal clients that they were really inappropriate, that the phrasing was inappropriate, and that they felt it

was intrusive and they just invoked a sense of shame; you know, like, “Is there domestic violence?” So what we do here is, we’ll say, “Are there any concerns for your safety? Are there any concerns for your children’s safety?” So just that reframing stuff ... “Was there ever a time when you felt unsafe?” And again, just the basic [Violence Restraining Order] questions, I mean they’re quite straightforward. (FRC manager, 2009)

In summary, many service professionals reported actively working to engage Indigenous clients with their services. However, they acknowledged that there are potential barriers. There was a strong sense of optimism that, with appropriate strategies such as having culturally appropriate service models and practitioners in place to support the involvement of Indigenous clients in their services, in time these barriers could be overcome. However, a powerful theme from these interviews is that this process cannot be rushed, as attempting to push their way into communities without building trust is likely to result in a loss of engagement in the longer term.

## 3.6 Client satisfaction

This section explores the effectiveness of family relationship services in meeting the needs of families, based on the views of service users, using data from the GPPS 2009. Parents participating in the GPPS 2009 who had used services were asked whether they would recommend the service to others in similar circumstances. The question involved a simple “yes” or “no” response.

### 3.6.1 Recommending services to others

Over 80% of parents whose relationship had never been in trouble and who had used services to support their relationship said that they would recommend the service to others in similar circumstances (Table 3.24).

**Table 3.24 Whether parents who had used the service to support a relationship would recommend the service to others in similar circumstances, fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers		All	
	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents
FRCs	–	26	–	24	84.0	50
Marriage and relationship counsellor	85.9	64	82.7	98	84.0	162
GP or other health professional	82.7	52	84.1	69	83.5	121
Religious leader/elder	86.9	61	92.0	50	89.2	111

Notes: There were too few respondents in the survey who attended a FRC to allow statistically reliable estimates to be produced for fathers and mothers separately.

Source: GPPS 2009

In addition, over 70% of non-separated parents who had used services to help resolve relationship problems said that they would recommend the service to others (Table 3.25). The parents who were most inclined to say that they would recommend the service they used to others were those who had attended marriage guidance or had consulted religious leaders/elders (84%). Those who used an FRC were least likely to indicate that they would recommend this service to others (73%).

While 64–72% of all separated parents who had used services to attempt to resolve relationship problems prior to separation said that they would recommend the service to others (Table 3.26), these proportions were lower than those for parents who used services and remained together (73–89%) (Tables 3.24 and 3.25).

Table 3.27 considers the extent to which separated parents would recommend this same range of services to assist in negotiations after they had separated. FRCs and counsellors were recommended most often, but lawyers and GPs were also frequently recommended.

**Table 3.25 Whether non-separated parents who had used services to resolve relationship problems would recommend the service to others in similar circumstances, fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers		All	
	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents
FRCs	73.3	45	72.8	81	73.0	126
Marriage and relationship counsellor	84.6	143	83.0	224	83.7	367
GP or other health professional	76.5	85	77.7	139	77.2	224
Religious leader/elder	84.2	38	83.3	35	83.8	80

Notes: There were too few respondents in the survey who attended a FRC to allow statistically reliable estimates to be produced for fathers and mothers separately.

Source: GPPS 2009

**Table 3.26 Whether separated parents who used services to resolve problems before separation would recommend the service used to others in similar circumstances, fathers and mothers, 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers		All	
	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents
FRCs	65.0	40	74.4	78	71.2	118
Marriage and relationship counsellor	63.2	87	77.3	167	72.4	254
GP or other health professional	73.0	37	70.7	99	71.3	136
Lawyer	–	19	62.8	43	64.5	62
Religious leader/elder	–	18	70.7	41	64.4	59

Notes: There were too few fathers in the survey who used a lawyer or religious leader/elder to allow statistically reliable estimates to be produced for fathers.

Source: GPPS 2009

**Table 3.27 Whether separated parents who used services post-separation would recommend the service used to others in similar circumstances, mothers and fathers 2009**

	Fathers		Mothers		All	
	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents	%	Number of respondents
FRCs	–	23	83.9	56	82.3	79
Marriage and relationship counsellor	–	19	83.1	59	80.8	78
GP or other health professional	–	14	79.6	49	76.2	63
Lawyer	71.2	73	80.8	130	77.3	203

Notes: There were too few fathers in the survey who used these services (apart from lawyers) to allow statistically reliable estimates to be produced for fathers.

Source: GPPS 2009

### 3.6.2 Effectiveness of service delivery

The Survey of FRSP Clients 2009 asked respondents to rate a range of aspects of their experience with the service they attended. Ratings from which the respondent could choose were: “excellent”, “very good”, “good”, “fair” or “poor”. Respondents could also say that the particular aspect of the service was not applicable to them. Ratings of “excellent”, “very good”, “good” are hence classified as “favourable” ratings. The aspects of the services asked about were the:

- waiting time to get an appointment at the service;
- affordability of the service;
- extent to which everyone was treated fairly (no one took sides);
- ability of the service to provide clients with the help they needed; and
- overall quality of the service.

Table 3.28 indicates that each issue (taken separately) was rated favourably by most respondents across all service types. The proportion of clients rating waiting times favourably was lowest for POPs (62%), FDR services (65%) and FRCs (66%). For other types of services, waiting times were rated favourably by around three-quarters or more of parents, with a highest level of satisfaction being for EDST (89%), SFVS (86%) and MFRS (85%). The waiting times were rated more favourably for the early intervention services than for the post-separation services (with the exception of CCS).

**Table 3.28 Clients' favourable ratings of service delivery, by type of service, 2009**

	PSS				EIS				All services
	FRC	FDR	CCS	POP	SFVS	MFRS	Counselling	EDST	
	%				%				
Waiting time to get an appointment at the service	66.3	64.7	81.6	61.8	86.0	85.2	79.1	88.7	75.6
Affordability of the service	89.4	67.3	86.3	85.1	94.5	85.0	75.6	84.7	81.1
Extent to which everyone was treated fairly (no one took sides)	73.3	72.6	76.7	78.7	91.2	90.2	90.5	97.8	83.9
Ability of the service to provide clients with the help they needed	55.5	53.9	73.0	58.0	80.7	76.7	80.6	88.9	71.0
Overall quality of the service	70.0	67.9	82.7	84.4	91.2	86.3	88.2	94.8	81.6
<b>Number of respondents<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>789</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>3,174</b>

Notes: “Not applicable” responses were excluded in calculating the percentages reported. <sup>a</sup> Number of respondents for each aspect of the service varies depending on percentage of “not applicable” responses. The number of respondents reported here is for the first item above (satisfaction with waiting time).

Source: Survey of FRSP Clients 2009

The service type for which the lowest proportion of clients provided favourable ratings of affordability was FDR (67%), followed by counselling (76%). This probably reflects the fact that FDR and counselling routinely charge for the services provided. Some FRC services are free, including the first 3 hours of FDR, information referral and preparation for FDR.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a very high proportion of clients of the early intervention services considered that these services had treated everyone fairly. The lowest level of agreement that everyone was treated fairly was provided by clients of FDR services and FRCs (73% for each service).

The area in which clients were least satisfied was in the ability of the service to provide them with the help they needed, particularly for post-separation services and particularly for FRCs and FDR services (56% and 54% respectively providing favourable ratings).

While the majority of clients rated the overall quality of the services favourably, FRC and FDR clients were the least satisfied with the overall quality of the service they had attended (70% of FRC clients and 68% of FDR clients provided favourable ratings, compared with 82–94% of clients of other services).

Taken as a whole, these client satisfaction ratings are quite positive, particularly when it is considered that a substantial proportion of clients have mental health issues, substance misuse issues, and/or a highly conflictual relationship with the other parent, or there are violence issues or safety concerns (see Chapter 2), all of which tend to make it more challenging for services to meet the needs of a client.

Table 3.29 summarises clients' ratings of the aspects of their experience with early intervention services for the following groups: (a) mothers with resident children, (b) fathers with resident children, (c) fathers with non-resident children, (d) other women, and (e) other men. Across all the groups, clients rated all aspects of the service delivery favourably. Except in relation to affordability, fathers with non-resident children were a little less inclined to provide favourable ratings, although the majority viewed these issues favourably. The "other men" and "other women" were the most inclined of the five groups to view the service they had used in a favourable light.

**Table 3.29 Clients' favourable ratings of service delivery, by gender and family circumstances, early intervention services, 2009**

	Mother with resident children	Father with resident children	Father with non-resident children	Other women	Other men
	%				
Waiting time to get an appointment at the service	79.4	78.9	75.0	88.7	87.5
Affordability of the service	78.4	76.1	81.6	82.1	83.4
Extent to which everyone was treated fairly (no one took sides)	91.2	92.0	86.7	96.1	94.4
Ability of the service to provide clients with the help they needed	80.9	78.8	72.7	88.2	85.6
Overall quality of the service	89.8	87.6	80.5	93.1	92.7
Number of respondents	598	227	76	460	256

Source: Survey of FRSP Clients 2009

Table 3.30 provides information on clients' ratings of the aspects of their experience with post-separation service for the following groups: (a) mothers with resident children, (b) fathers with resident children, and (c) fathers with non-resident children.<sup>20</sup> Fathers with resident children who used post-separation services were a little less likely to rate each of the aspects of the service delivery favourably than mothers with resident children. Fathers with non-resident children were the least likely to rate the ability of services to meet their needs favourably and to rate waiting time and the overall quality of the service favourably. Nonetheless, two-thirds of these fathers provided a favourable rating of the overall quality of the service. It is clear from this table that waiting time is an issue for a significant minority of clients. It is also clear that, while the overall quality of the service was rated positively by between two-thirds and almost three-quarters of these parents, and fairness was rated positively by an even greater proportion, considerably fewer (between 51% and 60%) felt that the service was able to provide them with the help they needed. This again reflects the complexity and often extended nature of issues faced by many separating families.

<sup>20</sup> There were too few mothers with non-resident children who responded to the Survey of FRSP Clients to allow statistically reliable estimates to be produced for this group.

**Table 3.30 Clients' favourable ratings of service delivery, by gender and family circumstances, post-separation services, 2009**

	Mother with resident children	Father with resident children	Father with non- resident children
	%		
Waiting time to get an appointment at the service	69.2	66.5	61.9
Affordability of the service	83.7	74.8	80.8
Extent to which everyone was treated fairly (no one took sides)	75.6	72.0	70.1
Ability of the service to provide clients with the help they needed	60.1	55.6	51.0
Overall quality of the service	74.0	70.7	66.6
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>786</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>307</b>

Source: Survey of FRSP Clients 2009

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter has addressed the patterns of use and effectiveness of the new and expanded family relationship services, as well as the extent to which service use has altered since the 2006 changes to the family law system. In addition, the chapter also examines what, if any, changes were apparent with respect to separated parents' expectations of consulting a lawyer and the use of family relationship services by Indigenous clients.

The average age of clients using the early intervention services was similar to the average age of those using post-separation services. The main differences in age were that clients at EDST services were somewhat younger and those using counselling services were somewhat older.

For early intervention services, about half the clients for the SFVS were male, about two-fifths of the clients for counselling and EDST services were male and the majority of the MFRS clients were male (81%). For all of the post-separation services, about half the clients were male and half female. There was little difference in the proportion of clients who were born outside of Australia across service types.

The services with the largest number of clients were counselling services (101,214 clients), FRCs (60,199 clients) and EDST (49,593 clients). The services with the smallest number of clients were POPs (8,194 clients) and SFVS (6,906 clients). There was an increase in the number of clients for all FRSP services types over the period 2006–07 to 2008–09. In percentage terms, the increase was greatest for FRCs (336% increase). The growth in the number of clients accessing services was expected given that the number of services increased over the three years (including the FRCs).

Over the same period, the total number of FRAL calls dropped by 17%, although between 2007–08 and 2008–09, the number of TDRS incoming calls rose by 307%. The number of FDR cases handled over this period also increased almost fivefold, although only off a fairly low base of 112 cases in the first year.

The number of inbound calls to Mensline dropped by 20% and the number of answered calls dropped by 5%. On the other hand, the number of outbound calls, including Call Back Service calls, increased by 45%, suggesting a change in the way in which Mensline provides its service.

Clients who attended early intervention services did so for a range of reasons. The majority of clients who attended counselling services did so to sort out relationship problems, but about 18% did so to address personal problems, while 9% used these services to sort out issues around their children post-separation. Most clients attending post-separation services did so mainly to sort out issues about their children after a relationship break-up or separation.

There is significant use of services (a little over 50%) by parents in non-separated families to assist them in resolving problems, but there is less use of services (13%) for the more preventative purpose of supporting relationships in which there had not been problems. Relationship counsellors, and GPs/health professionals feature prominently as service providers for parents in non-separated families. FRCs are also used, as are religious leaders/elders, especially for supporting relationships.

There was also extensive contact with or use of services by parents who separate. Prior to the reforms, the most commonly contacted separation-related services in order of frequency were lawyers, followed by counselling and dispute resolution support, legal services and then the courts. After the 2006 reforms, the most commonly contacted services in order of frequency were counselling and dispute resolution support, followed by lawyers, the courts and then legal services. Contact with courts dropped from 40% pre-reform to 29% post-reform. Following the 2006 changes, however, a greater proportion of parents thought it was important to consult a lawyer if they were thinking of separating. This may reflect the fact that the reforms themselves were new and may also have generated a greater level of legal uncertainty.

These data could be explained by the fact that, as time passes (the pre-reform parents had been separated for considerably longer), the more difficult and entrenched cases increasingly “drift” towards legal services and courts. On the other hand, there is some evidence that fewer post-separation disputes are being seen primarily as legal problems requiring legal interventions, while a greater proportion of disputes are being primarily associated with the resolution of difficulties in managing post-separation relationships.

Though the data cannot be seen as being conclusive at this point, there is a suggestion nonetheless of a modest culture shift with respect to use of services and the courts. This observation is further reinforced by evidence suggesting quite significant increases in the use of FRSP services between 2006 and 2009. The extent to which this represents a true culture shift away from dependence on legal processes will become clearer when the data from Wave 2 of the LSSF are examined.

It is clear that those using family relationship services were much more likely than those not using services to have reported the experience of some form of family violence, mental health problems or drug and alcohol issues, as well as distant, conflicted and even fearful relationships. In addition, service users who had separated were much less likely to report their current inter-parental relationship as being cooperative. In other words, post-separation services appear to be attracting family members who have significant relationship difficulties.

The majority of clients across all services had either one or two presenting needs. The proportion with five or more presenting needs varied from 24% at FRCs to 6% at EDST, reinforcing data reported in Chapter 5 and elsewhere that FRCs seem to be dealing with a proportion of highly complex situations.

Service professionals were generally confident about their capacity to work with different family types. However, language and cultural barriers were seen to be a problem by a considerable number of staff. This is likely to reflect the reality that many services are simply unable to cover the range of languages in their area except through interpreter services. Family relationship service professionals expressed a commitment to working sensitively and effectively with Indigenous clients. Many also emphasised the fact that it necessarily takes time and repeated contacts to earn the trust and confidence of Indigenous clients.

Service professionals rated the capacity of their organisations to deliver relevant services as being generally high, though at the same time, a majority of post-separation professionals felt that clients have unrealistic expectations about how the service can help them.

Satisfaction rates with early intervention services were high on all measures, with large majorities of clients being willing to recommend them to others. Post-separation services were less favourably rated on a number of dimensions, but FRCs and FDR services still attracted overall favourable ratings by a majority of clients.

Most clients who used services to support relationships or resolve the relationship problems would recommend the service to others. The fact that FRCs and GPs/health professionals were endorsed a little less often as services to resolve relationship problems suggests that this is not seen as the main function of these services. FRCs were endorsed most often with respect to assisting in negotiating with the other parent over post-separation children’s matters. On the other hand, the ability of FRCs and FDR services to provide clients with the help they needed was rated lower than other face-to-face FRSP services. This seemingly contradictory finding perhaps reflects the inherent difficulty of the main work being done by these services. In many cases, the problems presented by separated parents in dispute over their children are manifold. And in many cases, the issues confronting these family members and their practitioners do not suggest immediate or simple solutions.