

8 February 2021

**A whole of family approach to youth justice aimed at reducing reoffending
has been given the green light in the ACT with a new pilot program
being launched by OzChild**

OzChild's delivery of Functional Family Therapy is set to begin achieving better outcomes for young Canberran's in the fight to prevent them from entering or becoming further involved the justice system.

The family intervention program has been funded by the ACT Government for six months and was launched in the ACT today by the Minister for Justice Health and Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Emma Davidson.

The Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program works closely with young people and their families and is designed to improve family dynamics, communication and supportiveness while decreasing intense negativity and dysfunctional patterns of behaviour occurring in the young person.

The program works to extend these changes into other areas of the young person's life, including communication and interaction with extended family members, teachers and peers.

"At OzChild we are committed to changing the trajectory of a young person's life, piloting this program in our Nation's Capital shows a real commitment from the ACT Government to support at-risk young people and families through evidence-based interventions," says OzChild Chief Executive Officer, Dr Lisa J. Griffiths.

A first for the ACT, the FFT Youth Justice program will be backed by the organisation's success in delivering FFT in NSW and Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare (FFT-CW) in partnership with Gudan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation in the ACT, as well as experience in delivering a similar program in Victoria (Multisystemic Therapy (MST) in partnership with the Department of Justice and Regulation.

"The ACT Government's commitment to trialling programs like FFT, that are backed by research and demonstrate real and measurable outcomes for young people affirms an intention to not only improve outcomes for young people but deliver positive returns for the whole community," adds Dr Griffiths.

"FFT will address the underlying reasons why a young person is offending and focus on reducing those behaviours by working with the whole family. We anticipate being able to work with 20 families over the duration of the pilot with the hope of extending the program thereafter," says Dee-Ann Brown, OzChild's Assistant Director in the ACT.

Benefits for the young people extend further than just preventing youth justice residential care placements, explains Ms Brown.

“Young people learn to take a strength-based approach to improve communication, work through conflict with their family, improve engagement in their local community, and see a reduction of other services involved in their lives.”

“In Victoria and New South Wales all families who completed full treatment (within OzChild MST and FFT programs) had young people living at home by treatment completion. And 85 per cent of young people were in school or working by program completion.

“In relation to family relationships, 83 per cent of parents (in FFT-CW and FFT) noted that their family relationships were somewhat better, a lot better or very much better than before the program which tells us these programs are not only keeping children and young people safely at home, but significantly improving functioning,” explains Dr Griffiths.

“We are excited and passionate about working with more young people and families in the ACT, we know we have a lot of work to do and we are ready. The intention of this program aligns with our organisational values, and our commitment to improve life outcomes for vulnerable young people,” adds Ms Brown.

-ENDS-

- OzChild Chief Executive Officer, Dr Lisa J. Griffiths is available for interview or comment about the need for greater investment in programs targeted at early intervention and prevention.
- OzChild’s evidence-based programs are achieving significantly positive results for children, young people and families in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and in the ACT. Dr Griffiths is available to discuss the results and outcomes being achieved.
- Dee-Ann Brown, OzChild’s Assistant Director in the ACT is available for interview to discuss the new program and the success of OzChild’s FFT-CW program in the ACT.
- Michelle Van Doorn, National Executive Director of Services at OzChild is available for interview to discuss the programs being delivered and outcomes achieved in the ACT.

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ABOUT OZCHILD

For 170 years OzChild has been committed to delivering quality services which make a real and lasting difference to Australian families to ensure all children and young people are safe, respected and nurtured to reach their full potential.

OzChild is committed to improving the lives of at-risk children, young people and families in our community, through foster and kinship care support and the delivery of evidence-based programs to achieve better outcomes, strengthen and repair relationships to build a brighter future for young Australians.

OzChild is now the largest provider of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs in Australia. Nationally the organisation is delivering multiple evidence-based programs to support children, young people and families, to ensure better outcomes can be achieved.

This includes Treatment Foster Care Oregon, Functional Family Therapy - Child Welfare, Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect, Functional Family Therapy for at risk youth, SafeCare, Multisystemic Therapy for Youth Justice, and Triple P Positive Parenting Program.

About Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare (FFT-CW)

- FFT is a family intervention program that supports young people aged 12-17. It is a strength-based model built on a foundation of acceptance and respect. At its core is a focus on assessment and intervention to address risk and protective factors within and outside of the family that impact the adolescent and his or her adaptive development.
- FFT and FFT-CW (Turner et al., 2017) aim to support the development of positive interactions and behaviours within families to prevent statutory intervention and entry/re-entry into out-of-home care. FFT focuses on adolescents whereas FFT-CW incorporates a developmental focus to meet the needs of children and young people across the entire age range (0-18) (Turner et al., 2017). FFT often accepts families that are motivated to engage in treatment due to the adolescent's problem behaviours. However, with younger children in FFT-CW, it is necessary to implement parent-driven intervention strategies that build an environment in which children can thrive (Turner et al., 2017).

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