

# LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT UPDATE



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

## Update to the Profession May 2021

The Courts acknowledge the tremendous support and positive response to the Lighthouse Project and its objectives to provide better-informed and safe outcomes for families involved in family law proceedings. Those who work with separating couples would be aware that the time of separation can significantly increase the risk of harm, and early risk assessment is critical. Cases involved in the Lighthouse Project receive targeted levels of support and case management that focuses on risk identification and safety, and we encourage you to familiarise yourself with the project.

### Case Study

The case study below outlines a recent case within the Lighthouse Project and how Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) was able to best support this family.

#### *Facts*

The applicant filed an Initiating Application seeking final and interim parenting orders. The parties had previously attended FDR prior to filing and had agreed to an interim parenting plan. The parties had attempted another FDR session. The applicant received an invitation to complete the DOORS Triage screen within 24 hours of filing and completed it promptly. The matter was identified low risk and then referred to the Lighthouse FDR team where, given previous success at reaching an interim parenting plan at FDR and that the parenting plan had been in place for a period of two years, the matter was assessed as suitable for a Court initiated FDR conference.

#### *Outcome*

As the applicant completed the risk screen early, the following occurred:

- Within a week of filing, the parties were invited and attended a Court-initiated FDR conference with a Registrar (the family dispute resolution practitioner) and a Family Counsellor (as a child expert). They provide enormous benefit to the parties in assisting them to make child focused decisions.
- The matter settled on the same day and a final parenting agreement was forwarded to the Court. The Court was satisfied that the Orders that were agreed to by the parties were in the best interests of the children and final orders were made.
- By participating in FDR the matter settled eight days prior to its allocated first Court date, saving the parties and the child not only the emotional toll, but also the costly and time consuming process of pursuing litigation.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Lighthouse Pilot commenced in the Federal Circuit Court of Australia on 7 December 2020 in Adelaide, and in Brisbane and Parramatta on 11 January 2021.

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

- Early risk screening through a secure online platform.
- Early identification and development of safety plans and referrals.
- Assessment, triage and support of cases by a specialised team of judges, family consultants, senior registrars and registrars.



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## Benefits of screening and accessing the Lighthouse Project

- Early and case-specific pathway to resolution – whether by Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) or trial before a judge.
- Intensive case management.
- Referral to health and other support services for clients.

## Project Progress

The Lighthouse Project has now been operational in Adelaide, Brisbane and Parramatta for over four months and we have already seen positive results in how it can assist litigants and enhance the way the Court manages cases. This update provides tangible results and details about how the Pilot is progressing.

## Early Data and Observations

The Project Team is beginning to see more meaningful data come through as matters progress through the case management pathways. There has been an increase in the number of risk screening questionnaires that have been completed by Respondents. Nationally, our early data shows that 43.4% of all risk screens are completed by litigants within 24 hours of being sent the invitation to screen. Another 48.9% are completed between 2-5 days after receiving the invitation to screen. This is encouraging as it demonstrates a proactive approach to screening by litigants and the communication to litigants appears to be quite effective.

Figures at a glance:

- Over 1200 risk screening questionnaires have been sent;
- Over 400 triage interviews have been conducted by Family Counsellors; and
- Over 200 matters are currently in the high risk Evatt List.

## Early feedback

For appropriate cases where parties have screened and their case has been identified as suitable for FDR, early indications show that they have settled on a final basis within three months of filing, and do not require a court date. Furthermore, Senior Registrars are reporting that the Evatt List processes, such as early information gathering and tailored case management, is resulting in matters settling on an interim basis with appropriate orders being made that focus on the safety of the family.

An important feature of the case management of matters in the Evatt List is the focus on gathering information early and intensive and individual case management. Early reports indicate that such features greatly assist the case being settled at an interim basis with safe orders.

*“I appreciate that this is service is available and absolutely see its value in the community”*

Litigant, May 2021

- Tailored case management to suit the needs of each case.
- Referral of cases to a dedicated high-risk court list, known as the Evatt List.

For more information on the Lighthouse Project, visit the Court’s [website](#).



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## Practice Direction No. 3 of 2020 – Lighthouse Project and Evatt List

On Friday, 14 May, the Hon Will Alstergren, Chief Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, amended the FCC Practice Direction for the Lighthouse Project. The amendments include updates to the Family Safety Risk Screening Process section to require a litigant's personal email address and mobile phone number. This change will support the Project's continued efforts to ensure that all litigants are offered an opportunity to screen. All family law practitioners should read this updated Practice Direction, which can be accessed on the Court's [website](#).

## Evaluation

The Project's formal evaluation commenced in early May and you may have received an email inviting you to complete a survey through the evaluators, the Nous Group. We encourage any professional who has been involved with an eligible matter in the Lighthouse Pilot to respond. This feedback is important for us to be able to continually improve our delivery of the Pilot and ensure that it meets the needs of litigants, the legal profession and the Court.

## Where can I get more information?

The Lighthouse Project Team is available to deliver information sessions to your organisation. We have a suite of presentations on:

- The Lighthouse Project – general overview
- Family DOORS Triage – a detailed look at the Family DOORS Triage risk screening process
- The Evatt List – a detail presentation on Evatt List case management
- We can also tailor presentations to suit your organisation and any audience. If you would like to know more contact Elizabeth Evans via [LighthouseProject@federalcircuitcourt.gov.au](mailto:LighthouseProject@federalcircuitcourt.gov.au).

The [Family DOORS Triage risk screening and case management - Information sheet for parties](#) is also available translated into the following languages:

- [العربية | Arabic](#)
- [简体中文 | Chinese Simplified](#)
- [繁體中文 | Chinese Traditional](#)
- [Filipino | Filipino](#)
- [Ελληνικά | Greek](#)
- [हिंदी | Hindi](#)
- [Italiano | Italian](#)
- [ਪੰਜਾਬੀ | Punjabi](#)
- [Türkçe | Turkish](#)
- [Tiếng Việt | Vietnamese](#)