Innovations in the Family Court to help respond to domestic violence

Date : February 4, 2021

One of the positives to arise from 2020 is the implementation of the **Lighthouse Project**, an initiative by the Family Court and Federal Circuit Court that seeks to improve the Court's capacity to respond and assist in the protection of vulnerable parties and children in family law proceedings. Your Domestic Violence lawyer can provide some guidance as to the new project.

In summary, the implementation of the Lighthouse Project arose from a need for the Courts to assist vulnerable victims, including children, to leave an abusive environment quickly and safely.

The Lighthouse Project is being piloted at the Adelaide, Brisbane and Parramatta Courts.

To be eligible for screening, the Initiating Application / Response filed with the Court must only relate to your child/ren. The Application must be filed at one of the three aforementioned Registries.

Once an application or response is filed, you will receive a link to complete a risk screen known as 'the Family DOORS Triage'. This will enable the Court to process and consider information provided by you that is specifically developed for the Courts.

Your domestic violence lawyer can confirm that the information you provide to the Court is confidential, cannot be used as evidence in Court and cannot be requested by another party. Whilst there are very limited exceptions to this rule, the intent is to enable parties to freely and confidently participate in the screening process.

When the Court receives the completed Family DOORS Triage, a specialist team of Registrars, family counsellors and experienced support staff will assess, triage and identify persons who may require support / safety measures. Additionally, your matter will be allocated to one of three avenues:-

1. The Evatt List – reserved for high risk assessments;
2. Usual List – the matter goes through the usual protocol of the Court;
3. Alternative Dispute Resolution – the matter is referred to a mediator in attempt to resolve the matter without the Court's invention, with the aim to avoid incurring substantial legal fees and not risk the prospect of spending approximately three (3) years in Court.

Any participant identified as a high risk candidate for family violence and/or other safety concerns will meet with a Family Counsellor to gather further information. Thereafter, the matter will be referred to the Evatt List.

Domestic Violence Lawyers are able to provide information including that the Evatt List focuses

on early information gathering and intervention through a Judge-led support team that is specialised in working with families where high risk safety issues have been identified. Any matter that is categorised within the Evatt List is designed to resolve the matter expeditiously and safe as possible, anticipating to have the matter ready for Trial within 9 – 12 months.

If you would like to read more about the Lighthouse Project, you can access further information via the Family Court of Australia website on:
http://www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/fcoaweb/family-law-matters/family-violence/lighthouse-project/lighthouse-project

For advice about the family law process in relation to your children, please contact us on 1800 300 170 or email us at famlaw@matthewsfolbigg.com.au

Disclaimer

Family law situations can be complex and sometimes they can involve serious issues. Information outlined is proposed to provide general guidance only. Due to the seriousness of legal matters as well as the uniqueness of your individual situation, professional advice should be sought. For advice, please contact one of our Family Lawyers.