



**ATTORNEY-GENERAL
THE HON PHILIP RUDDOCK MP**

NEWS RELEASE

8 May 2007

HELPING SEPARATED PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

A greater focus on the needs and role of children in situations of family breakdown is a significant feature of additional family law funding announced by the Attorney-General Philip Ruddock in the 2007-08 Budget.

A total of \$55.6 million in additional funding over four years will help separated families and their children. This builds on the initiatives previously implemented by the government to reduce conflict and place a greater emphasis on the needs of children.

\$36.9 million will be used to establish two initiatives in regional Australia.

The first new programme in regional Australia will enable up to 11,000 children from separating families to participate in decisions that impact on them and help them deal with other issues arising from the breakdown of the parent's relationship.

Research and pilot programmes have demonstrated the importance of ensuring that separating parents hear their children's point of view during the separation process. When children are more directly involved, the level of conflict tends to be reduced and parents can achieve more constructive outcomes.

The second initiative is an educational programme in 28 locations that will assist separated parents whose inability to communicate without conflict is affecting their contact with their children. This programme was piloted as "Building Connections" in regional NSW in 2005-06. It will help separated parents to focus on the needs of their children.

\$15 million will assist the Family Court and Federal Magistrates Court to improve access to justice for de facto couples so that property disputes and children's matters can be heard in one court under a nationally consistent regime. \$2.9 million will allow the Family Court of Australia to employ additional Family Consultants and to undertake training in a more child-inclusive approach for relevant matters that are heard by that court. This will provide a stronger focus on children's needs.

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