

***Memorandum of Understanding: Sunshine
Coast Family Law Report Writing Collective***

Gold Standards for Family Reports

The Collective's members are Solicitors and Social Scientists working together toward changing how the Family Law Act and the Courts deal with families who are separating and making plans for the care, welfare and development of children.

In recognition that Family Reports play a pivotal role in decision making within the Court system, the Collective seeks to lift the standard of Report Writing to serve the best interests of children and their families.

The Collective has identified that insufficient funding is the main obstacle to a high standard of Family Report writing, leading to practices among Family Report writers that involve seeing children without including home visits, or in some cases not seeing children at all.

The Collective's goal is to demonstrate that high standard comprehensive Family Reports lead to better outcomes for children and families, ultimately saving ongoing litigation, financial resources of families and adjustment problems in children.

Membership of the Collective is open to Solicitors and Family Report Writers from any discipline who are prepared to adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Family Report Writers who belong to the Collective are members of professional bodies which have Codes of Ethics and a means of investigating complaints. They make their CVs available to solicitors on request.
2. Report Writers work within the limits of their competencies, in accordance with their Professional Codes of Ethics, and include among their competencies knowledge of domestic and family violence and child abuse dynamics.
3. To produce Comprehensive Family Reports, Writers conduct one or more home visits in each place where children live. Writers also visit environments where children will potentially be living. When children usually see a parent in a non-residential setting, the Writer conducts visits in that setting. When these conditions cannot be met, Writers produce instead an Interim Report clearly stating that it is not a Comprehensive Family Report and the reasons why home visits could not be completed.
4. Writers decline assignments that they cannot complete to these standards within the fee structure provided to them, or request additional funding to enable them to meet these standards.
5. Writers remain independent of other professionals who are working with families and are aware of the potential conflicts of interest inherent in working with Solicitors and other professionals for the best interests of children.

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6. Writers seek regular peer or formal supervision in accordance with their professions Code of Ethics/Conduct.
7. Writers are committed to ongoing education and sharing of knowledge about all aspects of the practice of Family Report Writing.
8. Recognizing that reports should be funded according to the number of hours they take to prepare to the standard required, sustainable by the Writer under cross-examination in a court, Writers submit their bills accordingly: itemizing actual time spent in the planning, travelling, interviewing, consulting and writing stages.
9. Solicitors advocate on a case by case basis for Writers to be appropriately paid for their work by seeking supplementary payments when warranted. They also use the information provided to them about the real costs of producing Comprehensive Family Reports to lobby for systemic change.
10. Writers interview children when they have the appropriate training and experience (such as play therapy with young children) or engage appropriately skilled people to assist them.
11. When family members live or spend time in remote locations, Writers negotiate for the means to visit those locations or engage appropriately skilled colleagues to assist with the assessment.
12. Writers enlist help from an appropriate cultural consultant when the family being assessed is from another culture, so that the report produced reflects the norms and values of the family culture.
13. Writers conclude their reports by making recommendations to the Court. When producing an Interim Report because home visits were not completed, the report's recommendations include that a Comprehensive Family Report be undertaken as soon as possible.

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