

# LEARNER GUIDE

## Unit 20 – Referral and Assessment



RSAS Training Strategy Project 2018

# Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS)



A message from  
our CEO, Sally  
Sinclair.

Dear colleague

Welcome to the NESA Remote School Attendance Strategy Training Project. We recognise the importance of the role that you are doing and we are committed to supporting you throughout this role with a range of training offerings.

We appreciate the positive impact of your role within your local community and the opportunities you create every day by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage in school. We also understand that your role will be both rewarding and challenging, and we are confident that the training we are offering will assist you further in your role.

NESA's RSAS Training Strategy Project will involve a blended training approach that includes the following:

- Face-to-face forums with each forum running for three days in your local community
- Online training that will offer short courses that you are able to select
- Individual coaching and mentoring throughout your training
- The option to complete accredited units that will count towards a formal qualification

Our team are here to support you and we are available if you have any questions about this programme or the training you are completing. Our office number is (02) 9119 3090 and our email address is [rsas@nesa.com.au](mailto:rsas@nesa.com.au). We are available Monday – Friday between 9.00-5.00pm (Sydney time) - please feel free to give us a call or pop us a line; we are more than happy to discuss any questions you may have.

We wish you all the best in this important role and we look forward to working with you throughout this project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Sally Sinclair'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sally Sinclair  
CEO

# Referral and Assessment

## Objectives

This unit takes RSAS workers through the process of undertaking an assessment and referring individuals and families to available support in their communities. The unit will assist by helping you with strategies to assess the needs of families in your communities, and how to build your understanding of supports available in your to assist people with particular needs.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the unit, participants will be able to:

- Understand ways of assessing and referring families to support
- Identify the strengths of the RSAS in connecting people with services
- Demonstrate their understanding of the service options in the community
- Practiced skills for assessing and referring families to services

## Resources

The resources provided are a Learner Guide and Workbook.

This Learner Guide provides a resource to support the activities in the Unit Workbook. It is designed to help trainers, RSAS officers and members of the community undertake assessments and referrals.



This icon represents action when an individual task needs to be completed. You will find instructions on how to complete these tasks in the Unit Workbook



This icon represents action when a task is to be completed as a group. You will find instructions on how to complete these tasks in the Unit Workbook

# Part 1: What do we mean by assessments and referrals?

Undertaking assessments and referrals is the process of reviewing an individual or families need, and connecting them with an available service that might assist in addressing that need.

We know that in our work, families can tell us about, or we can observe a range of issues that with support might result in improved outcomes for the community. We also know about a range of supports and services that are available, that often our families aren't aware of. As RSAS workers, we can be the bridge between this need, and available services.

## What is an assessment?

An assessment is the process of gathering information in a range of different ways. The information gathered is then reviewed and considered, with the view of building an understanding of the needs of a person.

## What is a referral?

A referral comes when we take the information we have been presented with in our assessment, and connect someone with the supports that might be available to address that need.

To make a quality referral, we need to have:

- Confidence in our assessment of a person's needs; and
- An understanding of the available services in our community, and how to connect people with them.

## How can RSAS teams support families through assessing their needs and referring them to services?

RSAS staff are in regular contact with families each day. As part of this, you are able to build relationships with families and young people, observe their needs, listening to their stories and offer advice when asked for assistance.

All this engagement provide RSAS workers with valuable information about the needs and support that might be beneficial to a family to help address issues or challenges such as:

- No money for clothes, shoes and lunch
- Illnesses in the family
- Drug and alcohol issues
- Abuse (emotional/psychological; sexual, physical)

- Bullying (at home or school)
- Neglect or abandonment

This is important particularly where those issues might be impacting on their ability to get their kids to school. By using this information, combined with knowledge of the support that is available, you can connect people with the assistance that can contribute to better outcomes.



## Activity 1: Discussion

- Why referrals are important for individuals and families in our communities?
- What role can RSAS teams play in assessing and referring people to supports?
- What are the positive aspects of this?
- What are the challenges?

## Part 2: Undertaking an Assessment

### Making an assessment in RSAS

There are many differing ways that we can undertake an assessment of person. They can be:

- Written tests such as those undertaken in schools; and
- Physical assessments such as those undertaken by doctors.

In RSAS though, we are unlikely to use these forms of structured assessment. Our assessment in RSAS is likely to be based on what we:

- Observe through our daily interactions with families; and
- What we are told in talking with families and children each day.

This daily relationship building provides you with a wealth of information about the challenges faced by children and families. You can use this information, combined with your knowledge of the supports available to connect people with help locally.

Remember, your job is not to be an expert in resolving issues or challenges for people, rather it's to use the skills and knowledge you have to connect the up with experts that may be able to.



### Activity 2: How do we do assessments in our RSAS work?

- What are the ways we could assess the needs of our families in RSAS?
- What are the skills we need in doing so?

## Part 3: Making a Referral & Supports and Assistance

### Identifying supports and assistance

To be able to assist people following an assessment of their needs, we need to understand what the supports are in our community. That is, the organisation and services that we can connect people to that can address their specific requirements.

This would include those that are in the community permanently, or those services and supports that are visiting services. Services and supports could include:

- Health services;
- Drug and alcohol services
- Youth services; and
- School programs

The services mentioned above are only some of the services that could be available. A stakeholder directory is a great way of keeping track of services and supports. It can operate as reference for your team in delivering RSAS. You may already have a directory of local stakeholders in your RSAS team that you draw on to do your work. Or you may want to develop one that can be used by your team when particular issues come to hand.



### Activity 3: Developing our Stakeholder Directory

- Take this time to either develop or review your stakeholder directory as a team.
- What services are available currently in community? Are there any services that are not available? Or services that only come to town at certain times/dates?
- Do you know representative from each service?
- If you do not have a contact for a service how might you go about making a contact?

## Connecting people with help

Once you've identified the potential support for an individual or family, it's important to consider how you will approach connecting that person to that service. As with any work undertaken through RSAS, all engagement with our support must be voluntary.

Your knowledge of the individual or family will be critical to understand the best way to approach the subject of a referral to a service. Sometimes individuals and families will be open to receiving help and assistance from outside, and sometimes they may not be. You will need to use your judgement in determining what is the best approach based on what you know about each individual circumstance.

Some questions you may want to consider to give yourself the best way of achieving a positive referral result include:

- **Who:** Who in our team is best placed to have the discussion with the family? This could come down to who has the best relationship, what the issues are at hand.
- **When:** Based on what you know – when is the best time to have a conversation about accessing help? Is morning better than afternoon?
- **Where:** Location can matter. An approach at home might be right for some people, but not work for others. Consider the best place to approach someone about a referral.
- **How:** How you approach your conversation can make all the difference in how successful you are in encouraging someone to seek support outside the home.

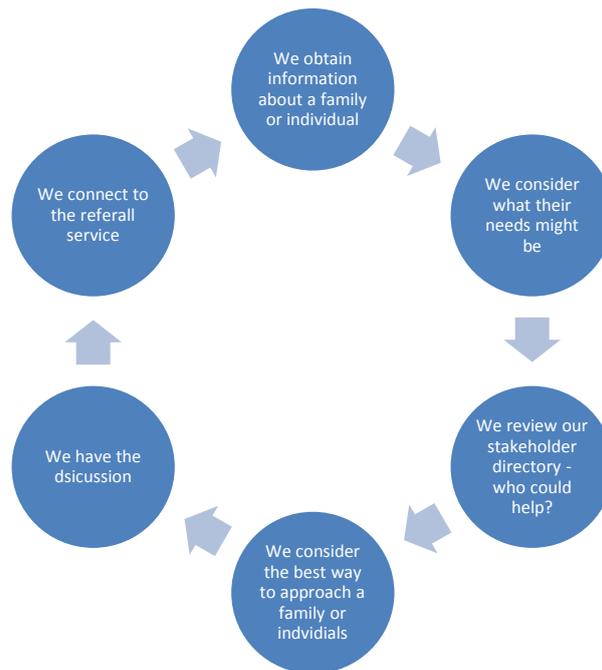
Considering these questions before making your referral will help to improve the likelihood that your advice will be taken on board. It can also help you to consider and manage the risks that may be present.

Another important part of this process is knowing who to contact to make a referral. Developing relationships with the appropriate service (e.g. health worker, social worker, visiting drug and alcohol service) is important. A good relationship with a referral service will help when undertaking a referral. Some ways to approach this may be to have a brief meeting with the service and let them know what you do and find out what their service offers and how they might like to receive referrals. Organising to have a short chat with the service worker every month or so may also be a good way to maintain relationships and keep up to date with the service and any new information they may have about the service. Creating and maintaining relationships with services might be the role of the SAS or senior RSAS representative.

## The Assessment and Referral Process

Putting it all together, the assessment and referral process is a way for us to connect those in our community with supports that we know are available as part of the RSAS teams.

Looking at this with an overview, our process can be described as:





## Activity 4: Interactive Role Play

- Divide into groups of three or four people
- Discuss the case studies
- Based on what the previous materials, role play each of the scenarios and how you might approach each one.
- You might also want to talk about a scenario that's happening in your own community.
- Once the scenarios have been discussed in smaller groups, everyone come back together as one group to discuss & share approaches.

### *Scenario 1*

Mum, Pat and Dad, Teddy are heavy drinkers. They have six children under 15 years. The little kids don't want to go home to the drinking and are now sleeping at other family members' houses. This has put pressure on extended family as there's not enough money to feed more mouths. The 15-year-old, Isaac; a great footy player is starting to drink and has been humbugging to buy grog.

### *Scenario 2*

Students, Jayde 5, Sasha 9 and Dante 11 live with their grandmother. Nan is a heavy gambler. The children can't get to sleep at night because of 'late night' card games. Nan has very little money now to buy food for her 'grannies'. Kids refuse to go to school saying that they are too hungry.

### *Scenario 3*

Tayla is a young mum, with 3 children under 6 years and wants to get away from abusive partner. She is trying hard to get the kids to school but has no support structures.

### *Scenario 4*

The Wilson family is slowly paying off fines and has little to no money for school clothes and shoes. The children are ashamed to go to school because of their clothing. If fines aren't paid soon though, there may be a bench warrant issued for Mum.

### *Scenario 5*

Cassandra, a fourteen-year-old female student has to look after her chronically sick grandmother. Mum is in prison and her dad left home when Cassandra was five. Cassandra is missing school and arriving late when she does attend. Cassandra is tired and obviously not coping. She really likes school and wants to go to boarding school to get away from everything.

### *Scenario 6*

Sheniqua, is a student aged 10 with diagnosed epilepsy. Her mum is a single parent. There are three other children in her care aged 3, 5 and 7. Mum is very tired and not complying with drug regime for her epilepsy. Sheniqua's seizures are increasing and the last occasion lead to physical injury. Sheniqua loves school and teachers ensure she complies with medication whilst on school grounds.

### *Scenario 7*

JB, a fifteen-year-old student has been attending a boarding school. JB attended the local school prior to studying away from home and knows the RSAS team very well. He returns to the

community each school holidays. JB refused to fly to the city for the new term stating that he gets too home sick. However, JB is doing very well in boarding school. Mum and dad don't know how to get JB back to boarding school.

#### *Scenario 8*

Five young boys from 3 different family groups have been sniffing glue and line marker paint. Gossip around town is that they stole the items from a local contractor's ute. Last term all of these students were re-engaged in school. However, this term they have been either suspended or attended for the first period and then left the school premises.

The RSAS staff know all of the families and were involved in re-engaging them back to school last term. The parents do not know what to do next. One dad gave his son a flogging the other night when he returned home at 11:00pm under the influence of glue.

#### *Scenario 9*

Ten families live out at the place they call 'the well', a reserve approximately 15kms out of town. A free bus service picks the kids up in the morning and drops them off after school. Most of the kids used to attend school happily but following the suicide of a teenager in town, the death of a respected elder and the passing of a young mum, the older kids (11 – 15 years) have refused to come to school.

Parents have tried to get them on the bus in the mornings but they refuse to go. Increasingly they swear at their parents and there have been minor scuffles. Now some of the younger kids are refusing to get on the bus. The community has had enough and have asked RSAS staff for help.

#### *Scenario 10*

JT is a 10 year old boy whose attendance at school is patchy. There is some history between JT's family and a few of the kids at school. JT is often seen by himself around community. When he is on the school grounds, you see that some of the other kids are quick to push or call out things to him that result in him being angry and pushing for a fight. His teacher has asked for help to make him more comfortable at school.

#### *Scenario 11*

Amber is 12 years old, and is a good student who attends school most days. She is the eldest of four in her family, and lives with her mother, father and Aunty. Lately, she has become withdrawn, and has stopped turning up to school. There have been quite a few people staying in Amber's house in the previous few months, including Eric who is 21. Talk around school is that he is now Amber's 'boyfriend'. Amber is distressed when this is mentioned, but doesn't want to talk about it.

#### *Scenario 12*

The Williamson and the Rogers families are two of the key family groups in community. The families have a difficult history, which stems back many years. Jesse and Rose in the RSAS team have connections to each family group respectively. Two of the families are currently not speaking. This flares up at school, with two of the children from each family getting into a fight a lunchtime. This is starting to have an impact on school attendance and there is tension in the RSAS team.



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