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**Information  
for  
Prospective  
Volunteers**

**MARCH 2008**

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## Who we are

Frankston Community Support and Information Centre (FCSIC), formerly known as Frankston Citizens' Advice Bureau, is an accredited Community Information Centre staffed by trained volunteer community workers. It is a community-based support, information and referral service which provides help in a supportive and informal setting. Workers also advise people of the procedures required and where to obtain other appropriate services for everyday living. Our focus is on assisting people become more independent and contributing members of the community.

## What we do

Frankston Community Support and Information Centre receives more than 12,000 enquiries for its services each year and is one of the busiest agencies of its type in Victoria.

As more Frankston residents have become disadvantaged through social and emotional problems, we have become involved in a number of additional services and activities including counselling, crisis support, research and community development. The Centre:

- ❖ Responds to the needs of local residents by offering a range of information and support services, most of which can be provided capably by trained community volunteer workers.
- ❖ Supports local residents by giving practical assistance if they are in a crisis situation after sudden changes in their life circumstances.
- ❖ Contributes to the development of Frankston by working in partnership with other local groups and organisations on community projects, services and activities.
- ❖ Encourages Frankston residents to take interest in community issues and offers them opportunities to become involved.
- ❖ Makes representation to government, other organisations and the community on behalf of individuals and groups whose needs are not being met adequately by current services.

## Committee of Management

FCSIC is independently managed by local residents through an annually elected Committee of Management consisting of community representatives and trained staff. This Committee is responsible for ensuring the agency maintains the Centre's policies and standards. FCSIC has appointed a Manager to administer day-to-day operations and a Co-ordinator of Volunteers who supports the volunteer community workers. The Centre is an Incorporated body, produces an Annual Report and holds an AGM in October each year.

## Hours of Operation

The Centre is open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday between 9:00 am — 4:00 pm and Thursday 1:00 pm — 4:00 pm. It is closed to the public each Thursday morning, but open to administration volunteers who enter data and record statistics, perform computer maintenance tasks and maintain the databases.

## The Client's Right To Decide

It is not the function of the FCSIC staff to make decisions for the client. The role of the Centre is to present as many options as possible to the client and to explain the likely outcome of each option so that the client can make an informed decision. The Centre advises on the procedures that may be necessary to enable clients to achieve their goals and obtain services.

## Skills Required

Volunteers require a range of skills and a familiarity with information resources. Depending on your job role in the Centre, you will require some of the following skills in addition to using your common sense:

- ❖ Crisis Intervention Skills
- ❖ Interviewing Skills
- ❖ Information Assessment Skills
- ❖ Community Work Skills

## Your Own Knowledge

Your own knowledge of the locality and current issues is essential. You will build up a picture of local resources from searching for information and talking to clients, but information must not be given to a client based solely on personal knowledge. The Centre's information resources must be referred to at every enquiry to ensure that you will be giving accurate and comprehensive information to your client. It is also reassuring to know that there are always up-to-date information files to refer to and that you are not expected to be a 'walking' encyclopaedia.

## Being Part of the Team

This means more than just doing your session(s) each week. It also means:

- ❖ Attending the Centre's scheduled ongoing training sessions
- ❖ Reporting and discussion of problems and issues that arise
- ❖ Being willing, when able, to stand in when another worker is sick or on holiday.
- ❖ Helping out with routine administration.

## Keeping Informed

Be informed about Centre procedures and community information by:

- ❖ Reading the daily diary and noticeboards at the Centre
- ❖ Attending ongoing training sessions
- ❖ Keeping up-to date with resource information
- ❖ Being aware of the current issues in your community
- ❖ Keeping yourself informed of Management Committee decisions

## Co-Workers in the Centre

When you get stuck, there is always someone around to point you in the right direction – the Manager, the Co-ordinator of Volunteers or other experienced workers who are always willing to help. New workers often find it helpful to consult with their co-workers.

## Confidentiality

FCSIC complies with Information and Privacy Principles in the *Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic)*. Staff and volunteers never discuss clients or their problems with anyone outside the Centre, except when the client has given express permission for their enquiry to be referred to another person or agency. Even the fact they have visited FCSIC is confidential.

## Impartiality

The same service is given to all people who come in to the Centre, regardless of their views, background, lifestyle or mode of presentation, and all support and information is given impartially, regardless of the personal views or opinions of individual staff or volunteers.

## Independence

The FCSIC gets some funding from the Federal Government and our local Council. Corporate funding (when available) may be used to fund special projects or staff positions. Funding sources do not influence the policies or practices of the Centre.

## Time Commitment

Centre workers give the following commitment:

- ❖ Rostered shift once a week
- ❖ Time for background reading
- ❖ Scheduled on-going training sessions
- ❖ Additional training, workshops, advanced courses, etc. provided during the year.
- ❖ Social events for staff, e.g. Christmas party, annual BBQ.

## Role of Volunteer Community Workers

The Centre aims to provide people with information, advice and skills so they can be more self sufficient within the community. To do this the Centre has trained volunteer community workers coming from a wide range of social, political, religious, cultural and work backgrounds. Volunteer community workers who have direct contact with the public in a support role must be accredited, which entails successfully completing a training course.

Our workers gain a great deal of satisfaction from providing a valuable service to their community and from the personal development which many experience from their training and working with people from all walks of life. Many volunteers make friendships that last a lifetime from working with a team of people in FCSIC.

After training is completed, a Community Worker is expected to:

- ❖ Interview people who have queries
- ❖ Distribute emergency relief funds
- ❖ Use crisis intervention counselling skills
- ❖ Give practical help
- ❖ Keep records for each inquiry
- ❖ Be part of the Centre team
- ❖ Keep informed on the Centre's procedures and local information
- ❖ Attend on-going training sessions as required by agency policies.

## Community Workers Information Course

Volunteers selected to work with clients in interview situations need to complete a 50 hour accredited Community Workers' Information Course. This training program is designed to develop the skills necessary for an effective Centre worker.

**COMPETENCY CHCCS6B:** Assess and deliver services to clients with complex needs This accredited Community Worker training for Interviewers course must be completed if working in an interview situation with a client. Volunteers are taught skills in interviewing, communication, providing information and basic counselling. Low cost training is available to selected interviewers.

After completing this course volunteers are required to attend ongoing training to update and improve their skills and keep them informed of current issues.

## Role of Administration Volunteers

Volunteers are involved in a number of activities at the Centre as well as, or instead of, interviewing.

These include:

- ❖ Information file development and maintenance
- ❖ Statistics
- ❖ Publicity
- ❖ Management Committee
- ❖ Community Liaison
- ❖ Reception
- ❖ Word-processing
- ❖ Training

Administration workers come from a wide range of social, political, religious, cultural and work backgrounds.

## Services offered by FCSIC

### **Emergency Relief Assistance**

Subject to assessment, the Centre provides emergency relief to Frankston City residents experiencing a financial crisis and unable to pay for essential items. Assistance may be provided in the form of:

- ❖ Food parcels or supermarket food vouchers
- ❖ Essential costs of travel, medication, emergency accommodation or other basic living essentials.

A worker must be sensitive and non-judgmental when assessing the needs of a person requesting emergency relief.

### **Client Advocacy**

Assist residents negotiating with a Government department, financial institution, landlord, etc.

### **Crisis Intervention**

Many professional counselling services in Frankston have long waiting lists and personal crisis needs immediate attention. The Centre's community workers are trained to listen to the client, to allow them to express their feelings, say the things that may be very difficult or impossible to say to friends or family. If ongoing counselling is required, then an appointment can be arranged for them with a professional counsellor.

## **Crisis Support**

Service for those experiencing major problems in their lives who visit or phone the Centre (no appointment necessary) to seek assistance with problems that relate to:

- ❖ Marriage
- ❖ Personal Relationships
- ❖ Children
- ❖ Personal Finances
- ❖ Accommodation
- ❖ Family Violence
- ❖ Victims of Crime

and for any other major problem which may cause distress.

## **Ongoing Counselling**

People with complex personal problems may need volunteers to arrange appointments with professional counsellors.

## **Domestic Violence**

Help for people experiencing physical, verbal or emotional violence or threatened violence.

# **Giving Information**

This means more than just giving someone a leaflet. It means understanding what information is needed, finding the correct information, communicating it to clients in an appropriate manner and ensuring that clients fully understand the information and the processes and procedures necessary to act upon it if they desire.

# **Practical Help**

This can include:

- ❖ Giving food and food vouchers
- ❖ Making phone calls on behalf of clients
- ❖ Assisting with the filling in of forms
- ❖ Writing a letter on the client's behalf or providing assistance in the drafting of a letter
- ❖ Negotiating between a client and another individual or organisation, e.g. an employer, a landlord or the representative of another organisation.
- ❖ Representing a client and advocating his or her interests, e.g. in the areas of consumer complaints, equal opportunity, etc.

## Referrals

The Centre can arrange referrals to support services including:

- ❖ Accountancy Advice
- ❖ Emergency Accommodation
- ❖ Family Counselling
- ❖ Relationship Counselling
- ❖ SE Water

If a person is unsure of what service they require, they can call into the Centre (no appointment necessary), and a trained community worker will undertake an assessment of the person's situation and needs. The worker may then refer the person to a service, or organize an appointment for them.

## Other services offered

If a person is unsure of what service they require, they can call into the Centre, and a trained community worker will undertake an assessment of the person's situation and needs. The worker may then refer the person to a service, or organize an appointment for them.

### Tax Help

Between July and September Australian Taxation Office trained volunteers assist people, disadvantaged by age, disability or income, complete their tax return.

### Community Information

- ❖ The Centre provides up to date information on organisations and activities within Frankston.
- ❖ Budget Counselling
- ❖ Internet Access
- ❖ Support to Victims of Crime

## Information Resources

The Centre keeps and regularly updates information sources including:

- ❖ **Internet [www.frankston.net](http://www.frankston.net):** The Centre's website has links to emergency, health, Government and community information websites. All FCSIC computers connect to the Internet.
- ❖ **Information Files and databases:** The Infocom Resource accesses national, state, regional and local information. Volunteer workers also build databases.

- ❖ **Pamphlets and Information directories:** The Centre produces and updates brochures about services in the local area and keeps a wide range of pamphlets from government departments and other agencies. Information directories supplement the information file with more details or specialised information.

## Other Agencies and Specialists

At times you may have to go outside the resources of the Centre for information and there are many other agencies that can help you. The Centre works with other local specialists, such as relationship and grief counsellors, social workers and financial counsellors. You will learn more details of these arrangements during orientation and probation training periods.

## Assessment of Volunteer Applicants

The Centre has a responsibility to both clients and trainee workers to ensure that only people who are both suited and comfortable with the Centre's work become agency interviewers. As you will appreciate, crisis intervention and interviewing requires specific skills and abilities and some people's talents lie in other areas. We believe that people will gain most satisfaction and be most effective when they are doing work they are suited to. We, therefore, have an assessment process that begins in the initial interview and, if selected, continues through orientation and training to suit the position. There are no written tests. Training and assessments are conducted in English and applicants must possess good written and spoken English skills.

Trainees have the right to discontinue training at any stage if they feel that the Centre's work is not what they expected, or if they feel unsuited to it. We are happy to discuss further possibilities for voluntary work in other areas of the community with anyone who decides to withdraw.

## Application to be a Volunteer

If after reading this booklet you feel you would like to volunteer at the Centre please complete and return the 'Volunteer Application' (on this webpage). You will be contacted by mail.

**As a legal requirement, all staff at this agency are required to undergo a police check. This check is never performed without your consent and conducted in accordance with strict guidelines to ensure confidentiality and equity.**

# Community Information Victoria (CIVic)



The Victorian Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux Inc. was established in 1970 by the existing agencies to act as a co-ordinating and supporting body for member bureaus. In 1998 the name was changed to Community Information Victoria Inc. and supports CABs in the provision of their services.

## **Role of CIVic**

Community Information Victoria (CIVic) is an Association of member agencies that provide community information and support services to their local communities throughout Victoria. It formulates policies and sets standards for the movement, which are ratified by delegates representing all bureaus.

CIVic is committed to assist the member agencies in providing a community information and support service that is free, confidential, impartial, and independent, and respects the rights of individuals and groups to make decisions for themselves.

CIVic provides assistance to the membership in relation to community information, advocacy, policy and program development, research and consultation, development and support of the membership.

## **Aims**

To support the membership in providing services and programs that meet the Standards and Policies of the Association.

The aims of CIVic are achieved by implementing the objectives as set out in the Business Management Plan.

## **Summary**

CIVic respects the rights of the member agencies to decide on the services they will provide, and the diversity of models evolving, as they meet their communities' needs.

CIVic ensures that member agencies use trained Community Information Workers to provide access to community information and support services for their local communities.

CIVic focuses on increasing the capability of agencies, to make them more independent and increasingly supported by their local communities, and other agencies.

Agencies need to be provided with support to utilise specialist Peak Bodies. Each agency and each community in which they operate has differing, often unique, and frequently changing needs.

## Citizens' Advice Bureau History

Victorian Citizens' Advice Bureaus (CABs), now known as Community Information Victoria (CIVic), are based on the British model. Bureaus were set up just before the outbreak of the Second World War to help the population understand and cope with new legislation. When the war ended, the service continued as Citizens' Advice Bureaus to help with post-war problems and further new welfare legislation. Since then the CAB service in Britain has continued to expand and develop to meet community needs. There are now over 1000 CABs in the UK.

In 1960 Senator Marie Breen founded the Victorian CAB movement by initiating the first steps to establish similar community information and referral centres. The Victorian Family Council held a seminar to discuss the need for such a service and, in 1962, a pilot project commenced in the Nunawading Council area. After the success of this project, similar agencies were established in other areas and now Victoria has 64 Citizens' Advice Bureaus with two-thirds in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

## History of the Centre

Frankston Community Support and Information Centre is a neighbourhood service established in 1968 by a group of local residents, initially to provide information and advice about community services. The Centre was one of Victoria's first Citizens' Advice Bureaus and one of the first community services to be established in Frankston.



## Contact details



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