


IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION  
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE

ATTACHMENT AS-6 TO STATEMENT OF ANGELA MAREE SINGH

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This is the attachment marked '**AS-6**' produced and shown to **ANGELA MAREE SINGH** at the time of signing her Statement on 16 July 2015.

Before me: .....

  
An Australian Legal Practitioner within  
the meaning of the Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)

Attachment AS-6



**Victorian Indigenous**  
**FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
**TASK FORCE**

**Final Report**  
December 2003



With the production of this report the Task Force has now finished its role (December 2003).

If you require any further information on the Victorian Indigenous Task Force Final Report, please contact your regional IFV Action Groups through:

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Department for  
Victorian Communities



**Victorian Indigenous  
FAMILY VIOLENCE  
TASK FORCE**

**Final Report**  
December 2003



## KEY VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

1. SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE
2. STRONG COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND POSITIVE ROLE MODELS
3. SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES AND BEING SUPPORTIVE OF EACH OTHER
4. HEALTHY LIFESTYLES BASED ON HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPECT FOR SELF AND OTHERS
5. CULTURAL INTEGRITY/RESPECT AND CULTURAL SAFETY WITHIN INDIGENOUS AND MAINSTREAM SERVICES
6. NO MORE VIOLENCE—IN THE HOME, IN THE FAMILY, IN THE COMMUNITY OR IN THE WORKPLACE



## KEY OUTCOMES

1. FAMILY STRENGTHENING AND PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS
2. SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY BASED APPROACHES AND SOLUTIONS
3. COLLABORATIVE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING BASED ON COMMUNITY DRIVEN PRIORITIES
4. FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE
5. INTEGRATED STRATEGIC PROCESSES WHICH REFLECT AND SUPPORT A 'WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT' PROCESS
6. STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND MAINSTREAM SERVICES
7. STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*"Aboriginal people must accept and take responsibility to stand against the violence and abuse that is tearing our families and communities apart."*

'One of the greatest difficulties one faces in life is to speak up against the 'silence of acceptance' that allows the muted tones of someone who is being violated, abused, raped or belted within an inch of their life to go unheeded.... The **silence** is **deafening**'.

We each have a voice. It is our obligation, responsibility to speak out against abuse and violence to help heal our families, communities and people.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, took up the challenge to raise community awareness and understanding around family violence,

- With trepidation, because we knew in some communities our activities would not be welcomed or supported
- With compassion and humility in being given the gift of sharing the harrowing and painful stories of men, women, Elders, youth and children, who have survived horrific ordeals of violence. That experience left us still feeling the pain
- With anticipation, because individuals, families and our communities are starting to respond by raising the awareness of violence and speaking out against it
- With encouragement to support local communities in their efforts to start leading responses against violence at a local level
- With strength and pride, to ensure this message assists in some way to support the healing of our families and community as a whole

*My heartfelt thanks goes out to every person who came forward to tell your story as you were willing to identify the issues, contribute your concerns, and provide suggestions, ideas and solutions to end violence in all its forms from our homes and community.*

*The Task Force dedicate this report to you.*

We must all commit our efforts to breaking the cycle of violence to allow families to build a better future where we can all live safely and in peace.

To all the people who, with their passion and commitment assisted in raising the awareness of this issue of Indigenous family violence and from an idea, developed the concept of a 'community led' strategy.

From every Indigenous person, family and community across this state.

**THANK YOU AND LET THE HEALING BEGIN!!!**



## FOREWORD

**It is a fact that 1 in 3 Indigenous people are the victim, have a relative who is a victim or witness an act of violence on a daily basis in our communities across Victoria.**

**Data provided to the Task Force by the Victoria Police indicates that an Indigenous person in Victoria is 8 times more likely to be a victim of family violence than a non-Indigenous person. Police data gathered during the same period confirms that 2.9% of Victoria's Indigenous community were victims of family violence compared with 0.55% for non-Indigenous people.**

Aboriginal children are the subject of substantiated child abuse at more than 7 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children. The Department of Human Services advised the Task Force that there had been a 38.7% increase in Indigenous child protection investigations with parental domestic violence characteristics between 1998-99 and 2002-03—from 452 investigations in 1998-99 to 627 investigations in 2002-2003. The Department also confirmed that the number of Indigenous substantiations with parental domestic violence characteristics had increased by 52.7% between 1998-99 and 2002-03 from 300 substantiations to 458 substantiations respectively.

As I write this foreword, I am well aware that somewhere in our community, a woman or child is experiencing violence or being abused right at this moment.

Family violence is an unacceptable practice that must be confronted vigilantly through working in partnership with the Victorian Government and the Indigenous community. The Task Force recognises that family violence cannot be addressed in isolation from a range of other issues that affect Indigenous communities, such as alcohol and substance abuse, youth suicide, social and emotional illness, depression and despair.

Since October, 2001 the Task Force has undertaken the complex and challenging process of confronting family violence issues within our communities.

With the support of the Victorian Government, the Task Force undertook and completed the challenging task of in-depth community consultations at a local, regional and statewide level through the following mechanisms and initiatives:

- Community consultations across the state
- Three day Statewide Indigenous Family Violence Forum
- Focus group workshops targeting specific groups: Elders, children, men, women, young people, same sex couples, etc
- Assisted with the appointment of nine Regional IFV Support Officers and the establishment of nine Regional IFV Actions Groups
- Identifying issues and raising awareness about family violence to Indigenous and mainstream service providers and Government
- Providing funding to enable communities to respond to or address family violence at a local level
- Developing regular responses for Government to consider
- Providing an Interim Report and now—
- A Final Report to Government.

This process has highlighted and illustrates the Victorian Government's acceptance of the need for a 'community led' approach in dealing with Indigenous family violence at a local level in Victoria.

The approach taken has been the right approach—but it comes with challenges.

What is needed now, is to meet the needs of current and future generations of Indigenous women, children and families through long term, environmental, social and economic improvements that develop and strengthen community governance, capacity, confidence, essential services, infrastructure and economic sustainability. Government must balance the immediate safety needs of women and children in communities with the practical reality that change is a long term process.

This report takes us on a journey that acknowledges the Task Force, where we began, what we did, what was done, what we found, what we know and hopefully the path ahead. It also identifies options, recommendations and suggestions to help progress this process and assist our Indigenous communities and Government in their deliberations.



**Daphne Yarram**

History shows us that there have been hundreds and hundreds of community consultations, reviews and research reports completed by Australian Governments and not with the participation of the Indigenous community. These reports highlight the issues, the problems and of course the promises and commitment to set up more programs and services to solve the 'black problem'.

Even today, in the year 2003 more consultations, reviews and reports are being conducted about Indigenous people with recommendations and solutions to support a 'better way of life' for our people.

For far too long these reports have been shelved by Governments, remained tucked away in the offices of bureaucrats and have not seen the 'light of day'.

The Task Force acknowledges this Government has shown commitment to Indigenous affairs under its 'whole of government' Framework document and in that context its commitment to develop a collaborative partnership with the Indigenous community to improve the safety and security of Indigenous women and children.

What is needed now, is the commitment and resolve of all members of the Victorian Indigenous community to confront family violence issues head on and determine for ourselves what solutions are appropriate to reducing and ending the threat of violence within our families and communities.

As Chairperson I would like to thank and acknowledge the commitment, courage and support of all Task Force members in assisting me in bringing this report to fruition.

To our Task Force Secretariat, for their commitment, guidance, untiring efforts and support over the past two years and assistance in completing this Final Report, our many thanks.

Through our collective efforts, we can break the cycle of violence and begin the healing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Yarram". The signature is stylized and cursive.

**Daphne Yarram**

Chairperson

Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force



## KEY STATEMENT

The Task Force believe that opportunities and goodwill already exist for the Victorian Government and the Victorian Indigenous Community to develop a Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy that is community driven, reflects the priorities and issues identified by communities and which empowers Indigenous people to effectively deal with and address family violence occurring in their community.

Using the following eleven principles as a set of minimum standards, the Government is best placed to work with the Community to achieve improved outcomes when both parties:

- 1) Recognise the uniqueness and diversity of Indigenous culture, society and history in Victoria, and promote reconciliation that gives proper recognition and respect to the Indigenous communities and people of Victoria.
- 2) Recognise that from an Indigenous perspective the causes of family violence are located in the history and impacts of white settlement and the structural violence of race relations since then. These factors include:
  - dispossession of land and traditional culture
  - breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal lore
  - racism and vilification
  - economic exclusion and entrenched poverty
  - alcohol and drug abuse
  - the effects of institutionalism and child removal policies
  - inherited grief and trauma
  - the loss of traditional Aboriginal male roles, female roles and status
- 3) Acknowledge that family violence is generally seen as an issue focussed around physical abuse and spousal relationships, in an Indigenous community context, family violence includes a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural and economic abuses that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and communities.
- 4) Recognise that responses to family violence need to build on the strengths of Indigenous families and communities and encompass Indigenous concepts of social, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing.
- 5) Recognise the need to support, empower and enable communities to develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and needs.
- 6) Require that priorities and strategies for the improvement of programs and services be developed and implemented primarily at the local level and agreed with community service providers.
- 7) Recognise that to achieve improved outcomes, there must be whole-of-government coordination and continuing commitment at the highest of levels of government in addressing Indigenous disadvantage and the underlying issues.
- 8) Recognise that to improve outcomes for Indigenous individuals, families and community, community and Government agencies with the responsibility of coordination and delivery of family violence related programs and services work together effectively to develop integrated and culturally appropriate responses.
- 9) Recognise that community organisations must be empowered and have sufficient resources to build the capacity and infrastructure at a local level to deliver effective 'community led' approaches which result in improved and sustainable social justice outcomes.
- 10) Ensure the development and enhancement of program and funding arrangements for the successful implementation of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.
- 11) Ensure the development and delivery of early intervention programs that respond to the underlying causes of family violence and promote strong and healthy persons and families.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### AN INDIGENOUS RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

While it is difficult to document the extent of violence in Indigenous families and communities in Victoria, there is a general consensus that violence is widespread, disproportionately high and on the increase. National research shows that Indigenous women are more likely to die a violent death than non-Indigenous women and are more likely to be the victims of family violence than non-Indigenous women.

Victoria has experienced an alarming 27 percent increase in reports of child abuse involving Indigenous children over the past four years compared to an overall increase of 12 percent over the same period. Figures for 1999-2000 show 2010 child abuse reports involving Aboriginal children. Family violence and substance abuse are the most common reasons for reports involving Indigenous children.<sup>1</sup>

Family violence has been highlighted as an issue of serious concern to Indigenous persons, families and communities in Victoria and throughout Australia for a number of years. It is widely recognised and acknowledged that family violence is adversely affecting the social, cultural, health, emotional and economic wellbeing of Indigenous people, families and communities.

From an Indigenous perspective, the causes of family violence stem from the history and impacts of white settlement and the structural violence of race relations since then. These factors include:

- Dispossession of land, traditional culture;
- Loss of traditional language;
- Breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal lore;
- Racism and vilification;
- Economic exclusion and entrenched poverty;
- Alcohol and drug abuse;
- The effects of institutionalism and child removal policies;
- Inherited grief and trauma; and
- Loss of traditional Aboriginal male and female roles and status.

All of these factors are seen as contributing to high levels of distress within Indigenous communities, which is often demonstrated through destructive behaviours such as substance abuse, self harm and violence against family and others.

From an Indigenous perspective, mainstream models appear to be premised on inequality within a spousal relationship which give rise to a service response of refugees and criminal sanctions that do not fully address the complex fundamental causes of violence in Indigenous communities. In response to the unique historical context in which Indigenous family violence occurs, Indigenous communities have called for a holistic approach to family healing.

In an Indigenous community context, family violence is broader than spousal violence and encompasses a mix of harmful, violent and aggressive behaviours that can occur within families, extended families, kinship networks and communities. Within this context, Government is seen as having a central role in supporting, empowering and enabling communities to examine these issues and develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and need.

Government is also seen to have a role to play in developing an integrated and coordinated 'whole of government' policy and program framework/structure that supports the development and implementation of sustainable, long term, holistic, local, community driven responses. At present the allocation of resources to Indigenous family violence does not appear to match the size of the problem, adequately support community based initiatives or preferred models of service delivery.<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous people in Victoria have a rich and diverse cultural heritage. They, along with other Indigenous groups in the south-east of Australia, have also experienced extensive and damaging impacts of white settlement. In recent years much needed attention has been paid to the links between contemporary disadvantage and the history of colonisation. However, insufficient recognition and attention has been given to the strengths of Victorian Indigenous communities. Much of this strength derives from the central place and importance of family, kin and community in Aboriginal society.

When the Independent Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force was established in October 2001, it was very clear that violence and abuse suffered by so many Indigenous Victorians was on the increase and needed to be given serious attention.

The Task Force anticipate through the formation of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum that Government continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to a 'whole of government' partnership approach that supports the following Task Force key values and principles:

- Safety and security for victims of violence
- Strong community leadership and positive role models
- Shared responsibilities and being supportive of each other
- Healthy lifestyles based on harmonious relationships and respect for self and others
- Cultural integrity/respect and cultural safety within Indigenous and mainstream agencies
- No more violence—in the home, in the family, in the community or in the workplace

that will create the following key outcomes for Victorian Indigenous people at the grass roots level:

- Family strengthening and protection for victims
- Support to implement innovative community based approaches and solutions
- Collaborative planning and decision-making based on community driven priorities
- Financial support to implement long term sustainable solutions to address family violence
- Integrated strategic processes which reflect and support a 'whole of government' process
- Stronger partnerships between Indigenous and mainstream services
- Stronger partnerships with Government

Responses to family violence need to build on the strengths of Indigenous families and communities and encompass Indigenous concepts of social, emotional, cultural and spiritual well being. This involves recognition of how past practices, including dispossession, assimilation and separation of families continues to negatively impact on the present and the development of an approach that addresses this legacy and seeks to heal individuals, families and communities.

In Victoria, family violence remains a sensitive and difficult problem for many within Indigenous communities to raise and discuss. Much of the discussion in this area has been led by non-Indigenous people and often lacks acknowledgment of the ownership of Indigenous issues by Indigenous people.

Ownership by the Indigenous community of the process and outcomes is a crucial element of successful projects. Intervention methods negotiated and owned by stakeholders in one community will rarely prove successful if imposed upon another community by Government. Ownership of projects at all levels is crucial to success, and project time-lines should take into account the lead-time involved in seeding project ownership.<sup>3</sup>

*"If Government give us the right tools and also supports and recognises that Indigenous Victorians must drive this important and significant process in taking this very nasty and destructive issue to the forefront in our community, then we might just save some of our children before its too late"*

Situating family violence as an effect of colonialism provides a platform from which all members of Indigenous communities can address loss and grief issues and take responsibility for current behaviours in a 'no blame' framework.<sup>4</sup>

Given that issues related to family violence remain difficult for many in the Indigenous community, it is doubly important that Government ensures sensitivity and respect when discussing these issues. Similarly, there is a need for acknowledgment of the skills and competence within the Indigenous community to address these issues. Further strengthening the skills and capacity of Indigenous families and communities to address family violence is a cornerstone of the approach outlined in the original Framework document.

The Task Force has seen an overwhelming response from the Indigenous community in relation to speaking out about being involved in the process of raising family violence issues 'up front'. This was evident at the Statewide Indigenous Family Violence Forum held in March 2003 when so many women spoke out publicly regarding how serious the issues were and called on the men in their communities to consider what is happening to their kids on the ground.

*"Our men, in particular our young men, need to listen to their Elders and get the respect back that has been lost for so long. We need our male Elders, uncles, brothers, sons and cousins to take a strong leadership stance to get the cultural values and respect back in place. This is our last chance to save our life lines—our families".*

Since the Forum, the Chairperson of the Task Force was surprised and encouraged by the number of men's groups that have formed over the last six months to tackle the issues of family violence and other issues head on. Also for having the courage and commitment in taking responsibility for getting it right at the grass roots level. Steps taken in this area demonstrated true leadership, as for many years men have not recognised the holistic effects their actions can have on their families.

Although the Task Force commends this approach, it is also recognised that to address family violence in Victorian Indigenous communities a holistic approach needs to be taken towards the development of any future Strategy. That is, entire Indigenous family and community networks need to be involved and empowered to drive the development and participation of Indigenous men, women, young people and Elders in holistic healing.

Intervention programs need to have holistic plans involving the victims, perpetrators, children and family. Ongoing counselling needs to be developed to support Intervention programs for individuals, couples and families. Community members also made strong statements that if a Men's Behaviour Change Program is developed, then everyone needs to participate in the program in all ways.

*"I went to one of those Men's change programs three times in six months. I was embarrassed and felt really shamed. I was alone and had no one there that I knew or could really open up to. When I left, I got angry and then I went home and bashed my woman because it's her fault that I had to go there in the first place".*

These types of programs need to be designed and implemented by firstly acknowledging the post-colonial context of violence but also protects the well-being and safety of women and children.



Wiridamarra Cooperative (Heywood Vic.) noted that now that family violence has been brought out in the open through the formation of men's and women's domestic violence groups, they can hold family camps where previous attempts have collapsed due to hidden agendas and shame about family violence. This was clearly viewed as a major breakthrough in regenerating community self-esteem and allowing the community members to focus their energy on positive outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

There are many other examples of initiatives and projects being undertaken at the grass roots level in Victorian Indigenous communities. The commitment given by Government to these projects must continue to support local Indigenous communities to develop their own solutions, otherwise the momentum generated over the last two years will dissipate into 'thin air'.

This Final Report to the Victorian Government highlights the progress of key milestones achieved by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force over the last two years through the support of:

- the nine Regional IFV Action Groups,
- the Statewide Coordinator;
- the nine Regional IFV Support Officers; and
- the Victorian IFV Working Group

**Section One—Where It Began**, outlines the background, development of the Framework document and the establishment and operations of the Task Force.

**Section Two—The Journey So Far**, outlines what the Task Force developed and implemented over the last two years against key milestones—culturally appropriate mechanisms, partnership approaches, 'community led' strategies and initiatives. This also includes Regional IFV Action Group findings and consultations, the work of the Regional IFV Support Officers, and the findings to come out of the Statewide Forum.

**Section Three—What We Did and What We Found**, outlines what the Task Force found through research, a literature review, community consultations, key milestone activities, Indigenous organisations comments and observations made by Task Force members.

**Section Four—The Path Ahead** outlines the Task Force Action Plan which details recommendations for Government to consider in developing its 'whole of government' response to implement a Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The Path Ahead Action Plan in this Report highlights the recommendations to be actioned through the following five priority areas:

- Safety and Security for Victims of Violence
- Empowerment of Indigenous Communities
- Collaborative Planning and Decision-Making Based on Community Driven Priorities
- Strengthening Service Responses to Indigenous Family Violence
- Stronger Partnerships

The Action Plan Major Headings with suggested areas for action are:

- Service Responses for Victims
- Service Responses for Perpetrators
- New Programs, Activities and Service Responses
- Community Education—Raising Awareness about Family Violence Issues
- Building on and Strengthening Existing Infrastructure
- Activities and Service Responses
- Research Activities

Each of these priority areas for action also identifies the Department, agency and organisation responsible for responding to the Task Force's Action Plan and Recommendations.

**It needs to be highlighted that this Final Report to Government raises priority issues identified by Victorian Indigenous people and communities. The purpose of this Report is not to provide Government with all the answers or solutions but to provide a focus for conversations to be held in the future about what must be considered when developing or implementing strategies and actions to address family violence in Indigenous communities.**

**It is anticipated that the Victorian IFV Working Group in partnership with the Victorian IFV Partnerships Forum, Regional IFV Action Groups and Victorian IFV Support Officers will take lead responsibility for responding to 'community led' solutions over the course of the Strategy.**

*"We live in a democratic, diverse, multicultural society where individual groups have the opportunity to express themselves through their choice of food, clothing, relationship arrangements, religious views and expression, languages, etc. Indigenous people have their own unique set of cultural values, beliefs and customs which must not only be accepted but also acknowledged as being important to shaping the policies and programs implemented by Governments*

*The impact of colonisation on Australia's Indigenous people continues to influence their place in Australian society. State and Commonwealth Governments established 'Aboriginal' Departments and agencies to meet the specific needs of Indigenous people. Indigenous policies and programs have been put in place to address the specific needs of Indigenous people and specific funding allocations have been made to purchase or provide services through Indigenous and mainstream service providers.*

*Governments who engage in conversation with Indigenous people to develop solutions must listen to what they say, otherwise it is a waste of everyone's time "*

## CRITICAL ISSUES

In 1989, the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party stated that domestic (or family) violence, which is frequently associated with alcohol consumption, cannot be attributed to any one cause.

**'Domestic violence has its roots in institutionalisation, incarceration, loss of role, loss of parental and role models, low self esteem, and alienation.'** Members of this Task Force agree and, on the evidence gathered over the past two years, are of the view that this statement still holds true for Victoria's Indigenous communities today.

Task Force members note that at the July 2001 meeting of State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, together with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, agreement was reached to develop a common seven point strategy covering the following:

1. Reducing family violence
2. Child safety and wellbeing
3. Building community capacity
4. Improving the justice system
5. Creating safe places in communities
6. Improving relationships (focusing on perpetrators and those at risk of offending)
7. Promoting shared leadership<sup>6</sup>

The cost to the community (Indigenous and mainstream) to deal with family violence related issues can, on one level, be measured by examining and reviewing the funding allocated by Governments (both directly and indirectly) in the 'societal resource systems' operating in communities. That it is—funds allocated to Courts, the Police and Legal Services; hospitals; public housing authorities; and community based service providers (Indigenous and mainstream). The Task Force recognise that resources are finite and that a challenge faced by all Governments is to maximise outcomes while also receiving value for money.

Similar inquiries conducted nationally, in Western Australia and in Queensland suggest that it is less costly to intervene early to address the effects of abuse and, wherever possible, prevent violence, abuse and neglect from happening in the first instance. At the same time, it is imperative that existing services undergo a transformation to enable them to deliver effective and timely responses to changing client demands. This may include reconfiguring their internal policies, procedures and work practices (including data capture, interrogation, analysis and reporting) as well as upgrading the skills of staff who are given responsibility for responding to the changed needs of clients.

The Task Force acknowledge that the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments are both investing funds directly and indirectly in services, activities and programs designed to meet the specific needs of Indigenous people living in Victoria. They also acknowledge that Government support was provided to establish the Task Force to investigate the nature and extent of family violence occurring in Victoria's Indigenous communities and to provide advice about what short, medium and long term action could be taken to address this very issue.

Victorian Indigenous communities are at a very important cross road. Indigenous people and community leaders have indicated strong support for change and, in some instances, have demanded that it happen now. The Task Force know the path ahead will be difficult and present new challenges for Indigenous people, their families and staff of service providers (Indigenous and mainstream). It will also require trust and support from Government and senior Departmental staff responsible for administering policies, programs and funding allocations.

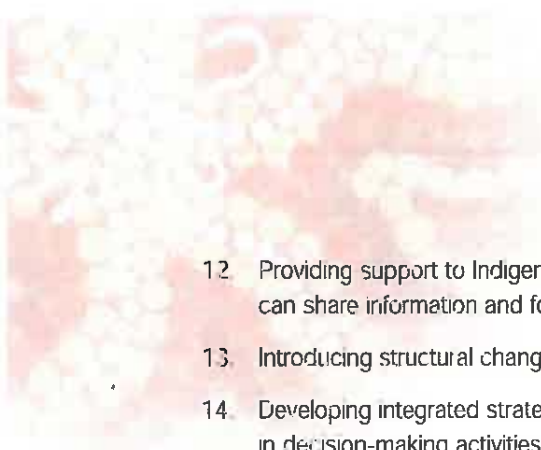
Within this context, the Task Force acknowledge that a number of positive outcomes can be readily achieved by strengthening and building up existing service responses. Before this can happen, however, there needs to be further research undertaken by Government to clearly identify which areas need attention, what the best options are for re-configuring service delivery approaches to address family violence related issues and an analysis of the cost associated with achieving this outcome. The approach taken should focus on the savings that Government will achieve in the long term to put in place early intervention and awareness raising activities in addition to up-skilling staff so they are better placed to deal with issues arising in their communities.

The Task Force are aware that developing solutions to address family violence in Indigenous communities will not be easy in the short, medium or long term without support from Government or members of the Indigenous community. Also, that it is imperative for sustainable responses to be put into place which are owned and driven by communities and create an environment which empowers individuals, families and community groups to take control of their lives by dealing directly with the underlying issues.

The Task Force recognise the importance of changing attitudes about family violence by putting in place actions and strategies to support community awareness and education initiatives. If supported, these activities will create an environment where self healing can occur and, in the longer term, reduce the number of incidences of family violence as attitudes about family violence also change.

In presenting their Final Report to Government the Task Force would like to confirm that key points raised by Indigenous community members, Indigenous workers in services and other key stakeholders have been taken into consideration and contributed to shaping this document. The key points raised include:

1. Safety and security for victims of violence is the number one priority.
2. Confirmation that Indigenous people want to not only identify the priorities but also to drive the process at the local community level.
3. Empowering Indigenous people by ensuring Indigenous participation occurs in all planning and decision-making processes set up by Government—at a central and regional level.
4. Strengthening service responses to Indigenous family violence issues by building the capacity of Indigenous services in a manner which supports sustainability in the long term.
5. Building stronger partnerships with Government and other services to enhance service responses at the local community level.
6. Investing in new services that focus specifically on supporting victims of violent acts—especially those who are most vulnerable and those who are sexually assaulted or abused.
7. Providing service responses for perpetrators to ensure they have opportunities to address their issues in a manner that will lead to fewer family violence incidences in the short, medium and longer term.
8. Providing access to data gathered by service providers and passing this on to Indigenous groups so they can make more informed decisions about what needs to happen in their communities.
9. Developing a marketing strategy that includes access to resources to support local community education and awareness campaigns that seek to change attitudes about family violence.
10. Undertaking research activities which gather up-to-date information about what is happening in specific areas and which can be used to inform decision making about what changes could be made to enhance service responses so they are more culturally secure for Indigenous people.
11. Supporting activities which focus on specific groups within Indigenous communities—such as children, youth, women, men, Elders, people in same sex relationships and staff of Indigenous service providers.

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12. Providing support to Indigenous people to engage in discussions about family violence so they can share information and focus their efforts on implementing 'good practice' processes.
  13. Introducing structural changes to Family Court processes so more support is given to victims.
  14. Developing integrated strategic processes which involve Indigenous representatives participating in decision-making activities that focus on service planning and implementation.
  15. The need to put in place a 10 year plan to address Victorian Indigenous family violence issues as the issues associated with family violence must be built on strong foundations that can sustain themselves for future generations.

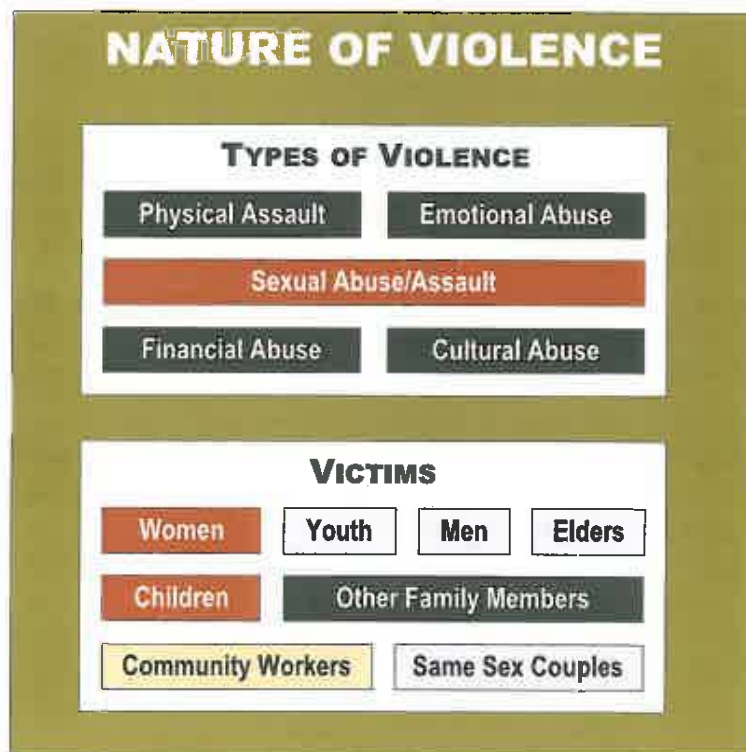
### References

- 1 Commonwealth Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Program 2002
- 2 PADV, 2002
- 3 Literature Review, Family Violence In Victoria, Successworks Pty Ltd, 24 September, 2003, pg. 58
- 4 Literature Review, Successworks Pty Ltd, pg. 58
- 5 Literature Review, Successworks Pty Ltd, pg 59
- 6 Comments made by the Hon Senator Amanda Vanstone in the Forward Section of the "Rekindling Family Relationships—Forum Report", published in August 2001.



# SECTION 1

## WHERE IT BEGAN



## VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence is being increasingly recognised at a state and national level as a problem which is adversely and drastically affecting the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people, families and communities.

At a national level, the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) has endorsed the National Indigenous Family Violence Strategy to support local Indigenous communities to develop holistic and integrated responses to family violence in their communities.

On 3 November, 2000 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a framework to advance Reconciliation which included a special focus on Governments ensuring they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young people including measures to tackle family violence and other symptoms of community dysfunction.

In Victoria, the Women's Safety Strategy is being developed under the *Forward Plan for Women 2000–2003* to provide a 'whole of government' response to violence against women. Four priority areas were identified for 'whole of government' action in 2001, including the development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy will also provide the mechanism for Victoria to meet its commitments to addressing Family Violence under the COAG Communiqué on Reconciliation and the MCATSIA National Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The process is outlined in the attached document '*Framework for the Development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy: A Partnership Approach between Victorian Indigenous Communities and Government*' (at Appendix 1) and includes the establishment of an independent Indigenous Task Force on Family Violence to lead the development of the Strategy.

The Framework for the Development of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy aims to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing in Indigenous families and communities through engaging Indigenous communities in the development of integrated and holistic approaches and responses to Family Violence.

This is a new initiative which aims to develop an Indigenous led strategy to prevent, reduce and respond to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous communities throughout Victoria. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy will be developed through a 'community led' approach that will occur as part of a parallel and complementary 'whole of government' approach.

## FRAMEWORK USED TO DEVELOP A VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE STRATEGY

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Framework provided the mechanism through a 'community led' approach to develop a Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. Consistent with the Victorian Government's policy commitment to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities, it established an independent Indigenous Family Violence Task Force.

The main role of the Task Force was to support, empower and enable Indigenous communities to examine the issues of family violence and to develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and need.

This occurred through community awareness raising, building community capacity, developing an understanding of the definitions of family violence and engaging communities to develop local responses as well as recommending the priorities and solutions the Task Force would include in the Final Report to Government.

The Victorian Government recognised the importance of this innovative approach which allows for immediate responses to Indigenous family violence while at the same time, building community awareness and capacity to formulate its own solutions and develop sustainable long term responses to move ahead in the future.

Furthermore, in establishing the Task Force and internal Government processes to develop the Strategy, the Government in partnership with the Indigenous community will continue to undertake the following to develop a 'whole of government' response for the implementation of a Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy:

- Community involvement, engagement and leadership
- Support for the development of local solutions and partnerships
- Improved coordination and responsiveness across Government
- Increased knowledge and understanding through research, improved monitoring and data collection systems

This Framework document was developed as a way of providing the support and commitment the Indigenous community required to undertake the very difficult and traumatic task of confronting family violence issues head on and determining for themselves, what solutions are appropriate to reducing and ending the threat of violence within Indigenous families and communities.

The Framework also provided the necessary structure and administrative arrangements to ensure Government agencies support Indigenous communities in tackling these issues and in ensuring Government agencies will work together in developing long term responses.



## VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

In the 2002/2003 Victorian Budget a commitment of \$7.6 million over four years and \$1.9 million ongoing was announced to help prevent, reduce and respond to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous communities. To support this commitment Government appointed an Indigenous led Task Force.

Over the last two years (2001-2003) of the Task Force's term, a proportion of this funding supported the role of the Task Force in developing its recommendations and funding priority initiatives at a local community level. In future years, these funds will underpin the ongoing responses determined by the Task Force and local Indigenous communities in addressing the underlying causes of family violence in Victoria.

Development of the Strategy is to occur through three distinct phases of activity:

1. Indigenous community engagement and capacity building, and the development of community responses to family violence.
2. The development of a 'whole of government' response to family violence in Indigenous communities.
3. Implementation and monitoring of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The Task Force was established to develop and implement the activities outlined in Phase One of the Framework document.

The Task Force would like to highlight that the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy aims to address the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous families and communities, which in turn will lead to a decreased level of contact with the:

- child protection;
- juvenile justice; and
- criminal justice system.

It also aims to lead to improved outcomes in health, education and improve life chances for Indigenous children and youth.



## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE TASK FORCE

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force (the Task Force) held its inaugural meeting in October 2001 and was formally launched by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Community Services at a meeting held at Parliament House in May 2002.

Membership of the Task Force includes a range of key Indigenous leaders who have experience and expertise relevant to family violence related Government and community services including the Indigenous members of the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council (the ATSIC Commissioner and the two ATSIC Regional Council Chairpersons).

Current membership of the Task Force is:

- Daphne Yarram (Chairperson)
- Alf Bamblett
- Marion Hansen
- Fay Carter
- Troy Austin
- Lance James
- Karen Bryant
- Tim Chatfield
- Ella Pitt
- Joleen Ryan
- Alan Thorpe

Past members include Barbara Honeysett, Judy Monk, Richie Kennedy and Maryanne Sam.

The Task Force membership was not seen as a representative structure but rather a mechanism for facilitating the participation and input of all Indigenous stakeholders and members of the Aboriginal community in the development of a Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

**The primary role of the Task Force was:**

- 1. To engage Indigenous communities throughout the State in the development of 'community led' strategies for addressing Indigenous family violence issues; and**
- 2. To provide a Final Report to the Victorian Government making recommendations in relation to a culturally appropriate Statewide Strategy for addressing family violence issues in an integrated and holistic manner.**

The work of the Task Force was not about directly addressing family violence with individuals and families but about facilitating a process whereby communities begin to take ownership of the issue of family violence through the establishment of Regional IFV Action Groups.

The work of the Task Force was complemented and supported by a range of community based and Government working groups and initiatives including:

- Regional IFV Action Groups
- Regional IFV Support Officers
- Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund
- A Whole of Government Departmental Working Group
- A Statewide Indigenous Family Violence Forum

Task Force members understand that there are many factors which contribute to the occurrence of family violence incidences in Indigenous communities. Support mechanisms need to be made available to not only meet the needs of family violence victims but to also address the underlying causes (See Section 3).

*"One of the main issues needing attention is to change the perception of Indigenous perpetrators and victims that family violence is an acceptable part of relationships. This issue could be addressed through the development and delivery of specific preventative and education programs and activities".*

## TASK FORCE FRAMEWORK

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) have jointly supported the components of the Framework over the last two years (2001-2003).

AAV has the primary role and responsibility to support the Task Force and the Working Group, including provision of Secretariat support with an Executive Officer to the Task Force and an Executive Officer to the Working Group. AAV is also the fund holder for the Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund (\$2.6 million for four years).

DHS has responsibility for the employment and support of the Statewide Coordinator, the Regional IFV Support Officers, and the establishment of Regional IFV Action Groups for the first 12 months.

A joint Lead Agency Group was developed in October 2001 between AAV and DHS to ensure effective coordination, communication and cooperation between the two 'key arms' identified in the Framework document. The Office of Women's Policy were invited to be represented on the Lead Agency Group in March 2003 to support the commitment and support from the Minister for Women's Affairs, the Hon. Mary Delahunty MP.

The Group is comprised of the Task Force Chairperson; Director of AAV Planning and Development Branch; Director of Family and Community Support, Community Care Division, DHS; and other senior officers from OWP, AAV and DHS.

This Group has held regular meetings to discuss Task Force issues, family violence related matters, funding opportunities and policy issues.



## TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS

### DAPHNE YARRAM Task Force Chairperson

**Current Role:** Chairperson  
Binjirru Regional Council



#### Critical Issues

1. Ensuring that sustainable long term solutions are put in place to address family violence occurring in Indigenous communities throughout Victoria
2. Involving Indigenous people in all discussions held about family violence so they can have input into the planning and decision making process of Government about family violence issues
3. Building up the capacity of Indigenous services so they can respond effectively at a local level to issues occurring in their community
4. Ensuring that individuals, families and groups in communities have the support they need to come together, discuss and develop solutions for family violence issues in their families and their communities
5. For Government to act now to build on the work undertaken by the Task Force over the past two years so the expectations raised through this process are realised
6. To continue the momentum created by the Task Force and the Government in identifying the issues related to family violence in Victoria's Indigenous communities

#### Solutions

- Community led and driven mechanisms and initiatives to provide effective solutions to family violence
- Strong partnership approaches between Government and the Victorian Indigenous community
- 10 year Action Plan that is carefully planned and funded appropriately to achieve real outcomes at the "grass roots" level
- The whole of government response to the Task Force Final Report which encompasses a widespread approach based on holistic community and family healing

#### Key Statement

***We must make our communities safe—for our children, our families, our Elders and ourselves. It is time to speak out about the issue and support the victims and families. We cannot wait for someone else to take the lead in solving family violence. Indigenous people must have support if they are to take responsibility for addressing this issue otherwise the problem will not be resolved in our lifetime.***

***As an Indigenous leader, I am confident that we can address family violence in our communities with the support of Government and others who want to see this terrible issue addressed.***

## TASK FORCE ROLE AND OPERATIONAL PLAN

The Framework document was developed to guide the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy against three distinct phases of activity. This section of the report details the key milestones to date that the Task Force has progressed against Phase One of the Framework—*Indigenous Community Engagement and Capacity Building, and the Development of Indigenous Community Responses to Family Violence*.

The first planning meeting of the Task Force was held in Marysville on 17 and 18 November 2001. At this meeting the Task Force developed a framework for the management of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and its Operational Plan which was endorsed by AAV and the DHS in December 2002.

In developing its Final Report to Government, the Task Force was resourced and supported to engage Indigenous communities in the development of a holistic integrated response to family violence in Victoria. All of these components outlined below greatly assisted the Task Force to effectively plan and meet the requirements of the Framework document, Government and the Victorian Indigenous community. Outcomes and recommendations made from activities against the components list (as shown below) are outlined in Section Two of this report.

These components included but were not limited to:

- Raising community awareness and understanding to build stronger Indigenous communities to be able to respond effectively to family violence;
- Undertaking Statewide Indigenous community consultations through community visits, forums, conferences, written submission processes and focus groups;
- Consulting with other relevant stakeholders including Government departments and agencies, non-Government organisations, peak bodies and other relevant organisations at a local, regional and state level; and
- Advising on the development and implementation of policy, program and legislative responses relevant to preventing, reducing and responding to family violence in Indigenous communities;
- Support the establishment of Regional IFV Action Groups so they can identify, plan and implement local responses to family violence issues and to link with and work in conjunction with Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees (RAJAC) and other relevant Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations in;
  - Supporting and enhancing the development of Regional IFV Action Plans as a component of the proposed Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy;
  - Encouraging and supporting the development of community based initiatives that aim to prevent or reduce violence in local Indigenous communities;
  - Providing regular reports and other reports as required to the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs, Community Services, Women's Affairs and the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council and other relevant forums on progress in developing the Strategy, as well as identifying critical significant issues of concern requiring an immediate response;
  - Providing an Interim Report to the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs, Community Services and Housing and Women's Affairs by September 2002 which outlined the major findings and key directions which had formed the basis of recommendations in this Final Report to Government;
  - Providing a Final Report to the Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs, Community Services and Women's Affairs by October 2003; and
  - Recommending an ongoing structure and process to oversight implementation and monitoring of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

## TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS

### FAY CARTER

**Current Role:** Manager  
Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES)



#### Critical Issues

1. Secrecy and violence are accepted as the norm
2. Elders Abuse
3. Breakdown of family structures
4. Children and youth unaware of their culture
5. Appropriately trained Aboriginal people

#### Solutions

- Education and Awareness Campaign that 'Violence is UNACCEPTABLE', led by Elders voices and statements
- Establish an Elders Statewide Forum
- Establish Regional Family Healing Centres to include sessions of Cultural Learning
- The development of an appropriate training package for all staff working in the area of family violence

#### Key Statement

*Indigenous people must be empowered to resolve all aspects of family violence themselves through the implementation of community driven strategies.*

### ALF BAMBLETT

**Current Role:** Executive Officer  
Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association  
Limited (VACSAL).



#### Critical Issues

1. Making it safe for children in homes and in the community
2. Culturally appropriate support services to meet the needs of children and families
3. Supporting communities to run programs for Indigenous men
4. Making perpetrators accountable for their actions
5. Need for ongoing funding and resources to support community driven family violence initiatives

#### Solutions

- Annual Statewide Men's Forum
- Culturally relevant Indigenous Men's Change Behavioural programs
- Men's Resource Centres and Men's Support Group/s
- Increase in the number of facilities to support the victims of family violence

#### Key Statement

*Don't remove our children, remove the abuse. STOP FAMILY VIOLENCE.*

*As a community we cannot afford to keep putting band-aids on the situation, we have to attempt to solve the problem for ourselves.*

*The Government must listen to what we say and stop 'consulting' with us every five minutes about what the issues are and what we think the solutions are. Give us the money and the time and we can do something to help ourselves to stop family violence in communities.*

## TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS

### KAREN BRYANT

**Current Role:** Program Coordinator (Elizabeth Hoffman House)



#### Critical Issues

1. Communities need to accept the reality of family violence and the impact it has on our families and to stop living in denial
2. Workers need to be specifically trained to deal with family violence and sexual assault
3. Lack of programs and services for victims of family violence, particularly in rural areas
4. No research, data or appropriate programs for men who are offending.

#### Solutions

- Community and organisations develop a charter around a no tolerance on abuse.
- Indigenous workers need to be resourced and trained around responding to family violence and provided with appropriate support mechanisms.
- Additional resources by way of refuges, safe houses and time out places and counselling facilities.
- Additional funds to research the needs of men and to identify suitable programs for behaviour change that is culturally appropriate.

#### Key Statement

***We need to come together as a whole community to address family violence. We know that in saying this we need to help victims as well as offenders, but always keeping in mind that safety and ongoing protection of the victims is the paramount concern of any intervention. It must also be said any offender programs must not be at the detriment of, or lessen the resources available to victims.***

### TIM CHATFIELD

**Current Role:** Chairperson Tumbukka Regional Council



#### Critical Issues

Obtain resourcing to support ATSIC funded FVPLS to recruit:

- Sexual Assault Staff
- Principal Solicitor
- Provision of dedicated regional Indigenous FV psychologist/counsellor
- Regional family violence support workers.

And to undertake:

- Family violence services mapping
- Resource kit development.

#### Solutions

Raise awareness of family violence issues, including the fundamental principle that violence is not the Aboriginal way, at every opportunity.

Support the ATSIC Board Of Commission's Family Violence Action Plan which commits to strengthening the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS) in Victoria, through employing and training a sexual assault worker to:

- raise the awareness of communities about the effects of family violence;
- identify local solutions for dealing with family violence,
- assist communities to work in partnership with government and non-government agencies and seek commitment to resources required for family violence projects, and

Seek additional resources to assist development of a Family Violence Action Plan within the Tumbukka Regional Council Plan.

Advocate for expansion of Family Court Aboriginal Foster Care program in Victoria

Advocate support for VALS Indigenous Women's Justice Forum

Advocate for increased funding for Women's Shelters

Monitor FACS parenting program

Advocate for children's legal representation

#### Key Statement

***As Chair of the ATSIC Tumbukka Regional Council I endorse and commit to Council's vision to improve the social, physical and emotional well-being of Aboriginal men women and children in the Tumbukka region. I would urge government and non-government organisations to recognise family violence issues can only be addressed through strategies developed in partnership with Indigenous communities.***

## TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS

### MARION HANSEN

**Current Role:** Rehabilitation Program Coordinator at Ngwala Willumbong



#### Critical Issues

1. Significant loss of cultural, family values and principles.
2. Acceptance of violence within family and communities—need to turn around.
3. Not enough resources in communities to support victims of violence.
4. Need more resources in the alcohol/drug field given there is a direct link to violence.
5. More resources to work/protect children and youth to break the cycle.
6. Housing for single people is urgently needed.
7. Lack of respect for Elders.

#### Solutions

- Local Elders Groups to be supported to work with families and communities to regain the cultural values and principles
- Each Region should have qualified workers to support victims of violence.
- Needs to be more residential treatment centres for alcohol and drug abuse.
- A quota of housing needs to be allocated for young people
- Mainstream agencies need to be made accessible to Aboriginal people by way of cultural audits being applied and Aboriginal people employed within the agencies

#### Key Statement

***We as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples need to rekindle and practice the cultural values and principles of our forefathers. Give our elders recognition. Come together to rid our communities of all forms of abuse and violence.***

### TROY AUSTIN

**Current Role:** ATSIC Commissioner (Victoria)



#### Critical Issues

1. The connection between family violence, youth suicide, substance abuse and incarceration rates.
2. Need to expand pre- and post-release programs for prisoners that incorporates health, housing, employment and financial guidance.
3. Need to provide positive parenting programs and programs that teach life skills to young people.
4. Victim's acceptance of violence. Some victims believe that they deserve the violence that they experience. Many victims do not know where to seek assistance and support. There is also the shame factor.

#### Solutions

- Provision of qualified Indigenous Youth Workers and counselling for young people who carry around emotional scars.
- Develop appropriate release programs that will ensure re-integration with family and community.
- Develop appropriate empowerment programs for young people about to embark on their journey as partners, parents and young adults
- Raising awareness that the victim is not to blame and of available support services. Community standing by the victim rather than turning their back on them.

#### Key Statement

***All of us must make a concerted effort to stamp out violence in our communities. Young people in particular must be protected and the rights of the children must be paramount. I appeal to our communities to support victims of violence and encourage all victims to seek help. Families experiencing violence need to acknowledge the problem early and participate in programs that assist the family to overcome issues that cause violence. Offenders of violence need to acknowledge what they are doing and take action to correct their behaviour.***



## TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS

### AUNTIE ELLA PITT

**Current Role:** Community Member



#### Critical Issues

1. Making it safer for Elders in their own homes so they are not stood over or taken advantage of.
2. Accommodation for Elders to live independently from their family members.
3. Ensuring that Elders don't get money taken from them by their family members.
4. Making sure that children are safe from abuse and violence in their homes and communities.
5. Reducing racism in schools.

#### Solutions

- Having a place for Elders to go and have time out from their family members.
- Making children confident about speaking out about abuse or violence if it occurs in their families.
- Educating young people about who their relations are, who they can have relations with as well as safe sex practices.
- Strengthening families so they can heal themselves.
- Having access to counsellors who actually know about Indigenous experiences.
- More teachings about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and life experiences in schools—what happened in the olden days and how this still affects many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.
- Making perpetrators accountable for their actions—taking them away from their families and providing them with counselling.

#### Key Statement

*Family violence includes verbal and emotional abuse not just physical abuse. I think family violence is a clinging disease that drains all the goodness out of people leaving no will power.*

*We know some of the cures for this is to get rid of the booze and drugs, and turning off the TV and have some time for talking to your family. We must teach the children things in life they can be thankful for—like saying a prayer for each other at least once a week.*

*You don't have to know a prayer—you just have to ask for help from the heart. Then your willpower will come back. So please, try your best—we need to get rid of this clinging disease (family violence).*

### JOLEEN RYAN

**Current Role:** Student Youth Representative



#### Critical Issues

1. Our elders are being abused—physically, emotionally and financially—and the respect for them is fading.
2. Indigenous young people's perspective on family violence that "family violence is a part of our culture"

#### Solutions

- Strengthen the relationship with elders within the community through interaction with the community (especially the youth) at camps, mini-forums and sessions facilitated by the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups, Support Workers and the Indigenous communities.
- Provide awareness of this perception and that this is not true. This could be done through youth camps, information kits, mini-forums or information sessions facilitated by the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups, Support Workers and the Indigenous communities.

#### Key Statement

*No-one should have to put up with any form of violence and abuse and certainly no-one deserves to be a victim of it either.*

## TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS

### ALAN THORPE

**Current Role:** Alcohol & Drug Support Worker  
(Ngwala Willumbong)



#### Critical Issues

1. The abuse of alcohol and drugs
2. Employment
3. Housing
4. Education

#### Solutions

- We need services for men and women where referrals can be done to address the issues.
- More communication within families and in communities.
- Better measures around social and economic status.

#### Key Statement

*Individuals need to make an affirmation about how they are going to conduct themselves and address issues in their individual lives. We need to get back to some basic values about how we understand our culture and the way we treat each other. We need to respect each other and not get caught up in the politics so much. More caring, sharing and better communication.*

### LANCE JAMES

**Current Role:** Family Programs Manager—  
Family Counselling Services (VAHS)



#### Critical Issues

1. Getting people to realise that any form of family violence is totally unacceptable.
2. Having the resources so community organisations can respond to family violence issues occurring in their communities.
3. Addressing the underlying issues that contribute to family violence situations.
4. More services particularly in country areas to be able to counsel and support families in their time of need.

#### Solutions

- We need to support families and communities with resources so they can address family violence issues themselves—that is community driven solutions.
- We need to have a bigger profile about family violence through promotion that does not leave it dormant but brings it to the surface and into the open.
- Solutions need to be community driven to support families—there has to be some structures for community support. Co-ops have a critical role to play in supporting families in seeking some of the solutions.
- Court issues need to be a lot stronger and support victims—people don't have confidence in the system—need to strengthen this and make it more culturally secure.

#### Key Statement

*All the issues raised by communities and families over the past two years confirms that something needs to be done to enhance the well being of families and eliminate family violence altogether. Family violence is not acceptable anywhere in any shape or form.*





## SECTION 2

# THE JOURNEY SO FAR

### CONSULTATION & DECISION-MAKING

Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum

Indigenous Family Violence Working Group

Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups

Sexual Assault Task Force

### EDUCATION & RAISING AWARENESS

Activities focusing on Children and Youth

Intervention Programs  
& Activities

Marketing Strategy &  
Internet Portal (Web-site)

Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council

Statewide Indigenous Elders Council

### COLLABORATION-PLANNING

## WHAT WE DID

From October 2001 to October 2003 Task Force members developed key milestones to support their implementation methodology. This was achieved through key mechanisms put in place and activities being sponsored by the Task Force to gather relevant information about family violence issues in the Victorian Indigenous community. This information was used by the Task Force to prepare this Final Report to Government.

In this section of the Report the Task Force provide a summary of progress made to date against Phase One of the Framework document, and present key findings made against each Key Milestone.

Recommendations in this section of the Report reflect observations made by the Task Force over the last two years in relation to family violence issues from an Indigenous perspective. They are included to build on initiatives currently undertaken by the Victorian Indigenous community in partnership with the Task Force and the Victorian Government.

## KEY MILESTONES

- Community Led Approaches
- Statewide IFV Coordinator
- Regional IFV Support Officers
- Regional IFV Action Groups
- Regional Profiles to support the development of Regional IFV Action Plans
- Development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund
- 15 Grants Recipients of the Community Initiatives Fund
- Statewide Indigenous Community Engagement
- Community Led Consultations
- Statewide Indigenous Family Violence Forum
- Education and Awareness Initiatives
  - Short Film Promotion—'Mirror Images'
  - Education Resource Kit
  - Youth Kits
- Establishment of an 1800 Number
- Departmental Secretaries Group
- Indigenous Family Violence Working Group
- Working Group Key Projects
  - Literature Review
  - Review of Statistics and Data
  - Mapping of Family Violence Services
  - Independent Research into the Nature and Extent of Family Violence
  - Review of Regional IFV Support Officer Positions
  - Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

## COMMUNITY LED APPROACHES

The Department of Human Services (DHS) secured agreement from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to direct \$827,175 one-off funding to be carried forward and for relevant services to be established. The DHS funds supported the establishment of the nine Regional IFV Action Groups, including a Statewide IFV Coordinator and nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions.

These positions were to be based initially with DHS until February 2004, pending the outcomes from a review commissioned by the Task Force after the first 12 months of operation. The focus of the review was to ascertain the best location for these positions with a view to maximising input and ownership by local Indigenous communities.

The nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions were established to work directly with Indigenous communities to coordinate the establishment of nine Regional IFV Action Groups. The role of the Regional IFV Support Officers was to work alongside Indigenous communities to support them in developing a greater awareness and understanding of family violence in their community, and to facilitate the development of community based responses appropriate to local conditions and need.

The Task Force led the process in the development and implementation of the Statewide IFV Coordinator and the nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions in May 2002 when a planning session took place that examined issues of recruitment, debriefing and placement issues.

The Task Force developed all Position Descriptions, advertisements and Selection Criteria regarding roles and responsibilities for the Statewide IFV Coordinator and the nine Regional IFV Support Officers. This process was undertaken to ensure that all support mechanisms established for the development of local Indigenous community responses were culturally relevant to how Indigenous people and communities operate in Victoria.

Task Force members were involved in the short listing and interviewing process of the Statewide IFV Coordinator position and the nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions. The process was coordinated by DHS, however, both a Task Force member and a local Indigenous community representative needed to be represented as part of the major component of the interview panels across the state.

### STATEWIDE IFV COORDINATOR

A Statewide IFV Coordinator position was established and the successful applicant appointed in March 2003 to assist the Task Force and Working Group to establish the Regional IFV Action Groups and to provide ongoing support to the Regional IFV Support Officers. This included the provision of information and training, the facilitation of inter-group networking, information sharing and peer support, ensuring access to debriefing, supervision and evaluation support.

The Statewide IFV Coordinator is a member of the Lead Agency Group and is represented on most Family Violence related Government committees and working groups to ensure Statewide and Regional IFV issues are discussed and addressed at the Government decision-making level.

The Statewide IFV Coordinator has presented regular progress reports to the Task Force and the Working Group which outline the status of each Regional IFV Action Group and the activities undertaken by individual Regional IFV Support Officers.



Jan Muir

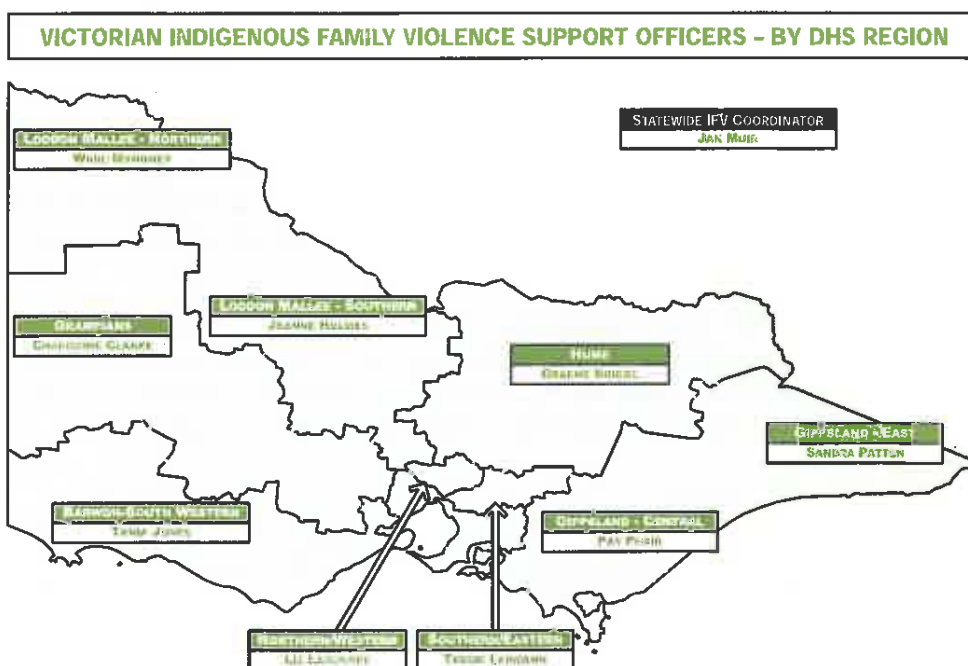
## REGIONAL IFV SUPPORT OFFICERS

The nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions were established and are currently located within rural and metropolitan regional DHS offices across the state. The positions were appointed between September 2002 and March 2003 for an initial period of 12 months.

The role of the Regional IFV Support Officers for the first year of the Strategy development was:

1. To work directly with local Indigenous communities to coordinate the establishment of each Regional IFV Action Group;
2. To work alongside local Indigenous communities to support them in developing a greater awareness and understanding of the broad components of family violence in their community; and
3. To facilitate the development of community based responses appropriate to local conditions and need.

The Task Force initiated the process for the Statewide IFV Coordinator and nine Regional IFV Support Officers to establish formal linkages between the Regional IFV Action Groups and the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees. The Regional IFV Support Officers invited representatives from each of the RAJACs to participate in the Regional IFV Action Group meetings held on a monthly basis, to maintain consistency and to ensure strong partnership approaches are adopted within the local Indigenous community.



In July 2003, the Task Force, AAV and DHS commissioned a Review into the most appropriate long term location from 1 March 2004 for the Statewide IFV Coordinator and the nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions. The Review also needed to ensure that there was maximum advantage by the Indigenous community to have direct access to their Regional IFV Support Officer. The Review was completed and recommendations were determined by the Task Force at its meeting in Metung on 29 September, 2003.

The Review of the location of Statewide IFV Coordinator and the nine Regional IFV Support Officers was based upon:

- Cultural suitability of placement of positions within DHS;
- Access by communities; and
- Ongoing professional and community support.

The Terms of Reference for the Review project is outlined under the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group—Key Projects section in this Report. Outcomes will be determined in January, 2004.

## REGIONAL IFV ACTION GROUPS

One of the key initiatives that has greatly supported the work of The Task Force is the establishment of the nine Regional IFV Action Groups in regional and metropolitan Victoria. The Regional IFV Action Groups have been established since November 2002 (not at the same time) and operating at the grass roots level, bringing together members of Indigenous communities to raise awareness and understanding as well as to begin the process of developing local responses to family violence issues.

The Regional IFV Action Groups comprise representation from target groups: Elders, women, men, youth and community leaders from the local Indigenous community as well as local Indigenous organisations. Each group is represented by 10–12 members and invites mainstream and Indigenous service providers to each monthly meeting to provide advice on other key Indigenous initiatives in the region and to listen to Indigenous community leaders discuss critical issues relevant to family violence at the local level.

The Task Force believe the creation of Regional IFV Action Groups is a key mechanism for focussing regional activities as well as supporting specific target groups in each community: Elders, women, men, children, youth, same sex couples, and Torres Strait Islanders.

The Task Force determined the structure, role and Terms of Reference for each Regional IFV Action Group in consultation with the Regional IFV Support Officers and other key stakeholders.

### Role and Responsibilities

1. To raise local community awareness of family violence and to improve understanding of family violence issues in each region.
2. To engage in active problem solving and the development of local community based responses, initiatives and strategies for addressing family violence issues.
3. To develop cross-agency linkages and promote information sharing at a local level.
4. To assess local community needs and map service provision and utilisation.
5. To coordinate the development of Regional IFV Action Plans which are holistic in their approach, address the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of families and community and reflect the important role of Elders, women, men, children, youth and community leaders.
6. To monitor outcomes and service effectiveness of Indigenous and Mainstream service providers.
7. To monitor and report on the implementation of Regional IFV Action Plans.
8. Provide direction and support to the Regional IFV Support Officers.

### Key Tasks to be Undertaken

To develop a Regional IFV Action Plan which identifies the following as a minimum:

1. Local community needs within the region.
2. Mapping of existing services, programs and gaps.
3. Opportunities for service improvements and prioritising service delivery and community initiatives.
4. Opportunities for developing partnerships.
5. Linkages with local family violence specific networks.

Regional IFV Action Groups have been actively working towards developing their Regional IFV Action Plans in consultation with Indigenous community members at the local level. The regional profiles outlined further in this section outline critical issues, priorities, suggested solutions and key statements that members of Regional IFV Action Groups consider are important and which will need to be addressed under the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. It is expected these plans will be finalised by May 2004.



A further key role for the Regional IFV Action Groups is to consider applications received under the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy—Community Initiatives Fund for their region and to ensure that:

1. Members are fair and impartial and declare if a conflict of interest exists where members may have a personal interest in an application submitted in their region.
2. Assessment of applicants includes confirmation that the applicant is recognised in the community and that they have the ability and capacity to deliver the proposed activity.
3. No duplication of programs occurs for applications.
4. Applications submitted meet the criteria stated in the Application Form.
5. A report is provided to Aboriginal Affairs Victoria which includes comments on all of the above.

### **TASK FORCE WORKSHOP, REGIONAL IFV ACTION GROUP PARTICIPATION, 19 OCTOBER, 2003**

The Chairpersons of each Regional IFV Action Group and the Regional IFV Support Officers met with the Task Force on 19 October, 2003 to seek clarity on their roles and responsibilities for Phase Two and Three of the Strategy. The Task Force also provided the opportunity for workshop participants to provide final comments for inclusion in the Task Force's Final Report.



The Chairperson of the Task Force outlined the need to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of the nine Regional IFV Action Groups and the nine Regional IFV Support Officer positions.

The following is an extensive list of issues regarding local and regional 'community led' approaches in relation to the Regional IFV Action Groups and Regional IFV Support Officers:

1. What is the future role of the Regional IFV Support Officers and the Regional IFV Action Groups?
2. Need to clarify membership/representation of the nine Regional IFV Action Groups.
3. Who determines the membership?
4. What is the agreed number of members to be represented on the Regional IFV Action Groups and the required age of an Indigenous person to be eligible for membership? Sitting fees issues need to be considered when determining membership.
5. Do members need to come from traditional country to be representative of community?
6. What is the membership duration on the Regional IFV Action Group?
7. What type of 'screening' guidelines should be in place for membership on the Regional IFV Action Groups?
8. Should there be a 'Code of Conduct' in place for Regional IFV Action Group meetings?
9. If vacancies become available or someone resigns from the Regional IFV Action Group what mechanisms are in place to replace members?
10. Are there Media Issues for the Regional IFV Support Officers and Chairpersons of each Regional IFV Action Group?
11. Are there training issues for the Regional IFV Support Officers and Chairpersons of each Regional IFV Action Group?

### 1. What is the Future Role of the Regional IFV Support Officers and the Regional IFV Action Groups?

The workshop agreed that the roles and responsibilities would change significantly for the Regional IFV Support Officers and Regional IFV Action Groups to implement Phase Two and Three of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The main focus will be to work with local and regional Indigenous communities through regular community consultations to develop comprehensive Regional IFV Action Plans to address Indigenous family violence issues in each region. These plans would then be presented to the formally established body (Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum) to replace the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force.

### 2. Need to clarify membership/representation of the nine Regional IFV Action Groups.

Membership to the Regional IFV Action Group is to be representative of Elders, women, men, children, youth, same sex couples, and a Torres Strait Islander. Where there is not a representative to cover these target group areas a representative is eligible for membership once approved by the Indigenous community in that region.

For example, a) if an individual has experience, knowledge and an interest in ensuring children's family violence issues are raised they are eligible for membership. The same applies for other identified target group areas. b) the Northern Regional IFV Action Group has nominated VACCA to represent children's family violence issues.

The Regional IFV Action Groups may provide an open invitation to mainstream agencies and other Indigenous community/government forums (RAJACs, LAECGs, ARKECs) as the need arises to provide advice on other family violence related initiatives being addressed in the region.

Membership of the nine Regional IFV Action Groups needs to have a gender balance of male and female representatives.

### 3. Who determines the Membership?

The workshop participants supported the notion to adopt a formal process whereby Regional IFV Action Groups invite Expressions of Interest for nominations to the Regional IFV Action Groups. These are then forwarded to the newly established Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum for the final decision. The Expression of Interest Form will be developed to reflect Indigenous community language/jargon.

Representatives will be nominated from each informally established Local Community Action Group to be members to the Regional IFV Action Group. This is to ensure that there is recognition of community members that may not be connected to a Cooperative or community organisation. Representatives that nominate do not have to be affiliated with an organisation but must be representative of a community and have the support of the community they represent.

### 4. What is the agreed number of members to be represented on the Regional IFV Action Groups and the required age of an Indigenous person to be eligible for membership? The issue of Sitting Fees needs to be considered when determining membership.

It was noted that some Regional IFV Action Groups had two Groups established for one region and that this needed to be clarified by the Task Force. Membership of each Regional IFV Action Group should be kept to a minimum of 10 members and a maximum of 12 on each Regional IFV Action Group.

To be eligible for membership on the Regional IFV Action Group a minimum age level of 18 applies. If under 18, confidentiality issues need to be considered. Need to ensure that young Indigenous people under the required age of 18 want their issues raised at the Regional Action Group which should be done through linkages with the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) and other family violence related forums.

The Task Force confirmed that new guidelines will be developed in relation to sitting fee requirements for the Regional IFV Action Groups.

**5. Do members need to come from traditional country to be representative of community?**

Members to the Regional IFV Action Groups can be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person from the community in which they live, regardless of whether they were born in another State/Territory.

**6. What is the membership duration on the Regional IFV Action Group?**

The Term of Office for membership to the Regional IFV Action Group is a minimum of two years and the Chairperson's term of office is a maximum of two years only.

**7. What type of 'screening' guidelines should be in place for membership on the Regional IFV Action Groups?**

The workshop agreed that this was a difficult decision to make up front. The newly established Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum should commission research to identify how mainstream and/or other agencies develop and implement screening of members to formal bodies nationally. Some models identified were the National Family Violence Roundtables and the RAJAC model.

**8. Should there be a 'Code of Conduct' in place for Regional IFV Action Group meetings?**

It was agreed that it is the Regional IFV Action Groups Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson's responsibility to exclude a member from the meeting on the grounds of what is included in the Code of Conduct (to be further developed by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum). Exclusion must also be proven.

The Chairpersons need to be supported in enforcing the Code of Conduct at meetings. Meetings must also ensure that confidentiality is maintained on information that is discussed at a Regional IFV Action Group meeting. Currently each meeting has 'housekeeping' announced at the start of each meeting. A protocol should be set in place for the Chairperson to announce the Code of Conduct as required at each meeting.

**9. If vacancies become available or someone resigns from the Regional IFV Action Group what mechanisms are in place to replace members?**

The Regional IFV Action Groups call for 'Expressions of Interest' from Indigenous community members and the same process applies for endorsement (Partnership Forum) when considering new members to the Regional IFV Action Group.

**10. Are there Media Issues for the Regional IFV Support Officers and Chairpersons of each Regional Action Group?**

Promotion and training opportunities need to be available for Regional IFV Support Officers and Regional IFV Action Group Chairpersons in relation to public speaking and dealing with media issues in relation to Indigenous family violence issues—Working Group to discuss.

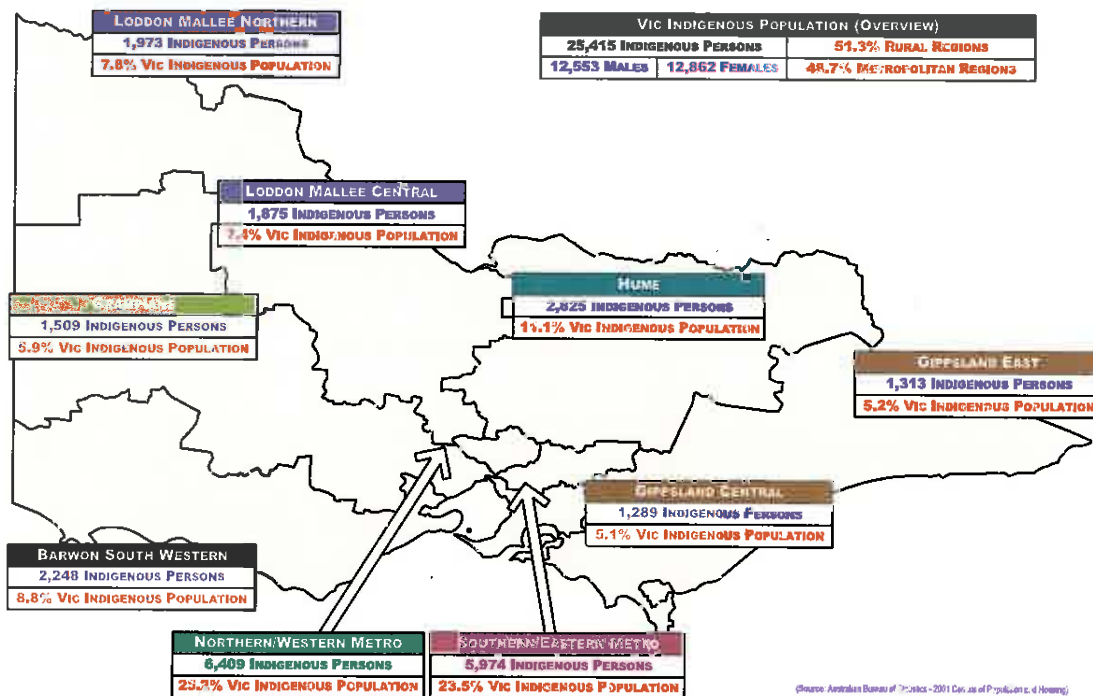
**11. Are there training issues for the Regional IFV Support Officers and Chairpersons of each Regional IFV Action Group?**

Professional development opportunities need to be provided for members of Regional IFV Action Groups to strengthen their roles so they can effectively deliver on Indigenous family violence requirements to community and to empower members in their roles on the Regional IFV Action Groups—Working Group to discuss.

## REGIONAL PROFILES

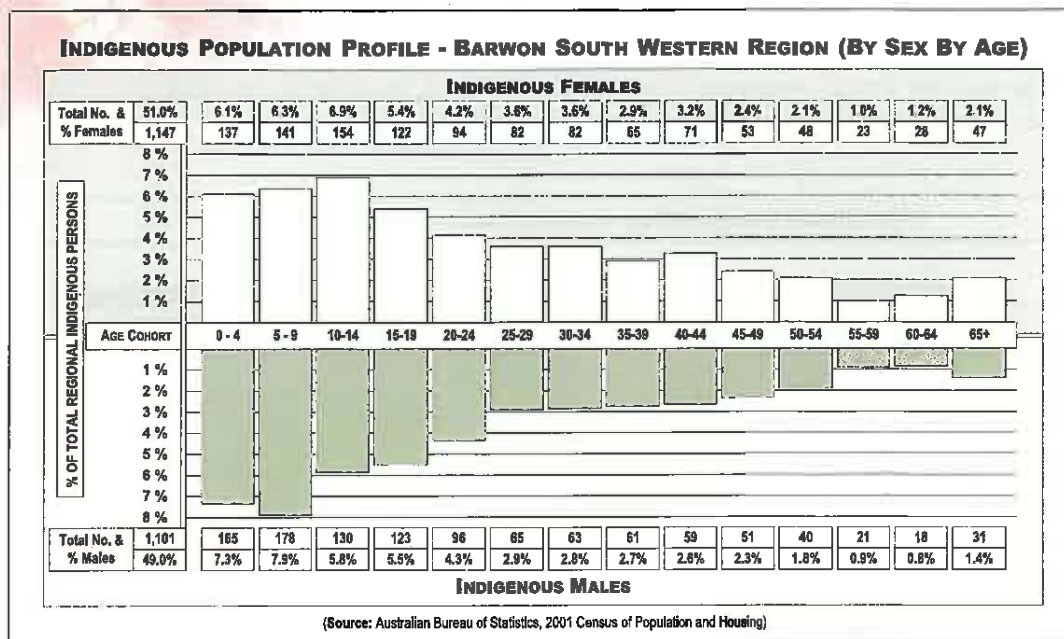
This section of the Final Report contains information provided to the Task Force by members of each of the Regional IFV Action Groups. It should be noted that this information is a starting point only and will change once the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy is developed by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and Indigenous Family Violence Working Group.

### VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS POPULATION - BY DHS REGION



## Barwon South Western

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- Gwenda Black
- John Day
- Alan Browning
- Debbie Clarke
- Jessica Couzens
- Adeline McDonald
- Tanya Aitken
- Nick Hayne
- Denise Lovett
- Nahtia Saunders
- Charmaine Hume
- Kelvin King

### REGIONAL IFV ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

#### Issues

- Lack of resources and access to out-of-hours family violence support services affects all communities but it is especially evident in Hamilton and at Framlingham
- Need for community acknowledgment of family violence: Secrecy and apathy still prevalent
- Lack of acknowledgment and support services for victims of sexual assault (especially the Elderly)
- No community based family violence framework which allows for a dedicated worker, which places a strain on community organisational resources to provide crisis intervention and appropriate responses
- Lack of youth support services and accommodation
- Access and provision of appropriate counselling services
- No holistic family intervention strategies—most services treat family members individually rather than as an entire unit
- No free services which offer on-going support—mainly fee paying services and no funds from strategy and lack of cultural sensitivity
- Individual politics of individual organisations

## Priorities

1. Crisis Intervention
  - Develop a relevant and sustainable therapeutic response to family violence at the time of crisis
2. Capacity Building
  - Empowerment of community through regional representation to address family violence and link into appropriate service agencies
  - Provision of realistic long term funding that is sustainable
  - Develop and profile Indigenous specific best practice models
  - Adequate accommodation services for people affected by family violence—female, male and young people
3. Community Awareness and Education
  - Raise awareness of family violence by developing and distributing information to regional communities regarding the impact of family violence on children and young people
  - Develop strategies to address community attitude towards family violence
  - Gather and disseminate documented information of the impact of family violence on Aboriginal people in Victoria
  - Focus on healthy relationships, peer support and community mediation
4. Counselling
  - Access to funding for counselling to support the victim, witness, survivor and perpetrator
  - Provision of counselling services to strengthen families through a holistic, culturally appropriate service provision that can support the individual, family and community on a long term basis
  - Provide a healing focus that can compliment community programs and projects
5. Professional development
  - For community workers to address family violence in a holistic and sensitive manner

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

*"Committed to developing and endorsing family violence initiatives that support individual organisations, communities and regional groups*

*Family strengthening with a holistic and culturally empowering approach*

*Developing a regional capacity to address family violence issues which include education, housing, social justice, alcohol and drugs*

*Community awareness and education programs (brochures, drama, posters, CD, DVD, etc)*

*We hope to bring about change by working together with a cultural focus"*

## ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

Location	Organisation
Framlingham	Kirrae Health Services Inc/Framlingham Trust
Geelong	Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
Heywood	Winda-mara Aboriginal Corporation
(Hamilton)	Health Service/Wunnukin Keeping Place
Portland	Dhauwurd Wurrung Elders Corporation
Warrnambool	Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd



### Priorities

1. Develop Elder Abuse programs for the silent and the suffering
2. Address isolation for Indigenous people in rural and remote communities
3. Families who don't access services—workers accountability
4. Strengthening families
5. Educational programs for families

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

*Theme—"Helping hands give greater strength and our aim is to strengthen family relationships"*

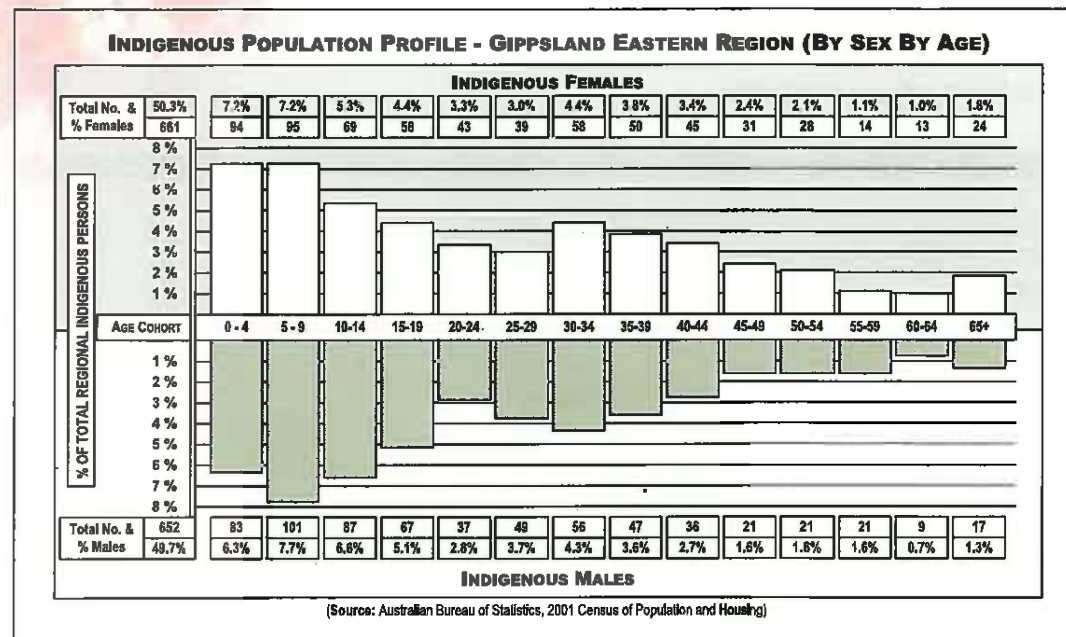
### ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

Location	Organisation
Morwell	Wanjana Lidj Family Preservation—KODE School Ninde Dana Quarenook Aboriginal Corporation—Legal Service Bendin House: Gunai Lidj Child Care: Woolum Bellum Pre School
Morwell, Warragul	LAECG and TAFE
Traralgon, Warragul	Koori Hospital Liaison Officers



## Gippsland (East)

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- Alice Paten Hill
- Terry Hayes
- Phil Perry
- Corrine Hood
- Robert Farnham
- Amy Hood
- Aunty Madge Siely
- Colleen Harney
- Sandra Neilson
- Bruce Trevorrow
- Tanya Carter
- Vanessa Becker

#### REGIONAL IFV ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

##### Issues

- Health
- Housing issues (overcrowding)
- Gambling
- Lack of men's safe houses/shelters
- Unemployment
- Violence (family/community/individual)
- Elders Abuse Issues
- Youth/Young people matters (homelessness)
- Alcohol and Drug Matters
- Child Protection matters (physical, neglect, sexual, emotional, abuse)

### Priorities

1. Establish Indigenous Men's Safe Houses
2. Develop culturally appropriate programs to address Elders Abuse
3. Access to Youth Hostels
4. Establish a Regional IFV Support Centre
5. More culturally appropriate Child Protection Officers within DHS

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

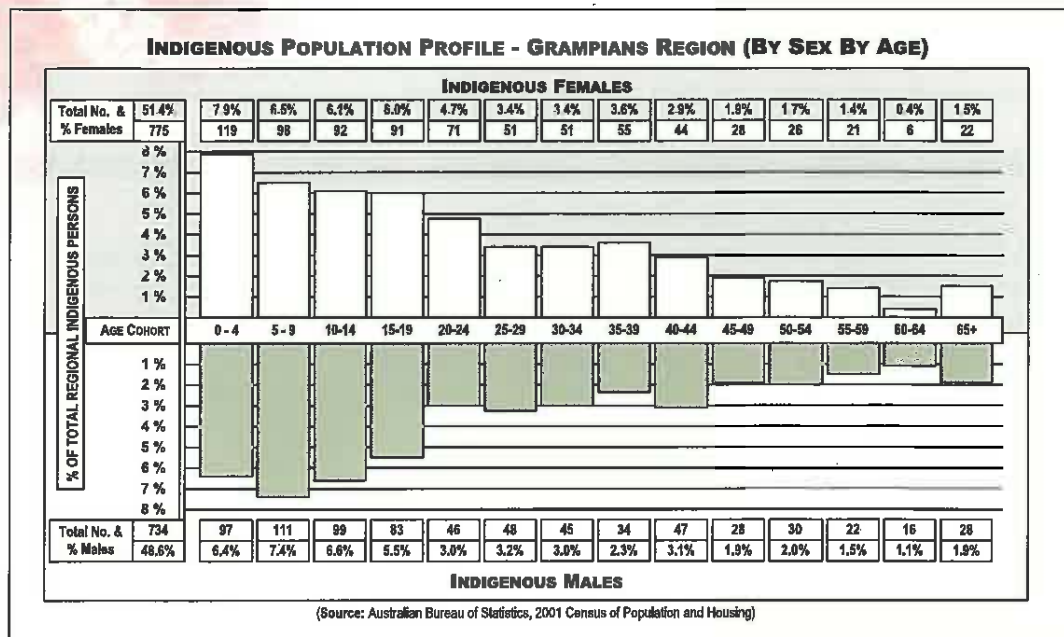
*"Our aim is to engage and encourage community members to raise and identify family violence issues within their respective communities. As Regional IFV Action Group members, we will engage and encourage community involvement throughout this level of participation and through the process we will strive towards addressing all areas of violence"*

### ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

<b>Location</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Bairnsdale	Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative
Bairnsdale	Kurnai (CDEP) Park
Lakes Entrance	Kurnai/Gunai Elders Aboriginal Corporation
Lake Tyers	Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust
Orbost	Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc
Sale	Ramahyuck and District Aboriginal Corporation

## Grampians

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- Deb Millera
- Don Chatfield
- Michelle Marks
- Allan Burns
- Tim Stares
- Megan Lexton
- John Secombe
- Ray Marks
- Robin McDonald
- Edward Kennedy
- Craig Hollaway
- Anita Marks

#### REGIONAL IFV ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

##### Issues

- Lack of cultural spaces for men and women to meet for their cultural gender business
- Gambling (it is a growing problem in rural areas)
- Lack of mentoring programs and role model development
- Alcohol and Substance abuse
- High levels of youth homelessness and contact with Police

### Priorities

1. Youth Issues—access to accommodation and development of Indigenous specific services
2. Men's Issues—Development of men's groups (there is no services or programs specifically for Indigenous men)
3. Women's Issues—Whilst services do exist, appropriate access needs to be enhanced with the support of women's groups
4. Community Issues—Develop services/access protocols which accommodate both extended and multi-gendered family units in crisis. (A family in the region was split up when accessing emergency accommodation due to the fact that one of the children was a male teenager)
5. Accommodation—Lack of emergency accommodation options, semi-long term accommodation in particular for young people in crisis

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

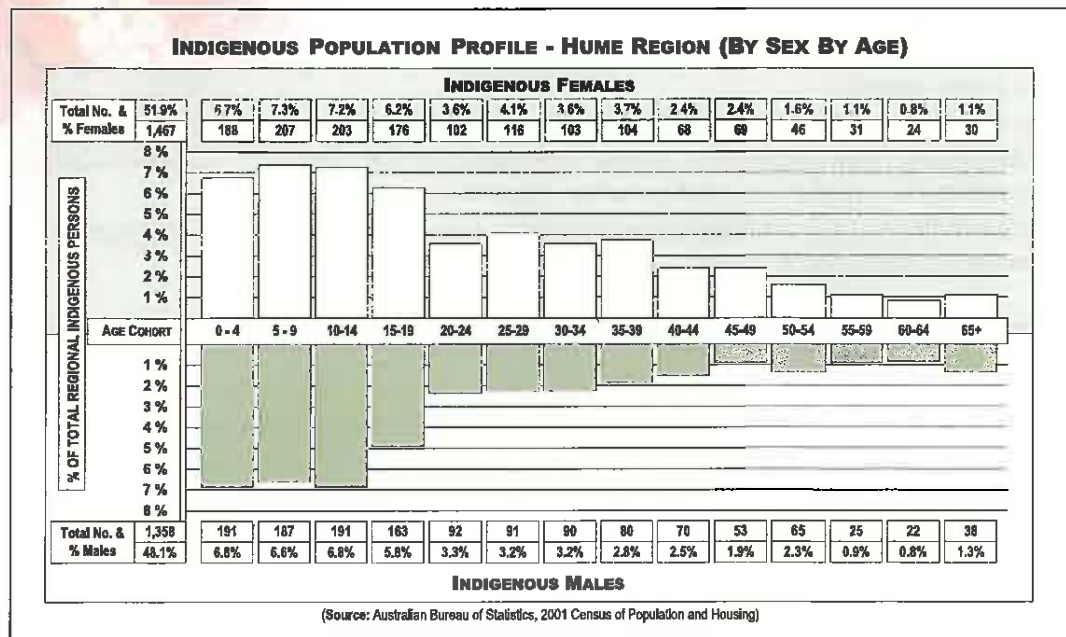
*"The Grampians (Gariwerd) Regional IFV Action Group is committed to the values that: Families in isolation should not be a reason for exclusion. Strong families create strong communities, and by working together, we commit ourselves to building a brighter future".*

### ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

Location	Organisation
Ballarat	Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
Halls Gap	Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
Horsham	Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd

## Hume

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- Marlene Burchill
- Leanne Wright
- Cobba Briggs
- John Martin
- Christine Bonacci
- Nanette Smith
- Larry Jackson
- Ally Charles
- Nancy Robinson
- Herb Goonan
- Myrah Mayberry
- Sue Williams

#### REGIONAL IFV ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

##### Issues

- Lack of services/organisations with Indigenous based programs for the Indigenous people in smaller towns.
- Lack of funding for sexual assault clients and access to counselling within their communities.
- Awareness within Indigenous communities regarding the assistance that victims can receive from service providers with domestic violence program/projects.
- Lack of trust within some communities that have Regional Action Groups about the Strategy, where it is heading, and if the budget is going to be one off or an ongoing commitment from the Government.
- Lack of accountability from service providers across all communities. This includes Wangaratta, Seymour, Wodonga and Shepparton. Committing to service provision with Indigenous organisations specifically, rather than opting for across the broad spectrum.

### Priorities

1. Obtain ongoing funding for Projects to assist in the prevention of family violence at a community level.
2. Allow the communities and members to become aware of services within their communities via displaying the 'mapping projects' work at all access points that communities use within the Hume Region.
3. Regional Plan to outline "Where to from here?" A plan that takes the Hume Region beyond the proposed review of IFV Support Officers recommendation. This would allow the Hume Region to further grow in addressing family violence issues.
4. Outsource the 'funding bucket' to make all sectors responsible to servicing communities around the Social Justice area.

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

*The Hume Indigenous Family Violence Action Group would like to see the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy continue to assist community members in addressing Family Violence within the Hume Region. The Hume IFVAG look forward to seeing the Government commit to the Strategy in an on going way. The Strategy is allowing people within our culture to present life experiences and present strategies to prevent the impact it has on each and every Indigenous person within the Hume Region.*

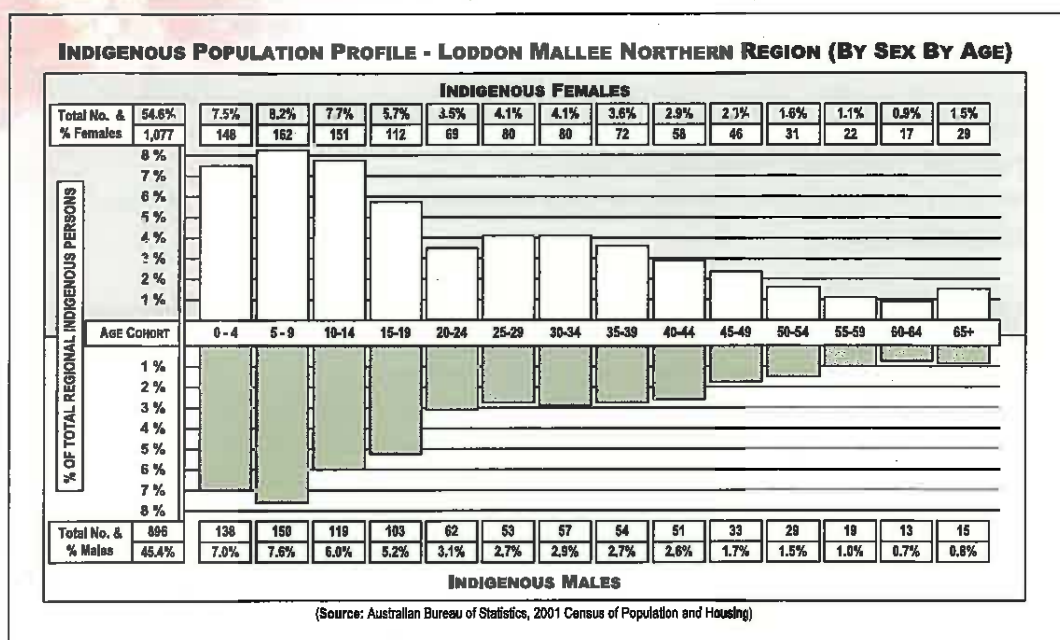
*The Community Initiatives Fund needs to represent the issues and the importance of allowing the communities within the state the right tools to fix problems, by extending the budget and allowing communities across the board to apply out right for their share of solutions. At present the budget creates frictions within regions and communities.*

### ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

Location	Organisation
Seymour	Jaambi Neighbourhood Community Centre
Shepparton	Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
Wodonga	Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation

## Loddon Mallee (Northern)

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- Bruce Baxter
- Stacey Hamilton
- Ricky Bell
- Shantel Thompson
- Judith Williams
- Myra Grinter
- Lillian Clarke
- Charmain Bell

#### REGIONAL IFV ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

##### Issues

- Unemployment
- Changing roles of men in community
- Poor standard of housing
- Lack of appropriate support networks for women
- Alcohol and Drug abuse/misuse
- Lack of educational material around family violence
- Child sexual assault/Child abuse
- Lack of respect for Elders—diminished roles of Elders
- No support networks for men
- Low self esteem and self worth among young girls and boys

### Priorities

1. Family support networks—ie. for Elders, Women, Men and Children
2. Education and self esteem raising among youth
3. Reduce child sexual assault/abuse and child neglect. More effort to keep children with their families.
4. Reinstate Elders to the position of respect and leadership
5. Reducing the unemployment rate in the hope to raise people's standards of living

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

*"The Regional IFV Action Group of the Northern Loddon Mallee Region realises it has an enormous task ahead of it to have an impact on the extent of family violence in our communities.*

*Like so many other communities throughout Victoria, we have felt the crippling effect that family violence has on the every day lives of our people.*

*We are a committed group of community members who have come to realise that the answers to our community's problems lay with us. We need to utilise the generous support of the Government to its fullest capacity so as to start some community healing.*

*We need to come together as a strong nation of people to remember and respect the past while also aiming our sights forward. We need to educate our youth so they have the capacity to look after our affairs when we are Elders...."*

### ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

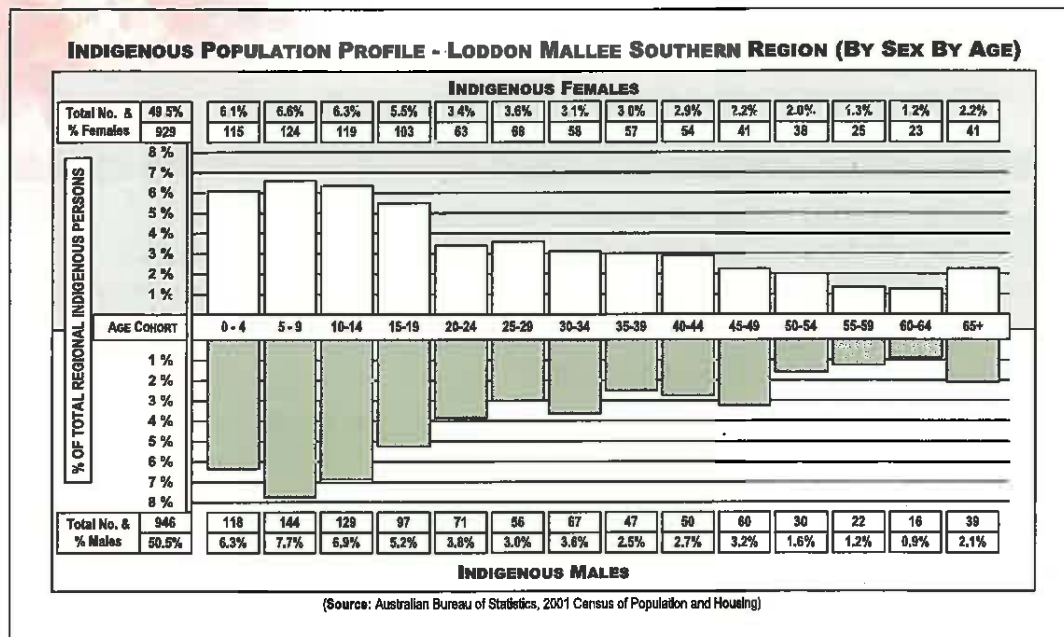
Location	Organisation
Mildura	Mildura Aboriginal Corporation
Robinvale	Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd
Swan Hill	Swan Hill Indigenous Community Services Centre





## Loddon Mallee (Southern)

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- George McGee
- Joanne Badke
- Anne Spittles
- Kelly Atkinson
- Joe Day
- Kitty McCormick
- Linda Wordie
- Layton Barker
- Lil Murray
- Des Morgan
- Donna Widdicombe

#### REGIONAL IFV ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

##### Issues

- Elders—Status of our Elders in our communities, we need to promote respect for, and prevent abuse of, our Elders in our communities
- Housing—Lack of adequate housing in the region, also lack of Koori specific safe houses, refuges and sobering-up centres
- Youth—Protecting both male and female young people from family violence. Need to review current education; housing, employment, cultural and spiritual needs of our youth
- Families—Need to strengthen our families and develop more effective parenting programs
- Alcohol and Drug Issues—Establish culturally appropriate detox places in the region
- Men—Changing role of men

### Priorities

1. Elders—To promote respect for our Elders in our communities by ensuring that our Elders form the structure of programs in our communities and provide cultural support to our community members through the programs developed.
2. Housing—To actively network with stakeholders to increase the number of available houses through the Aboriginal Housing Board and Office of Housing in our region. To raise the awareness of the lack of Koori specific and/or appropriate safe houses, refuges and sobering-up centres and advocate to have these established in our region.
3. Youth—To promote the provision of education programs (to both male and female young community members) addressing family violence, alcohol and drug issues and sexual health and to ensure these are delivered in a culturally appropriate manner. To encourage cross-generational cultural and spiritual development and to encourage and support our youth to access educational opportunities.
4. Families—To acknowledge the importance of family by supporting and promoting culturally appropriate programs aimed at strengthening our families including effective parenting programs. To ensure our families are supported to address the issues that prevent effective parenting (Stolen Generation, child protection, foster care and respite issues).
5. Alcohol and Drug Issues—To support Koori Alcohol and Drug Workers employed in the region and encourage the provision of Koori specific preventative programs. To raise the awareness of the need for a culturally appropriate detox centre in our region so our community members can be supported by family through the detox rather than having to travel away from community to access this service.

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

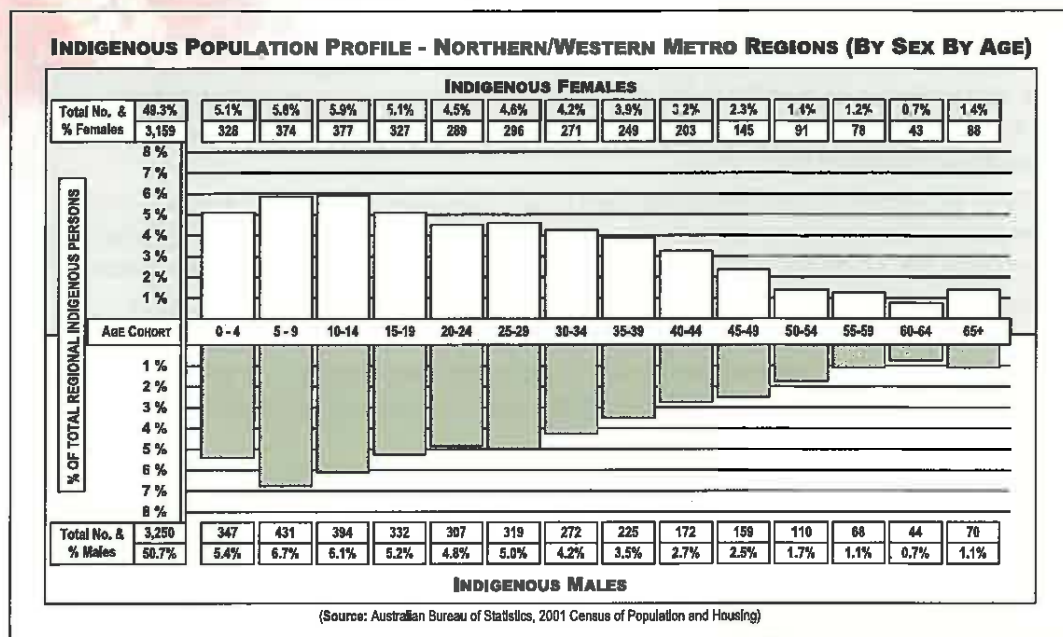
*"That all Koori families and children in our area have access to community-based culturally appropriate services that help our kids grow up safe, healthy and spiritually strong—free from abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and the damaging effects of substance abuse".*

### SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

Location	Organisation	Mainstream Organisation
Kyabram	Kyabram and District Community Health Service Kyabram Community and Learning Centre	Kyabram and District Community Health Service Kyabram Community and Learning Centre
Kerang	Health Worker (auspiced though Njernda)	Mallee Family Care Northern District Community Health Service
Echuca	Njernda Aboriginal Corporation Lakidjika	St Luke's Echuca Regional Health Campaspe Murray Community Care
Bendigo	Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd	

## Northern & Western Metropolitan Regions

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

- Phil Cooper
- Muriel Cadd
- Melissa Peters
- Liz Kneebone
- Deidre King
- Robert Critch
- Marg Stewart
- Leanne Brooke
- Reg Blow
- Linda Bamblett
- Lillian Tamiru


### REGIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

#### Issues

- Lack of information on the impact of family violence against all stakeholders
- Substance Abuse—Relationship between alcohol and drug abuse and family violence
- Inadequate funding for counselling
- Lack of accommodation services—emergency/safe houses/transitional
- Community attitude towards violence—Lack of leadership in addressing family violence
- Impact of family violence on children/youth
- Inadequate response to violence against children and young people
- Elder Abuse—No strategies to address violence against Elders
- Lack of services and adequate responses for same sex couples

#### Priorities

1. Funding
  - Provision of realistic/long term funding that is sustainable
  - Provision of funding for meaningful Counselling
2. Whole of Government Approach (on a local level)
  - Developing Partnerships
  - Seeking funding from other areas of Government to address underlying issues e.g. alcohol and drug, gambling and child protection

- 
3. Service Response
    - Process to develop and profile local best practice models
    - Develop therapeutic response to family violence at the time of crisis
    - Funding for alcohol and drug services to address family violence
    - Provision of services to strengthen families through a holistic response
    - Provision of a range of accommodation services—female, male, young people
    - Appropriate services for Same Sex Couples
  4. Leadership
    - Develop Aboriginal specific leadership strategies for addressing family violence
    - Encourage, engage and train leaders to stop violence
    - Support the role of Elders and protect cultural values
  5. Information and Education
    - Develop an awareness of Indigenous family violence in the wider service system— eg. Police, Courts, etc
    - Develop and distribute information to community regarding the impact of family violence.
    - Develop strategies to address community attitude towards family violence
    - Develop an information campaign to inform community on the impact of family violence on children and young people
    - Gather and disseminate documented information of the impact of family violence on Aboriginal people in Victoria

#### **Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments**

*"Family violence is not acceptable in any situation and it is not given the high priority it should be given. Family violence is caused by underlying issues that need to be addressed.*

*The most pressing issue for this region is sustainable funding. Without funding, none of the priorities can be achieved.*

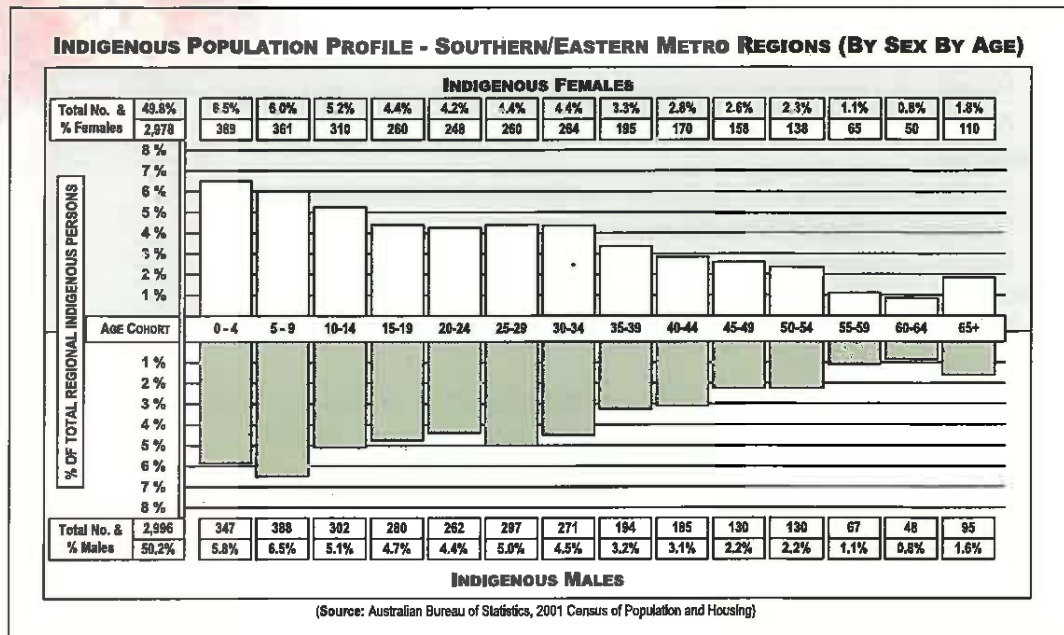
*We need to learn from the past".*

#### **ABORIGINAL SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
	Elizabeth Hoffman House Inc
East Brunswick	Aboriginal Community Elders Services
Fitzroy	Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.
	Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd
	Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sport & Recreation
	<b>George Wright Hostel</b>
Fitzroy & Northcote	Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
Northcote	Marg Tucker Hostel
	William T Onus Hostel
	Lady Gladys Nichols Hostel
Preston	Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation
	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Thornbury	<b>Aborigines Advancement League Inc</b>
	Bert Williams Centre
	Gurwidj Neighbourhood House
	Yappera Children's Services
West Meadows	Enmaraleek Association Incorporated

## Southern & Eastern Metropolitan Region

### REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (BY GENDER AND AGE)



#### Regional IFV Action Group Members

##### Southern Metropolitan Region

- Roseanne Hepburn
- Marg Worn
- David Dryden
- Helen Bands
- Kim Clarke
- Barbara Honeysett
- Robert Austin
- Debbie Austin
- Bryon Powell
- Vollee McHarg
- Malcolm Langdale
- Peter Rotumah

##### Eastern Metropolitan Region

- Doseena Fergie
- Anna Briggs
- Des Smith
- Glenys Merry
- Lillian Tamiru
- Aunty Dot Peters
- Peter Rotumah
- Chrissie Charles
- Rhonda Hammond

## REGIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

### EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

#### Issues

- No Indigenous female Refuge
- No Indigenous Time Out House for men
- Youth and Young People need to be able to access mainstream and Indigenous specific services
- Lack of Indigenous services in the region
- Child Abuse
- Cultural Abuse



### Priorities

1. Women's Refuge and Time Out House for men in the region
2. Appropriate information about existing services/culturally appropriate services
3. Youth and young people specific services
4. Strategies to be developed to address Child Abuse
5. Strategies to be developed to address community Abuse

### SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

#### Issues

- Child Abuse
- Elder Abuse
- Cultural Abuse
- Corporate Abuse
- Community Abuse
- Physical and Verbal Abuse
- Lack of public transport
- Women's Refuge
- Time Out House for men
- General community needs
- Linking with mainstream services
- Lack of Indigenous specific services within area
- Lack of information of family violence services within areas

#### Priorities

1. Community need to have access to a central meeting place
2. Appropriate access to Public Transport to effectively participate and access services
3. Establish more Indigenous specific services
4. Appropriate information about existing services/culturally appropriate services
5. Strategies to be developed to address Child Abuse

### Regional IFV Action Group Statement/Comments

#### Southern and Eastern Metropolitan Region

*The group would like the Task Force to note: There are NO Indigenous services from Lilydale to the City within the Eastern Region. From Lilydale as far back as you can see—there are limited numbers of Indigenous services.*

### SERVICE PROVIDERS IN REGION

Location	Organisation
Dandenong	Dandenong and District Aboriginal Co-operative—Bunurong Health Service Wilke Kwe and Lakijka (Outreach VACCA)
Hastings	KAALA Koori Association
Healesville	Coranderrk Aboriginal Housing Cooperative Yarra Valley Community Health Services—Indigenous Health Service
Lilydale	Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative Ltd—Outreach
St Kilda	Galliamble Men's Recovery Centre Winja Ulupna Aboriginal Women's Alcohol Recovery House
Windsor	Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative Ltd

## VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FUND

In the 2002/2003 State Budget, Government announced a total of \$2.6 million over four years for the establishment of an Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund. This Fund provides for flexible grants to community organisations for projects and activities, which would enable them to develop localised responses to family violence within the Indigenous community for preventing, reducing or responding to family violence through:

- Building the capacity of local communities to address family violence;
- Supporting local action oriented research; and
- Developing and implementing local Indigenous community based family violence initiatives.

The Fund is used to support the emergence of a range of local approaches developed by local Indigenous communities. This also includes the development of Statewide programs that can be trialed prior to the formal adoption of new community oriented programs and services under the proposed Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

Indigenous communities were invited to apply for funds through two rounds of funding, March and August 2003 for the 2003/2004 period.

The Task Force developed the guidelines and application forms for the Fund to ensure that it met the needs of the Indigenous community in relation to applying for family violence related initiatives. The Task Force also developed a framework that would enable the Regional IFV Action Groups a point of access to submit information about local activities.

This framework was developed in conjunction with the Community Initiatives Fund to support the emergence of a range of local approaches developed by Regional IFV Action Groups.

The Task Force held meetings with the Regional IFV Support Officers and other relevant service providers at the Aboriginal Community Elders Service (ACES) on 18 July 2003 to discuss the guidelines and selection criteria for the Community Initiatives Fund. This was to ensure that local Indigenous community groups and organisations would be clear about the process for applying for funds to develop local responses that are easily adapted and respond to local conditions and need.

The Funds were available in two categories:

**Minor Grants**—projects up to a value of \$15,000

**Major Grants**—all projects over \$15,000, up to a maximum of \$100,000 were considered under the major projects grant fund

Funding was available to Victorian Aboriginal organisations and groups. The organisation applying for funds had to meet the following selection criteria as determined by the Task Force.

### MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE PROJECTS FUNDED THROUGH THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FUND

The projects funded for the 2002/2003 have only just commenced (since June 2003) and therefore no data, information or best practice examples have been documented to be considered in the Action Plan/Recommendations Section of the Final Report.

Several of the projects have outlined in their submissions that if successful then communities have an expectation that these initiatives will be funded as ongoing. The Task Force acknowledge that the issue of ongoing funding for successful initiatives or activities is a discussion yet to be had with Government.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

***Legally incorporated under Victorian and Commonwealth legislation, or in the process of becoming incorporated:***

- Established with the purpose of promoting Indigenous community objectives and outcomes;
- Controlled or directed by Indigenous Victorians;
- Non-profit organisations or commercial enterprises wishing to run a non-profit program; and
- Able to demonstrate financial and administrative capacity to manage the funding and the project or activities for which it is received.

Funding will not be provided to mainstream agencies, Government agencies, or private profit-making organisations, unless the funding is for a non-profit program.

***The scope of the Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund is deliberately broad so as to accommodate a full range of local community priorities. Types of projects that may be funded include:***

- Community support programs (healing, counselling)
- Advocacy
- Positive Role Model Development
- Educational/Promotional
- Seeding Funds
- Minor Capital
- Targeted projects (Projects that target Elders, Women, Men, Youth, Children, Same Sex Couples, Families, etc).

***Funding will not be provided for:***

- Major capital projects
- Projects that fall within the responsibility of another agency
- Recurrent funding
- Court/Legal Costs
- Emergency Relief Funding
- Commercial or Business Ventures

***The Minister, following recommendations from the Task Force determines applications for the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund. In assessing applications, favourable consideration will be given to proposals that:***

- Are specific to addressing family violence
- Will provide an on-going or long term benefit
- Have clear outcomes
- Are adequately planned
- Complement the Victorian Government's objectives
- Meet the eligibility guidelines

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 1

*That a separate Monitoring and Evaluation Plan be developed by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and that the outcomes of each initiative and project funded under the Community Initiatives Fund be reported on each year. That all projects be assessed against culturally relevant selection criteria where requests for ongoing funding are supported.*



## INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FUND—GRANT RECIPIENTS

The following is an overview of the successful Victorian Indigenous organisations for 2002/2003.

### MAJOR GRANT RECIPIENTS

#### YAPPERA CHILDREN'S SERVICES \$35,000

A project involving the development of programs and workshops for staff, children and families using Yappera and working in partnership with Gurwidj (Neighbourhood) House covering issues on family violence including behavioural issues, anger management, positive thinking and assertiveness.

Expected to be completed by March 2004, it is anticipated that the project will result in strategies to:

- ensure Yappera staff members continually upgrade their professional skills in dealing with children and parents who have been impacted by family violence and breakdown;
- ensure the service continues to be relevant and meaningful for future families and children;
- develop partnerships with other children's services, agencies and Koori organisations to keep the program going; and
- monitor children and parents in need of the program and other relevant services outside of Yappera.

#### WATHAURONG ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE \$71,785

A project to employ a short term project worker to plan and implement a series of four community residential 'yarn ups' with an education, planning and healing focus. The project will improve recognition of violence and abuse through awareness and advocacy and community education to support and empower the community to develop programs for children, youth, men and women to respond to and reduce/prevent the incidence of family violence.

The project is expected to be completed by mid 2004. The completion of the project will be measured by the participation of community and increase in community seeking assistance, a decrease in police incidents and the development of a community action plan.

#### ENMARALEEK ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED \$100,000

The project is an activity-based diversionary, support and education program drawing on the positive influences of sport and associated social events. The project aims to address family violence issues by providing sporting activities and social events, camps, education/awareness sessions to all ages with a particular emphasis on contact and interaction with Elders.

The project will be measured by the level of participation in sports, social and educational activities, and referrals to specialists in other appropriate services and by a reduction in offences. An interim Family Justice Committee has been set up to deal with a range of issues including family and community violence. A specific activity committee will be drawn from this group to manage the project.

This project is expected to be an ongoing activity and may therefore have funding implications for the future.

#### BALLARAT AND DISTRICT ABORIGINAL COOPERATIVE LIMITED \$99,998

This project aims to engage families in a preventative capacity, targeting families who are most at risk of experiencing family violence. The project proposes running family and children's camps which will serve as respite for parents and children as well as comprising some education, family bonding, strengthening of traditional culture, community values and spiritual healing.

Together with the camps, complete families will be required to take part in the entire program that will be described as 'Strong Families'. This will incorporate home visits, support and counselling, strengthening of linkages into mainstream services and participation in groups and workshops such as 'coping with kids' (parenting skills and stress management), 'cheap and healthy tucker' (budgeting and nutrition) and a men's program based on self reflection and behavioural change.

This project will build on the recently completed VicHealth Leadership project and a needs analysis/strategy development project funded by the Office for the Status of Women under the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Program.

The project is expected to be completed by June 2004. The project will address family violence by strengthening the capacities and skills of families to deal and cope with conflict as it arises. Participation in the project and regular home visits will ensure ongoing support for families. The project will also develop and strengthen linkages that will increase access to services.

### **ABORIGINES ADVANCEMENT LEAGUE INC**

**\$100,000**

This project aims to develop and deliver a program that will focus on supporting/empowering women who are experiencing family violence as well as provision of an accessible and culturally appropriate counselling service for one-on-one counselling. The program expects to attract isolated women in the northern suburbs who don't have access to any community support systems.

The project is expected to be finished by December 2004. Through creation of an entire community adult education program around issues of family violence, women will be empowered to address the issues as it affects them. Through access to individual counselling, women will have the opportunity to address painful issues with positive healing.

The issues around inter-generational abuse will be included in the program. This project will have a template that could easily be adaptable to other communities.

### **NGWALA WILLUMBONG COOPERATIVE LIMITED**

**\$100,000**

This project aims to establish a self-sustaining statewide network of support groups for Aboriginal men. The network will be established in five zones across Victoria including, Barwon, Goulburn, Gippsland, East Gippsland and Melbourne.

The project aims to implement a model plan that promotes the spiritual well-being of Aboriginal men, which will assist them to achieve their fullest potential by developing new 'living' skills. This is achieved through a structured process of training and group work that will assist each individual to:

- connect to their feelings to identify and/or reconnect to their inherent personal strengths;
- acknowledge their personal weaknesses and triggers for negative behaviours such as domestic violence;
- understand and use a method of conflict resolution that can be used in times of personal or situational crisis; and
- participate in ongoing personal growth in a safe and supportive group network.

The project is expected to be finished within a twelve month period. Performance measures could be easily established through the setting of numeric participation targets, change measurements in participant's knowledge and/or behaviour and attitudes at entry, mid way and completion of participant satisfaction surveys.

## MINOR GRANT RECIPIENTS

### VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICE CO-OPERATIVE LIMITED **\$12,000**

This project is divided into two parts. The Family Healing Model is designed to involve the family (including extended) as a group in a holistic model for families who have/or are experiencing violent behaviour.

The proposal aims to intervene in the cycle of violence by providing a range of healing strategies:

- to replace the violent behaviours and the impact of such behaviour by building a basis for constructive family functioning;
- to heal the relationship between members; and
- to begin to heal the shame that family violence has within the community.

The model can allow for six months for the healing process to have a significant impact on family life to function without violent behaviour. 'Restoring a Positive Role for Men in their Families' is a model to support men who have issues with violent behaviours and assist them to know what to do by providing practical strategies to create a positive role model for men as fathers and partners.

The practical strategies include scripting, journal writing, and 'psychodrama', developing empathy for the other person and self management. These will in part, allow for feedback and demonstration of the acquisition of new concepts and skills during the group sessions. The group workshop will run for six weeks and will be designed to allow for the group to do another workshop at a progressed level.

### MOOGJI ABORIGINAL COUNCIL EAST GIPPSLAND INC **\$15,000**

This project aims to involve the communities of Far East Gippsland Region incorporating communities of Lakes Entrance, Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, Nowa Nowa, Orbost and Cann River in developing networks, strategies and priorities to address family violence issues in the region. The participation of communities in the Regional IFV Action Group and the development of a report summary outlining priorities and strategies will form the basis of a submission to the next round of Community Initiatives Fund Major Grants.

The project is expected to take a strategic step by encouraging and developing co-operative networks between communities whereby strategies can be developed on a regional basis.

### CENTRAL GIPPSLAND ABORIGINAL HEALTH & HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE LIMITED **\$15,000**

This project will enhance and develop its Yaken Nalu (Women Together) group to enable Indigenous Women of the Latrobe Valley area access to and participation in a range of activities/strategies that will benefit the women and the Indigenous community of the Latrobe Valley area.

The project aims to provide Indigenous women of the Latrobe Valley area with a focal point to discuss issues that affect them and their families and will include an opportunity to develop and implement strategies needed to address issues such as family violence and empowerment of Elders.

It is envisaged that Yaken Nalu will be an ongoing initiative. The project will have achieved its aims by the positive development of the women's self esteem, the increase in participation of the group, strategies and activities successfully implemented and increased involvement of Indigenous women in identifying and addressing issues that affect them and their families.

**PORTLAND-MARA INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S COUNCIL****\$15,000**

This project aims to initiate a Women's Well-Being House to provide support, advocacy, shelter and inspiration for women and children. The aim of the project is to provide a place for women to enhance their well-being by addressing urgent family violence and substance abuse issues through the support women give each other.

The Women's Well Being House will be voluntarily serviced by the committed membership of the Portland Mara Indigenous Women's Council to provide:

- a place for women to meet and talk;
- a place for women and children to go to;
- a place for women to address family violence;
- a place for women free of alcohol and drugs;
- a place for women to protect our children and ourselves;
- a place for women to celebrate their achievements; and
- a place for women to plan for their future success.

The project will fund the rental of a house and pay utilities and a phone line for twelve months. The project will be measured against the number of women accessing the service including the phone line and the number of women assisted by the Portland-Mara Indigenous Women's Council.

**LAKE TYERS HEALTH & CHILDREN'S SERVICES ASSOCIATION****\$15,000**

The Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust—Women's Group will be encouraging community members, both male and female, to engage in activities that raise awareness of the issue of family violence. The Women's Group will address the issue holistically to equip family members with strategies to deal with violent situations. This will be done by convening camps for mothers and daughters and for fathers and sons and will engage males from other areas of the community including uncles, grand-fathers and young people.

The aim of the project is to:

- raise awareness of the issue
- keep children safe from harm
- encourage education programs
- work holistically with other agencies in a partnership style approach
- seek positive parenting approaches

It is anticipated that if successful, the project will be delivered ongoing.

**KURNAI GUNAI ELDERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION****\$15,000**

This project aims to convene a women's camp for 40 women from Lakes Entrance designed to be a safe place for women to talk about their stories and develop future proposals to make a positive change in their lives.

The project has two components:

1. Self esteem needs to be addressed and developing strategies to increase self esteem will include booking out the local gymnasium for three hours, one afternoon each week in swimming, sauna and gym for healing and positive reinforcement.
2. Reintroduction and reinforcement of positive roles will be in the establishment of at least one girls sporting team.

The project is expected to be completed within six months with the hope that the self esteem and positive role modelling can be an ongoing project.

**KURNAL GUNAI ELDERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION****\$15,000**

This project aims to give back cultural values to the male members in the community by targeting male participation from all ages to highlight the issues associated with family violence 'not being our way'. The project will develop role models within the area and this will encourage good relationships between fathers and sons and other male participation throughout the community.

This project will aim to:

- Convene men's and boys camps
- Convene father and son weekend activities
- Convene weekend male activities
- Address cultural barriers (role models, leaders, cultural jargon)

The project is expected to be ongoing and will conduct education programs through activities that build bridges and engage in healthy relationships between male peers in the community. The group strives towards better lifestyle role models and leaders will be identified and raise awareness of family violence.

**KIRRAE HEALTH SERVICES INCORPORATED****\$14,106**

This project will focus on women's social and emotional wellbeing. It focuses on women who are geographically isolated and will run twice weekly activities with social interaction from within and the broader community.

By providing activities for women the level of depression, family violence, lack of motivation and general unhappiness will be addressed. The project aims to achieve improvement in self worth and self esteem thus reducing levels of family violence.

A positive parenting group and sessions on healthy living will form the basis of the activities as well as other related topics including diabetes, infant welfare, immunisations and women's health issues. It is expected that the project will take between six and twelve months to complete.

**RAMAHYUCK AND DISTRICT ABORIGINAL CORPORATION****\$15,000**

The project is a community support program that incorporates healing and counselling. The project proposes to raise awareness of family violence, address holistic approaches associated with the effects of family violence and identify counselling services for clients. This will be achieved through group discussions around women's business and group discussions around men's business.

The project aims to:

- raise awareness in an environment of healing and counselling
- identify community groups and one-on-one consultations
- identify ownership for the project
- develop partnership style approaches in associated family violence areas

If successful the project may be ongoing. The project will include convening men's camps, women's camps, case management and development and implementation of men's and women's groups.

## STATEWIDE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In February 2002, the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force and Secretariat conducted Preliminary Information sessions around the State with organisations that had been funded under the Commonwealth's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) Grants Program.

These sessions explored issues surrounding the incidence of family violence, the communities views on the causal factors which underpin family violence and the current thinking on identifying solutions to address these factors within community settings.

The Task Force conducted these sessions with Indigenous communities to raise the awareness of family violence issues and to encourage (through a 'community led' approach) the development of local priorities and solutions.

Indigenous organisations, key agencies and relevant stakeholders were then targeted in an attempt to ensure that local service providers were prepared for the potential increase in demand for family violence services.

### Preliminary Information Sessions

Dates	Locations
11 February 2002	Aborigines Advancement League—Peak Bodies Forum
12 February 2002	Geelong
29 April 2002	Melbourne Museum
21 May 2002	Mildura
22 May 2002	Shepparton
3 June 2002	Bendigo
11 June 2002	Bairnsdale
14 June 2002	Morwell
17 June 2002	Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre—Preston
26 June 2002	Heywood
27 June 2002	Warrnambool

The Task Force then commenced more in-depth community consultations in July 2003 around the State and engaged with community in neutral locations to ensure that open and frank discussion took place with all participants in a safe and secure environment. The Task Force put in place measures to ensure that once they left the area, counselling and debriefing services were available for participants if required.

### Preliminary Information Sessions

Dates	Locations
2 July 2002	Ballarat
2 July 2002	Kerang
3 July 2002	Bendigo
20 August 2002	Heywood Community
21 August 2002	Hamilton Service Providers
22 August 2002	Warrnambool Community
23 August 2002	Warrnambool Service Providers
28 October 2002	Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc
29 October 2002	Lakes Entrance Service Providers
29 October 2002	Lake Tyers
30 October 2002	Bairnsdale Community
30 October 2002	Bairnsdale Service Providers
7 November, 2002	Dandenong Community
9 November 2002	Healesville Community
14 November 2002	Ballarat Community

### OUTCOMES FROM PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS

The Task Force acknowledged at their December 2002 meeting that they were concerned about the minimal participation of local Indigenous communities at the Preliminary Family Violence Consultations and made the following observations:

- Local Indigenous communities were not responsive to what community termed as 'Government Bureaucrats' coming into their communities, seeking information about family violence issues and then expecting them to find solutions to problems that were firmly entrenched in their daily lives.
- Indigenous community members that were not going to participate in the consultations were threatening those that did want to participate in the sessions.
- Initial lack of participation by Task Force members in the sessions due to prior work commitments.
- Indigenous community members were concerned for their safety if they participated in the sessions.
- No support mechanisms were put in place after the first round of community consultations.
- No access to transport to attend sessions and the level of services available to actively participate.
- People were not attending these community consultations even when local Indigenous members were engaged to facilitate the process.

To try and facilitate a more positive 'community led' approach to these consultations, the Task Force agreed to invite Indigenous communities to submit proposals to run local activities and provide feedback to the Task Force regarding key issues, priorities and suggested solutions for addressing Indigenous family violence.

## COMMUNITY LED CONSULTATIONS

The Task Force funded thirteen proposals to enable Indigenous communities to run local activities and provide feedback to the Task Force regarding key issues, priorities and suggested solutions for addressing family violence in their regions.

The Task Force believed that if the activities were not specifically titled or referenced to Indigenous Family Violence then more community members would participate and family violence related issues would be discussed at a more informal level.

Feedback from reports provided by Task Force funded community consultation initiatives has been very positive in relation to the increased numbers of Indigenous community participants in these types of events. The Task Force noted that different forms of violence were documented through personal accounts and short stories which were freely given by community participants. Funding was also provided for debriefing, counselling and support services for Indigenous participants throughout the duration of these events.

Organisation and Community	Recommendations
<b>Bendigo Aboriginal Cooperative</b> "Many Aboriginal Voices" Focus groups	Resources to support a community 'drop-in' centre. Develop mentor programs to promote positive parent role models.
<b>Echuca Indigenous Media Association</b> Women's and Men's Forums	Support for additional Family Violence Workers at the grass roots level. Resources to have regular local Action Group meetings. Additional resources are required to maintain the engagement and interest of Indigenous men so they can meet in an informal and caring environment.
<b>Portland Mara Women's Council</b> Indigenous Women's Retreat	That more camps and retreats be held specifically for Indigenous women and girls so they can further discuss and identify issues relevant to addressing family violence in their communities.
<b>Yeerung Kurnai</b> Family Day and Tennis Clinic	Additional resources are required to maintain the engagement and interest of Indigenous men so they can meet in an informal and caring environment.
<b>Elizabeth Hoffman House in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Mother and Children's Unit</b> Report on Aboriginal Women and Children's Experiences of Family Violence within Victorian Aboriginal communities	Recommendations made in this report have been included in the Task Force Action Plan.
<b>Outblack Koorie Gay and Transgender Sista Girls Social Support Group</b> Domestic Violence Workshops (Lake Condah Mission)	Provide an ongoing voice to support the issues of same sex couples. That relevant programs and support services be put in place to meet the needs of Indigenous people in same sex relationships.
<b>Kyabram Aboriginal Women's Group</b> Aboriginal Needs Day	Increased female representation on decision-making forums in the Hume Region. More family violence awareness forums in the region and appropriate programs and services for female Elders and young people in relation to family violence.
<b>Gippsland &amp; East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative</b> Statewide Aboriginal Elders Camp	Specific service responses to assist Indigenous Elders to live independently and be safe in their homes. Also establishing a Victorian Indigenous Elders Council.
<b>Dardee Munwurro</b> Aboriginal Men's Workshop	More workshops for Indigenous men as well as the provision of specific support services for Indigenous men.



## STATEWIDE INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE FORUM

Once the Task Force had completed their Indigenous community family violence consultations, it became apparent that most participants recommended that a Statewide Forum needed to be held so that Indigenous Victorians could have more detailed and broad discussion on Victorian Indigenous Family Violence issues.

The Task Force convened the Inaugural Statewide Indigenous Family Violence Forum from 17-19 March 2003 which brought together over 300 Indigenous community members from around the State to discuss family violence and offer some priorities and solutions to work towards addressing family violence in their communities.

Participants sought to identify key issues of concern to Indigenous families and provided valuable information and advice to the Victorian Government to strengthen links with and affect current and future policy development.

Four workshop themes were identified for the Forum with six sub-themes and break-out groups for each theme. The themes were:

1. Traditional Culture
2. Prevention/Protection
3. Family healing
4. Existing service responses to Indigenous Family Violence

These groups were held concurrently on day two and three of the Forum. Each group was introduced by a facilitator and a key speaker presented on the workshop topic. All themes were identified as being relevant by the Victorian Indigenous community following the in-depth community consultation process conducted by the Task Force.

All participants were given the opportunity to provide input into other break-out groups through the feedback session and on day three through suggestion boxes provided in each break-out room.



## DAY ONE

The Forum commenced with the official welcome to country by the traditional owners, representatives of the Kulin Nation. Forum MC's and Task Force members, Daphne Yarram and Alf Bamblett provided an official welcome and encouraged all participants to take the challenge of raising the issues and to provide clear direction to Government on key outcomes. They also provided a presentation on the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force structure and introduced the Task Force members.

### INTRODUCTION—DAPHNE YARRAM AND ALF BAMBLETT—TASK FORCE

*"For those here today from the Victorian Indigenous community, I wish to acknowledge your bravery and strength in attending this Forum and coming forward to speak out about the issue of family violence in our communities.*

*In speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, we understand how difficult it can be for individuals to raise this issue within their families and communities.*

*We realise that this Forum is only a beginning in the fight ahead to reduce and prevent further violence occurring in our communities and wish to assure you that you are not alone.*

*The key to winning this battle is strength in numbers—the more of us who speak out about violence, the easier it will be in the long run for us to heal our communities.*

*Over the next three days we have the task of identifying solutions and making recommendations that will underpin the Task Force's Final Report to Government. That Report will set in-train the direction that Government takes in the future in working with communities to address the many underlying issues related to preventing violence within families".*

Alf Bamblett outlined who the keynote speakers would be (in order of speaking) over the three days of the Forum:

- Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon. Gavin Jennings MLC
- Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, MP
- Parliamentary Secretary for Women, Ms Mary Gillet MP
- Director, Planning and Development Branch, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Karen Milward
- Director, Family and Community Support, DHS, Kathryn Lamb
- Elder, Alma Thorpe
- Elder, Jim Berg
- Task Force members—Daphne Yarram, Karen Bryant and Troy Austin
- Elder—Elizabeth Hoffman
- Department of Justice—Indigenous Issues Unit—Andrew Jackomos
- Child Protection (VACCA)—Muriel Cadd
- Task Force Member—Alf Bamblett

Inspirational speakers provided the backdrop of what eventuated as an emotionally harrowing three days. Speakers from both Government and community made key statements in relation to Indigenous family violence issues and how they are affecting Indigenous people at the 'grass roots' level.

## KAREN MILWARD, DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT BRANCH, ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS VICTORIA

*There are many aspects of family violence as an issue that are challenging.*

*It includes 'silence'—Very few people within the community want to confront the reality of family violence. While many of us are comfortable in recognising and pointing to the violence and racism directed towards us by the mainstream community, we are less able to recognise and respond to the hurt inflicted upon us by sections of our own communities.*

*It includes 'institutional racism'—Just as some in our own community believe that violence is part of our culture—many people outside our community believe the same. This leads to an acceptance by people within mainstream agencies to somehow tolerate and accept violence committed against Indigenous people, and their subsequent reluctance and failure to intervene on behalf of Indigenous victims of violence.*

*It includes 'a lack of evidence and information'—I find it difficult to understand how little is known about the incidence of family violence within our communities. When one thinks of all of the investigations, royal commission's and strategies that have been directed at Aboriginal people over the past two decades—how is it that they have failed to recognise this issue or put in place mechanisms to monitor the extent and incidence of violence within families.*

*While these issues present very real barriers to tackling family violence issues they are not insurmountable.*

*In respect to the issue of 'silence' within the community, I believe that the Task Force has been incredibly effective in opening up debate within our communities. The fact that we are all here today is testament to the leadership of the Task Force members in giving people the confidence to come together in an open forum to discuss the problems and work together to develop solutions.*

*It's heartening to me personally to see our Elders and community leaders in charge of this process, rather than a retired judge, senior bureaucrat or other 'acceptable' person from the mainstream community.*

*In respect to 'institutional racism' I think we are also seeing some major changes and positive new directions from Government.*

*The fundamental approach that we proposed to guide the development of the Strategy, namely a 'community' led approach, has been accepted and supported. We have received a great deal of support from the Government and our Minister in particular—but I have also seen a great deal of support from senior officers across a variety of Departments who seem to genuinely appreciate and understand the need for community leadership on this issue.*

*While these steps won't stop racism on the ground overnight—in schools, and hospitals and police stations—it is a positive beginning that can lead to the cultural changes necessary within Victoria's Government agencies, that we as a community need to support us in implementing solutions.*

*This will include developing a coordinated 'whole of government' process that ensures the community and Government in partnership, track the incidence of violence in communities and evaluate and refine our efforts to reduce and prevent it in the future.*

*While confronting family violence can never be seen as something we necessarily want to have to do—it can be done in a way that helps heal us. Over the next three days some of us may be confronted and overwhelmed by our own pain and memories and the pain of those around us.*

*We should all take great care with each other over the next few days—support everyone who wants to be heard, make sure no-one who is upset is left alone and make sure that no-one feels threatened or intimidated in any way.*



Karen Milward

The afternoon provided the backdrop for showcasing a jointly funded promotional tool for communities with the showing of a short film—"Mirror Images" produced by Indigenous film maker, Daniel King.

This was followed with inspirational speakers Aunty Alma Thorpe and Uncle Jim Berg who both spoke from their hearts about how true and real family violence is within Victorian Indigenous communities.

They also encouraged participants to identify key issues of concern to Indigenous families, including providing advice to Government and the Task Force on local and regional priorities in relation to Indigenous Family Violence.

Task Force members Daphne Yarram, Karen Bryant and Troy Austin spoke about what family violence is and what it encompasses from the views of participants in the Statewide community consultations.



## DAY TWO

This day was solely dedicated to participating in the workshops to discuss family violence issues from an individual, family and community perspective and to make recommendations for holistic responses to address Indigenous Family Violence in Victoria to be included in the Task Force's Final Report to the Victorian Government.

Participants took a much needed break after Workshop 2 to listen to inspirational speakers Aunty Elizabeth Hoffman and Andrew Jackomos.

Task Force Chairperson Daphne Yarram and Alf Bamblett set the scene for participants regarding what the Task Force required from each of the workshops and the reasons for how the workshop themes were determined.

### WORKSHOP 1—TRADITIONAL CULTURE

- Sub Themes:
1. Diminishing roles of Elders
  2. The changing roles of men
  3. The changing roles of women
  4. Breakdown of family structures
  5. Young people and education
  6. Links between contemporary disadvantage and history of colonisation

During the preliminary consultations, communities across the State raised concern about young people and other community members having an understanding that violence is the traditional way.

Everyone the Task Force met, felt that this was a false and fundamentally wrong interpretation of culture and they placed a strong emphasis upon the need to change such perceptions.

Many community members also noted the relationship between loss of culture and family, and contemporary patterns of social breakdown and family stress. Many people stated that not enough culture is taught to our kids and the traditional roles of men and women are being lost.

*"What we are looking for within a discussion on traditional culture are ways in which we can use our culture and traditions as a mechanism for strengthening identity, building respect within families and communities and providing solutions to family conflict".*

### WORKSHOP 2—PREVENTION/PROTECTION

- Sub Themes:
1. Sexual Assault
  2. Elders Abuse
  3. Child Abuse
  4. Same Sex Couple Abuse
  5. Spousal Abuse
  6. Community Abuse and Workplace Violence

This theme is about identifying actions at a local community level that can stop the violence that is currently occurring and strengthen families and communities in a way that prevents it in the future.

Our preliminary consultations identified issues relating to many types of family violence. These included issues related to violence against women, children, Elders, workers in our organisations and youth. They also identified major gaps in current service responses to both victims and perpetrators of violence.

The Task Force has identified that in order for family healing to take place both victims and perpetrators of violence need to have access to services that assist in the short term and moves towards long-term stability for families.

*"What we are seeking in this workshop are some practical initiatives and suggestions that can make an immediate difference for these groups. In particular, we are seeking initiatives that can be developed and delivered by our own people and organisations".*

### WORKSHOP 3—FAMILY HEALING

- Sub Themes:
1. Family violence and Legal Resources Unit
  2. Indigenous Specific Refuges
  3. Men's Support & Rehabilitation Services
  4. Indigenous Counselling and Family Reunion
  5. Family Re-integration and Outreach Support/Respite Care
  6. Pre/Post Release Programs for Prisoners

A major dilemma within Indigenous communities when addressing matters of family violence is balancing the priorities to address the needs of victims for safety, protection and redress, with the need to keep families together and to make them strong.

During community consultations it was identified that communities do not wish to see members of their family incarcerated as a consequence of formal prosecution. However communities have also identified that there still needs to be consequences for perpetrators and the healing process needs to take place involving both the victim and the perpetrator within a culturally appropriate form of family therapy.

*"What we are hoping to gain from this workshop is some innovative thinking on how we can balance these needs and develop solutions within our communities that meet the needs of victims, whilst also strengthening our family and community bonds".*

### WORKSHOP 4—EXISTING SERVICE RESPONSES TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

- Sub Themes:
1. Mainstream Responses to Family violence
  2. Service Gaps and Indigenous Funded Service Provision
  3. Forging Protocols Between Government and Indigenous Service Providers
  4. Localised Resources—Metro vs Regional
  5. Development of Local Indigenous Family Initiatives
  6. Criminal Justice System Responses

The Task Force has identified that it is not safe to assume that all Indigenous people wish to access services attached to Indigenous organisations, with many individuals identifying that they would prefer to have their issues dealt with by mainstream services to ensure confidentiality.

This view does not infer that Indigenous services don't maintain confidentiality, however many people are concerned that the close relationship between prospective clients and staff of Indigenous organisations can create barriers to some individuals accessing valuable support services.

This issue also places a significant responsibility on mainstream service providers to understand the needs of Indigenous people affected by family violence issues and to provide culturally appropriate services when dealing with Indigenous families.

*"This workshop needs to take a good look at existing services in the justice, human services and educational system and make recommendations on steps that can be taken within Government to ensure that they can provide effective and appropriate services to our communities".*

***"I Don't Wanna Play House", written and performed by Tammy Anderson***

*After a gruelling 24 sub group workshops and heavy discussion on family violence issues in Victorian Indigenous communities, participants were provided with entertainment by Playbox Theatre Company "I Don't Wanna Play House", written and performed by Tammy Anderson.*

*This one woman play is a story of hope's triumph over pain which is told with disarming and often shocking honesty as Tammy tells of a life only a tenacious spirit could survive.*

*Tammy sings her story of constantly packing up and moving on back and forth from Melbourne to Tasmania through 16 houses in her first 15 years. Her play was both inspiring and emotional and left the audience spell bound with a standing ovation to Tammy at the end of her performance.*



### DAY 3

The final day provided participants with the opportunity to hear from non-Government agencies on Child Protection issues in Victoria. Task Force members formed a panel on stage in the theatre to provide feedback to all participants on the outcomes of the workshops held on day two and to provide the opportunity for further feedback, discussion and recommendations to the Task Force.

The day closed with the Task Force providing a general overview of the three day Indigenous Family Violence Forum. The Task Force advised participants that all discussions and recommendations for 'where to from here' would be compiled in the Task Force's Final Report to the Victorian Government in October 2003 and formally launched with the Victorian Indigenous Community at a later date to be determined.

The ACES Elders Choir provided the finishing touch for participants to continue their long journey home.

Counsellors were in attendance throughout the duration of the Forum and participants took advantage of the opportunity to speak with them and be referred on for future sessions at the conclusion of the Forum.

Community feedback overall was that:

*"It was one of the most successful Forums held in Victoria where community from all the regions could actively participate to discuss hard hitting issues that have never been spoken about before..."*

Community gave overwhelming support for an Annual Forum to bring together community from around the State to share ideas, gain strength and showcase best practice models of projects funded under the Community Initiatives Fund.

The Task Force also funded the development of an Indigenous Family Violence Promotional Kit to underpin and support the education and awareness process about the role of the Family Violence Task Force. The Kit seeks to encourage Indigenous communities to participate in focus group discussions and community consultations in relation to Indigenous family violence issues in Victoria.

The Task Force Promotional Kit contained posters, leaflets, the Framework document, the Interim Report, stickers, badges, caps and T-shirts.

The clear message to the Task Force from the Forum was to sustain the momentum and formalise partnerships and commitments with Government, for the future health and wellbeing of the Victorian Indigenous community.



## KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

### HOLISTIC HEALING APPROACHES

The Forum supported the notion that family violence solutions must be based on a holistic understanding of Indigenous community needs and a coordinated partnership approach across the Indigenous community organisation sector. The Forum also confirmed that holistic approaches require a partnership and coordinated approach within Government to resource and support Indigenous communities in a manner that allows for maximum flexibility in determining their own future and priorities.

### HEALING

The Forum identified that **"you can't work with just one arm of the family"**. In dealing with family violence we need to deal with the victims, including women, provide specialised healing for the children affected by family violence, provide healing for the men and then develop an integrated healing approach that effectively strengthens the whole family.

The Indigenous Family Violence Task Force confirmed to participants that it has called for services which address the multi faceted, intergenerational and cyclical nature of family violence in Indigenous communities. Holistic Family Healing Centres were proposed as an appropriate model of service delivery to strengthen and heal individuals, families and communities affected by family violence.

Under this model, Indigenous Family Healing Centres would be established in regional Centres throughout Victoria through a process of consultation with local Indigenous communities. The Centres would provide a comprehensive range of services designed to prevent, reduce and respond to all forms of family violence within local Indigenous communities. This would include community education and awareness raising, family support and parenting services, counselling, support and respite for victims of violence including women, children and Elders, men's services including referral to 'time out' places, and community dispute resolution services. The Centres would also focus on ways to support recovery and healing for an individual family or community which incorporates spiritual, cultural, social and psychological dimensions.

Such Centres as identified by other States and internationally are usually purpose built and important cultural beliefs and practices influence the design. There is usually strong use of indoor and outdoor areas, some separate spaces for women and men, and areas where family can come together. It is a given that the Holistic Family Healing Centres would be Aboriginal community controlled organisations. A number of models exist for their development in conjunction with relevant local communities.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

The Forum recommended that Holistic Family Healing Centres and Time Out Centres be established within all regions of Victoria.

### CULTURE

Family violence solutions must be based on a reconnection of community with traditional culture and knowledge. The Forum outcomes identified the fundamental importance of traditional culture as the source of community strength and resilience, and recommended that Government increase resources to support all Indigenous communities to experience and enjoy their cultural rights.

## ELDERS

Solutions to family violence issues must be based on the recognition and respect for Elders and their roles. The Forum acknowledges the primary role of Elders as keepers of cultural experience and knowledge and in guiding the community and their authority in providing leadership as decision makers.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

The Forum recommends that an Elders Council be established in Victoria and that resources be directed to prevent Elder abuse and to develop programs that bring youth and Elders together to provide mutual respect and understanding.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

The Elders Council should be established through a Forum convened by ATSIC, AAV and Aged Care (DHS).

## COMMUNITY CONTROL

There was strong support for the 'community led' approach where the development, design and implementation of programs and services are driven by the needs of the community. It was further stressed that for the Strategy to be successful it must be community controlled and driven from the local level.

*'The information needs to come from the grass roots people, ordinary every day people, not just Government officials'*

## LAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Forum strongly reinforced the general view that when addressing family violence issues, recognition of the importance of land to Indigenous communities is paramount.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

The Forum recommends that the Victorian Government provide land and infrastructure necessary for the establishment of Holistic Family Healing Centres on country and the provision of programs that reconnect community with their land and culture.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

Specifically, participants of the Forum recommended that:

The Task Force direct the Victorian Government and ATSIC to undertake an analysis of all properties that have been purchased for communities. This should be done with the view of improving the utilisation of those properties for community projects and programs such as:

- family violence
- substance abuse
- strengthening families
- other programs relevant to local community
- in particular, the future management and utilisation of Camp Jungai

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

The Victorian Government consider the return of crown land within Victoria to provide a resource base to enable communities to consider the development of programs and services that address family violence.

## ORGANISATIONS (CAPACITY BUILDING)

Strengthening community organisations and recognition of the key role they play in supporting community was identified as a critical element to ensuring ongoing success of programs and services to local Indigenous communities.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

That the Victorian Government provide a recurrent funding base and an increase in resources for capacity building within Indigenous organisations. This would enable these organisations to take control of the development and delivery of family violence related programs and other services to effectively plan for the future of their communities.

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

That the CEO's Network operating through VACCHO (funded through the AAV Indigenous Community Capacity Building Program) be funded to undertake a scoping exercise that identifies specific issues to Indigenous organisations.

## SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY WORKERS

The provision of additional support and training for Indigenous community workers was identified as a critical component in supporting communities to address issues such as family violence. The Forum acknowledges that the Indigenous community needs to provide greater recognition of and understanding towards the workers and the efforts in providing assistance and support to the community often outside of their core role and expertise.

*'Our workers are enrolled in the charcoal institute for burnt out blacks'*

### RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM

To ensure the overall wellbeing of our workers is considered by providing appropriate training, debriefing and strategies to deal with critical incidents as well as being able to access counselling services.

## BALANCING THE NEEDS OF WOMEN AND MEN

The Forum identified that family violence issues must be based on an equal approach to understanding and responding to the needs of men and women in the provision of family violence related programs and services. The Forum identified that family violence impacts equally on the health and wellbeing of both men and women, and that efforts must be made to provide services that meet the specific needs of all community members.

## FOCUSING ON CHILDREN

The Forum strongly advocates support for the Indigenous Child Placement Principle in ensuring that Aboriginal children remain within their community and culture. The Forum strongly agreed that the needs and rights of children are paramount. The Forum also recognises the importance of ensuring that children exposed to family violence and/or sexual assault require a variety of specialist support services to address trauma and prevent the impact of such events carrying through to their adult lives.

### **SAME SEX COUPLES**

The Forum acknowledged that any solutions to family violence must recognise the importance of responding to the needs of same sex couples within Indigenous communities and ensure the provision of resources and specialist staff within key Indigenous organisations are able to respond to and meet their specific needs.

In the Indigenous gay community the issue of family violence is endured in silence. As a minority group within a minority group, the gay community is even more isolated and less inclined to seek the support of the wider Indigenous community in being able to openly lay the issues on the table and seek solutions.

The gay community is rarely consulted on issues that equally affect their wellbeing. Providing them with the opportunity to raise the awareness and education of the issues faced by the gay community ensures that consideration to specific support services be given at the policy development stage when designing/providing support programs to the Indigenous community.

### **BALANCING THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS**

An equal approach to understanding and responding to the needs of victims and perpetrators of family violence is critical. The Forum recognises that victims require the protection and support of the whole community in making them feel safe and secure within their community and family environments and that appropriate crisis services are in place to support victims to deal with their immediate needs.

The Forum recognised that perpetrators may have themselves once been victims of family violence and that dealing with the needs of these perpetrators is one of the factors in reducing and preventing family violence within the community.

Although the Forum identified that predominantly the victims of family violence are females, there needs to be recognition and support for input and resources for services and programs for men.

The Forum also identified the difference between perpetrators, paedophiles and offenders in relation to family violence and sexual assault.

### **MAINSTREAM SERVICES (PARTNERSHIPS AND PROTOCOLS)**

Genuine partnerships between Indigenous and mainstream service providers was identified as one of the critical keys to successfully responding to family violence. The Forum noted that the development of such partnerships must be based on a comprehensive understanding and respect for Indigenous culture and the provision of adequate resources to support communities to take an equal and effective role within the partnership process and the provision of services to community.

### **RECOMMENDATION ARISING FROM FORUM**

To ensure that when the Victorian Government is considering the recommendations in the Task Force Final Report there is a greater funding commitment for ongoing services and programs for family violence.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO THE TASK FORCE AT THE FORUM

*"We seek support from the Forum and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to fund a men's unit to support, initiate, coordinate and develop men's issues and programs that are culturally relevant to Indigenous men.*

*That the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force support funds for the development and implementation of the "Hear Me Now, Strengthening Young Koori's" kits for all children, from early childhood, primary and secondary school levels (funded through the PADV program).*

*That the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force and the community members of the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees pursue the expansion of such initiatives to include Indigenous communities on the Borders of NSW/VIC and VIC/SA.*

*That comprehensive mapping of all Indigenous specific programs, services and policies across the Victorian and Commonwealth Government be undertaken which*

- Contains details of all programs including objectives, funding implications, contact details and personnel*
- Is updated every twelve months and to be provided at no cost to all community organisations and services*
- Includes services being delivered by the New South Wales Government in relation to southern New South Wales.*

*The sharing and exchange of information at this Forum has been a critical factor in addressing Victorian Indigenous family violence issues."*

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 2

*The Task Force believes that support needs to be provided to hold an Annual Statewide Forum so Indigenous people from each community and/or region can meet to discuss issues, share solutions with each other and gather new information. Information from these Annual Forums can then be used to build on activities, programs and approaches being implemented in their local area and region.*

The focus on local and regional priorities and needs is critical if successful and sustainable outcomes are to be achieved in each community. Self determination and ownership of actions undertaken in each community should reflect and build on the Statewide themes raised by the Task Force and that were discussed by community representatives at the Indigenous Family Violence Forum held in 2003.

The complete summary of discussions in Forum Workshops is included in this Report after Section 4. The Task Force have incorporated recommendations arising from the Forum into the Action Plan.

## EDUCATION AND AWARENESS INITIATIVES

### SHORT FILM PROMOTION—“MIRROR IMAGES”

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force in conjunction with the Indigenous Issues Unit, Department of Justice has developed, as portrayed through the eyes of a perpetrator, a short film, entitled 'Mirror Images'. The film was written and produced by Indigenous Film Director, Daniel King.

This film was shown to participants at the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Forum in March, 2003.

Daniel's film is about breaking the cycle of domestic violence within the Aboriginal family and chose strong and widely recognised Aboriginal actors such as Aaron Pedersen, Margaret Harvey and Richard Frankland to portray the characters in his film.

The film is a short drama that captures the story from the angle of the abuser then within this situation explores the emotion and reasoning behind why he abuses his family.

The film aimed to:

- raise the awareness to the issues and the causes and affects pertaining to domestic violence not only within Indigenous families but also within the wider community; and
- provide the opportunity for the film to be used as an educational tool within both the Indigenous and wider community.

### MIRROR IMAGES SYNOPSIS

*"I was looking in the mirror the other day and I saw him... I saw the wreck that he had become and then I saw Jimmy.*

*A boy's innocence is torn between his mother and father. A mother's love for her family is torn between her son's future and husband's present. A father's past has torn him from his family".*

Mirror Images is about breaking the cycle of domestic violence within an Aboriginal family.

### EDUCATION RESOURCE KIT

The Task Force and the Department of Justice have been granted exclusive commercial rights to use 'Mirror Images' for the development and production of the educational resource kit on the issue of Indigenous family violence. The development of content for the educational resource kit will entail extensive consultation with all stakeholders in the area of Indigenous family violence to ensure a comprehensive information gathering process. Stakeholders must include the Victorian Indigenous community, mainstream and Indigenous service agencies and Government agencies.

An educational resource kit, addressing Indigenous family violence must incorporate a structured guide to be used in conjunction with the film. This will ensure that copies of the film are distributed through outlets that will provide supported and culturally appropriate access to the content and issues.

It is anticipated that the completed educational resource kit will include information on a range of issues as identified by Victorian Indigenous communities at a local level. Information will also be provided regarding the availability of mainstream and Indigenous services and access to procedures.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 3

*That a communication strategy be developed to guide all stages in the research, development and distribution of Indigenous family violence educational resource materials.*

## YOUTH KITS

The Task Force have placed an emphasis upon providing educational resources aimed specifically at Indigenous Youth. It was identified during the preliminary information sessions that many young people see family violence as the 'traditional way'. The Task Force strongly promotes that 'family violence' is not an accepted part of our culture', hence the need to educate young people that violence is not the 'traditional way'.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 4

*That the Youth Kits funded by AAV be developed in conjunction with the Task Force, Regional IFV Action Groups and Regional IFV Support Officers and the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC). Furthermore, the Task Force agreed that these Kits would contain a 'comic book' similar to the one developed by 'Street Wise' which is Indigenous specific.*

## ESTABLISHMENT OF AN 1800 NUMBER

The Task Force commissioned the Victorian Family Violence Legal and Preventative Unit to conduct preliminary research into the establishment of an 1800 number for the Indigenous family violence advice/referral line for access 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.

This research project needed to identify the issues pertaining to the development of an 1800 Number specific to the needs of Victorian Indigenous communities. The development of such a service would aim to link Indigenous communities into suitable services within the local region or metropolitan-based services. This Consultations and Options Report was finalised in September, 2003.

### TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR CONSULTATION AND OPTIONS REPORT

- Research into the development of an 1800 number to provide a referral service for Indigenous communities requiring family violence related advice/referral.
- To examine the process of development of existing 'advice/referral lines' in providing parity for the development of the service, to include exploration of existing models within Victoria and interstate.
- To identify staffing requirements and the necessary skill level of counsellors to provide quality professional advice and referral within potentially high crisis situations.
- To provide a report to the Task Force as to the findings and related expenses in the establishment of such a service.

The Family Violence Legal and Preventative Unit consulted with telephone service providers and Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholder agencies to determine what services already exist, how effective and relevant they are to Victorian Indigenous communities.

The report highlighted that there are many distinctive challenges for any type of telephone service seeking to remain responsive to the varying needs of the Victorian Indigenous community:

- Organisational capacity
- Manner of service delivery (eg. 24 Hour Crisis Counselling, legal advice or referral only)
- In-House training and support
- Effective promotion and marketing
- Building effective inter-agency links

The report concluded that an Indigenous 1800 service needs to be able to respond effectively to community needs as family violence across all levels of the Indigenous community is at crisis point. The capacity for Indigenous services to support the needs and demands of people seeking support services within their own communities, let alone mainstream services is increasingly limited. Some of the priorities identified were:

- worker burnout
- stress
- lack of continuity of services
- limited access to adequate legal information
- limited support particularly for women and children

Crisis counselling, Legal Advice and Referral, and Information and Referral Services all perform important functions. Consultation with stakeholder groups has identified the need for a specialist Family Violence Telephone Legal Advice and Referral Service as a matter of priority. Further work, however, should be undertaken in qualifying the scope of any Legal Advice Service to the community.

An alternative model would be to establish an 1800 service as a 'Legal Information and Referral Service' only with the main focus being to provide comprehensive referral and procedural information. Such a service would not preclude the capacity to provide legal advice on urgent family violence matters, however would be managed through clear referral criteria including conflict of interest checks and be subject to organisational capacity.

Improving access to legal representation and support for all sectors of the Indigenous community affected by family violence, and in particular for women and children who were more likely to be victims of family violence is recognised as a priority. Ensuring that such a telephone service provided integrated Indigenous counselling and advocacy support together with comprehensive referral systems to both Indigenous and mainstream services was considered critical in meeting the broad spectrum of needs within the community.

Costs for such a service range from \$200,000 to \$500,000 per annum subject to hours of service, staffing, setup, existing infrastructure and technological resources. The more money, the more potential for such a service to increase its scope and capacity overall.

Volunteers, providing the service with valuable expertise and human resources would complement any 1800 model. WIRE volunteers are estimated to contribute \$80,000 per annum to their centre and these cost benefits need to be factored in along with the organisational resources required to support any volunteer program to volunteers.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 5

*That an 1800 Number service be established as a resource option for Indigenous communities to provide a link to culturally appropriate family violence services across the State.*



## DEPARTMENTAL SECRETARIES GROUP (DSG)

The Departmental Secretaries Group (DSG) was to function as the senior officer level committee within the Victorian Government responsible for supporting the role of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force and directing the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group to ensure the progression of a 'whole of government' response to family violence in Indigenous communities.

Membership was to include Departmental Secretaries from the Department for Victorian Communities, Department of Human Services, Department of Justice, Victoria Police, Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Department of Education and Training.

In recognition of the partnership approach, the Task Force would like the Departmental Secretaries Group to convene at its earliest opportunity to support and progress the findings recommended in its Final Report.

In light of this partnership, the Task Force agreed at its last official meeting held from 17-19 October 2003, that the following representatives be invited as members to the DSG:

- the Chairperson of the newly established Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum (to replace the Task Force from December 2003 onwards); and
- the Co-Chairs of the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group.



## INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE WORKING GROUP

A senior officer level Indigenous Family Violence Working Group (the Working Group) was established on 27 February, 2003 to support the work of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force. The Working Group has the responsibility for developing an integrated 'whole of government' response to Indigenous family violence through:

- Responding to the Report and recommendations of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force;
- Recommending to Government on an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy based on the Final Report of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force; and
- Responding to issues related to family violence as they arise, as referred by the Task Force, the Women's Safety Coordinating Committee or Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council (PAAC).

### Membership of the Working Group is represented by:

#### Victorian Government Representatives:

- Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Department for Victorian Communities—Co-Chairperson
- Department of Human Services—Co-Chairperson
- Community Support Fund, Department for Victorian Communities
- Office of Women's Policy, Department for Victorian Communities
- Department of Justice
- Victoria Police
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Education and Training
- Department of Treasury and Finance

#### Commonwealth Government Representatives:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission—ATSIC
- Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health—OATSIH
- Department of Family and Community Services—FACS

#### Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Representatives

- Chairperson of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force
- Nominated Member—Indigenous Family Violence Task Force
- Executive Officer—Indigenous Family Violence Working Group
- Executive Officer—Indigenous Family Violence Task Force

#### Local Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups Representatives

- Statewide Coordinator—Regional IFV Support Officers
- 1 Metropolitan Indigenous Family Violence Support Officer
- 1-2 Regional IFV Support officers



The Working Group met for the first time on 27 February 2003 and regular meetings have been held since. The terms of reference for the operational plan and key projects were finalised with an emphasis upon supporting current activities and setting up frameworks for evaluation. Given the extensive membership of the Working Group (18 members) and initiatives to be completed in a short time frame, it was agreed that the Working Group would establish a smaller sub-committee. This sub-committee (4-6 members) would support all major projects of the Working Group and meet on a regular basis.

In July 2003, the Task Force and the Working Group commissioned the following key projects to support their investigation and consideration of family violence issues:

- Mapping of family violence services with a particular emphasis on identifying best practice approaches and on access and appropriateness of service provision to meet the needs of Indigenous communities in Victoria.
- Review current statistics and data sets relevant to the identification and monitoring of family violence in Indigenous communities.
- Undertake a Literature Review of national and international research on Indigenous family violence responses, early interventions and prevention models and services.

- Conduct independent research into the nature and extent of family violence in Indigenous communities in Victoria
- Development of an evaluation plan, including appropriate indicators, to monitor and evaluate progress in developing the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The Task Force agreed to provide its Final Report to Government in October 2003 and a 'whole of government' response would be provided in May 2004 to support the development of a 'community led' approach to reduce family violence within Indigenous Communities.

In August 2003 the Working Group members received a proforma to assist in the collection of departmental information to support the development of the 'whole of government' response to Indigenous family violence issues.

The Working Group and Task Force agreed that a one day workshop, to be independently facilitated needed to be held in January 2004 to:

- Discuss the proforma information provided on current Government activity to address Indigenous family violence issues in Victoria from both State and Commonwealth Departments.
- Work through the issues and recommendations in the Task Force's Final Report to Government.
- Provide for a more in-depth and informed approach towards 'whole of government' planning to provide a more integrated and informed response in May 2004.
- Provide for a partnership approach towards meeting the requirements of Phase 3 of the Framework document to develop a Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy by June 2004.

## WORKING GROUP KEY PROJECTS

In July 2003, the Working Group and Task Force commissioned five key projects to support its investigations and consideration of Indigenous family violence issues. Three of the five projects are completed with the final two projects to be commissioned in December 2003.

The objectives of each of the key projects are outlined and reported against below:

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature Review was conducted as part of the Working Groups key projects and has greatly assisted the Task Force in offering information to Regional IFV Action Groups about existing services at a national level and the possibility of development of similar services within Victoria.

The purpose of this project was to undertake a Literature Review of national and international research on Indigenous family violence responses, early interventions and prevention models and services.

- A review of research that has been conducted nationally and internationally that examines Indigenous family violence.
- An examination of family violence early intervention and prevention models relevant to work within Indigenous communities, within Victoria, interstate and internationally.
- An examination of family violence services demonstrating models of good practice when working with Indigenous communities.
- A review of research currently being undertaken that correlates to the work of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The final product includes a comprehensive review of Literature examined including reference details and identifies literature relevant to the work of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force. Sections of the Literature Review are emphasised throughout this Final Report to support the Task Force Recommendations and Final Report Action Plan to be developed as part of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. (See Appendix 4)

## REVIEW OF CURRENT STATISTICS AND DATA

Review current statistics and data sets relevant to the identification and monitoring of family violence in Indigenous communities.

Development of a framework relevant to monitoring incidences of family violence within Victorian Indigenous communities:

- review of both mainstream and Indigenous statistics available relevant to incidences of family violence within Victoria.
- review of statistics available via mainstream and Indigenous service providers working with Indigenous families (self-referral, unreported incidences of family violence, referral from another agency ie DHS, Child Protection).
- consultation with Police Koorie Liaison Officers to explore incidences of Indigenous family violence and levels of prosecution.
- review of mainstream frameworks for monitoring incidences of family violence.
- development of a proposed framework of indicators to track incidences of Indigenous family violence (including referral processes).

This project is yet to commence due to the short time frame provided in the original tender schedule.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 6

*That the Statistics and Data Research Project be readvertised and information gathered is presented to Indigenous Family Violence Working Group to assist in the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.*



## MAPPING OF FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

To map family violence services with a particular emphasis on identifying best practice approaches and on access and appropriateness of service provision to meet the needs of Indigenous communities within Victoria.

- Mapping of family violence services within all regions across Victoria.
- Assessment of services in terms of cultural sensitivity and utilisation by Indigenous communities.
- Identification of good practice models within family violence services when dealing with the Indigenous community.
- Assessment of referral systems and intake capacity of family violence services.
- Exploration of relevant agency policies in terms of cultural practices when dealing with Indigenous families experiencing family violence.
- Exploration of other service systems (ie Koori Court and Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees) and how they relate to the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.
- Development of a statewide Indigenous Family Violence Resource Kit, for access by professionals and members of the Indigenous Community.

This project has been finalised and endorsed by the Task Force. It will be distributed to Victorian Indigenous organisations, relevant service providers and agencies in December 2003. (This document will be distributed to all Indigenous and mainstream service providers in January 2004. It will also be placed on the Department for Victorian Communities' Aboriginal Affairs Victoria website as a PDF document.)

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 7

*That the Family Violence Services Directory commissioned by the Task Force be included on the internet portal website.*

## INDEPENDENT RESEARCH INTO THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The purpose of this project was to conduct independent research into the nature and extent of family violence in Indigenous communities in Victoria. Specifically:

- Examination of localised activities that have been established to address Indigenous family violence through consultation with Regional IFV Support Officers.
- Finalise consultation with Victorian Indigenous and mainstream services that regularly deal with Indigenous families experiencing violence, to explore common scenarios, referral mechanisms and culturally appropriate support systems.
- Identification and examination of the types of violence that occur within Indigenous communities to include spousal abuse, Elders abuse, child abuse, same sex couple abuse, economic, spiritual, social, financial etc.
- Identification and examination of the impacts of the changing roles of men, women and Elders in relation to family violence.
- Identification and examination of the loss of traditional culture and the correlation to Indigenous family violence.
- This research will be conducted as a process of formalising Task Force community consultations and to report on progress of the Regional IFV Support Officers and activities of the Regional IFV Action Groups.

This project is still being finalised and to be considered by the Task Force.

## REVIEW OF REGIONAL IFV SUPPORT OFFICER POSITIONS

A review of the Regional IFV Support Officer positions was commissioned and involved the following actions:

- Examining the strengths and weaknesses associated with placing the positions within Regional Offices of the Department of Human Services and identifying current placement issues and the impact these have on the capacity of the positions to function effectively.
- Assessment of resources required for Regional IFV Support Officers to effectively implement the Strategy.
- Consultation with Indigenous community members and Indigenous organisations about placement options.
- Consultation with Task Force members about placement options.
- Recommendations for placement of positions for the remainder of the 2003/2004 financial year, including possible agency alternatives and transitional arrangements (budget considerations, etc).

The review process also considered cultural issues; Indigenous community perspective's and program delivery objectives.

This project was completed and considered by the Task Force at its final meeting on 17 October 2003. The Task Force will make recommendations to Government based on comprehensive information identifying all current issues, placement options and recommendations for future placement of positions. Outcomes will be determined in January, 2004.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 8

*That an Evaluation Plan be commissioned by February 2004 to support implementation of the 'whole of government' response developed as part of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN

Development of an evaluation plan, including appropriate indicators to monitor and evaluate progress in developing the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

This project is yet to be developed and tendered by the Working Group and Task Force. The Task Force recognise the importance of developing such an evaluation and monitoring tool as it would inform the Working Group about directions to be achieved under the Strategy.

The Task Force also acknowledge that other factors contributed to the non-commissioning of this key project:

- Awaiting information from other key projects commissioned by the Task Force and Working Group.
- Delays in appointing Regional IFV Support Officers and the Statewide IFV Coordinator and establishing Regional IFV Action Groups.
- Awaiting information from community consultation projects.
- Departmental responses in relation to family violence issues.

The Evaluation Plan will aim to:

- Identify appropriate benchmarks and indicators.
- Monitor process issues associated with Phase One such as community engagement and participation in the various forms and groups.
- Monitor the impacts of Phase One activity such as changes in knowledge, attitude and awareness, increases in community skill and capacity, and the development of community based initiatives for preventing, reducing or responding to violence.
- Monitor the process issues associated with the development of the 'whole of government' response.
- Assess the effectiveness of strategies to prevent, reduce or respond to violence in Indigenous communities.

## OTHER GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES FOCUSING ON FAMILY VIOLENCE OR VIOLENCE RELATED ISSUES

Task Force members understand that access to and sharing of information is critical, if effective planning and decision-making is to occur. A key issue identified by the Task Force was the formation of a number of other committees, sub-committees and working groups over the past two years to address different aspects of violence or violence related matters.

The Task Force are aware that a number of senior Departmental staff are active participants on a number of these committees, working groups and sub-committees and that their responsibilities include:

- representing their Department (or a specific program area)
- sharing information; and
- discussing options which can be taken up to improve existing policies, program arrangements and service practices.

Task Force members are aware that most of these committees, working groups and sub-committees have included a focus on Indigenous specific issues as part of their discussions and deliberations.

There are currently thirteen Government Family Violence related committees established to develop appropriate strategies to address Victorian Family Violence issues. The Task Force are aware that most of these committees, working groups and sub-committees include a focus on Indigenous specific issues as part of their discussions and deliberations.

### COMMITTEE OR WORKING GROUP

#### Office of Women's Policy—Women's Safety Strategy (WSS)

1. Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV)
2. Women's Safety Executive Co-ordination Group (WSECG)
3. Community and Professional Education Sub-Committee
4. Family Violence and Children's Issues Sub-Committee
5. Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault
6. Statewide Steering Committee on Violence Against Women in the Workplace

#### DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

7. Implementation of S5(1)(g) Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987
8. Family Violence Court
9. Safer Streets and Homes Strategy
10. Family Violence Prevention Pilots
11. Family Violence Resources for Health Professionals
12. Family Violence Prevention Through the Workplace

#### ATTORNEY-GENERAL

13. Review of Services to Victims of Crime

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 9

*That the Victorian Government considers reducing the overall number of family violence committees so that Indigenous representatives on the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum can make more effective use of their time when engaging in discussions, collaborative planning and decision-making about Indigenous family violence issues and responses.*



# SECTION 2

## FORUM







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## WORKSHOP ONE—TRADITIONAL CULTURE

### DIMINISHING ROLE OF ELDERS

#### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*WE NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ELDERS ARE THE KEY TO OUR PAST AND THE WAY OF OUR FUTURE ...*

*Family violence relates strongly to the loss of traditional culture, particularly the diminishing role of (and respect for) Elders*

*Traditionally the role of Elders was to provide leadership and guidance to the family and extended family and Elders often took on the parenting role, the mentoring role and all decisions about the family and community were deferred to the Elders.*

*The solution to family violence issues must be based on the recognition and respect for the role of Elders. The Task Force acknowledges the primary role of Elders in guiding the community and their authority in providing leadership and as decision makers.*

*The Forum found that there was an increase in the instances of abuse of our Elders. Elders abuse clearly signifies the deterioration of our culture. Many Elders are now being physically, mentally, socially and economically abused. The Task Force when raising awareness of the types of Elders abuse, were alarmed at the number of community members who did not realise that their actions were inadvertently causes of abuse to the Elders.*

*Elders told of instances where they would have family members stand over them for money on Pension days or would be left isolated with no means of transportation and no contact with anybody in remote locations with family only visiting when they wanted something*

#### KEY STATEMENTS FROM FORUM WORKSHOPS

- Elder status is an earned right in the community not just an age factor
- Elders are the keepers of our oral history and are the key to maintaining our culture
- We must teach our children to respect our Elders and educate our youth in the cultural ways
- Our Elders need to take the lead
- Elders need to have access to appropriate peer and support structures
- There is no Elders Body/Council that ensures traditional ways are passed on to the next generation
- We must ensure our Elders have access to our youth by the establishment of a cultural school where Elders can be seen as teachers
- We should create opportunities for regular family reunions
- We should bring back storytelling as a way of sharing fears and experiences
- We should provide retreats and respite for our Elders
- We must acknowledge the isolation of some of our Elders in remote areas
- We should care for our Elders in the building and design and location of Elders accommodation
- We must ensure that our Elders are not left isolated and provide them with opportunities to socialise and ensure their safety and well being
- We need to honour our Elders while they are still alive
- We need to have a mechanism that outs Elders that don't deserve the status and respect

#### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. An Elders Council be established in Victoria representative of regional and metropolitan Elders to provide a voice for Elders
2. Development of an Elders Mentoring Program whereby young people have access and linkages to Elders providing them with education and cultural awareness and understanding of their duty to respect and follow the guidance of their Elders
3. Improve the general circumstances of Elders including assessment of health requirements, access to accessible, supported housing to allow longer term independence and access to social activities and community functions
4. Improve access to transport for Elders particularly for medical and social support
5. Address economic abuse of Elders by ensuring their payment/income is protected
6. Develop a register of Aboriginal Elders and celebrate their life while they are still with us

## CHANGING ROLE OF MEN

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

#### ***MEN MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY TO STOP THE VIOLENCE...***

*It has been a challenge for Task Force and community to encourage the involvement of men within the family violence consultations.*

*Indigenous men have identified themselves as being labelled more generally as the perpetrators of violence, breaking down this conception has been difficult. During consultations male leaders, speaking on behalf of other Indigenous males, have clearly identified that men too are victims of violence.*

*The Forum demonstrated a major access to service issue for men in terms of time out venues and men's behavioural change programs.*

*The Forum identified that currently DHS provides \$170,000 recurrently for the provision of men's programs. These programs have been identified as too structured and confronting and not suitable to Indigenous men.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Lack of support networks and men's groups
- Greater employment opportunities needed for men
- Need to forge links to family and culture
- Need to maintain family values
- Young men need to be taught respect for their culture and people
- Welfare systems have made supports so readily available that women feel they are better off without their men
- Men need to accept responsibility for their actions and seek help in addressing problems
- Urgent need for separate funds for appropriate men's services and programs
- Male perpetrators who are victims of violence need support services
- Where do male victims of family violence go
- No time out places for men who are perpetrators of violence
- Defacto fathers are not properly recognised as carers of children
- An awareness and community capacity building around perpetrators of family violence and sexual assault
- Funds are not equitable around the issue of family violence
- Lack of Aboriginal people trained to deal with male perpetrators
- Confidentiality within communities is a big issue
- After hours referral services need to be established including service for men

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. That men's programs be developed that are culturally appropriate, allow time for and give ownership to the needs of the men to begin addressing family violence issues
2. There needs to be better support provision for men who are victims of violence
3. There needs to be a greater awareness of services and programs throughout the state for men

## CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

***WOMEN SHOULD BE PROMOTED AND RECOGNISED FOR THEIR LEADERSHIP ROLES . . .***

*Family violence relates strongly to the loss of traditional culture including the changing roles of women*

*The Forum demonstrated that Indigenous women want the violence to stop, but not the relationship. A statement such as this is a clear indicator of the need for holistic approaches towards addressing family violence*

*Indigenous women have stated that both their individual safety and that of their children is a priority, yet healing men through anger management and structured 'time out' enables families to remain united*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Safety of women and children must remain first priority
- Women feel humiliated and ashamed and are reluctant to seek assistance
- Women don't always want to leave the relationship and should be supported when they wish to remain
- Women have to leave the family home following a family violence incident and usually end up in inappropriate accommodation due to lack of Indigenous specific services
- Indigenous specific refuges not appropriate to all due to family connections
- Non Indigenous workers make Indigenous women feel that they must end the relationship to get support—feminist views
- Police responses to Indigenous women reporting family violence incidents is very poor and some incidents left the victim charged with minor offences such as traffic violations
- Women have limited understanding of the support available to them in family violence incidents
- Women need to be provided with more information about the legal process and options available to them
- Women need to be able to form support groups to encourage and support each other around the issues of family violence including information on drug and alcohol services and programs
- Women need healing places not just respite from the men or refuges with no links to family healing
- Need to have Indigenous female workers to support women
- Women should be acknowledged for taking on extra roles and stepping outside the square
- Women's role within the kinship system is still very strong
- Women are responsible for about 90% of initiatives in the community organisations but the men are recruited as Managers and CEO's.

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. A greater focus is required upon regional culturally appropriate supports for women
2. Indigenous specific refuges are required in regional areas
3. Enhancing the resources of the metropolitan Indigenous specific refuge
4. Cluster models of respite/healing accommodation required as more appropriate to Indigenous community
5. Promote strong women leaders as role models within the community
6. Ensure Police have a greater understanding and respond appropriately to Indigenous women victims of family violence
7. Ensure resource materials including advice about legal rights and options for referrals are made available to Indigenous women across in Victoria
8. Indigenous female workers trained and employed to support women in family violence situations

## BREAKDOWN OF FAMILY STRUCTURES

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*Dispossession and invasion set the context of most social issues facing Indigenous people today. Traditional roles were understood and clear which reflected the survival of their communities. Roles were clearly defined for women and men. Invasion changed the roles dramatically and caused the breakdown of traditional society*

*The issue of family violence is widely acknowledged as causing great trauma to the family unit. The effects on children were described as a contributor to the nature of violence that currently exists amongst our young people. Our young people believe that violence is an acceptable part of our culture and this is reinforced when they see parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and their grandparents in violent situations. Many victims of violence go on to become perpetrators of violence.*

*Violence within families also causes great stress on extended kinship relations with community members often feeling that whilst they need to protect the victim, the perpetrator is also in need of support. Many community members are unable to disassociate themselves from the actions of the perpetrator and this in turn is seen by the victims as an endorsement of their actions.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Government policies of assimilation and segregation began the breakdown of family structures
- Disempowerment led to lack of self worth and self respect
- Interracial relationships contributed to family breakdown
- Lack of trust and respect within families
- Loss of shared responsibilities
- Alcohol and drug and gambling issues
- Unemployment and poverty
- Lack of parenting skills
- Lack of role models
- Separation of families due to violence
- Victims being ostracised by the community
- The adoption of family violence as part of the 'norm'
- Lack of appropriate housing creating stress and overcrowding
- No safe houses or respite care for families experiencing difficulty
- Inflexible Government policies for housing, safety, police responses, court responses
- Lack of understanding, knowledge and respect in mainstream organisations and service providers of Koori peoples and communities needs
- Lack of resources to support the concept of family healing
- The need to be part of the decision making in relation to our own destiny and determining our own futures by empowerment
- Need for family group healing—don't separate family as the solution
- Need a healing place for support and build up self-esteem and empowerment

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Establishment of healing places in metropolitan and regional areas
2. Establish mentor programs in schools using Elders
3. Establish family reunification/healing services and programs
4. Establish parenting and life skills programs in Victoria
5. Provide additional resources for Koori specific services and establish Koori advocates for all family services
6. Provide mediation services and education programs that support the family unit
7. Provide additional resources to establish more outreach workers particularly in rural and remote areas

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

#### *YOUNG PEOPLE THINK FAMILY VIOLENCE IS PART OF OUR TRADITIONAL CULTURE*

*Family violence is often excused on the false premise that it is part of traditional culture*

*Through the Statewide Forum family violence incidents and the impact of poor home environments was seen as a contributing factor in young people having low self esteem, no understanding of respect for self and others and bad lifestyle choices leading to Alcohol and Drug abuse and less commonly prostitution.*

*The Forum demonstrated that it is becoming increasingly more common for young girls to purposely have children at a young age to provide them with their own sense of family. These young girls have an illusion of being able to have access to their own housing when they have their own children therefore wanting to create their own family environment. The reality for these girls is that at some point they will find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness and be forced to live with family or friends in overcrowded circumstances and exposing the next generation to the risk of violence or entry to the system of child protection.*

*Young men and boys have limited interaction with positive male role models and ultimately end up with a lack of social skills and self confidence issues which manifests itself in abuse or bullying behaviour. Young boys/youth have the understanding that violence is part of the Aboriginal culture and that by becoming perpetrators of violence they are maintaining the culture.*

*The issue of family violence has been identified as one of the contributing factors in low retention rates by young people in schools. There is a need to provide greater supports to young people in the education system to ensure that they have the opportunity to gain a high level of education including tertiary education and ensure that they are best placed to seek employment opportunities and to ensure they have suitable environments to study and family support.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- The impact of family violence in early childhood needs to be investigated further
- Poor home environments are directly related to poor school retention rates
- Low self esteem and low self confidence leads to poor lifestyle choices
- Youth are at increasing risk of self harm and drug and alcohol related illnesses and premature death
- Youth are at greater risk of contracting sexual diseases
- Youth need to have an understanding and respect for Indigenous culture and values
- Youth have limited choice in family/life/work opportunities
- Our babies are having babies as a way of creating their own family life
- Our youth have a lack of social skills and developmental skills required for job opportunities
- Our youth have difficulties forming relationships with Elders, parents, families, peers
- Our youth need better access to higher/tertiary education
- Youth need to be provided with bridging programs and financial support to maintain employment/careers
- We must improve parent participation in children's and youth activities
- We need to provide better employment and career prospects and choices
- We must acknowledge the impact of peer pressure on the youth
- Youth need to be provided with gender specific safe places
- We need to provide youth specific facilities and support services
- We must ensure that there will be no stolen generation from this generation
- We must involve youth in the development of programs and services specific to their needs
- We must give our young people licence to dream and the support to achieve their dreams

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Establishment of a Statewide Youth Council
2. Commitment for ongoing education programs and support for young Indigenous people
3. Department of Education and Training examine current services within the education system to provide better support to young victims of family violence
4. An Indigenous Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy be developed
5. An awareness program be developed targeted at youth and raising issues of alcohol abuse, drug abuse and sexual relations issues
6. Funds be provided to develop cultural awareness programs aimed at our youth
7. Funding provided to Indigenous organisations to provide youth specific services
8. Mentoring programs for Indigenous youth in employment

## LINKS BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY DISADVANTAGE AND HISTORY OF COLONISATION

### KEY STATEMENTS

- People have poor health
- Dominating culture enforced on community left no options to adapt our traditional lifestyle
- Breakdown of cultures lead to family violence which was not tolerated before colonisation
- White man's law is not adequate in dealing with family violence
- How do we move on from the past
- There is a shame in the community around 'Koori areas'
- Counselling is critical in addressing the past in order to be able to move forward
- Safe environments are need with appropriate people employed for counselling, disclosures and support
- Holistic approach to healing required
- Support service must recognise past history in today's society and the negative effects on community
- How do we empower families in Koori communities
- Need to support good models of family healing
- Need more family courts for family intervention that are Koori friendly
- How do we get back our culture
- Government funds are not enough, community must take control
- More resources required for rural and isolated communities
- Mainstream Counsellors still haven't got it right
- Family Group conferencing models developed for family advocate role to work with Child Protection matters
- Employment of Aboriginal Child Protection Workers across Victoria
- Central area for data on Indigenous people
- Support for Koori Workers through a support forum
- Local and Regional forums to further establish networks and support



## WORKSHOP TWO—PREVENTION/PROTECTION

### SEXUAL ASSAULT

#### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*Sexual abuse of women and children is a major concern for all community members. Community acknowledges that it is not just men who are perpetrators of sexual abuse, but that it is women, children, workers, organisations and churches and that the sexual abuse can happen anywhere and increasingly there is the fear for our Indigenous children placed in out of home care*

*Many community members and/or their children have experienced some type of sexual abuse throughout their lives. The most alarming issue is that most people do not report sexual abuse nor do they attempt to seek counselling to address the sexual abuse issues.*

*Other concerns in relation to sexual abuse are related to taboo relationships whereby young people are involved in sexual relationships with cousins*

*Sexual abuse is often kept quiet for fear of the shame factor. Community has accepted that it must acknowledge sexual abuse is happening in our community and take steps to speak out against it and put in place preventative strategies.*

#### KEY STATEMENTS

- Alcohol and drugs are major triggers of sexual assault
- We need to recognise family cycles of sexual abuse from generation to generation
- We need to acknowledge it is not just men, but women, children, workers, organisations and the church
- Sexual assault happens to anyone and it can happen anywhere
- Sexual assault leads to isolation, shame, loss of identity, loss of spirituality, loss of self esteem, loss of choices and the violation of body and mind
- Community acknowledges that justice can be denied when the family is in denial
- We must work as a community and ensure a network of support for victims who do not want to utilise mainstream services
- We need to make community more aware of the issue
- Who do people go to for help
- We need good referral systems
- Only one Indigenous CASA staff member who is at risk due to kinship with community members
- More Indigenous CASA workers needed across the state
- More training for mainstream CASA workers to ensure culturally appropriate responses
- We must ensure people living on borders are not disadvantaged by lack of service provision
- Police response times may mean greater injuries to victims
- We acknowledge the difficulty of women having to report to men
- The community must not keep protecting the perpetrator
- All services must start working together to address the issues
- More men must be involved in finding solutions to the problems and women should support them to do that
- We need to have more men's groups
- We need Healing Places away from co-ops and mainstream agencies
- We know that some of our children are being assaulted while under DHS supervision
- We need better access to health and medical services
- We urgently require access to free counselling services
- No one should be denied access to health services when they have no cash and the service does not bulk bill
- The current limit of five counselling sessions of victims of crime counselling should be increased to reflect the need

- Waiting times for support services by DHS must be decreased with some victims being told of a six week wait for support
- Co-operatives must stop denying the truth and clean out the perpetrators
- We must develop clear referral systems which cover all appropriate services
  - Family violence workers should be trained to deal with sexual assault
- We must develop programs to address the increase in rape of young men
- We should encourage Elders to have a say in the selection of family violence workers
- There are no funds for the appropriate development of good Indigenous sexual assault programs

#### **ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)**

1. That Government places a high priority on establishing an Indigenous Sexual Assault Task Force to investigate the extent and nature of sexual assault which to date has not been achieved due to the unwillingness of the community to touch on this sensitive issue and the limited time constraints.
2. Government provide funding and resources to support the establishment of Indigenous male and female CASA workers within Victoria
3. Government provide funds to provide cross cultural awareness training to non Indigenous CASA workers
4. CASA to seek feedback from community on Indigenous issues
5. Provision of immediate and practical help—phone services are not sufficient
6. Evaluation of current programs to determine effectiveness
7. Establishment of an Indigenous specific rape crisis centre
8. Establishment of a Indigenous specific 1800 number help line
9. Establish men's and women's healing places
10. Better allocation of funds to regional areas
11. Better accountability from mainstream agencies that have Indigenous specific funds

## ELDERS ABUSE

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Lack of access to services for Elders
- Elders are regarded as being able to support everyone from the community, but who supports them
- Lack of support for families to support their Elders
- Stolen Generations Elders have difficulties in reconnecting with community
- More training and support needed for workers in the Elders services area
- Lack of respect of Elders needs to be addressed
- More consultation with Elders about their physical, social, psychological, financial and emotional needs
- Financial abuse of Elders by organisations using them as resources to the community
- Financial abuse by families who come for money or leave children with grandparents with no financial support to Elders

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Task Force to encourage endorsement by Victorian community in developing a "No Tolerance Policy on Elders Abuse in our Communities".
2. Statewide Elders Council be established and resourced to have responsibility for developing a policy for addressing Elders abuse
3. Resources required to ensure access and transport of peer support groups and associations regionally for the Elders
4. More Elders employed in mediation roles and education roles
5. Access to better accommodation options both locally and regionally
6. Awards annually for contribution of Elders
7. Local Elders Groups established Statewide
8. Elders given greater status in decision making

## CHILD ABUSE

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*The solutions to family violence issues must be based on recognition of the needs and rights of children and that where children are affected by family violence that all agencies abide by the Indigenous Child Placement Principle in ensuring that they remain within their own community and culture.*

*The Task Force also recognises the importance of ensuring that children exposed to family violence and neglect require specific support services to address trauma and prevent the impact of such events carrying through to their adult lives.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Look at strategies to prevent children from going into 'out of home' care
- Strategies needed to address prevention of family violence to children
- Resources to look at the effects family violence has on children
- Education and truancy of children from family violence situations
- Children not a major focus of family violence strategy
- Children over 12 years become fringe dwellers in their community
- Over representation of Indigenous children within Child Protection
- Majority of Indigenous children placed with non Indigenous families
- Some Indigenous community members voluntarily give up their children to carers as they are not supported to keeping the family together
- Inadequate resources mean that VACCA are unable to cover the State and have opted for DHS to have responsibility for putting in place MOU's between DHS and local community
- Issues around the cross border communities
- Not enough resources for Indigenous organisations to monitor placement of Indigenous children
- Policy of Child Placement Principle needs more Indigenous input, involvement and ownership
- Concerns around the cycles of institutions of Indigenous children
- Stolen Generation children blaming community for not fighting to keep child
- Not enough Indigenous carers
- Long term placements result in harder integration back to family
- Extended families need to be supported to care for displaced children
- DHS need to review their 'out of home' care system
- DHS need to provide services that does prevention strategies with families
- Aboriginal services are not funded to develop prevention models

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Early intervention and support to families at risk
2. Adequate funding to Indigenous organisations to provide prevention programs
3. Raise awareness towards prevention by forums at a local community level
4. Education and workshops on Child Protection Act
5. Review Government policy for Aboriginal Children in Care
6. Establish Aboriginal designated Child Protection Officers within DHS
7. Provide a Safe House for women and children victims of family violence
8. Develop early prevention strategies to address children going into care
9. Raise community awareness
10. Move into preventative models rather than crisis driven responses that address local models, cultural practices and services
11. Develop family models rather than just children focussed

## SAME SEX COUPLE ABUSE

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*In the indigenous gay community the issue of family violence is endured in silence. As a minority group within a minority group, the gay community is even more isolated and less inclined to seek the support of the wider indigenous community in being able to openly lay the issues on the table and seek solutions.*

*The gay community is rarely consulted on issues that equally affect their wellbeing. Providing them with the opportunity to raise the awareness and education of the issues faced by the gay community ensures that consideration to specific support services be given at the policy development stage when designing/providing support programs to the Indigenous community.*

*The gay community identified many similar issues and suggested similar responses as the wider Indigenous community including physical violence, emotional abuse, racism/discrimination, alcohol, drug abuse, mixed relationships, experiences from family/parents, shame, jealousy and Christianity.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Need for designated Indigenous gay and lesbian workers to be placed within an Indigenous Statewide organisation
- Need to undertake data capture re the needs of Indigenous gay and lesbian people for Government and non-Government services
- Acknowledge the lack of support services in both mainstream and community for Indigenous gay and lesbian people
- Need for better information on level of same sex abuse
- Need to educate service providers regarding the existence of gay and lesbian people within the Indigenous community who may require services
- Indigenous specific programs should address the needs of gay and lesbian people
- Note the special needs of gay and lesbian people within the prison system ie male rape
- Indigenous funding of programs should acknowledge the needs of gay and lesbian people
- Education and information should be provided to Indigenous young people
- Support mechanisms needed for same sex couples who are Elders

## SPOUSAL ABUSE

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*Holistic responses required addressing the underlying issues*

*Spousal abuse is more commonly becoming accepted as normal behaviour in the Indigenous community. Both men and women can be affected by spousal abuse with a greater recognition that men are also victims of spousal abuse. The underlying issues need to be examined in determining the contributing factors in spousal abuse. The community acknowledges that individuals need to take responsibility for their actions and that solutions to family violence will take time. Healing both individuals and communities has been identified as a priority with emphasis placed on family day activities that allow communities to come together for social interaction in a alcohol and drug free environment.*

*The community placed strong emphasis on the need for 'Healing Places' and 'Time Out' places for the men when violence occurs.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- We need to address the underlying issues of spousal abuse including loss of cultural values, family, culture and access to country
- Spousal abuse is accepted as normal behaviour
- Both men and women are affected with perpetrators often having been victims
- Lack of response from mainstream agencies around spousal abuse
- There should be protocols developed around dealing with spousal abuse
- The issues are broader than alcohol and drug abuse
- We need to have response teams with culturally appropriate workers
- We require better coordination between response agencies to ensure a more holistic response
- We need to create long-term healing/support services in acknowledging that healing takes time
- We need to create safe places for victims and acknowledge that the community must play a role in looking after the victim and the perpetrator
- We must begin to hold the Police accountable for their response times
- We must create time out places for men and link them into programs such as men's behavioural change programs, alcohol and drug programs Elders mentor programs and support pathways back to community
- Police should take duty of care not to release violence offenders until it is safe to do so and consider the impact on individuals by involving the Elders in decision making
- Services need to build on prior learning and give the community the choice of Koori or mainstream services providers

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. 'Time Out' places established for men and women in rural and regional areas
2. Build on existing models and enhance them to be culturally appropriate
3. Provide better choice of options for community
4. Link mainstream services in supporting the Indigenous community
5. Review Police protocols in dealing with victims and perpetrators and ensure they follow duty of care obligation to victims
6. Follow up on referrals and support services to ensure consistency

## COMMUNITY ABUSE AND WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Challenges of being a worker vs community members
- Racism, black on black
- Due to community abuse some members can't get access to local organisations
- Family politics creates factions which influence community organisations
- We need an equality of service delivery
- Administrations of organisations can be abusive to community
- Mismanagement of community organisations leads to unaccountability to community and community abuse
- Bullying community members get more services
- Confidentiality of staff and others involved in organisations is paramount in ensuring individuals are not open to abuse
- Community abuse is where members are forced to go to another town to seek services
- Funding bodies need to be more accountable to community by stepping in where mismanagement occurs instead of using the excuse they don't want to interfere with community affairs
- Need to establish a community based independent watchdog
- Organisations should be made to service the whole community as a funding condition
- Staff have limited resources to do their job
- Directors need specialised skills in running organisations and managing staff
- We need to strengthen organisations capacity to work together
- Community needs should set the agenda and organisations should provide the service—not the other way around
- Direct service delivery is not being provided in favour of non community related things
- Non Indigenous management in community organisations should only be an interim arrangement and Indigenous people skilled up to take on the role
- Screening processes required to ensure potential employees are capable of doing the job
- Funding bodies should be more accountable to service provision and access by all community members

## WORKSHOP THREE—FAMILY HEALING

### FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND LEGAL SERVICES

#### KEY STATEMENTS

- Who do the community speak to about family violence issues
- What assistance is provided to victims of family violence
- Deal with family violence in communities by education and advocacy and recognition of family violence issues and look for long term solutions
- Links to be established with Regional IFV Support Officers
- Establishment of a 1800 number specific to Indigenous clients
- Establish ground level partnerships with police, legal representatives, workers, counsellors and a network of services
- The community needs a clearer understanding of what the Family Violence Legal and Preventative Unit does
- Concern over how the service will run and what type of service it can provide eg legal advice, housing, money, kids regional needs, alternatives to mainstream services, service mapping and a working group which builds on gaps
- Will the service link with Doctors and early support such as legal, counselling for the family not just first hand victims
- Training and support of staff is critical to the success of the service
- How does the service propose to manage expectations
- The service needs to provide a multi faceted approach
- The service will benefit from partnerships with Government including bureaucrats for adequate resources



## INDIGENOUS SPECIFIC REFUGES

### KEY STATEMENTS

- What happens to women leaving a family violence situation
- Elizabeth Hoffman House the only Indigenous specific refuge
- Cluster models more appropriate to Indigenous community
- Do we need men's refuges
- Lack of services to men and women
- Refuge rules separate families ie young males not allowed over 12 years of age
- Lack of resources in regional areas
- Knowledge by community of location of refuge
- Not enough Koori specific support
- Family violence should not be tagged with SAAP
- Indigenous organisations are not equipped or resourced to deal with transitional housing needs
- Support for families reintegrating back to community
- Need Indigenous referral hotline at no cost to community

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Better accommodation options needed for women wanting to leave a family violence situation
2. Trained and resourced Indigenous specific family violence workers needed
3. Preventative programs established for strengthening families
4. Safe houses needed in each region
5. Service that reintegrates women and children back to community

## **MEN'S SUPPORT AND REHABILITATION SERVICES**

### **KEY STATEMENTS**

- Factors that contribute to abuse include alcohol and drugs
- Inappropriate service for Indigenous men
- No Indigenous specific services for men
- Time to be accountable as a man in the community
- What supports are available and what are the gaps
- Funds required to address the gaps
- Holistic healing models required that address family violence as well as alcohol and drug factors
- No more bandaid solutions
- Prevention programs required
- Places where men can go and open up without prejudice and support services available to start the healing process and address the issues
- Need to change the culture of abuse
- No supports once you leave Galliamble or similar and therefore the cycle continues
- Better prisoner release programs required for pre release
- Men's Groups should be placed in the Correctional System
- We need to address sexual assault by the young men against young women
- Family Law impacts on family relationships
- Existing men's services under resourced

## INDIGENOUS COUNSELLING AND FAMILY RE-UNION

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*The Indigenous community have identified that a lack of affordable and/or accessible counselling has impacted on individual's ability to heal. The Indigenous community expressed the need for a choice of Indigenous specific or mainstream counselling services to ensure confidentiality issues are maintained. In some regions there were no suitable counselling services for the Indigenous community*

*In the early round of consultations, the Indigenous community strongly stated to the Task Force that they were not yet ready to tackle the issue of family violence and required counselling for themselves and family prior to being able to come together as a community to develop solutions for long term family violence strategies.*

*At the conclusion of our work as a Task Force, it has been identified that counselling remains the most critical aspect in healing individuals, families and Indigenous communities*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- How do we deal with family conflict
- We need more counsellors even with basic skills
- We need to utilise partnerships with training providers
- All Koori people should undertake basic training skills
- We need to use role models and mentors
- We need to provide support to Indigenous role models and mentors
- We need to utilise our Elders as mentors, teachers and supporters
- We need to provide additional training to non Indigenous counsellors
- We need to identify early triggers and provide intervention at an earlier stage
- We need to acknowledge the suppression of feelings as a trigger

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Identification of culturally appropriate counsellors and mechanisms for referral and payment
2. Mapping of the types of Indigenous counselling services available

## FAMILY REINTEGRATION AND OUTREACH SUPPORT/RESPITE CARE

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*The solutions to family violence issues must be based on a family healing approach which reunifies families and community and focuses on the prevention of factors that cause violence within families and communities. Any such approach must incorporate an equal approach to understanding and responding to the needs of women and men in the funding and provision of family violence related programs and services.*

*The Task Force recognises that family violence impacts equally on the health and wellbeing of both women and men, and that provision must be made for services that meet the specific needs of both these groups. Consideration must also be given to ensuring that there are specific services provided to children of family violence situations.*

*Ongoing support to the family with the provision of family healing/reintegration sessions will reinforce the individual support and the provision of outreach support and respite care is seen as a crucial element in ensuring the sustainability of the family healing process.*

*Families are being increasingly fragmented by the current methods of addressing family violence by removal of women and children from the family home, extended family and community.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Family members separate their behaviour from community
- Separation causes fragmentation in communities
- Community models of respite need to be explored by community and adapted to suit
- Support for strengthening families
- Transitional places for families prior to reintegration
- Rehabilitation impacts on people going back to community
- Community politics impact of family reintegration
- Address the alcohol and drug problem in community
- Additional resources required for rural areas
- Services are placed in the city and not accessible by rural community
- Need for interagency service funding
- Mainstream agencies have good will but are not appropriate to support community
- Bandaid service provided limited responses to family violence
- Better access to information about services
- Mainstream timeframes for healing not appropriate for Indigenous community
- Utilise CDEP participants

## PRE/POST RELEASE PROGRAMS FOR PRISONERS

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Provide support for pro-active approaches to addressing family violence
- Case management for pre and post release prisoners addressing issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, employment, housing, family relationships, income
- Establish incentives for successful post release outcomes ie arts, trust
- Establish post release and transitional facilities in rural areas
- Acknowledge that adjustment period may be much longer than the parole period, particularly for people with limited support
- Maintaining family contacts whilst in prison is a big issue
- Dealing with the damage caused inside prison, ie sexual assault
- Community needs better education about the prison program and what support is available to them
- There are not enough Koori workers in the prison system, particularly the women's prison system
- There are not enough resources within the prison programs
- Need to establish a prisoner support program
- Need to ensure that all organisations have a prisoner support role
- Need better resources to facilitate family visits
- Need to conduct research to establish why women are increasingly becoming incarcerated
- Youth not able to heal and reform in prison

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Indigenous Workers in the Prison system
2. Koori Support Workers to support post release prisoners

## WORKSHOP FOUR—EXISTING SERVICE RESPONSES TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

### MAINSTREAM RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

#### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*The solutions to Indigenous family violence issues must be based on a genuine partnership between Indigenous and mainstream service providers. The Task Force strongly advocates the development of such partnerships must be based on a comprehensive understanding and respect for Indigenous culture and the provision of appropriate resources to support communities take an equal and effective role within the partnership process and in directing the provision of services to community.*

#### KEY STATEMENTS

- Mainstream services need to develop culturally appropriate services and responses
- The relationships between mainstream agencies and service providers needs to be built up over time
- There are no programs or limited programs for men in mainstream services
- There is lack of information on mainstream services in the Indigenous community
- The Healing Centres provide a good response model
- The jurisdiction of the Koori Court needs to be extended to deal with family violence and sexual assault issues
- We need to extend the capacity of the Koori Court to deal with contested cases
- Mainstream service providers need to be educated to recognise and respond, in partnership with community organisations, to key symptoms of family stress and violence
- Koori organisations need to be pro-active in dealing with clients outside of their core business before it gets to protection agencies and courts
- We need to educate mainstream services about the Child Placement Principle
- Mainstream services need to be more flexible in their requirements of Koori clients in accessing the services including less paperwork, less intrusive processes and involvement of the Elders and community
- Mainstream services have a funding obligation to ensure Indigenous participation

## SERVICE GAPS AND INDIGENOUS FUNDED SERVICE PROVISION

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*The Task Force identified that many mainstream service providers were using the statistical data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to submit for funds to provide services for the Indigenous community. Most Indigenous organisations had no knowledge of the services available with Indigenous specific funding and in cases where there was knowledge, the service provider was deemed to be culturally inappropriate and not 'Koori friendly'.*

*The Task Force recommends that Government ensure that Indigenous specific funding have accountability mechanisms put in place to ensure that Indigenous community members have an understanding of and have access to those services and that the recipient of the funds have an obligation to provide proof of the services delivered.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Indigenous community needs to have a belief statement identifying Aboriginal values, roles and culture
- What services are there to prepare our children for life
- Identify proactive and preventative programs
- Youth not given a role in our community
- Development of a victim culture denies responsibility for actions
- Education and training support for perpetrators
- Not enough refuges and long waiting lists to get into refuges
- Not enough capacity building funds for Aboriginal organisations
- Provision to **access** Aboriginal specific and mainstream responses
- Aboriginal organisations need to be able to **access** specialist and non specific resources
- No after hours support at hospitals
- Misinformation resulting in gaps in services
- No adolescence support including shelters and drop in services
- No information sharing resulting in lack of awareness of resources and services
- Need to re-establish family days, healing days and family centres
- Camp Jungai to be run by community as a Healing Place
- Ability to utilise existing community centres for Indigenous specific programs

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Family Healing Centres where women, children and families heal together before reintegrating back to community
2. Community centres for bringing community together
3. Camp Jungai be given back to community

## SEXUAL ASSAULT

### KEY STATEMENTS

- People still not understanding of protocols in relation to Child Protection and the Child Placement Principle
- Community not aware of the process of Family Law Court
- DHS is perceived as having power over the Indigenous community because of the services provided by them
- How do protocols work for community
  - What are individuals families rights in relation to protocols
  - Success of protocols is dependent of community engagement and ownership
- What is the process for developing protocols
- Protocols needed for Police and DHS working with community
- Utilise community knowledge in developing protocols
- How do we overcome the historical issues that Indigenous people have in accessing mainstream services
- How does community become involved in mainstream services/programs
- Lack of information of existing services and programs by Indigenous community
- How do we change opinions of agencies and service providers
- How do we get a commitment from agencies to deliver on services
- Agencies can't initiate relationships
- Availability of scholarships for Indigenous students
- Traineeships for Indigenous youth in mainstream areas

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Cultural awareness training of mainstream staff
2. Establishment of Community Family Advocates positions
3. Aboriginal protocols/agreements developed between Government and non Government
4. Increased levels of participation in protocols by Police
5. Establish Aboriginal Child Protection Officer positions
6. Establish Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer positions
7. Establish Family Planning Centres that are community controlled



## LOCALISED RESOURCES—METROPOLITAN VS REGIONAL

### COMMENTS AND/OR ISSUES

*Balancing the needs of rural and metropolitan organisations in responding to family violence issues must be based on an equitable distribution of resources and funding equal to the level of need across all communities in providing adequate resources to combat family violence.*

*Statewide service providers are greatly under resourced and it was identified that many of these services are inundated with increasing workloads and did not have the resources to get out of the metropolitan area and respond to the regional needs.*

*The Task Force strongly advocates for additional resources to be provided to Statewide service providers to ensure regional coverage and the ability of the service to meet the needs of families who for a range of reasons are unable to travel to Melbourne or regional cities.*

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Where are the Indigenous funded services
- Regional/smaller communities miss out on the funding
- Lack of resources by workers to write submissions
- Funding mainly goes to city based organisations and Statewide services not locally
- Funding needs to be provided to communities as well as regions
- Statewide services not accessible to rural community
- No services after hours in rural areas
- Recognise the differing needs of communities
- Rural areas need a safe house
- Rural areas need time out places for men
- Need to look at long term funding not one off grants to community
- Healing Places needed in each region
- Indigenous workers don't always make links to each other
- Regional workers can't provide proper regional coverage
- No advocate roles to support court appearances
- Regional workers are covering hundreds of kilometres
- More funding required to provide localised services
- Inadequate resources such as cars, phones etc for immediate access and communication
- No funds to support Statewide attendance at forums, networking opportunities, etc
- No backup of staff for workers on leave, sick, etc
- State bodies need to service local communities
- Capacity building to be promoted within the community
- Lack of information being disseminated to regions and local communities
- Organisations are working outside their core business

## DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL INDIGENOUS FAMILY INITIATIVES

### KEY STATEMENTS

- How do we overlap the services between Indigenous and non Indigenous
- We need to raise the awareness of family violence in the community
- Provide opportunities for young people to avoid alcohol and drug issues around family violence
- Ensure involvement by Elders
- No safe houses available
- We must address confidentiality in the community, ie location of refugees
- Mainstream services need to take responsibility instead of referring back to Indigenous organisations who are already over utilised and under resourced
- There must be links created between RAJAC's and CJP's
- We need the funds to improve our capacity building for communities both in skills and resources and in planning, particularly for the long term
- We must address the lack of trust in mainstream services within the community
- We must address the poor retention rate of workers in the Indigenous areas and stop the burnout and unrealistic workload expectations
- We need to support our Indigenous workers
- We need to ensure localised services to deal with family violence
- Need to provide links with other services outside the area
- Community members need to be educated on community programs
- Need more representation across all organisations to allow all members equal representation
- Lack of housing is a major issue

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Programs should be funded for three to four years to allow for planning and long term outcomes
2. There needs to be partnership protocols developed between agencies and communities
3. All non Indigenous service providers should be provided with cultural awareness training provided by the community
4. The community must be consulted and be part of the development of mainstream programs
5. We need to develop a family violence workers support network that responds to regional and remote workers
6. The community needs to link with other networks and address debriefing issues
7. We should be promoting role models within the community

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONSES

### KEY STATEMENTS

- Establishment of a civil/family law/community legal education unit to provide an education about individuals rights and demystifying the process
- Under the Justice Agreement monitor all justice services to Koori's
- Family violence is a major issue in the criminal justice system
- Intervention Orders do not work
- Lack of support services
- Police failure to respond appropriately and within appropriate time-lines
- Police making judgements and not providing enough support for victims rights
- Need for programs for men
- Need for safe houses and more Indigenous specific refuges within Victoria
- The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service acts for the perpetrators and refers victims to other services
- More Police Liaison Officers positions to be established
- Culturally appropriate training to be provided to Cadets
- Acknowledging that Indigenous Police Officers don't necessarily want to be Koori Liaison Officers
- The court system, including lawyers and magistrates, clerks, is not sensitive to culture and background of individuals
- Magistrates have limited flexibility in sentencing resulting in jail terms instead of rehabilitation programs
- Koori Court to be evaluated and trialed in more areas
- Education and awareness required about the differing courts, processes and levels of offences
- The training for Koori Court personnel is very rigorous
- We acknowledge the high risk to Police when dealing with domestic violence incidents
- Intervention Orders were originally for family only, now the Intervention Orders are broader, and often withdrawn or broken with consent resulting in Police resistant to responding
- Services should not be dependent on obtaining an Intervention Order ie Priority housing for domestic violence may require an Intervention Order for approval to priority wait list
- Police responding to family violence incidents must assess on a case by case basis as there isn't always an automatic threat to children

### ACTION NEEDED (RECOMMENDATIONS)

1. Clearer explanations regarding Orders should be given by the Clerk of Courts
2. Orders should be tailored to meet specific needs
3. Early Intervention programs and processes to avoid prison sentences
4. The development of a 'know your rights' kit targeted to the Koori community
5. Interim Accommodation Orders may often be more appropriate to allow for extended family and grandparents to have children
6. The legal service education unit should expand it yearly legal week to provide regional seminars/forums on how the law works
7. The community needs to be more accountable and take responsibility
8. We need to improve Indigenous employment programs within the Criminal Justice portfolio
9. We need more Indigenous people involved in the Court system

# SECTION 3

## WHAT WE FOUND



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## DEFINING INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

Indigenous definitions of the nature and forms of family violence are broader and more encompassing than those used in mainstream which tend to focus on physical abuse in spousal relationships and assault.

The Task Force have defined Family Violence as:

**An issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.**

Family violence includes:

- Inter-generational violence and abuse and recognises all victims, whether they are affected directly or indirectly.
- Perpetrators and victims of family violence can include parents, uncles, aunts, (step) children, (step) siblings, cousins, grandparents, in-laws and distant relatives.
- An individual can be a perpetrator and a victim at the same time in a family situation [SNAICC, 2000].

Family violence also includes elements of what the mainstream refers to as 'Elder abuse' and 'child abuse' and it encompasses a range of acts that are 'criminal' under the *Crimes Act 1958* as well as non-criminal acts such as emotional abuse and economic abuse.

It is clear from comments made to Task Force members by Indigenous people throughout the State that:

*"Family violence is at crisis point within the Victorian community and many communities are experiencing an escalation of violence".*

The Task Force have researched and heard many examples from individuals, communities and the mainstream from all over Australia about the different forms and definitions of family violence. Information has been gathered from international and national research, community consultations, the Victorian Family Violence Statewide Forum, the nine Regional IFV Support Officers and Regional IFV Action Groups and from Victorian Indigenous families.

The Task Force believe that the version outlined in SNAICC's *"Through Young Black Eyes"* report thoroughly defines: physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, spiritual or cultural abuse, economic abuse and social abuse.

The Task Force has also included the definitions from Indigenous community members stated at the Statewide Forum and through the extensive community consultations within the SNAICC version.

## TYPES AND NATURE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The term 'family violence' has many different elements and within these there are varying degrees of 'violence'. In recent years, the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments have commissioned a number of research projects to examine the nature and extent of 'family violence' related incidences occurring within Indigenous communities. These projects have focused on gathering information in specific jurisdictions (States/Territories) to ensure that the understandings gathered reflect the cultural practices, beliefs, values and historical experiences of Indigenous people in these communities.

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force have drawn on the findings from other projects to enhance their understanding about family violence—its nature, its components, what it means and how it can impact on different groups within the Indigenous community. The Task Force found many similarities between Victorian experiences and that of their cousins in other States and Territories.

So where do we begin? The most logical starting point is to commence by defining 'what' family violence is. This section of the report has been prepared to achieve this. It looks at the various forms that family violence can take:

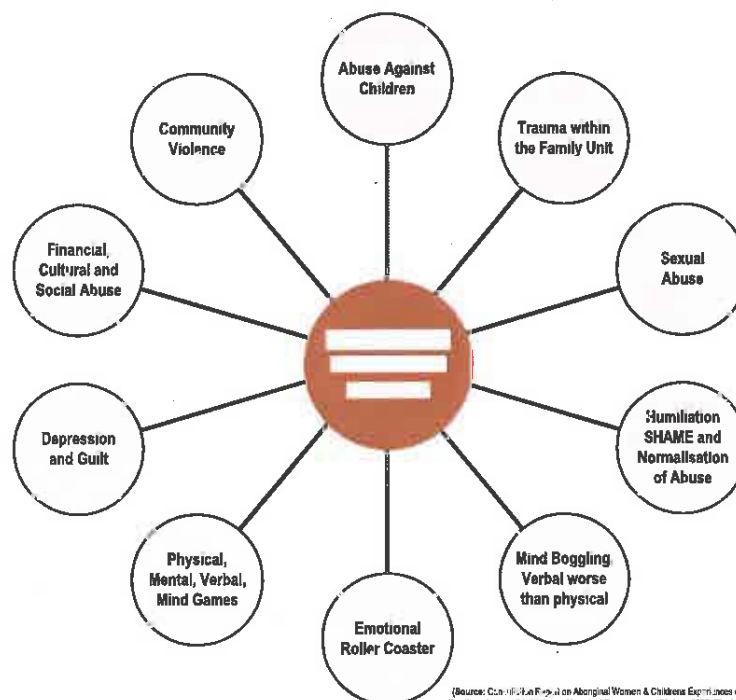
- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Economic Abuse
- Psychological or Emotional Abuse
- Social Abuse
- Spiritual or Cultural Abuse
- Verbal Abuse

and explores some of the underlying factors contributing to Indigenous family violence such as:

- Inherited Grief and Trauma;
- Dispossession of Land and Loss of Traditional Language and Cultural Practices;
- Loss of Traditional Aboriginal Roles and Status (for Males and Females);
- Economic Exclusion and Entrenched Poverty; and
- Difficulties in Confronting Issues

### DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Participants were asked to define what family and domestic violence meant to them. This diagram outlines issues participants describe as being part of family violence.



(Source: Consultation Report on Aboriginal Women & Children's Experiences of Family Violence within Victorian Aboriginal Communities - 29 June 2011, Elizabeth Hoffman House in, [Working with the Victorian Father and Children's Unit](#), page 9)

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse can also be a form of physical abuse, but because of the specific nature of trauma associated with the experience by survivors, it is grouped differently to Child Sexual Assault. This abuse may include any kind of forced sex or making someone feel degraded through sexual acts. Examples include:

- Trying to force someone to have sex or take part in sexual acts against their will
- Actually forcing someone to have sex against their will (this is rape and is also a crime between married couples)
- Using an object, penis or other part of the body to penetrate the vagina, mouth or anus without permission or consent
- Injuring sexual organs
- Hurting someone during sex
- Forcing someone to have unsafe sex, ie, without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases
- Forcing someone to take their clothes off or to remain naked against their will
- Being made to pose for pornography, eg, photos, videos or in front of others
- Being made to look at pornographic photos or view other pornographic materials including videos and internet sites
- Being forced to watch, observe or take part in sexual activities, voyeurism and exhibitionism
- Criticising sexuality or using sexually degrading comments or names, eg, slut, whore
- Sexual harassment

### **Risk factors potentially influencing the development of sexual aggression and violence**

<b>Individual Factors</b>	<b>Family/Social Factors</b>	<b>School Context</b>	<b>Life events and Situations</b>	<b>Community and Cultural factors</b>
<i>Prenatal brain damage</i>	<i>Having a teenage mother</i>	<i>Bullying</i>	<i>Physical, sexual and emotional abuse</i>	<i>Socio-economic disadvantage</i>
<i>Prematurity</i>	<i>Having a single parent</i>	<i>Peer rejection</i>	<i>School transitions discrimination</i>	<i>Social or cultural isolation</i>
<i>Birth injury</i>	<i>Absence of father in childhood</i>	<i>Poor attachment to school</i>	<i>Divorce and family break-up</i>	<i>Neighbourhood violence or crime</i>
<i>Low birth weight, birth complications</i>	<i>Antisocial role models (in childhood)</i>	<i>Inadequate behaviour management</i>	<i>Death of family member</i>	<i>Population density (eg housing)</i>
<i>Physical and intellectual disability conditions</i>	<i>Family violence and disharmony</i>	<i>Deviant peer group</i>	<i>Physical illness or impairment</i>	<i>Lack of support services including recreational facilities</i>
<i>Poor health in infancy</i>	<i>Marital discord in parents</i>	<i>School failure</i>	<i>Unemployment, homelessness, transport, shopping</i>	
<i>Insecure attachment in infant/child</i>	<i>Poor supervision and monitoring of child</i>		<i>Incarceration</i>	
<i>Low intelligence</i>	<i>Low parental involvement in child's activities</i>		<i>Poverty/economic insecurity</i>	
<i>Difficult temperament</i>	<i>Neglect in childhood</i>		<i>Unsatisfactory workplace relationships</i>	
<i>Chronic illness</i>	<i>Long-term parental unemployment</i>		<i>Caring for someone with an illness or disability</i>	
<i>Poor social skills</i>	<i>Criminality in parent</i>		<i>Living in a nursing home or aged care hostel</i>	
<i>Low self-esteem</i>	<i>Parental substance misuse</i>		<i>War or natural disaster</i>	
<i>Alienation</i>	<i>Parental mental disorder</i>			
<i>Hyperactivity in child</i>	<i>Harsh or inconsistent discipline style</i>			
<i>Impulsivity</i>	<i>Social isolation</i>			
	<i>Experiencing rejection</i>			
	<i>Lack of warmth and affection</i>			

(Source: "Putting the Picture Together—Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities", TICHRR Submission 8 July 2002, Appendix 4, State Law Publisher, Perth, 31 July 2003)



## PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse involves the direct assault of an individual, children, pets and public and personal property and the use of weapons and objects to inflict physical abuse through:

- Slapping, pushing, punching, biting, kicking, shaking, choking, hair pulling
- Using a weapon, eg. Spearing, flogging with a stick, belting, stoning
- Destroying property or possessions—eg. Clothes, personal items, furniture
- Being cruel to pets, including in front of family members
- Dangerous driving of vehicles that frightens or endangers others
- Locking people out of the house
- Overworking someone or keeping them from getting enough sleep

I had a relationship with a well known sports person. We moved to another city and it became apparent that he was rooting around. I wanted to come out of the closet and he didn't.

We would go to night clubs and he would always be cruising. One night a bartender was talking to me and he came over and made a scene and belted me and sent me home in a taxi.

One night he came home and just flogged me for nothing then he was sorry afterwards. That was it, I then caught a plane back home.

Growing up I experienced domestic violence in my family with my parents. I thought that I would not want to grow up having this in a relationship.

I ended up taking him back and did what he did to me in revenge for what he did—just to let him know how it feels. I reciprocated.

I often wonder how I allowed it to happen, it then becomes that you become used to it and are prepared to live with it to a point.

## VERBAL ABUSE

Verbal abuse is the use of continual put downs which can occur in public, private or in front of friends or family. The perpetrator usually focuses on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity or worth as a parent, partner or member of the family or community.

- Stupid, brainless, idiot, thick
- Slut, bitch, big hole, tart, dog
- Fat, shitface, ugly; or expressions like "you think ya look good", "what ya tryin to prove?"
- Useless; or "good for nuthin", "can't cook", "can't even look after ya kids"

Verbal abuse can also include:

- Intimidating behaviours
- Threats to harm or kill a person, children, relative or pet
- Threats to destroy property or possessions
- Harassment

Verbal abuse is closely related to psychological or emotional abuse.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Psychological or emotional abuse results in making a person feel blamed that they are the problem in a relationship or family. It includes constant comparisons with other peers, which works to lower the victim's confidence, self esteem and self-worth. Behaviour that neglects or withdraws from any interest in an engagement with the victim is also included.

Jodie is the eldest of seven kids and they grew up among a wide extended Koori family. She could never understand why her stepfather was so horrible to her. He singled her out and gave her a really hard time. He was sadistic, violent and verbally abusive.

It wasn't till she was a teenager that her mother told her that her stepfather was not her biological father and that's why he treated her differently.

Jodie decided that that would never happen to any of her kids.

## SOCIAL ABUSE

Social control and isolation may also be used as a form of abuse. Isolating a person from family and friends is a commonly reported example of social abuse. Examples of social abuse of a family member may include:

- Not being allowed to contact, visit or see friends or family
- Not being allowed to plan or attend social events or move around socially
- Not being able to make telephone calls without permission or supervision
- Prevention from learning or speaking English or other languages that improve (or mask from the perpetrator) communication with others
- Having limited or no personal freedom
- Not being able to make or keep appointments, eg, with a doctor, without permission, supervision and/or in the presence of the offender
- Having limited or no decision-making role in the family

My partner used to lock me up in the room all the time. Over a period of 2 years and six months I would leave him up to three times a week.

All the neighbours would be aware of what was going on. Even afterwards the sweet talk would come.

Sometimes I called the cops and he would shit himself.

I always thought that people with good educated backgrounds were not capable of this.

I ended up going to a nut house. I was in the middle of finishing my degree and this affected me to a high degree.

Being in a gay relationship it was hard and he would always act as the 'good' person. My partner never told me for 8 months that he was HIV +.

## ECONOMIC ABUSE

Economic abuse involves the unequal control of money/finances in a relationship or family.

Examples include

- Complete control of monies and income by offenders
- Preventing a family member from access to their own money or bank accounts
- Unrealistic expectations of spending patterns and budgeting
- Controlling how other family members spend their income
- Forcefully taking money from family members
- Threatening family members for money

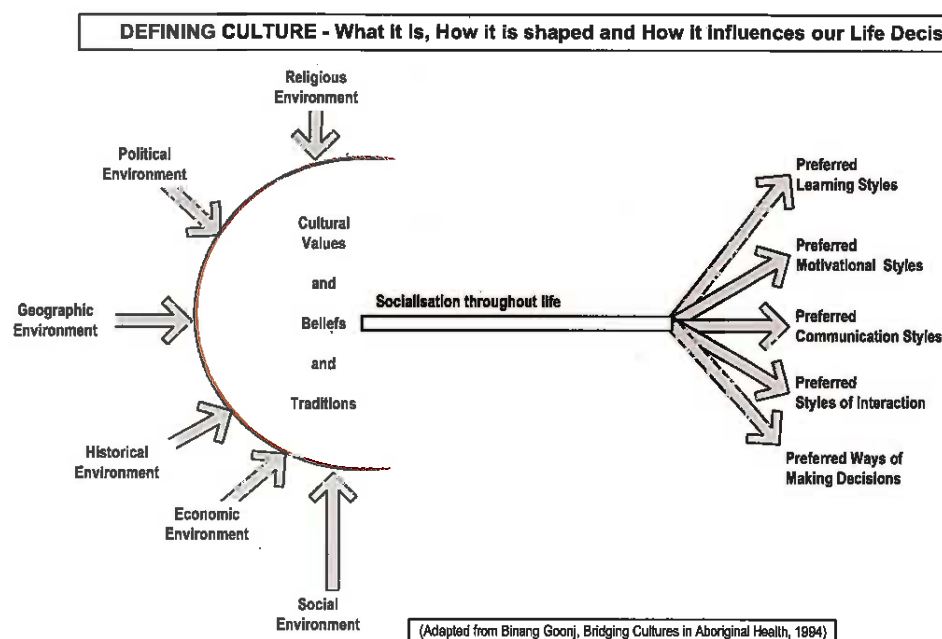
The following are a list of "last straw statements" made by women arriving at Australian refuges.

- "I really thought he meant it when he said he'd change, he's always so upset afterwards"
- "Until I saw him punch my small son with his closed fist I didn't realise that the kids didn't have any choice, so we left"
- "He always told me he'd kill me if I ran, but one day I realised he'd kill me anyway"
- "It took me years to work out that if "he couldn't help himself" how come he didn't lose it with the policeman?"
- "I always thought it was my fault till I met his previous girlfriend and he'd told her the same!
- "He was always careful not to put a mark on my face or arms but when he lashed out and broke my nose I had to go to the hospital. He told them I fell down and this nice nurse looked him right in the eye and said "On your fist?" When I told my family they all told me they'd known for ages but as long as I was going to lie about it they wouldn't interfere"
- "He always said sorry but it isn't enough any more"
- "The day I ran to a girlfriend's house with blood all over my blouse and she looked at me and said "so what's the excuse this time?"
- "When I ran away with my kids my son looked at me and said" I hate Daddy, if you go back I want to live with Nana"

## SPIRITUAL OR CULTURAL ABUSE

The cultural values, beliefs and traditions of nations, societies and distinct groups within a 'civilisation' are influenced and shaped by the environment within which they live and operate. Cultural values and beliefs are not static or fixed but instead change over time—sometimes dramatically in short periods of time, at other times over hundreds or thousands of years. The 'socialisation' process within and between groups and communities has a strong influence on this process as different generations develop different attitudes and views to their parents, grandparents and others based on their individual and peer experiences.

On the surface, many of Australia's Indigenous people live in an environment significantly different from what is seen as 'traditional' Indigenous cultural practices. However, the underlying 'spiritual' essence of Indigenous culture continues exist for many Indigenous people through a shared 'group consciousness' or bond which is seen in and expressed through a strong national Indigenous identity that is based on an interconnected 'spiritual identity'.



Spiritual or cultural abuse is about using power and control to deny a partner or family member their human, cultural or spiritual rights and needs. This form of abuse may also include the misuse of culture or religion as a reason for family violence. Another example is to insult or run down a person in relation to their cultural background or religious preference or practices. Further examples include:

- Denying access to cultural land, site, or family
- Denying access to cultural or spiritual ceremonies or rites
- Preventing religious observances or practices
- Forcing religious ways and practices against a person's own beliefs
- Denying a person their cultural heritage

My mum was very protective and we never really grew up with domestic violence issues. My father was a very strong Christian seven days a week. The kind of stuff I experience well I copped a lot of abuse—particularly in primary and secondary school being bullied. I would always be the kid that ran away.

I had a younger brother and came to the belief that I did not like myself. I usually buried myself in my work and never had self-respect and that was the public show.

When I was in high school we lived off church welfare and with that combination when all the school went to see a flick if I was bad I was not allowed to go.

The constant feeling of being hungry for affection. Physical violence is one degradation of this and there are other ways that this stuff can manifest itself. Fortunately, I had a relationship where I received respect and you have to love yourself to receive love.

Self-destruction and having that love I always say it to my family and don't say it enough to my partner. I hear him say it to me all the time but I cannot reciprocate. We don't sit around and talk about this in a group or at 2.00 am when we have been out.

I thought that it was about looking for the right person and need to love myself and then I could give it back to someone else. It was wrong to have feelings for someone of the same sex and that is where Christianity comes into play from my past.

I think that what happens in relationships is that we take the bad things out and when we have a happy time we forget or don't put much energy into them.

I walk down the street and say I would love to do it that and if you do that you should not be in a relationship. It is not being fair and you should be partners as well as mates and stop having to give up things in a relationship. Trust has to be in it as well.

Another thing is mixed relationships, like black and white. We take on their values and they are not prepared to take on ours. We will always be individuals—no one's relationship is to be devalued from anyone else's.

No one mirrors anyone else's relationship, and you cannot base yours on someone else's. There was to be a point in my life where my father actually wanted my mother exorcised for thinking differently.

## TYPES OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

As mentioned earlier in this report, the Task Force recognise that family violence is very complex and that many underlying factors contribute to its occurrence in Indigenous communities. In making this statement it is also important to recognise that there are many different types and degrees of violence which impact on various groups within the Indigenous community.

It must be understood that relationships within Indigenous communities extends beyond the individual and their families and that it also encompass extended family networks as well as Indigenous workers in community organisations (who may have a direct or indirect relationship to the victims and/or perpetrators of violence).

The Task Force has prepared the following table to summarise the different types of violence that can impact on ALL Indigenous people in a community.

Family Violence Matrix		
	Type of Violence	Degree of Violence
<b>Babies</b> <b>Children</b> <b>Youth</b> <b>Women</b> <b>Men</b> <b>Elders</b> <b>Community Workers</b>	Verbal Abuse/Threats Threatening Behaviour Physical Abuse/Assault Sexual Abuse/Assault Damaging Property Deprivation Social Abuse Financial Abuse Emotional Abuse Cultural Abuse Stalking	<b>Short term</b> <u>Physical Injuries which will heal</u>
		<b>Medium term</b> <u>Psychological scars which can be healed</u>
		<b>Lifelong</b> <u>Support needed over an extended period to heal physical injuries and psychological scars</u>
		<u>Permanent Disfigurement or Physical Injury</u> <u>Permanent Mental/Psychological Scars which will never heal and require ongoing support</u>

Existing mainstream service responses for victims and perpetrators are configured around various 'levels' of violence. That is, a person who has been verbally abused will require a completely different response to a person who has been seriously assaulted and/or raped. The age and gender of victims is also a factor in the types of service responses funded by Government. The most obvious example to draw upon is children who have been sexually and physically abused over a sustained period—particularly young females.

At the same time, service responses are in place for males (victims and perpetrators) to ensure that their needs are considered. The needs of victims in same sex relationships are also accommodated in some service responses.

At this point in time, the Task Force was unable to complete a rigorous analysis of the types of violence and abuse occurring in Indigenous communities. Having said this, the Task Force acknowledges the importance of undertaking longitudinal research that presents both quantitative and qualitative data about the types of violence experienced by victims.

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

As mentioned previously, the Task Force found that there were a number of factors contributing to the causes of family violence in Victorian Indigenous communities.

Research undertaken by the Task Force found that the contributing factors in other states were many and varied and that these were similar in nature within Victorian Indigenous communities.

At this point in time, the Task Force are not in a position to clearly identify all of the factors in every community, however, it is anticipated that the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum will draw upon the knowledge and skills and experience of members of the Regional IFV Action Groups to identify local and regional issues.

This section of the report has been prepared to provide a summary overview of those issues raised during community consultations by Indigenous people. It looks at various issues identified by community, including:

- Inherited grief and trauma
- Dispossession of land and loss of traditional language and cultural practices
- Loss of traditional Aboriginal roles and status (for males and females)
- Economic exclusion and entrenched poverty
- Difficulties in confronting issues

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA

*Domestic violence is widespread and complex. It is a major issue affecting the social, physical and financial wellbeing of individuals and families and results in significant social and economic costs to the community*

*In 1996, the Australian Bureau of Statistics surveyed 6,300 Australian women for the Women's Safety Survey. The survey asked women about their experiences of actual or threatened physical or sexual violence and found that in relation to violence by a male partner:*

- *2.6% of women who were married or in a defacto relationship (or 111,000 women) had experienced violence perpetrated by their current partner in the 12 months preceding the survey*

*The survey also recorded women's experience of violence in their lifetime and found that:*

- *23% of women who had ever been married or in a defacto relationship had experienced violence in that relationship; and*
- *1.1 million women experienced violence by a previous partner, which occurred during and after the relationship*

### INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

*Just as in all communities, the reasons for domestic and family violence in Indigenous communities are complex and have to be understood in their historical and cultural context*

- 1. Statistical data highlights that Indigenous people experience significantly higher levels of violence as victims, witnesses and perpetrators, than the non-Indigenous population.*
- 2. Aboriginal women are more than 45 times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than non-Aboriginal people*
- 3. National Research has found that witnessing parental domestic violence has a significant effect on young people's attitudes and experiences*
- 4. Indigenous people are 8.1 times more likely to be homicide victims than non-Indigenous people.*
- 5. Violence as a cause of hospitalisation for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 is recorded at a rate of 2.7 times higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous males, and 15 times higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous women.*
- 6. In a 1995 survey, 13% of Indigenous people reported being physically attacked or threatened in the preceding 12 months, with 66% of those reporting more than one attack or threat.*

Violence in Indigenous Communities, National Crime Prevention, 2001, Paul Memmott, Rachael Stacy, et al.

## INHERITED GRIEF AND TRAUMA

What is trauma? A traumatic stress reaction may occur when:

*A person experiences, witnesses, or is confronted with an event or events that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to the physical integrity of self or others, and the person's response involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror.<sup>1</sup>*

It is also well understood that individual acts of violence, such as murder, rape, and domestic violence are extremely traumatising experiences, both for individual survivors and their families. People often experience traumatisation from acts of violence at the hands of other people, such as rape, domestic violence, or colonisation, which are comparable to a natural disaster.<sup>2</sup>

### Issues Contributing to Family Violence—As identified by Community

<b>Cultural Breakdown</b>	One of the main causes of concern by the community was the issue of cultural breakdown and the Men's Groups in particular are all involved in a process of cultural regeneration. Many Men's Forums have identified cultural activities as a solution to family violence and the notion of father and son camps has been popular with men throughout Victoria.
<b>Unemployment-Financial Stress</b>	The issue of unemployment leading to financial stress is one that communities have constantly raised. They identified one of the main triggers of family violence as being the lack of money available to families and the high level of poverty that exists in Indigenous communities.
<b>Alcohol and Drug Abuse</b>	Once again, an important issue identified by the community is that of substance abuse, the over use of alcohol and drugs. In the majority of family violence cases, alcohol and drugs are present.
<b>Loss of Role for Men and Women</b>	The impact of the loss of cultural roles of men and women has been seen by the community as playing a pivotal role in family violence. There is frustration by both men and women at their loss of role in Indigenous communities.
<b>Learned Behaviour</b>	The impact of learned behaviour on children has been the subject of research Australia wide. There have been no definite conclusions, however, there are indications that children who are the victims of family violence become the perpetrators.
<b>Lack of Support</b>	Some victims of family violence feel that they do not have the support needed to get out of the situation. An article in The Age (June 30, 2001) detailed problems for family violence victims because in <i>"Indigenous communities, the task goes well beyond saving women. Strong kinship ties mean a domestic dispute can engulf an entire community as the wife's relatives spring to her defence, then the husband's follow suit. Brothers and cousins become embroiled. Whole clan groups can end up in jail."</i>
<b>Shame to get support</b>	Some victims are ashamed to get support because they feel they are to blame for the situation and if they seek support they will be blamed. Some Police and Magistrates make the victims feel that they are as much to blame as the perpetrators.
<b>Lack of leadership</b>	The community lacks the leadership necessary to support victims of family violence because of the kinship system that means that there are a number of people who will be supporting the perpetrators.
<b>Stress</b>	Indigenous organisations have limited staff and large case loads and are attempting to provide adequate services to the Indigenous community. Workers suffer from stress and are reluctant to be involved in cases that will add to this stress.
<b>Victims follow through very quietly on Intervention Orders</b>	Some victims obtain Intervention Orders do not follow through because of their reluctance to break their family unit for a long period of time. This leads to frustration on behalf of the authorities who are in turn reluctant to grant Intervention Orders when they feel there will be no follow through.
<b>Low Self-Esteem, Low Self-Worth</b>	The perpetrators feel they are worth very little and take it out on their families and community.
<b>Poor Standard of Housing</b>	The community sees that poor housing, not housing and being overcrowded lead to family violence in the community.



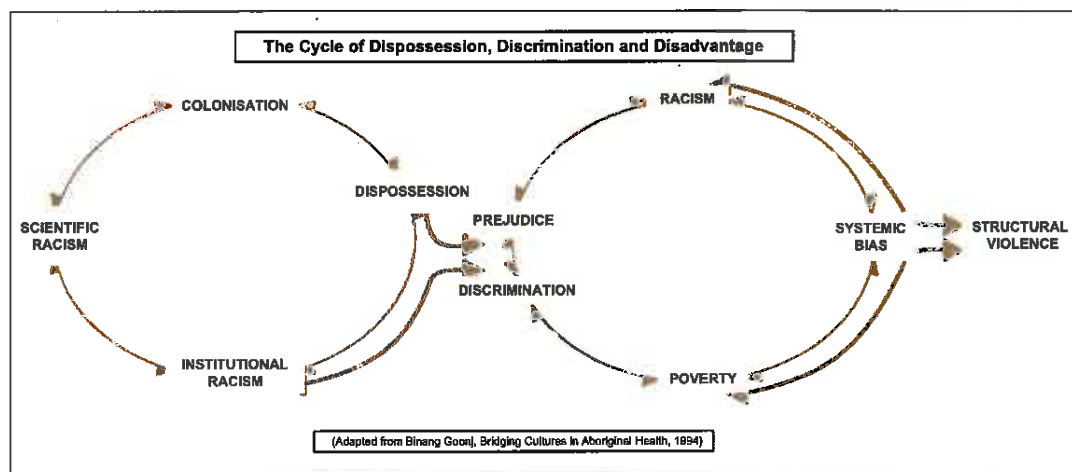
## DISPOSSESSION OF LAND AND LOSS OF TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

The impact of colonisation on Australia's Indigenous people is well documented and continues to have an impact today on the place Indigenous people have in relation to non-Indigenous Australians. Land rights continues to be an important issue for Indigenous clans and nations—and not just for economic reasons.

Many non-Indigenous Australians do not understand why the 'so-called Aboriginal problem' is still an issue today as Government policies and practices now 'recognise' the unique needs and circumstances of Indigenous people. Task Force members recognise that the cycle of dispossession, discrimination and disadvantage cannot be resolved overnight nor in the single term of any Government (State or Commonwealth).

Indigenous community members raised the issue of loss of language and cultural practices as a major underlying reason why there has been a breakdown of Indigenous family structures. They said that roles and responsibilities in traditional Aboriginal clan groups and nations were clearly defined and based on the relationship people had with their land.

Academics and historians acknowledge that language is the foundation on which civilisations are built and that language has a direct influence on cultural practices and ceremonies. History programs and documentaries on television highlight the importance of language on cultural practices as well as the influence that land had on shaping the attitudes, societal views, agricultural practices and trade relations of nations. The same can be said about Aboriginal people, as land was the foundation on which Aboriginal life was based.



The dispossession of land has had a profound impact on Indigenous people which has been exacerbated by the past policies and practices of Governments. Aboriginal people in one location were forcibly removed from their families and placed in 'missions' located many miles from their traditional country. Children were often separated away from their parents and grandparents who were often punished for speaking their traditional language and forbidden from practicing their ceremonies. 'Mission Managers' controlled every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people living on these properties.

Why is it important to know this? Because there are many Elders and other Indigenous people living today who have first hand experience of this 'lifestyle'. Institutionalisation practices removing children from families continues to be a nightmare for many Aboriginal people who cannot seem to break the cycle of dispossession, disadvantage, racism, prejudice and poverty resulting from past policies. High rates of unemployment and a dependency on 'welfare' has a direct impact on the health and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people which in turn influences the strength and functioning of Indigenous family units.

Governments must understand that addressing the underlying issues influencing family violence over the long term is critical otherwise the root causes leading to family violence will never be fully addressed. Structural violence will continue to manifest itself not only in Indigenous families and communities but also in the wider community as hospitals, Police, Courts, Child Protection Workers and service providers (Indigenous and mainstream) respond to the needs of victims and perpetrators of family violence.

The community consultations raised concerns that **"Indigenous community people have lost contact with traditional lore and have made an assumption that violence is part of the tribal punishment once practiced by traditional ancestors"**. The Elders of the community believe that this assumption is wrong and traditional lore was practiced according to a set of unwritten rules with punishment summonsed under direction of traditional leaders only.

The Task Force acknowledges existing cultural programs being delivered by the Department for Victorian Communities (AAV) in preserving cultural sites and providing cultural information to the Indigenous and mainstream community,<sup>3</sup>

The Task Force encourages Regional IFV Action Groups to explore an extension of this and other cultural services in providing a program for the youth and interested community members.

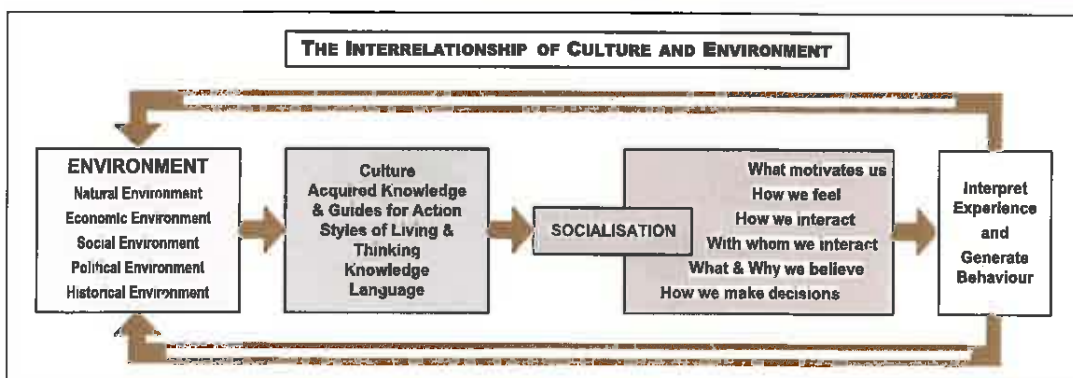
The Task Force has placed emphasis upon the need to educate people about family violence and traditional culture. As part of this process the Task Force aims to resource Indigenous young people and families with access to services and cultural links. The education component will be extended to mainstream communities in dismantling the myth that family violence is an issue that only largely affects Indigenous people.

During the preliminary visits, the Indigenous participants raised concern about young people and other community members having an understanding that violence is the traditional way. The Task Force and Indigenous communities have agreed that family violence is not an accepted part of the Indigenous culture and have placed an emphasis upon changing such perceptions.

The Task Force acknowledges the recent launch of the 'Hear Me Now' Strengthening Young Koories program overseen by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited, that was funded by the Commonwealth's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) Program. The Program has launched a resource tool that is aimed at giving young Koories some strategies that will strengthen them, with the hope that by doing so, it will prevent abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Many stakeholders noted the relationship between loss of culture and family and social breakdown impacts upon the daily function of family systems.

*"There is the presumption that everybody has a cultural base and knows where they come from. Communities have stated that not enough culture is taught to our kids. There also needs to be acknowledgement of the impact felt by the Stolen Generations and the traditional roles of men and women are being diminished."*



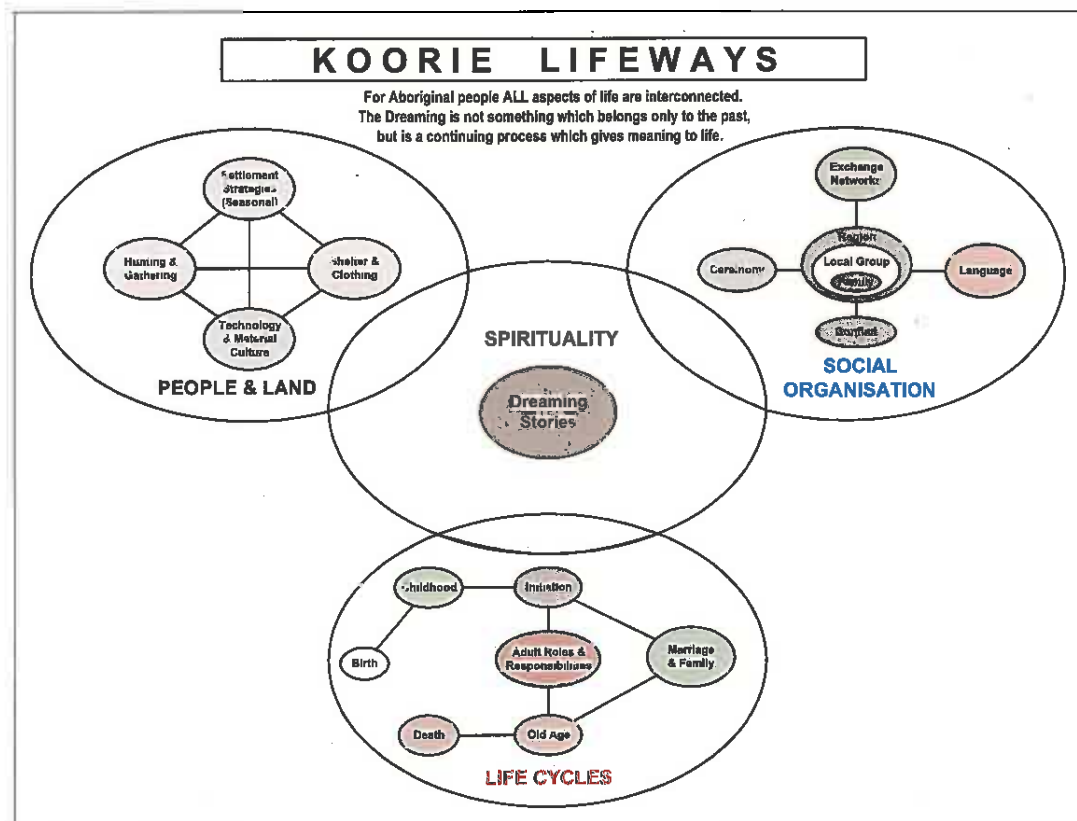
## LOSS OF TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL ROLES AND STATUS (FOR MALES AND FEMALES)

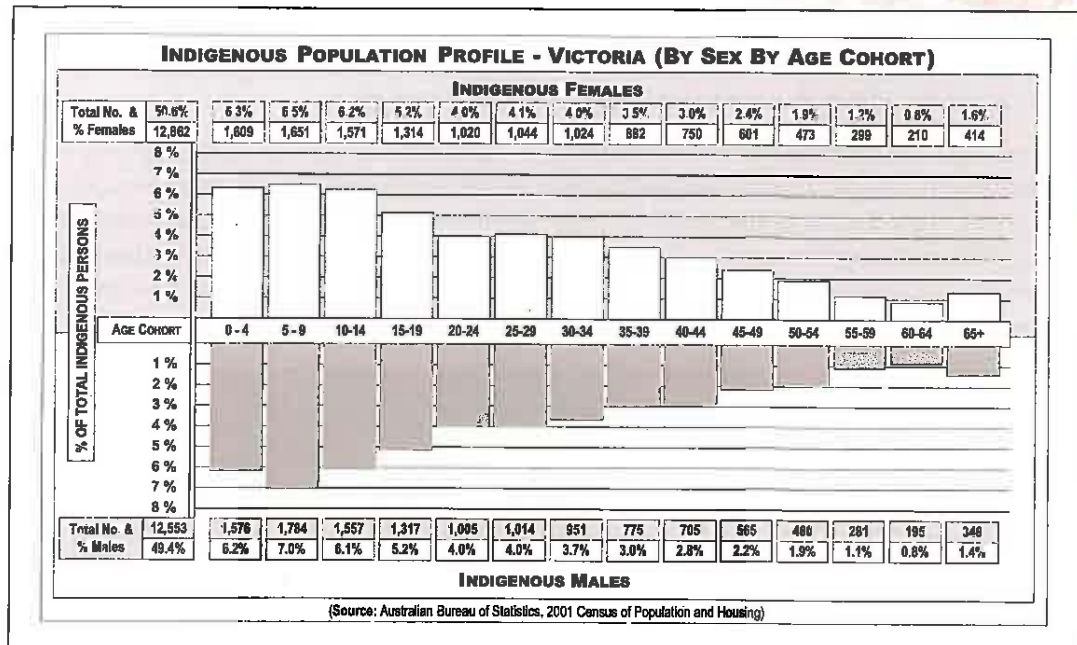
An important part of family life and functioning is the 'role' each person has within the family unit. The roles and responsibilities of Indigenous men, women, children and Elders within a family unit and clan group were clearly defined before colonisation. Responsibility for different aspects of family life was shared between different family members such as child raising, shelter, food, clothing and ceremony. The same basic principles still apply in today's contemporary society (for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people), however, there are now different pressures impacting on family functioning and strength.

With the breakdown of traditional Indigenous family values, individuals, families and communities are turning on each other and violence is prevalent in communities today. The challenge faced by Indigenous people today (male and female, young and old) is complex as family structures are also influenced by what happens in the wider community. Many Victorian Indigenous people understand that it will never be possible to return to 'traditional' Indigenous ways of life and that they must focus on making a place for themselves in Australian society as it is today.

*"Now some of our Elders are experiencing abuse within the community, whether it is verbal, physical or emotional abuse—it is still abuse".*

Traditional Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs were closely related to the land and environment where Indigenous families and clan groups lived. The 'spiritual' aspect of Indigenous life (as shown in the 'Koorie Lifeways' diagram) is still inherent in many Indigenous people today, even though it may not be obvious. Indigenous people are still bound by their social organisations and obligations as well as to the land (or country) they belong to. The physical and economic environment may have changed since 1788, however, Indigenous people still hunt and gather (work), seek out shelter (housing), develop technology (obtain qualifications and skills) and trade (use money) to survive.





Analysis of the 2001 Census of Population and Housing statistical data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicates that 38.2% of Victoria's Indigenous population are 14 years old or younger. Responses given to questions about families indicates that in many communities single parents represent between 40% and 45% of the Indigenous community and that (on average) there are at least 2 or 3 children within the single parent family units. In many instances the 'single parent' is usually female with the father/s being absent or having no contact with their children. Grand parents, aunts and uncles are often called upon to provide support to single mothers and their children which, in turn, places additional financial stress on caregivers whose only source of income is provided by the Government.

The strength of non-Indigenous family units is influenced by the level of income earned by the parent/s. For many Indigenous people obtaining work is difficult as there are few jobs they have the qualifications or experience to apply for, particularly those who live in non-metropolitan towns where job opportunities are even more scarce. Unemployment statistics for Indigenous people confirm that participation in the workforce remains a challenge.

There are also a significantly high number of Indigenous females who have 'opted out' of the workforce to concentrate on providing parental support for their children. In many Indigenous family units a significantly high proportion of parents have never been in the workforce. Money within these family units comes from one or another Government source and is usually set at a fixed amount.

The Task Force acknowledge that the loss of 'traditional' family roles in Indigenous family units may never be fully resolved and will cause pressure and angst for people as they deal with this situation as best as they can. The Task Force also note that the Victorian Government commissioned a research project to provide it with policy implementation options for 'Balancing work and family responsibilities' (June 2002)<sup>5</sup>. The report considered the key trends occurring in 'contemporary societies', in particular 'the substantial erosion of the traditional model of the male breadwinner and female homemaker'.

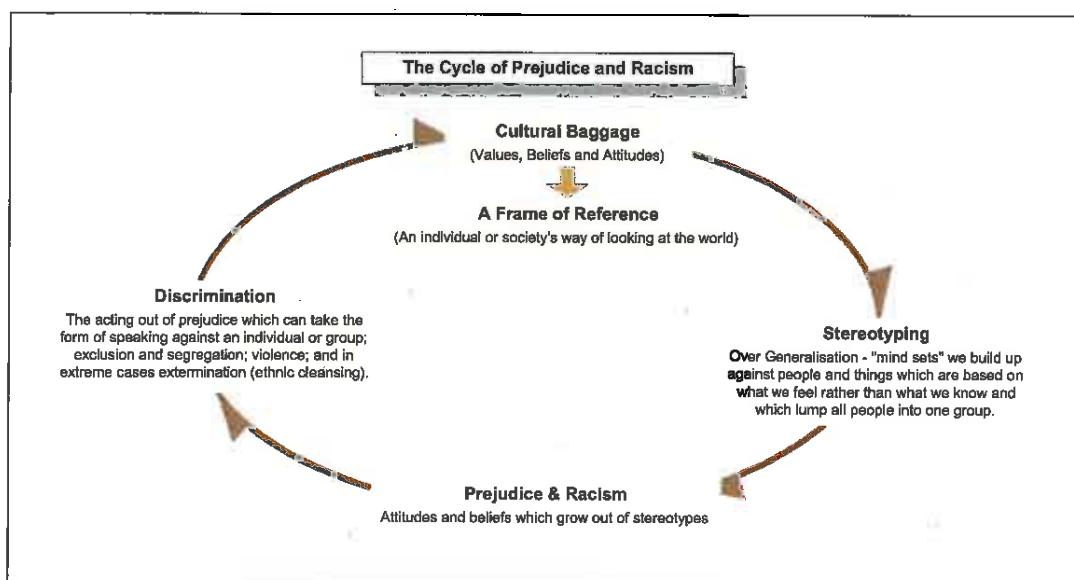
### **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 10**

*That a research project be commissioned to establish what is actually happening in Indigenous families in relation to balancing work and family responsibilities. That this information then be used to assist and inform Government policies about how to deal with this issue from an Indigenous specific perspective.*

## ECONOMIC EXCLUSION AND ENTRENCHED POVERTY

Indigenous people in many parts of Victoria made comments to the Task Force about the racism they experience in their communities and the affect this has on them personally—particularly when it came to getting work. The stereotype of Indigenous people being lazy, unreliable, unclean and drunks still pervades the mindset of many non-Indigenous people. Examples of racism, discrimination and vilification occurring in communities include:

- Going into a shop and not getting served—even when there are no other customers
- Being asked to pay for a meal before getting it while others pay their bills when they finish
- Being called derogatory names like 'boong', 'coon', 'nigger', 'gin', 'dog', etc—at school, in town, on the sporting field, etc
- Applying for rental properties over the phone and being told the property is 'no longer on the market' when you show up at the real estate office and the agent sees you are black
- Being turned away from caravan parks and motels after confirming a booking over the phone yet when you show up they say 'Sorry, but we're full and have no rooms left'
- Not being allowed into certain venues on certain nights because you are black and management 'don't want any trouble like last week' even when you were not the person who caused the trouble
- Being turned away for membership of local sporting teams (like football, netball, basketball, etc) when you know the teams are short of players.



The flow on effects of racism and discrimination cannot be underestimated as it has enormous influence on the ability of Indigenous people to get jobs in many communities. Employment opportunities for Indigenous people tend to be limited to working specifically in Indigenous organisations, designated positions in mainstream organisations and Government departments, and 'work for the dole' CDEP schemes run by Indigenous organisations.

Racist and discriminatory attitudes gain strength in many communities where shared views are held by individuals and where children in these families take up these views. Attitudinal change will only be addressed through education and awareness programs, supported by anti-discrimination legislation and Equal Opportunity Tribunals that, for many Indigenous people are the only avenues they have for seeking justice.

Unemployment rates for Indigenous people continue to remain at high levels. It is well documented that the average rate of unemployment in Indigenous communities is at least four times higher than for non-Indigenous people. There are many reasons for this including low levels of education and a lack of relevant experience. An analysis of employment patterns confirms that a high proportion of Indigenous people work in health and community services jobs (usually the local Aboriginal Co-operative), followed by manufacturing and education.

**Mary's 21 year old son Bill had been on heroin for six years. He had been in a lot of trouble, and had recently been in jail. He was home with Mary in her house 20 km out of town and she was trying to help him stay off the 'gear'. She said she was doing her best to 'keep him up safe'.**

**One night he said he was really hanging out, he really needed a hit and if she helped him this once he would be able to stay off it.**

**Mary drove him into town and gave Bill the money for the hit, he asked her to wait in the car while he went to meet his dealer. Five minutes later he came running back to the car, jumped in and said "Drive!! Just drive!!".**

**Mary drove off as fast as she could. Bill then said he had ripped off the dealer and that he would be after him....**

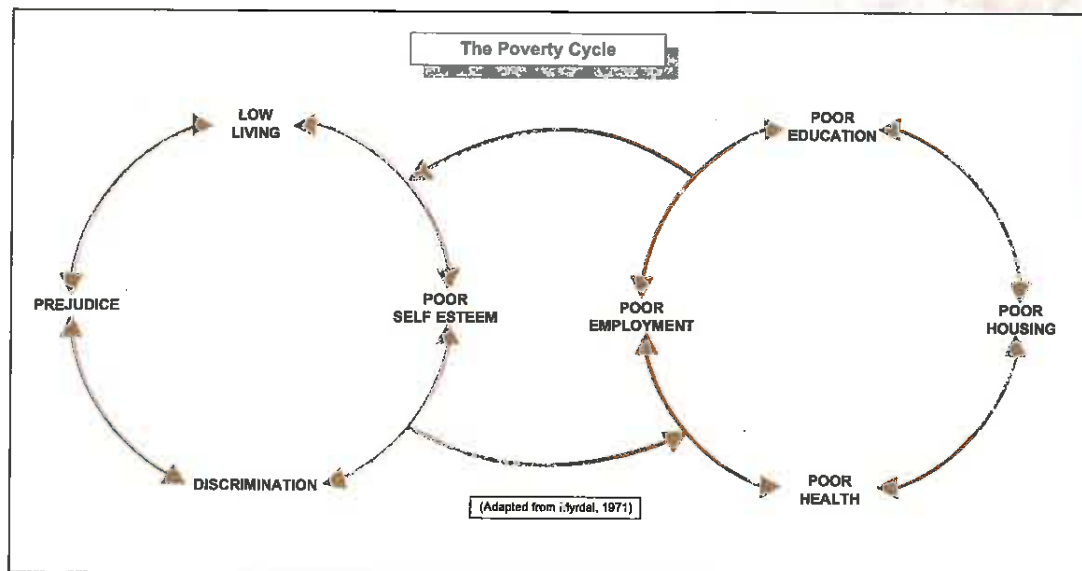
Non-Indigenous people tend to be employed in retail positions, manufacturing and agricultural, forestry and fishing positions. A more in-depth analysis of non-Indigenous employment patterns (particularly in rural areas) would confirm that the businesses are classed as small to medium enterprises (SME's) which are family owned. These employers would be more selective about who they employ and would not take on an Indigenous person even where a wage subsidy was offered. The Commonwealth Government has made numerous attempts since the mid 1970's to change employer attitudes with mixed success.

Opportunities provided by the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) are for many Indigenous people the only option available to gain work and improve their work skills and qualifications. It also allows them to supplement their unemployment benefit with additional income. Further analysis of income data from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing reveals that:

- Approximately 20% of Indigenous people have a weekly income between \$120 and \$199;
- Approximately 25% have a weekly income between \$200 and \$399; and
- Approximately 18% of Indigenous people have a weekly income between \$400 and \$599.

When income data is cross-compared with employment rates it is clear that the majority of Indigenous people are recipients of Government benefits. Drilling down further into the data would suggest that the majority of people on weekly incomes between \$200 and \$399 a week are sole parents the majority of which would be females who have opted out of the workforce.

Of particular concern to the Task Force is the length of time Indigenous people remain on unemployment benefits. In some families the parents have never had a job. Some young women in Indigenous families in rural areas are encouraged by their families to have babies so they can collect a benefit—especially those aged between 14 and 18 years. At the same time this income is more than the youth allowances or Abstudy they could receive. These benefits are more than they would receive for staying at school or being a dependent on their parent's benefit and the household income would also dramatically increase as the child/parent would then receive their own benefit.



*"Once we only had to worry about alcohol abuse. Today we have drugs and other substances that contribute to the breakdown of values and leads to violence and other abuse".*

It is well documented that alcohol and drug abuse in Indigenous communities is also at a critical point. Drinking and drug taking tends to occur when benefits are received in many Indigenous communities. This is the time most pressure is placed on service providers as they 'pick up the pieces' in families where parents hit the bottle, bong, needle or gamble. It is also the time when most family violence occurs.

More research is needed to build a better picture about the connection of family violence and alcohol and drug abuse in Indigenous communities in Victoria. At the same time, research activities would assist to inform the activities of Regional IFV Action Groups, Indigenous and mainstream service providers and the Working Group. These activities would also raise the issue in communities and provide a focus for discussions taking place within the various men's, youth and women's groups.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 11

*That a research project be commissioned to establish the connection between family violence and alcohol and drug abuse occurring in Indigenous communities. That information gathered is then used to develop a Statewide Community Education Campaign focusing on the impact of alcohol and drugs on family violence in Indigenous communities.*



## DIFFICULTIES IN CONFRONTING THE ISSUES

The Task Force identified that community need to be able to trust somebody to tell their "secrets" to. The community has identified that there is no safe way to disclose, so communities are fearful of the consequences and what the impact will be on people the disclosure is about. There is also concern about the current level of support available to individuals who do disclose and the guarantee of their safety. Those individuals that do disclose are also burdened with the concern that 'will they be blamed for family breakdown or will they be believed'.

*"The shame of talking about sexual assault/family violence within the community"*

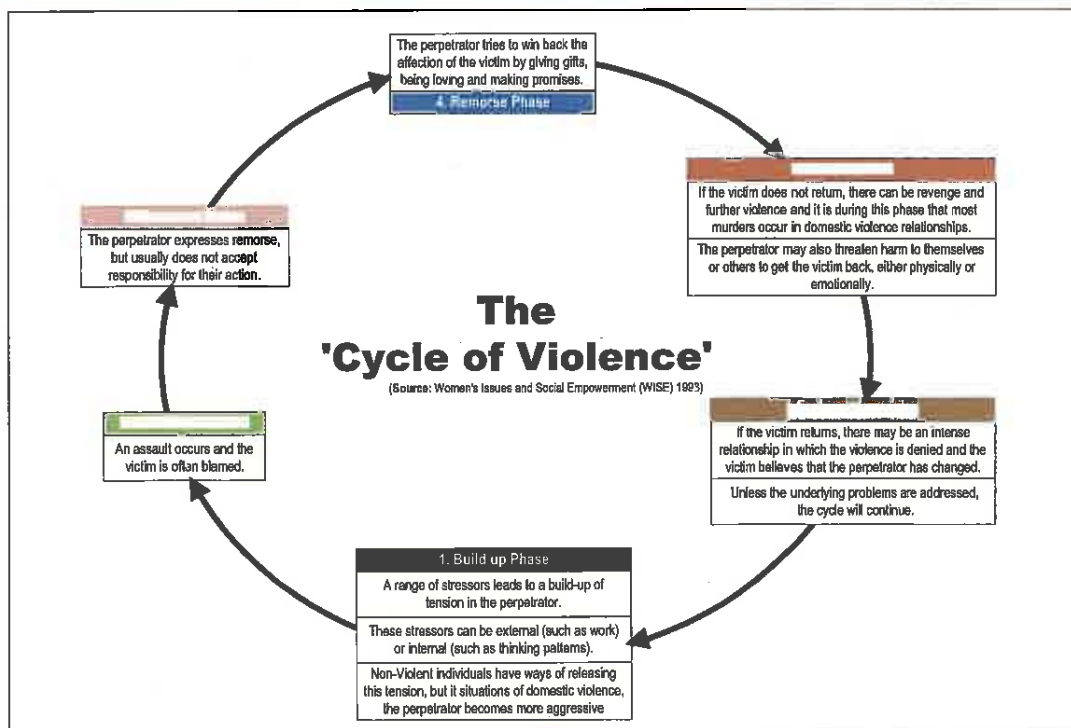
At present many individuals trying to escape family violence have minimal options other than to leave their community and travel to a refuge elsewhere in the state. This results in community members being removed from their cultural base with minimal access to family supports.

*"Strong leaders are required to lead the way to resolve issues"*

The community has also raised concerns about 'how do you market this Strategy and get ownership when people who turn up may be abusers?'. The Task Force has identified that dealing with family violence requires dealing with victims as well as the perpetrators of violence. The Task Force has supported community comments about the need for family healing to include all members affected by the violence.

I remember when I was little, and I would run away from home because of the way my stepfather beat me. I would catch the train to my auntie's, I was only about 8, and she would give me a feed and let me stay a while and then she would drive me back home.

She would say 'wait in the car' and I would hear a rattling as she got the hammer out of the boot. Then she'd go in and tell my stepfather that she would come and use it on him if he hit me again. Then she'd come and tell me to go inside.



The Task force acknowledges that family violence is a very contentious issue that needs to be addressed at a pace that suits the local community. The Task Force believes that strong respected community members need to be encouraged to lead the discussion of family violence within the community. By promoting respected community members the Task Force believes that positive role modelling will be observed by the younger people within the community.

*"No support for community people who try to improve their life--Referred to as flash blacks, coconuts, etc"*

The community has raised concern that Indigenous people who wish to strive and obtain an education and a high quality of life are labelled 'flash blacks' or 'coconuts'. This form of labelling appears to be associated with the fact that many Indigenous people struggle to establish a basic quality of life due to past injustices and those who do strive are generally ostracised from the community.

This matter however for local rural communities has had major impacts as those people who have been labelled in this manner generally move from their local community to larger city and metropolitan centres. This process removes role models and quality skilled people from local communities to work on larger statewide initiatives, where achievement is often encouraged and rewarded.

*"Get the community to recognise and accept there is a problem. Speak out against it".*

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force agrees that "change to attitudes and behaviours in relation to family violence within the Indigenous community is a long-term goal and requires a coordinated and integrated approach"<sup>6</sup>.

It is strongly interwoven with change in other areas of health, skill, development, employment and economic independence. 'Outsiders' can provide support and mentoring, but the community itself needs and wants to take responsibility.

The Task Force has accepted that family violence at the local level can only be addressed at a pace established by the community.

*"Elders need to be promoted as leaders and role models. We need to target strong family members as leaders and have Family Role Model/Mentoring Programs"*

## THE EXTENT (AND CAUSES) OF VIOLENCE WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Since it was established in October, 2001, the Task Force has had numerous discussions about what was required to gain a clear picture about the extent and causes of violence within each Indigenous community throughout the state.

Victorian Government departments provided information and data to assist the Task Force to obtain a greater insight into what was happening within the regions in relation to family violence related issues.

This data and information has been included in this section of the report to allow readers an opportunity to observe how the service system in Victoria is meeting demands from Indigenous clients.

This section also includes information about the following:

- The prevalence of family violence within Indigenous communities (victims)
- The Family Court and other legal processes
- Family violence perpetrators

The Task Force has included examples of programs and initiatives being implemented by the Victorian Government which, in some areas, may be taken up by Indigenous people to assist them to address family violence caused by perpetrators.

It should be noted that more information is provided in the Appendices Section of the report which includes detailed information about initiatives implemented within Victorian communities as well as overseas experiences.



## FAMILY VIOLENCE—VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

The Task Force found that the extent of violence within the Indigenous community is very broad. As part of the Strategy development the Task Force maintain the view that family violence encompasses the entire community as opposed to traditional definitions of spousal abuse and domestic violence. The Task Force acknowledges that there are new forms of emerging violence and they are concerned that this violence is being accepted and minimal attempts are being made to address the underlying issues.

*"Family violence is often 'inherent' in that victims as children often becoming abusers themselves and children from broken homes 'miss out' on learning to be good parents".*

The preliminary information sessions conducted by the Task Force identified a community perception that **the 'abused' go on to be abusers**. Many Indigenous people as youngsters have either witnessed or been victims of various forms of violence or abuse. The belief that violent traits are inherited comes as an observation of patterns in behaviours. Such patterns are inherent due to a lack of access to support for the abused and no access to Family Healing.

Community members raised the issue of service responses being needed for perpetrators as well as victims. A number of suggestions were put forward about the need to get perpetrators to change their behaviour and to take responsibility for their actions. Mandatory participation in 'Behaviour Change Programs' was raised on many occasions, particularly where Intervention Orders had been issued.

### Issues Contributing to Family Violence—As identified by Victims and Perpetrators

Victims	Perpetrators
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Alcohol and Drugs</i></li> <li>2. <i>Blame themselves—One of the common issues identified by the victims is that they are to blame for the violence perpetrated against them because of something they have said or done that they shouldn't have. This is because of the low self-esteem and confidence of the victims.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Gambling—Gambling is becoming an increasing problem within Indigenous communities and one that is exacerbating the family violence issues as the loss of money results in family violence.</i></li> <li>4. <i>Children blame themselves saying they were naughty. The children blame themselves for the family violence because of their behaviour. This is destructive and leads to problems for the victims at a later stage.</i></li> <li>5. <i>Want the violence to stop—Many victims say that they don't want to get rid of the perpetrator; they just want the violence to stop.</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>I don't know what made me do it—Perpetrators do not understand their own behaviour.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Powerlessness—It is recognised that family violence is a way of perpetrators exercising control over the victim. Therefore the powerlessness that is felt by members of the Indigenous community is leading to the increase in family violence.</i></li> <li>3. <i>Blame the victim—Perpetrators blame the victim saying things like "She knows what I'm like. She always does it."</i></li> <li>4. <i>Sorry for themselves—Some perpetrators excuse their own behaviour and feel sorry for themselves as a result of it. They are unwilling to deal with the fact that they have a responsibility for their actions.</i></li> <li>5. <i>Have to keep them in line—There is a feeling that family violence is one way of ensuring that the men are the 'bosses'.</i></li> <li>6. <i>Denial that they are responsible—Some men will say that family violence is wrong and shouldn't happen, however, they are the ones who will go home and bash their wives.</i></li> </ol>

## THE PREVALENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES (VICTIMS)

A number of issues in regards to Police response to Indigenous family violence reports have been identified. The Task Force and community representatives agree that Police need to respond to reported incidents, and victims of abuse need to be protected. The Indigenous community have identified that Police generally responded poorly to reports of violence within the Indigenous community, with some community people stating that police have failed to respond at all.

The Task Force have identified a need for cultural workshops with Police, targeting regions with a high population of Indigenous community members. This process has been identified as significant in providing cultural links for Police as well as also providing a formal network link within the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

*"Ambulance and Police services are often reluctant to attend family violence incidents".*

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 12

*That a Cultural Awareness Program dealing with family violence in Indigenous communities be developed for the Victoria Police*

It should be noted that Police data used in this report relates specifically to Indigenous victims and offenders and has not been compared to the broader community.

<b>Aboriginal Victims of Family Violence Incidences by Age Group by Region (1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003)</b>							
<b>Police Region</b>	<b>&lt;17</b>	<b>17 to 24</b>	<b>25 to 39</b>	<b>40 to 59</b>	<b>60 +</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Region 1</b>	–	12	26	6	–	<b>44</b>	6.7%
<b>Region 2</b>	3	19	23	16	2	<b>63</b>	9.6%
<b>Region 3</b>	12	95	166	60	2	<b>335</b>	50.8%
<b>Region 4</b>	1	17	17	9	–	<b>44</b>	6.7%
<b>Region 5</b>	10	37	87	39	–	<b>173</b>	26.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>659</b>	
<b>% of Total</b>	3.9%	27.3%	48.4%	19.7%	0.6%		

(Source: Victoria Police LEAP Database, produced by Policy & Research, Community & Cultural Division, Victoria Police)

The Task Force supports the work of the RAJACs and the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement program in continually highlighting concerns to Police about their dealings with the Indigenous community. The Task Force furthermore acknowledges the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the significance of the findings when addressing justice related issues at the local level.

The Task Force also acknowledges the work of Koori Police Liaison Officer and Family Violence Support Officer positions, but is concerned about the minimal time allocated to the nominated officer to perform these duties. There is only one full time Internal Koori Police Liaison Officer in the state with all other Officers required to perform this task within the duties of their general Police role.

Furthermore, the Task Force supports the idea of Regional IFV Action Groups developing formal links with RAJACs to begin exploring issues within their community and taking a greater part in planning towards addressing the issues.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 13

*That the Regional IFV Action Groups develop formal links with the RAJACs in their regions with a view to putting in place joint approaches and strategies to respond to family violence issues.*

The community identified a greater need for support when engaging services and seeking safety. The community has stated that Indigenous people are intimidated by the processes of court and Government agencies (Child Protection) and believe that more Indigenous support workers, advocates and mediators are necessary in addressing family matters as an attempt to avoid formal intervention of courts.

*"There are no services to support prisoners on release (and their families) to deal with family violence related issues".*

The preliminary Information sessions identified a lack of access to services that support the reintegration of prisoner's back into the community and more importantly back into the family. A greater need for outreach support for families facing family violence is necessary to ensure that support is ongoing and Indigenous families are able to progress towards long-term healing as opposed to short term intervention.

The Task Force acknowledges the efforts of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (VAJA) via the Department of Justice in development mechanisms to ensure those prisoners are better supported on post release. Furthermore, the Task Force acknowledges that local RAJACs progress towards addressing these issues is taking place at a steady pace and is currently addressing this issue.

*"There is a reluctance to take action that results in the imprisonment of family members or involves homelessness for victims".*

A major dilemma within Indigenous communities when addressing matters of family violence is the criminal element. Any form of violence against an individual is a criminal matter and whilst victims wish to remain safe, the formal process of prosecution of perpetrators within Indigenous communities rarely takes place. During community consultations it was identified that communities do not wish to see members of their family incarcerated as a consequence of formal prosecution. However, communities have also identified that there still needs to be consequences for perpetrators and the healing process needs to take place involving both the victim and the perpetrator as a culturally appropriate family therapy approach.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The notion of Restorative Justice is gaining increasing popularity as an alternative to formal sentencing for less serious offences. Whilst this is a mainstream approach the cultural equivalent to this would be the 'community justice panel'. These panels would comprise of respected Elders and members of the Indigenous community. This panel would be responsible for determining a code of conduct for their local community and consequences for breach of this conduct. The Task Force and community agree that the development of such a panel would require long term strategic planning.

Restorative justice also has a healing component and is written about in Canadian, the United States and New Zealand contexts (Schmid and Axford, 2001).

Taking the Canadian experience as an example, the Canadian restorative justice is a process of consultation within a select community. The process considers the needs of the community, the offender and the victim in devising a response to the crime. The response is restorative in that it attempts to restore the balance to the community, repairing the harm (Plett, 1999).

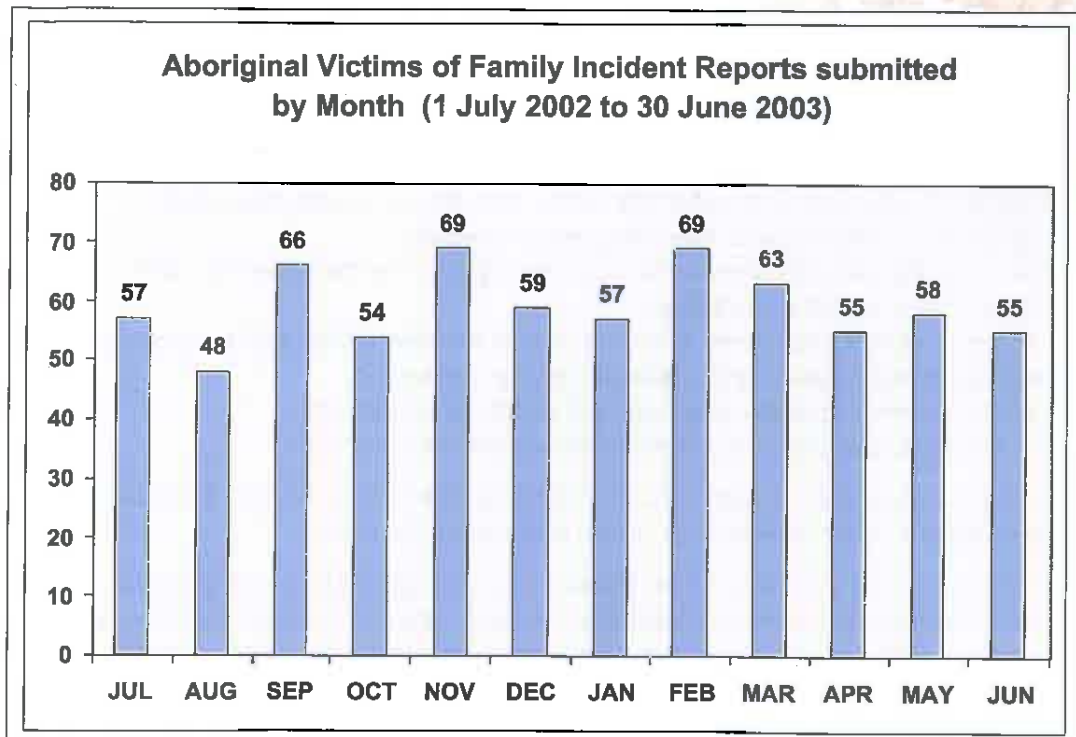
The following outlines the 'Vancouver Aboriginal Restorative Justice Program' as an example of the restorative approach. The approach can be described as remedying the crime by understanding that issues are inter related and crime disrupts the harmony which previously existed. The sanction is largely determined by the needs of the victim the community and the offender. The victim has a central role in helping to identify the injury and its impacts on the victim and the community and suggesting outcomes that would restore the balance. It also provides an opportunity for healing of the offender. Instead of jail the offender might offer restitution.

The process considers underlying reasons for the crime and the offender's needs. Counselling or training may be used and a lack of social services in the community, which contributes to that type of crime being committed, may be identified. A healing plan is devised which may incorporate spiritual and cultural factors. The process of facing the victim and the community is powerful learning opportunity for the offender. Many Aboriginal people have experienced discrimination, systematic loss of cultural and spiritual values, and suffered abuse as children and as a result the healing plan is more likely to address needs arising from historical issues. Sentencing can involve community members and community knowledge may be utilised in devising a healing plan. It is noted that the greater the community involvement, the greater the ownership of the justice system.

An important form of restorative justice processes is the sentencing circle, which is not only in keeping with the principles of restorative justice, but historical cultural practices, as well. The circle is where the court is arranged in a circle without desks or tables with participants facing each other, with equal exposure to each other. This breaks down the dominance of the traditional courtroom. Other Aboriginal customs are incorporated such as beginning and ending with a prayer.

Other forms to the circle do exist, such as sentence advisory Committees, Mediation, Family Group Conferencing, Community Council Forums (Plett, 1999).

The Task Force acknowledges the trial of the Koori Courts currently taking place in Melbourne and Shepparton and believe that support to such projects is necessary towards gaining greater cultural input into the sentencing process of Indigenous offenders. This component further emphasises the need for information about the various court systems and functions that is culturally targeted for Indigenous communities.



(Source: Victoria Police LEAP Database, produced by Policy & Research Community & Cultural Division, Victoria Police)

Marie hangs out in the inner city. She has had a tough life—taken from her mother as a baby, she grew up in children's homes and foster care.

She has had six children all of whom were taken into care at some stage. She hasn't seen any of her children for years.

Marie drinks heavily and now has a lot of trouble keeping herself safe. When money is low she has sex for cigarettes and drinks. She has been bashed and raped many times.

She is well known to health and sexual assault services but she felt powerless to know where to start. Marie says she feels so lost and alone.



## THE FAMILY COURT AND OTHER LEGAL PROCESSES

A number of Indigenous women also raised the issue of Family Court and other legal processes not being 'culturally sensitive' to the needs of Indigenous women. Numerous stories were told to Task Force members about the high level of intimidation felt by female victims when they appeared in the Family Court because of:

- Being in the same room as the perpetrator and the close physical proximity they had to the perpetrators of violence against them during court proceedings;
- The lack of physical barriers between them and the perpetrator and the perpetrator's family or friends—prior to and after proceedings;
- The lack of suitable 'quiet spaces' where they could sit with their children, other family/support members and legal representatives before proceedings commenced;
- Having somewhere for children to go while their parents are in court; and
- The line of questioning taken by Judges and the way questions were asked.

Information contained in the 'Indigenous Family Violence and Police Project Report' commissioned by the Department of Human Services in the Loddon Mallee Region noted that:

- A major concern for many victims is the limited privacy when applying for an Intervention Order. The current practice is that the victim (applicant) has to attend at the main reception counter at the court and give a detailed overview of why they need an order. This all takes place in the public area of the court house. The Registrar will be asking personal questions of the victim that may be overheard by other persons.
- There is also inadequate security for victims attending court, who may be harassed by the perpetrators and his supports.
- Victims also find the lack of confidentiality of court hearings a disincentive to taking legal action.

It was suggested by a number of Indigenous community people that an Indigenous Family Violence Court be established to address these and other issues.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 14

*That a research project be undertaken to determine the merits and feasibility of establishing an Indigenous Family Violence Court and the changes needed to provide a culturally safe and secure environment for Indigenous family violence victims.*

### **ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND THE FAMILY COURT**

Over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal peoples contact with the Family Court system. It is difficult to estimate the percentage however; the increase has required the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) to employ Family Court lawyers and has contributed to the establishment of a Family Law Unit within the VALS.

The Family Court of Australia has introduced new terminology and family counselling services with the aim of encouraging parents to negotiate and reach agreement around **child residency (custody) and child contact (access)**.

When family violence, child abuse or sexual assault is the primary cause of family breakdown then the process of counselling and negotiation becomes difficult and in many cases inappropriate.

Participants expressed their concerns around **residency and contact orders** and their association to **Intervention Orders**. Some women described the contact hand-over period as an opportunity for the perpetrator to further abuse the woman. Hand-over for contact of children is usually negotiated to take place in a public area or the local police station. Unless the woman has a witness with her during the hand-over period these situations continue to occur.

An Aboriginal specific child hand-over centre can play a huge role in monitoring the hand-over of children and supervising access in a neutral location.

The Child Support Agency was the subject of much criticism by the participants. Women stated that they found it hard to secure child maintenance particularly in situations where their ex partner is earning an income and continually avoiding or providing misleading information to the Child Support Agency. Generally the women stated that the Child Support Agency needs a complete overhaul.

(Source: 'Consultation report on Aboriginal Women & Children's Experiences of family violence within Victorian Aboriginal Communities— 29th June 2003', Elizabeth Hoffman House Inc In partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Mother and Children's Unit)

### **ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND INTERVENTION ORDERS**

An **Intervention Order** is granted on application by any Magistrates Court whether supported by police as a legal form of protection when a complaint is made or there is significant evidence to suggest:

- Police who are called out to a domestic/family violence incident have the power to take out an **Intervention Order** with or without the consent of a victim, when there is significant evidence to suggest that a violent incident has occurred and the victim may be at further risk.
- **Intervention Orders** are usually issued on an **interim basis** and return to court at a date determined by the courts. This enables the police to serve the **Interim Intervention Order** to the defendant and allows him/her the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

Participants who had taken out **Intervention Orders** were asked to express their views on whether the **Intervention Order** had or had not worked for them. The participants who had not taken out **Intervention Orders** were asked to express their reasons as to why they did not take them out.

The women who had taken out **Intervention Orders** in the past stated that they felt that **Intervention Orders** were frustrating as there appeared to be inconsistent responses from police and courts. Some women reported difficulties with the clerks at courts.

**"I took an Aboriginal woman to a court to apply for an Interim Intervention Order. The woman was much traumatised and I felt that the clerk had made a judgement on the way she looked and did not listen to her story. The woman who was waiting outside and was dressed appropriately got her Interim Order. I mean, this woman was escaping a partner who had convictions for child sexual abuse"**.

Women felt that the process of applying for an **Intervention Order** was confusing as they did not understand the interim process and having to return to court to obtain the full order. They stated that they had to continually tell their story to police, solicitors, workers and the courts which they found extremely frustrating.

Participants who did not return for their full order did not pursue the order because they had no support at court and felt intimidated when the perpetrator was present. Some participants who presented at court for their full order were not aware that they needed legal representation and hence the case would be adjourned with the women bearing the costs of the adjournment. In some cases the women withdrew their applications because of the costs associated to the adjournment of the case and their uncertainty around securing legal aid.

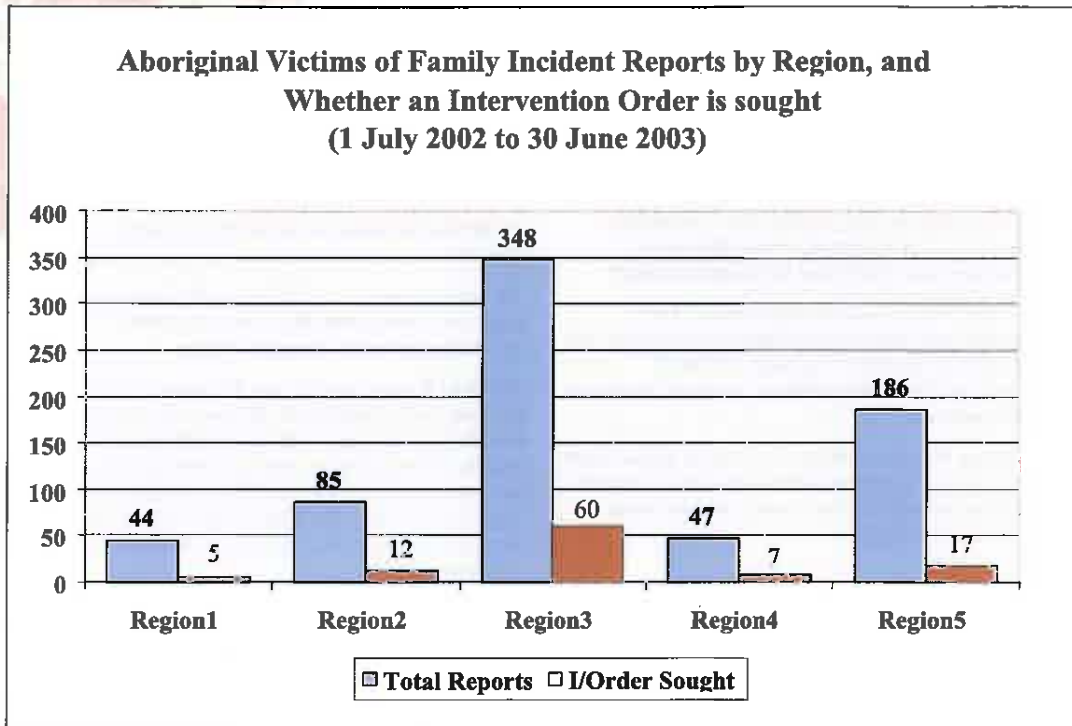
Most women stated that they needed to be more informed about how **Intervention Orders** worked. Discussions took place around the conditions attached to **Intervention Orders** and strategies around collating evidence for an application of an **Intervention Order** were also developed with the participants.

The women stated that their experiences with the Legal system were generally negative. Women stated that the Legal system was difficult to understand and the processes within the court system confusing. Participants stated that there was a need for a Koori support worker within the court system who could provide information about what to expect and explain the processes to Aboriginal people using the court system.

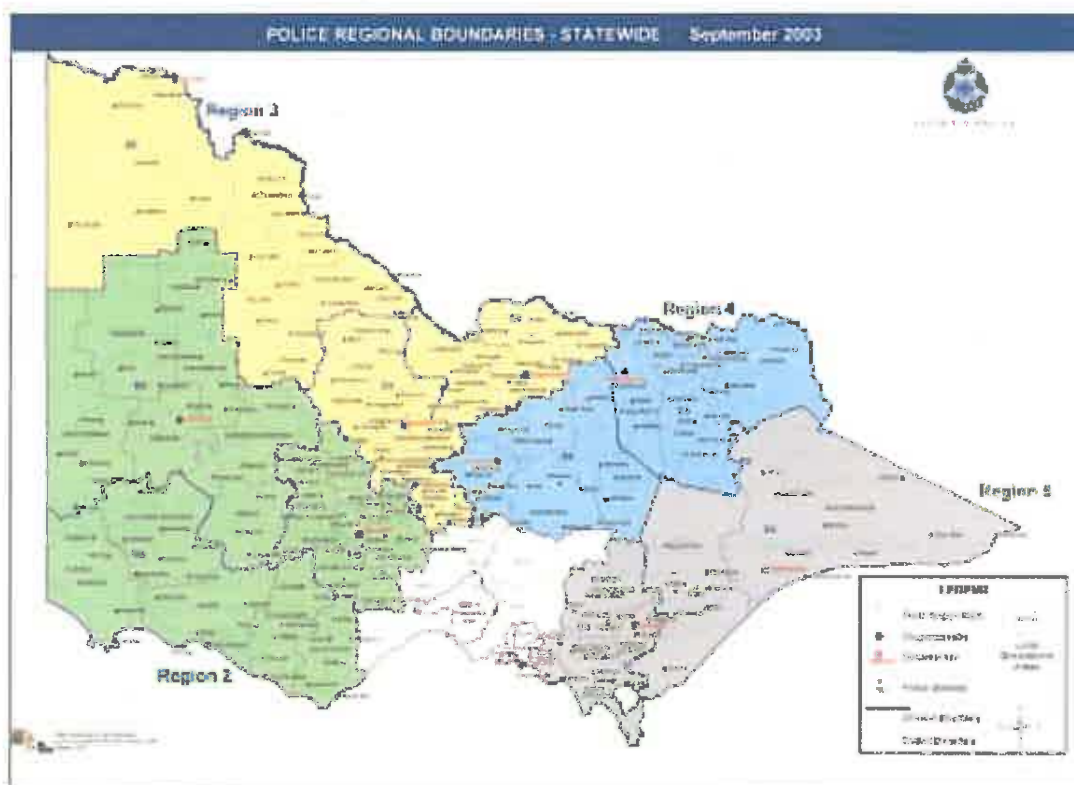
Breaches of **Intervention orders** were seen by these women as not being taken seriously by police. Participants talked about situations where they reported a breach of an **Intervention Order**, and in the process were made to feel like they had done something wrong and/or felt intimidated and therefore did not pursue the breach.

(Source: 'Consultation report on Aboriginal Women & Children's Experiences of family violence within Victorian Aboriginal Communities— 29th June 2003', Elizabeth Hoffman House Inc In partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Mother and Children's Unit)

### Aboriginal Victims of Family Incident Reports by Region, and Whether an Intervention Order is sought (1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003)



(Source: Victoria Police LEAP Database, produced by Policy & Research Community & Cultural Division, Victoria Police)



## FAMILY VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS

The Task Force were told on many occasions by community members that they did not want Indigenous perpetrators of family violence to be prosecuted by Police as they feared what would happen if they went to prison. Police statistical data provided to the Task Force for the period 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003 indicates that:

- 167 Indigenous offenders were processed for family violence offences—48.5% (81) were aged between 25 years and 39 years and 29.3% (49) were aged between 40 years and 69 years,
- 710 Indigenous Family Violence Incident Reports were recorded by Police
- 659 Indigenous people were recorded as 'Family Violence Victims'
- 101 Indigenous victims sought Intervention Orders—representing 14.2% of all Indigenous victims for the period

Police statistics provided to the Task Force did not, however, indicate how many family violence offences were committed by non-Indigenous people against an Indigenous person. Nor did they provide information about Indigenous offenders committing offences against non-Indigenous victims. It may be possible to obtain this data, however, more discussions will need to occur with Police to clarify if this is possible.

Police Region	<17	17 to 24	25 to 39	40 to 59	60 +	Total	%
<b>Region 1</b>	1	–	–	–	–	<b>1</b>	0.6%
<b>Region 2</b>	2	2	8	5	–	<b>17</b>	10.2%
<b>Region 3</b>	1	20	42	42	1	<b>106</b>	63.5%
<b>Region 4</b>	1	17	17	9	–	<b>44</b>	6.7%
<b>Region 5</b>	–	6	24	1	–	<b>31</b>	18.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>–</b>
<b>% of Total</b>	3.0%	18.6%	48.5%	29.3%	0.6%	–	–

(Source: Victoria Police LEAP Database, produced by Policy & Research Community & Cultural Division, Victoria Police)

One of the clear messages given to the Task Force by Indigenous community members throughout the state is the need to provide more services to perpetrators of family violence. In particular, access to 'Behaviour Change Programs' and Counsellors so the underlying issues could be discussed and then, hopefully addressed. Community members also suggested that 'Time Out Centres' be established in communities to provide Indigenous males and others with a place to go to calm down so that they do not commit a violent act against another person.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 15

*That 'Time Out Centres' be established in communities to provide Indigenous males and others with a place to go to calm down so that they do not commit a violent act against another person.*

Information gathered by the Task Force confirms that programs for perpetrators implemented overseas and in other parts of Australia can improve a perpetrators understanding about the factors that contribute and cause them to conduct acts of violence.

The information gathered highlighted the importance of including local participation and involvement in designing and delivering programs specifically for perpetrators who are incarcerated or in gaol.

The Task Force believe that this approach if implemented in Victoria will result in a reduction of serious violent related crimes.

Over the past two years the Task Force have received numerous requests from individuals, families and communities to look seriously at this particular issue. The Task Force note that DHS have already initiated the establishment of a program for mainstream perpetrators of violence and it encourages the Government to consider making places available in this program for Indigenous perpetrators.

This includes Indigenous people in communities as well as those currently incarcerated.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 16

*That the following service responses be put in place for Indigenous perpetrators of violence:*

- a) Culturally appropriate counselling, mediation and support services for Indigenous men mandated by the courts to participate in programs*
- b) Case Management Support Services for pre and post release prisoners that address alcohol and drug abuse, employment, housing, income and family relationships*
- c) Prisoner Support Program to assist in rehabilitation and re-entry back into society (post release)*
- d) Mental Health programs to address violence issues for men*
- e) Training Programs and packages for Interventions (Anger and Aggression management) for young people*
- f) Coordinated training programs to be delivered by Correctional Workers to be included as part of their roles and responsibilities*
- g) Counselling, mediation and support services both at community level and for men ordered by the courts to participate in these programs*
- h) Improved facilities to accommodate family visits to prisons*
- i) Rural and remote transitional facilities*

## **NO TO VIOLENCE—MALE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION ASSOCIATION INC.**

TOWARDS INTEGRATED COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO MEN WHO USE VIOLENCE TOWARDS FAMILY MEMBERS—NTV Response to "Ending Domestic Violence: Program for Perpetrators?" Report

### **WORKING WITH MEN FROM SPECIAL NEEDS GROUPS**

NTV sought to address the issue of working with men from special needs groups in its Standards manual in 1995. NTV believes that people from all special needs groups "are entitled to the opportunity to live their lives free of violence". (70)

Further, all special needs groups:

*"need the opportunity to participate in all relevant family violence programs according to principles of access and equity. While in general differences must be respected, NTV is of the view that policies and practices based on non-violence are transferable to other cultural groups.*

*When considering responses to the behaviour of people from other cultural groups involving behaviour considered to be violent, the question can arise of the possibility of being ethnocentric in applying cultural norms inappropriately. NTV believes that the test is the same in all cases whatever the person's cultural background".*

*"Any behaviour on the part of men which involves using violence is inappropriate and must not be condoned or excused on the basis of cultural difference. Respect for cultural differences does not extend to condoning violence". (71)*

In 1995 NTV set the following minimum standards for program focused groups Indigenous and culturally linguistically diverse communities:

- *"All agencies in addition to providing services themselves will have comprehensive resource files to make referrals when necessary for members of non-English speaking background (NESB) groups;*
- *All agencies in addition to providing services themselves will have comprehensive resource files to make referrals when necessary for members of Aboriginal groups;*
- *Assessment procedures need to reflect the resources available to the agency and the needs of the individual client. For example, a man with insufficient English skills for group work may be offered one-to-one work;*
- *Workers will be aware of their own racism or ethnocentrism and how it may affect their work. Workers will take steps when necessary to obtain appropriate information regarding the cultural beliefs of clients and what other services are available". (72)*

NTV also set the following best practice goals:

***"Members of all cultural groups will be given access and the chance to participate fully in all relevant family violence services. Information about the accessibility and appropriateness for NESB and Aboriginal clients of services offered will be used in the evaluation and planning of services.***

***All interventions will be culturally sensitive to the beliefs and practices of the people involved. The relevant issues include the following:***

- *In a group program are there issues of isolation from the other participants? If so, what should be done?*
- *Are there any particular guidelines to establish rapport with people of different cultures?*
- *Is the role definition of the worker relevant? For example, does the participant respond more positively to the worker as a paternal figure, a peer or friend, the opposite gender, a different age?*
- *There may be a need to explore the meanings of particular work practices. For example, is going to an agency interpreted as going to the Police which may result in severe punishment? What is the impact of having children under a protective order? What are the effects of being in a group of men? What are the effects of being in a group of men? What are the effects of going to a female dominated agency?*
- *How do the issues of resettlement interact with family violence? How does an awareness of this inform practice?"*

The NCP report acknowledges that the primary reason given by most service providers for not providing services to special needs groups was that they simply did not have the resources to do so. (74) Lack of resources hinder the service provider's ability to develop and deliver particular models of service delivery and staff expertise that can take into consideration specific disabilities, cultural or linguistic factors. Given this situation, service providers are reticent to develop and implement promotional activities either directly to these special needs groups, or indirectly through other service providers working with these groups. (75)

NTV is also aware of the significant issues relating to criminal justice responses to male family violence within the Indigenous communities and the incarceration of Indigenous men. The issues arising from investigations into Indigenous deaths in custody must also be considered within a mandatory response. NTV recognizes that there is a need for a consensus view by both government, the Indigenous community and the non-Indigenous community on this issue.

NTV notes the NCP report's documenting of some Indigenous community views of the need for the involvement of the whole community in the development of appropriate strategies to deal with male family violence. (76) These views parallel the perspectives of many non-Indigenous men and women with whom NTV members have had contact, as well as those of many NTV members themselves. The NTV integrated community response model seeks to allow community input and involvement in responding to male family violence, and ensure that working to prevent such violence is seen as a community responsibility.

The NCP report refers to attempts by Indigenous communities to "establish some types of 'men's group' programs which might provide a forum for discussing a wide range of issues, offer counselling and cultural support, promote a range of health and welfare strategies, and develop men's social networks. These group would then have a focus on restoring men's sense of community and family responsibility this would include addressing domestic violence". (77)

This relates to the experience of many NTV members providing men's programs where after completion of the program many men seek further opportunities to continue to explore a range of aspects about their role as men in society as well as about personal development issues.

Of the seven men's programs studied by Frances, 67 per cent of the men interviewed said that they had plans to continue with personal development work started in the group. (78) This is also supported by researchers who have indicated that as men continue to be detached from identifying with an oppressive patriarchy as the consequence of the dynamics of changing gender power relations, new possibilities open for the reconfiguration and transformation of masculinities. (79)

Men seeking help through voluntary programs have already challenged dominant traditional notions of masculinity which would normally preclude men from asking for help. Men's programs provide opportunities for men to develop new positive and progressive constructs of masculinities.

In participating in and supporting this work, many men's programs provide a range of on-going programs for men, dealing with issues such as relationships, communication skills, conflict resolution, fathering, and men and their emotions. One Victorian service provider offers a two year program for men on male family violence and a range of men's health and wellbeing issues.

NTV believes that there are significant opportunities for men's behaviour change service providers, at both a regional and statewide level, to undertake initiatives in working with men from special needs groups. This could include working directly with members of these groups, to research, identify and develop appropriate responses. However, this potential can only be realized if sufficient funding is made available.

The further development and implementation of a mandatory response within Victoria, resulting in men from special needs groups being ordered to attend programs, must be preceded by the development of appropriate services.

NTV recommends that government provide funding to facilitate the development of pilot models for special needs groups in consultation with 'Men's Behaviour Change' program providers, women's domestic violence services, members of the diverse communities and those agencies who have already implemented appropriate services for those special needs groups.

NTV is awaiting the outcomes of a small number of pilot programs currently being implemented to address these issues. The development of resources specific to these groups, and the provision of training for workers and/or community leaders, would also need to occur alongside pilot models of intervention.

<b>COMMUNITY AWARENESS</b>	<b>BEHAVIOUR CHANGE</b>	<b>BEHAVIOUR CHANGE</b>
<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Tertiary</b>
<i>Strengthening the community's understanding of and opposition to male family violence</i>	<i>Reducing opportunities for male family violence by supporting males at risk</i>	<i>Responding to males who have used violence to reduce re-occurrence</i>
<i>Changing community attitudes and beliefs, and the institutional practices and social structures incorporating them, which condone, promote or reward male family violence</i>	<i>Changing the values, beliefs and behaviours of males who may be at particular risk of using violence towards women and children</i>	<i>Identifying and responding to male family violence at the earliest possible stage to change the men's values, beliefs and behaviours thus preventing violence re-occurring</i>
<i>Eg. Community education campaigns aimed at 'ordinary people', but particularly males Eg. Community education campaigns aimed at Police, Magistrates, etc re. deterrence</i>	<i>Eg. Work in schools with young boys not only on attitudes, but on current behaviours in relationships Eg. Work with men whose partners may be pregnant Eg. Work with men at time of separation</i>	<i>Eg. Strengthen legal responses Eg. Work with professionals who have 'first contact' with men who may disclose that they have used violence 'Men's Behaviour Change' programs as programmatic response Male family violence telephone counselling, information and referral services</i>

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 17

*That Government make arrangements to set aside places for Indigenous men in the 'No To Violence' program*



## THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

### DISTINGUISHING CHILD ABUSE FROM CHILD NEGLECT

Typically, child abuse and child neglect are discussed and reported in the media and elsewhere as though they are the same issues. They are not.

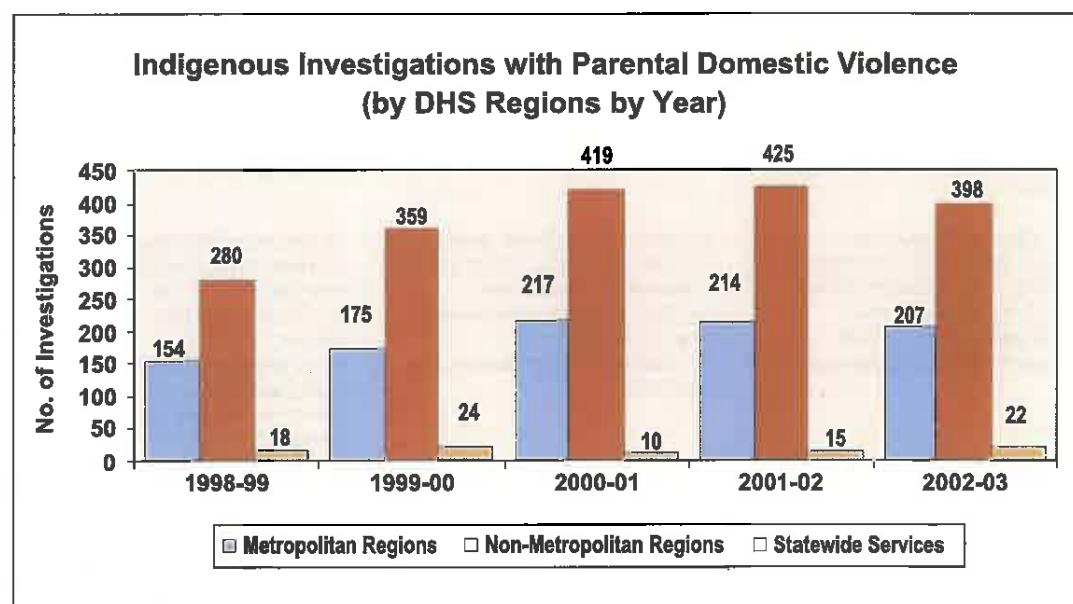
**Child Abuse** typically involves the wilful and deliberate harming of children at the hands of perpetrators who may themselves have been victims of abuse, separated from family and suffered great emotional trauma in their own lives.

**Child Neglect** typically arises where parents and families are unable to provide for their children in a material sense due to family poverty, unemployment, poor housing and family stress, despite their best efforts.

The major contributor to the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system and out of home care is child neglect—not child abuse. SNAICC have suggested that an Indigenous child who has been removed from home is less likely to have been abused than a non-Indigenous child.

Poverty and disadvantage are the major cause of child removal from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families—not inappropriate parenting or the abuse of children.

Rather than providing the additional support required by families living in poverty to better care for their children, Government authorities all too often opt to remove a child from the situation. This is an intolerable, unjust and ineffective way to respond to child neglect within Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander families. It is a response that blames Indigenous families for entrenched societal problems such as poverty and unemployment [SNAICC 2000].



(Source: Department of Human Services, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch)

## CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Task Force has identified children and young people as two distinct categories throughout the process of consultation. Whilst young people are encompassed within the discussion of protection issues, they have also been identified as having distinct issues to younger children.

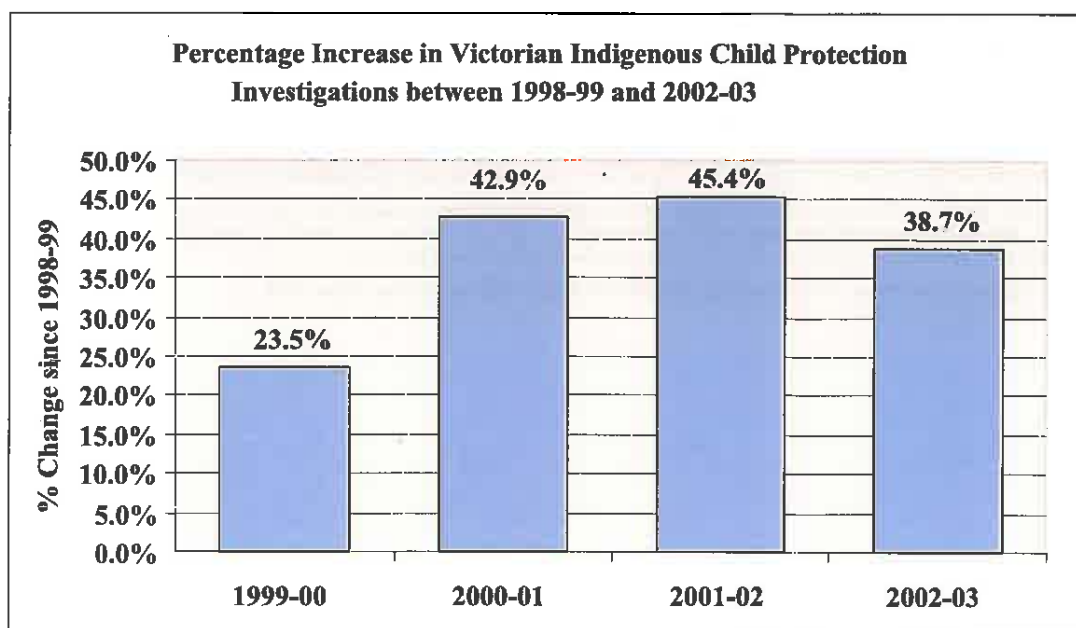
The Task Force has also identified children as individuals within the Indigenous community needing the greatest protection from all elements of family violence. The Task force has acknowledged that not only are Indigenous children victims of child and sexual abuse or violence between members of the extended family.

The Task Force acknowledges the current protocol that exists between the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and the Department of Human Services and sees this as an initial step towards ensuring cultural sensitivity when case managing Indigenous families.

*"It is the absolute right of our children to be physically and emotionally safe at all times. They are the most vulnerable members of our community, children rely on us to protect them from abuse. Responsibility for ensuring children are safe and that their needs are being met is a shared one".<sup>7</sup>*

The Task Force was informed that the majority of families presenting through the Department of Human Services (DHS)—Family Preservation Program and a number of child protection referrals appear to have an element of family violence. According to information released from the National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day the statistics demonstrate that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent nearly half of the Indigenous population, but experience higher rates of child abuse and child neglect than Non-Indigenous children;
- Indigenous children are six times more likely to be removed from their families by welfare authorities than Non-Indigenous children because of child abuse and neglect; and
- Child neglect, often associated with poverty, poor housing and unemployment, is the major reason for Indigenous children being removed from their families, with twice as many Indigenous children being removed from their families because of child neglect than child abuse.<sup>8</sup>



(Source: Department of Human Services, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch)

The Task Force believe that there is a correlation between the number of families presenting through the Department of Human Services and the lack of support available to parents and caregivers. The intervention of services such as Child Protection works towards ensuring the safety of children, with minimal support offered to parents in linking into services to address issues such as family violence, anger management and substance abuse.

The underlying systemic causes of child abuse and neglect need to be dealt with, as opposed to simply removing children where they are at risk or have been the victims of abuse or neglect. Protecting children—through placing them with other members of their Indigenous family—is at times both necessary and appropriate but it is not enough.<sup>9</sup>



*"Waiting"* by Stacey Glenbar depicts the image of a young Koorie girl who is waiting to catch the kite which represents her family who she has not seen since being taken away from them. The birds in the image are waiting for the new plants and food to grow on the trees or a change in the weather so they can fly off.

Painting owned by William Glenbar and reproduced with his permission and that of the artist.

## INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND CHILD PROTECTION

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children are still over six times more likely to be removed from their families than other Australian children. The key causes include:

- Higher rates of poverty
- Inadequate housing and living conditions
- Intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- Cultural differences in child rearing practices
- A lack of access to support services [AIHW 1999]

Many communities expressed concern that children and youth were presenting violent behaviour in schools and outside school hours by becoming involved in 'gangs' targeting individuals and seriously injuring them. This example of violence is resulting in young people being charged with assault and consequently entering the Criminal Justice System via Juvenile Justice.

Analysis of the Child Protection data provided to the Task Force by the Department of Human Services for the period 1998/99 to 2002/03 indicates that:

- There has been a 27.9% increase in the number of Indigenous investigations with parental domestic violence characteristics between 1998/99 and 2002/03;
- Police were involved in approximately 30% of the investigations conducted each year;
- Over 60% of investigations conducted each year were in non-metropolitan locations; and
- The Loddon Mallee and Gippsland Regions consistently recorded the highest number of investigations (in most years) followed by the Northern and Southern Metropolitan regions.

Indigenous Investigations by Region with Parental Domestic Violence Characteristics										
Notifier Category	1998-99		1999-00		2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Eastern Metropolitan	32	7.1%	27	4.8%	30	4.6%	17	2.6%	43	6.9%
Northern Metropolitan	60	13.3%	77	13.8%	83	12.8%	97	14.8%	70	11.2%
Southern Metropolitan	45	10.0%	49	8.8%	67	10.4%	71	10.8%	69	11.0%
Western Metropolitan	17	3.8%	22	3.9%	37	5.7%	29	4.4%	25	4.0%
<b>Total Metropolitan Regions</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>34.1%</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>31.4%</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>33.6%</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>32.6%</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>33.0%</b>
Barwon-South Western	32	7.1%	21	3.8%	43	6.7%	39	5.9%	41	6.5%
Gippsland	74	16.4%	99	17.7%	135	20.9%	135	20.5%	112	17.9%
Grampians	30	6.6%	54	9.7%	45	7.0%	37	5.6%	26	4.1%
Hume	51	11.3%	78	14.0%	42	6.5%	74	11.3%	54	8.6%
Loddon Mallee	93	20.6%	107	19.2%	154	23.8%	143	21.8%	165	26.3%
<b>Total non-Metropolitan Regions</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>61.9%</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>64.9%</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>65.1%</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>63.5%</b>
Statewide Services	18	4.0%	24	4.3%	10	1.5%	15	2.3%	22	3.5%
<b>Total Notifications</b>	<b>452</b>		<b>558</b>		<b>646</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>627</b>	
<b>% Change from Previous Year</b>			<b>+19.0%</b>		<b>+13.6%</b>		<b>+1.7%</b>		<b>-4.8%</b>	

(Source: Department of Human Services, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch)

In examining the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Children in Victoria's Child Protection System, the Task Force were concerned to note that there had been a 38.7% increase in investigations between 1998-99 (452 investigations) and 2002-2003 (627 investigations).

The Task Force became more alarmed when it was clear that there had been a 52.7% increase in substantiations between 1998–99 (300 substantiations) and 2002–2003 (458 substantiations).

Upon further analysis of data provided by DHS it is clear to the Task Force that there are a number of other family members who need to be considered when looking at these figures.

In particular, siblings of children taken into care as well as the parents who may not have any service or program to call upon to assist them in their time of need.

The Task Force encourage the Victorian Government to work closely with Indigenous communities to develop actions under the Strategy which provide support programs for parents and children who may have been traumatised by family violence experiences in the home environment.

The Task Force was not able to obtain current information about the trends in child protection responses related to protection and care issues and recommend that more research be undertaken in this area. The Task Force would also like to see any information gathered shared with the Indigenous community, in particular Regional IFV Action Groups.

Indigenous Substantiations by Region with Parental Domestic Violence Characteristics										
Notifier Category	1998-99		1999-00		2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Eastern Metropolitan	24	8.0%	19	4.7%	17	3.7%	8	1.8%	28	6.1%
Northern Metropolitan	38	12.7%	48	11.9%	56	12.3%	55	12.6%	51	11.1%
Southern Metropolitan	32	10.7%	38	9.4%	47	10.4%	51	11.7%	53	11.6%
Western Metropolitan	13	4.3%	17	4.2%	29	6.4%	16	3.7%	19	4.1%
<b>Total Metropolitan Regions</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>30.1%</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>29.9%</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>33.0%</b>
Barwon-South Western	20	6.7%	16	4.0%	25	5.5%	30	6.9%	32	7.0%
Gippsland	35	11.7%	62	15.3%	89	19.6%	73	16.8%	60	13.1%
Grampians	24	8.0%	45	11.1%	39	8.6%	30	6.9%	21	4.6%
Hume	38	12.7%	60	14.8%	32	7.0%	57	13.1%	44	9.6%
Loddon Mallee	60	20.0%	82	20.2%	116	25.6%	102	23.4%	130	28.4%
<b>Total non-Metropolitan Regions</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>59.9%</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>65.4%</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>86.3%</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>67.1%</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>62.7%</b>
Statewide Services	16	5.3%	18	4.4%	4	0.9%	13	3.0%	20	4.4%
<b>Total Notifications</b>	<b>300</b>		<b>405</b>		<b>454</b>		<b>435</b>		<b>458</b>	
<b>% Change from Previous Year</b>			<b>+25.9%</b>		<b>+10.8%</b>		<b>-4.4%</b>		<b>+5.0%</b>	

(Source: Department of Human Services, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch)

Task Force members maintain the view that 'community led' approaches need to be supported and implemented to address family violence issues which reflect the specific needs of Victoria's Indigenous communities. This includes putting in place new programs and/or approaches for family members and members of each community.

The Task Force were advised that the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) had developed a concept paper which proposed a new approach to addressing family violence issues in Victoria. The paper 'A Family Violence Prevention Model for Victorian Indigenous Communities' prepared in 2002 contained the following key elements:

- Aboriginal Mobile Crisis Response Service
- Indigenous Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Centre
- Family Violence Communities and Professional Education Unit

The Task Force encourages members of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and Indigenous Family Violence Working Group to consider the issues and program solutions raised in this when developing the Strategy. (see Appendix 10)

## VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY—COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

### CRITICAL ISSUES OR PRIORITIES

1. *Family violence is having a major impact on our communities both socially and economically. There is little recognition within Aboriginal communities of the importance in investing in the health and well-being of children, families and communities by preventing child abuse.*
2. *Building Resiliency—Aboriginal families need to be empowered to address the issue of family violence. Too often we focus on 'what's wrong', rather than using a 'strengths-based' approach encouraging community leadership in becoming solution focused.*
3. *Therapeutic Response—Lack of Aboriginal treatment services for victims or perpetrators of family violence.*
4. *Access to appropriate Mediation Services—lack of timely mediation services for families experiencing conflict.*
5. *Lack of counselling and support services in Aboriginal services dealing with issues of family violence on a daily basis such as VACCA, Aboriginal Community based organisations, etc.*

### SOLUTIONS

- *Adopt a developmental approach across Government departments. Engage communities as equal partners in collaborative planning, development, review and evaluation of family violence initiatives.*
- *Develop more of a focus within Aboriginal communities to work with families to empower clients.*
- *Improve access to early intervention and prevention services.*
- *Funding of Aboriginal therapeutic treatment services to address issues of family violence.*
- *Mediation Services—timely services that are accessible. Family Conferencing could be used to bring together all stakeholders involved to resolve conflict.*
- *Develop individual and specific community awareness campaigns building on communities strengths.*
- *Offer a specialised counselling service for men, women and children to address the trauma violence has on individuals.*
- *Introduce 'Family Centred' services to work with families on early intervention and prevention of family violence.*
- *Develop strategies to 'heal' Aboriginal communities.*
- *Form self help groups*
- *Conduct men's/boys and women/girls camps to revive cultural and family ties.*
- *Conduct family camps in line with above but specifically for families.*
- *Offer Aboriginal family mediation services.*

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The higher rates of substantiated child abuse and child neglect among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children arise due to the factors which cause child abuse and neglect to be more prevalent within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities [SNAICC].

As noted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (AIHW), the following:

- Poverty
- Poor socio economic status
- Differences in child rearing practices and
- Intergenerational effects of previous separations

are all considered significant factors in the national over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect and in their placement in Out of Home Care (AIHW, 2000).

In discussing family type and the over-representation of children from sole parent families in the child protection system, (both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non Indigenous), the likely reasons for this are that these families are more likely to:

- Have low incomes and be financially stressed
- Live in poor quality housing; and
- Suffer from social isolation [AIHW 1999]

Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across Australia are far more likely than other families to experience these disadvantages. [ABS/AIHW 1999].

Also, differences in child rearing practices, (that is ways of bringing up Indigenous children differ from those of the dominant imposed culture), and the intergenerational effects of previous separations are also major contributing factors to the over-representation of our children in the child protection system. [SNAICC].

**'Julie' is a Koori community health worker. There was a lot of discussion in the community about a young Koori woman whose defacto was sexually abusing the woman's two year old son. Despite notifications to the relevant organisations the small boy remained in the abusive household.**

**'Julie' eventually couldn't stand it any longer—she drove out to the house of the woman, and said she had come to get the boy. The boy's mother was in tears saying 'thank god you have come to get him', she packed him a bag and 'Julie' took him back to her place.**

As documented through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families and the Bringing Them Home Report, the forced removal of Indigenous children took place in all States and Territories.

*Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia. In that time, not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects. Most families have been affected in one or more generations by the removal of one or more children. [HREOC, 1997]*

In 1995, SNAICC prepared a national action plan for the prevention of child abuse and neglect through a series of consultations with Aboriginal communities in rural, remote and urban areas following the distribution of a national discussion paper. The consultations coordinated by SNAICC identified that the following factors contribute to child abuse and neglect:

- Breakdown of traditional Aboriginal society and loss of child rearing practices
- Deprivation of culture and loss of identity arising from previous generations of child removal from families and forced relocation of communities
  - Inadequate housing and housing facilities
- Alcohol and other substance abuse

More specifically the plan states:

*The relationship between poverty and the high incidence of child abuse and neglect was frequently noted in consultations. Aboriginal children are more likely to experience an absence of a decent standard of diet, clothing, housing and health care than is acceptable to the majority of Australians. Aboriginal people experience high levels of unemployment, reduced participation rates in education and recreation pursuits. Many parents are single, unemployed, living in crowded conditions and have little access to formal child care.*

It adds:

*Dispossession, racism, a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness and poverty are all factors leading to stresses in families that lead to child abuse and neglect. [SNAICC, 1996]*

The key factors which are commonly associated with child abuse and neglect have been well identified. The poor living standards which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people endure are at the heart of the problem. Responding to child abuse and child neglect without addressing these underlying issues, related to family and community well-being, makes no long-term difference to the situation.



## Working with Children and Young People

*"Family violence is often excused on the false premise that it is part of traditional culture".*

The Task Force was made aware at the Statewide Forum, that family violence incidents and the impact of poor home environments was seen as a contributing factor in young people having low self esteem, no understanding of respect for self and others and bad lifestyle choices leading to alcohol and drug abuse and less commonly, prostitution.

The Forum demonstrated that it is becoming increasingly more common for young girls to purposely have children at a young age to provide them with their own sense of family. These young girls have an illusion of being able to have access to their own housing when they have their own children therefore wanting to create their own family environment. The reality for these girls is that at some point they will find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness and be forced to live with family or friends in overcrowded circumstances and exposing the next generation to the risk of violence or entry to the system of child protection.

Young men and boys have limited interaction with positive male role models and ultimately end up with a lack of social skills and self confidence issues which manifests itself in abuse or bullying behaviour. Young boys/youth have the understanding that violence is part of the Aboriginal culture and that by becoming perpetrators of violence they are maintaining the culture.

The issue of family violence has been identified as one of the contributing factors in low retention rates by young people in schools. There is a need to provide greater supports to young people in the education system to ensure that they have the opportunity to gain a high level of education including tertiary education and ensure that they are best placed to seek employment opportunities and to ensure they have suitable environments to study and family support.

Children in Indigenous communities are living with violence, both direct and indirect, and experiencing unacceptable levels of sexual abuse (Atkinson, 1995). The traumatising nature of growing up in situations where violence is common place cannot be underestimated. The impact of living with family violence can have the following results:

- Children who witness and/or are victims of domestic violence are affected/traumatised by the experience.
- Very little has been done to address this impact, except in an ad hoc way within counselling, education and women's services.

Prevention and early intervention initiatives can be at the level of the individual, family and/or the community. According to *Domestic Violence in Regional Australia* (WESNET 2000):

- Early intervention and prevention services are the most under-developed interventions in all communities. Prevention models include work with adolescent boys and juvenile offenders as well as self-esteem and assertiveness programs for young women.
- There is an acute shortage of specialist services for children who witness or experience domestic violence.
- The need to change attitudes and behaviours about violence amongst Indigenous young people has been emphasised in research (Blaggs, 1999).

### **In relation to prevention:**

- Indigenous young people should be a priority in violence prevention approaches targeting young people due to their high level of exposure to violence.
- Prevention requires intensive interventions over a long period.
- Promotion of non-violence should be linked with other family healing strategies.
- Violence prevention interventions should be coupled with drug and alcohol services given the links between them.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report* (ATSIWTF 2000) identified that the participation of Indigenous children and young people in secondary and tertiary education was an important aspect in preventing violence (amongst other social problems). Assisting Indigenous people to remain connected to school is consistent with research on risk and protective factors and the building of resilience. (Catalano and Hawkins, 1998; Withers and Russell, 1998)

### **BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Research has identified four key factors in building resilience:

- connectedness to family
- connectedness to school
- connectedness to community
- connectedness to peers

According to Withers & Russell (1998:2)

Those at the more extreme points on the at risk continuum are more likely to experience multiple 'negative future events' (such as educational under-achievement, early school leaving, drug abuse, delinquency, offending and criminal behaviour, suicide) which decrease their chances of developing and sustaining satisfying, fulfilling and responsible lives.

Risk factors are usefully grouped into those relating to attributes of the individual, the family, the school and to broader societal circumstances. The updated summary reproduced in Figure 1 shows the diversity of attributes or circumstances that impinge on young people's (Dwyer et al, 1998)

The Task Force recognise the importance of providing a nurturing environment for Indigenous children and young people. Task Force members know from personal experience that some young Indigenous people may commit suicide to end their lives and be rid of family violence issues.

During the community consultations and discussions at the Statewide Forum, young Indigenous people were active participants in many of the discussions. From a Task Force perspective, it is critical that the Strategy developed by the Victorian Government encourages discussion with Indigenous youth to ensure that new initiatives and programs can accommodate their specific needs.

### **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 18**

*That a research project be commissioned to gather information specifically about the issues confronting Indigenous youth in relation to family violence in Victorian Indigenous communities. That the findings of the research project be considered by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and Working group in consultation with the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council when developing specific Indigenous youth responses under the Strategy.*

*That Regional IFV Action Groups engage in discussion with young Indigenous people in their regions to ensure that local and regional initiatives meet the needs of Indigenous youth in their communities.*

## **ELIZABETH HOFFMAN HOUSE Inc.—COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS**

### **CRITICAL ISSUES OR PRIORITIES**

1. *Communities and community organisations need to come to terms with the blatant truth about what is really happening in our communities around family, domestic and sexual violence. There is an urgent need for organisations to lead the way in portraying the message that family and domestic violence is not the Aboriginal way.*

*The enmeshment of the issues, the family structures and connections make it extremely difficult for the Indigenous community to address these issues on their own. Whilst we all may have differing views about family violence and how we should respond, if we as leaders of our organisations cannot collaboratively give communities a clear message that family violence is destroying our people, then the issues of family violence will continue to escalate.*

2. *Communities are in crisis and there are virtually no services equipped to deal with the nature and extent of the violence. There is an expectation for workers in community organisations to deal with the family violence issues in addition to their general duties. This is having adverse affects on workers and families as the workers are dependant on Elizabeth Hoffman House to assist them and, families are often left with very few options around what assistance can be provided.*

*The support required by families to assist them through the family violence crisis is simply not available. We need to ensure that any funds available are directed to developing appropriate crisis responses for communities and the victims as a priority.*

3. *Elizabeth Hoffman House is the only Indigenous specific family and domestic violence service in the state of Victoria. Elizabeth Hoffman House operate a high security refuge, a domestic violence outreach service in metropolitan Melbourne and a homeless service for Aboriginal women and their children who are homeless as a result of family violence, but do not meet the criteria of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service.*

*Elizabeth Hoffman House is a crisis service and has the capacity to also provide medium term support through its outreach and homeless programs. However, the demand for this type of service is extremely high and so is the turn-away rate. Every regional area needs some type of crisis response in place—whether that be via resourcing existing workers to adequately respond to the crisis or whether specific services are set up to deal with the crisis.*

4. *Concerns around the normalisation of violence and sexual assault amongst our young people. In some areas, sexual abuse is rife—and young men and women actually believe it's normal. A majority of our young women believe that if your man hits you then he really loves you. The young men believe that it is their duty to hit their women to keep them in line. In addition, perpetrators of violence are often supported by their extended family in condoning the violence often because the extended family also believes it's normal.*

*The youth issues are critical because if we are concerned now and do not develop strategies to confront these issues then in 10 years time we will be dealing with a new generation of very damaged adults*

5. *The establishment of a men's program that works with Elizabeth Hoffman House on addressing family violence issues using a family unit approach. This program needs to be strategically developed to iron out the structures and accountability processes. However, whether the perpetrator is a man or a woman—it is essential that perpetrators be accountable to the victims.*

### **KEY STATEMENT**

**ELIZABETH HOFFMAN HOUSE INC. WOULD LIKE TO SEE STRATEGIES THAT TARGET THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS THAT OUR COMMUNITIES ARE FACING. WHILST IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIS EQUATES TO A GREAT DEAL OF FUNDING, WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO PROVIDE BAND-AID RESPONSES THAT DO NOT ADEQUATELY ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS.**

## **ELIZABETH HOFFMAN HOUSE Inc.—COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS**

### **SOLUTIONS**

*All community organisations should develop a mission statement on family and domestic violence and the steps that the organisation is prepared to take if faced with family violence within their organisations. This statement should be displayed in their reception/waiting areas so that community members can see that the organisation is taking steps to address the issue, and the victim is assured that they will be supported. This is crucial in that victims have told us that the most important thing to them was to be supported by their community and the community acknowledging that they are victims of the violence. The many victims and survivors of family violence need their issues acknowledged.*

*It is also important that community organisations that apply for family violence funding, work with key family violence providers/agencies. This is important in that the Aboriginal community needs to portray a consistent message in what we say, what we provide and how we provide it to victims. For example, if a person goes to one agency and is advised about their situation and then the same person goes to another agency and receives conflicting advice, then where does that leave the victim—often that victim will return to the family violence situation.*

*Due to the enmeshment of the issues within our communities it is necessary that we develop partnerships with non-Aboriginal service providers; this approach could assist Aboriginal organisations in the development of policies/agreements relevant to their agencies and, would enable the sharing of resources which could relieve the burden on existing workers and services.*

*Many organisations ring us on a daily basis to seek advice on families who present at their service with critical family violence issues. Often, they are requesting crisis accommodation, assistance with legal matters and assistance with children's matters. Crisis accommodation is very difficult to secure due to the demand on generalist services and as stated Elizabeth Hoffman House has limited beds. Funds for crisis accommodation are also limited and these funds need to be made available to purchase short term accommodation when there is no availability across the sector.*

*Referrals to family law legal matters are extremely problematic. there is limited access to the Family Law solicitors and many family law solicitors do not do legal aid work. It is extremely important that our women and children have access to family law specialist as generalist solicitors who do family law work are not familiar with the complexities related to family law and hence this has resulted in many of our clients agreeing to orders that are not workable for the family.*

*Child Protection matters have also become problematic—in that it appears that the child protection system is failing to address the family violence issues and hence we are seeing the same families present within a 12 month period. This is largely due to the inadequacy of support services within the community who simply are not resourced to address the family violence issues, to adequately provide the appropriate support services and responses.*

*Community organisations who apply for family violence funding need to work in collaboration with existing family violence service providers to ensure that the immediate crisis can be addressed which could then enable a case plan to be developed in order to address the long term issues.*

*Counselling for victims and their immediate family members is crucial. Whilst counselling is usually targeted at the immediate victims, family members are adversely affected by the family violence issues and they are often left with the children. In addition, workers in the field need access to debriefing when confronted with traumatic situations.*

*Indigenous workers need to be resourced and trained around responding to family violence crisis. Often these workers are expected to deal with the family violence issues over and above their normal duties. For example, a health worker located at a health service often confronted with family violence cases and is dealing with issues that they are not familiar with.*

*These workers depend on Elizabeth Hoffman House for either a service or advice. On most occasions our service is full and we have no option other than to refer to mainstream. It is imperative that crisis is responded to and hence the need for a safe-house and/or crisis service in every region.*

*Community Education is the key to ensuring that the next generation is educated and informed about family and domestic violence issues. This type of education needs to commence at Kindergarten level and continue through to secondary education.*

*This educative approach needs to be reinforced by community organisations in the manner in which organisations choose to address the issues however, a collaborative message needs to be made in every aspect of family and domestic violence issues.*

*Elizabeth Hoffman House is very keen to work with any men's group however this type of intervention needs a great deal of strategic planning. This is essential due to the complexity of the family violence issues and, the need to ensure that mechanisms are developed within programs that enable perpetrators to be accountable to their victims.*

## **Victorian Women's Forum "Dare to Dream-Making it Happen!"**

*The following issues relating to family violence were identified by participants at the Victorian Women's Forum "Dare to Dream-Making it Happen!" held at VACSAL, 3-5 December, 2002*

- *Families are in denial so there is a need to open up discussion about the issues of family violence.*
- *Victims are not free to speak out because of feeling intimidated.*
- *Perpetrators need to be exposed to protect their families.*
- *Women need to take up the role of protectors and providers for their children.*
- *Women need to tell their stories.*
- *Organisations need to work in collaboration.*
- *We need to listen to the children and hear their voices.*
- *There is no appropriate counselling for Koorie families.*
- *There are no models of therapeutic response for child victims.*
- *Mainstream services are tapping into designated funding for Koories but then don't provide a culturally appropriate service because they are not accountable for what they do with the funding.*
- *Legal Services have to look at their service provision to communities in protecting the rights of women and children.*
- *Racism is one of the underlying causes of family violence.*
- *Women's legal rights are not being exercised.*
- *Children and young people do not have adequate crisis support.*
- *There is a lack of funding to prevent and strengthen families.*
- *Aboriginal children are more likely to be removed from their families.*
- *Aboriginal women and children have to leave the family home when they are the victims of family violence.*
- *There has to be culturally appropriate representation in the justice system because of the alienation that is felt by Koories when they attend court.*
- *There is not enough discussion on community issues of Sovereignty, Stolen Generations, Repatriation and Self-determination.*
- *A Treaty should be negotiated with the Australian Government and monitored and reviewed at the international level.*
- *Aboriginal children are being removed from their families because of family violence.*
- *Women are not given a choice whether to stay or go when Police are called to attend family violence incidents. DHS threaten child removal and create more trauma for the women and children.*
- *Women who do not report family violence are often arrested for other matters and therefore will not report further acts of family violence.*
- *There are no reporting systems or strategies for protecting Elderly women from emotional and physical abuse from family members.*
- *There is an increasing alcohol and drug problem among young Koorie women, with the majority of these problems exposed as a result of incarceration and exacerbated by not being dealt with appropriately.*
- *All Drug and Alcohol Workers in the community must be trained to deal appropriately with people in need.*
- *Communities and families are 'giving up' on the children who continue to be involved in the Juvenile Justice System.*
- *There are border issues at Mildura and Dareton, Albury and Wodonga, and Cumeragunga and Barmah.*
- *The level of frustration of Koorie workers is increasing because they are not able to provide continuous care and people 'fall through the cracks'.*
- *Incarcerated people are not being rehabilitated in prisons, but have problems when they come out of prisons.*
- *There are not enough post-release support programs.*
- *The level of self-mutilation and suicide among young Koories is increasing as a result of the underlying issues of family violence.*
- *Trauma is a result of family violence.*
- *DHS sets unrealistic expectations for women and families to achieve before they return children to their families.*
- *There is a lack of culturally appropriate diversionary and rehabilitation services for young Koorie men and women.*
- *Community organisations are not adequately funded to comprehensively deal with the problems of substance abuse in the community.*
- *The affects of drugs on young Koories has far reaching consequences as they will be unable to provide leadership in the Koorie community in the future.*
- *Parents hide problems because they feel ashamed at not being able to cope.*
- *There is a lack of accommodation for alcohol and drug rehabilitation.*
- *Nearly all women in rehabilitation have had their children removed by DHS.*
- *There are real issues in the ability of men to access services for family violence.*
- *The lack of employment opportunities is causing trauma for the community and leading to family violence.*

## **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit, Department of Corrective Services, QLD.**

*The Ending Family Violence Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Offenders was aimed at Indigenous men who had been convicted of a violent offence. It had a therapeutic and educative focus, designed to reduce the incidence of family violence in Indigenous communities. Over eight two-hour sessions, offenders were assisted to raise their self esteem; build confidence; identify that there was a problem; and recognise that mechanisms could be learnt to put plans, strategies and alternatives to violence in place, thereby improving their lifestyles.*

*The program would have been significantly improved through the incorporation of more learning and audiovisual materials.*

*The timeline was inadequate, given the need to discuss and consult with the Indigenous community on program content. Extra time was also required to make the program gender neutral, so that it would also be appropriate for Indigenous women offenders. Relevant skilled community people should have been employed in the development of particular teaching concepts, thereby providing a community context.*

*Information gathered from recent research (Ref) allows the following conclusions to be drawn:*

*Programs that work with men need to be integrated into a broad community context, taking account of the power base of men in relation to women, and the subsequent need for programs to be integrated into the wider service system. To this extent, a model that encompasses specific support services for men with an activist approach to wider community issues, presents as an approach worthy of continued support.*

*In overcoming barriers to men accessing domestic violence services, it is critical that educative processes and media outlets are fully utilised in reinforcing messages of healthy relationships as well as where and how to access support services. These processes need to be particularly sensitive to the needs of Indigenous communities.*

*There are a very small number of responses available to men from Indigenous backgrounds who use violence. The majority of evidence points to integrating programs for users of violence from these communities with broader community development programs. The key element is to develop a long-term program in which communal trust is developed in order to utilise key personnel and create sustainable initiatives. Such initiatives should not lose sight of domestic violence being a crime.*

*The Court-Mandated and Court-Referred Program for Offenders of Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence (Department of the Chief Minister, Darwin, NT) involved the production of a best practice program guide, accompanied by a background paper informing program development and providing a theoretical base. This initiative is the first of its kind, nationally and internationally, to be specifically designed for offenders of domestic and Indigenous family violence.*

*The program was a behaviour-change model, conducted over 26 weeks of 2.5 hour sessions.*

### **The Program Model:**

- *Reinforced the criminal nature of the violence to the offender and the community.*
- *Enforced the attendance of offenders.*
- *Exposed offenders to different attitudes and ways of behaving.*
- *Offered survivors and child witnesses support.*

*The development of the program guide was informed by consultation with Indigenous men and women, service providers, and review of existing research.*

*Program topics for Indigenous offenders need to be culturally appropriate. They were developed to include information on the cultural context of Indigenous family violence, change motivators relevant to Indigenous offenders and an exploration of Indigenous spiritual healing.*

*Programs also need to have the flexibility to be undertaken in a range of settings for Indigenous groups and be facilitated by elders within Indigenous communities. The problems of substance abuse and its link to family violence need to be addressed in programs.*

## THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON INDIGENOUS MEN

### THE CHANGING ROLES OF INDIGENOUS MEN

The loss of traditional roles of men and women has been identified as a major contributing factor that has led to dysfunction for many Indigenous families. Whilst the roles of men and women vary within each cultural clan, the community has identified that Indigenous men have largely lost their role as leader and role model. As a result of this loss communities have suffered the consequences of cultural impacts and sense of loss of traditional family roles.

A report prepared by the National Crime Prevention Unit entitled Violence in Indigenous Communities demonstrated a significant impact upon Indigenous men within a similar finding during preliminary information sessions:

<b>Our Finding</b>	"Indigenous men state that violence towards their partner is the traditional way"
<b>National Finding</b>	"men with no power except that which they enforce over young women of their acquaintances".
<b>OR</b>	
<b>Our Finding</b>	"...men are not being promoted as leaders and have lost their role within the community and the family"
<b>National Finding</b>	"... many Aboriginal men have lost their status and their self-respect. The path now followed by so many of the men, from hostel to gaol, is but an inevitable consequence of their loss of status and purpose-society"

The Task Force has significantly noted the role change of Indigenous males during community visits, but also at a national level during research into violence within Indigenous communities. This change in roles has impacted largely on Indigenous women given the increasing dependence of males.

The loss of traditional cultural roles has a huge impact on the raising of Indigenous children. It is not safe to assume that all Indigenous children will experience the value of family both immediate and extended, hence the loss of support from a family network that guides and supports the development of young people during their journey from a child to adulthood. The unspoken culture is also lost, as young people are clearly not forming traditional relationships with the Elders and kin networks. The preliminary information sessions identified that **'many young people do not know what it is to be Koori, other than the colour of their skin and the racism they are subjected to'**.

The Statewide Information Sessions identified a need for greater access to men's programs within rural communities. A major gap in services has been identified for Indigenous men, both as victims and perpetrators of violence. During the preliminary information sessions it was identified that men's services are lacking and those that do exist are poorly resourced or lack a cultural base. The Task Force and the Indigenous community have identified that in order for family healing to take place with both victims and perpetrators of violence they need to have access to services that assist in the short term and move towards long-term stability for families.

*"Family violence relates strongly to the breakdown of family structures (with many stakeholders noting the role that extended family networks once played in protecting women and children)"*

The Task Force has only recently funded Victorian communities and men's groups through the Community Initiatives Fund to develop local men's programs and initiatives to address family violence issues relating to Victorian Indigenous men.

### **Victorian Men's Forum "Dreaming to Reality", 23 & 24 September 2002**

*The following issues relating to family violence were identified by participants at the Victorian Men's Forum "Dreaming to Reality"*

- *Unemployment is a big issue for men in the community.*
- *Men need to be united in the cause.*
- *There is a need for more cultural training and heritage education for future generations.*
- *A sharing of experiences, expertise and spirituality will support Indigenous men to make changes.*
- *There is a need to develop coping mechanisms for the advancement of Indigenous communities.*
- *The male role must be reinforced with decision-making processes, values and identity, so that families and communities can be strengthened.*
- *Men must confront family violence issues, their roles within the family, their leadership skills, stop the family breakdowns and keep their families together.*
- *There must be reconciliation between Koorie communities and organisations.*
- *The effects of trans-generational trauma must be dealt with so that healing can occur.*
- *Passive welfare leads to substance abuse, which can lead to incarceration and, in some cases imprisonment can lead to death.*
- *Family violence requires the community to be stronger, to be able to talk to the offenders and lay down the law from the start to prevent family violence. This will lead to stronger, healthier families and communities.*
- *Men need to start 'walking the walk' and 'talking the talk' to recognise their roles and responsibilities in the community.*
- *The Koorie community has natural rights to justice, identity, sovereignty, proper political representation and self-determination.*
- *Role models and mentors are necessary to encourage the youth to come to large cultural and political gatherings.*
- *There is a need to pass on Koorie cultural knowledge, the history of our struggles and to promote this learning.*
- *Koorie youth need to learn cultural knowledge for their Elders.*
- *There has to be increased educational opportunities for Koories.*

### **WORKING WITH MEN**

Current research undertaken through the Literature Review commissioned by the Task Force describes some models and initiatives undertaken by other states.

Counselling Program for Indigenous Men who use Violence, Family and Children's Services, WA.

- The Counselling Program for Indigenous Men Who Use Violence Project comprised four components to develop culturally appropriate models for counselling services for Indigenous men who use violence in intimate relationships. Activities included research into relevant models; community consultation; the establishment of reference groups; involvement of mandated and voluntary men; culturally appropriate counselling programs over 12-14 weeks; and, where appropriate, family involvement.
- The project was designed to provide Indigenous men with violent behaviours with opportunities to address issues of responsibility, empathy and alternative behaviour in a culturally appropriate format, thereby increasing the safety and well being of family and community members.
- Although perpetrator programs are not usually considered as part of a preventative approach they certainly are needed to prevent further violence. *Crisis intervention in Aboriginal Family Violence* (Blagg 2000; Cultural Perspectives 2000) found that the interventions seen to be most acceptable and appropriate for Indigenous communities were ones that 'formed a basis for healing communities'.



## **MEN'S ISSUES—SUMMARY REPORT OF DECEMBER 2003 MEN'S FORUM**

### **BACKGROUND**

According to the Census, there are 12,367 Indigenous men and 12,711 Indigenous women in Victoria, and family violence statistics tell us that 80% of the perpetrators are men. However, the programs that are occurring in Indigenous communities are mainly by women who are affected by family violence. There are very few men's programs that have been developed and implemented, and in the main, Indigenous men have not been involved in programs that are established.

Through the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy, men are starting to become more involved and have identified their issues through the men's meetings and forums that have been held in the last twelve months. A philosophical base and view on the issues relating to family violence from an Aboriginal Men's perspective is being developed. This is informed by the need to strengthen the family base and ensure there are adequate supports for this to occur. There is also a need for more focus on the 'cause' as well as the 'cure', the need for more male role models speaking up on the issues of family violence, the need for a holistic approach to the issues around building a better quality of life for men and their families.

The need for men to have referrals to appropriate agencies that provide counselling to perpetrators of family violence is one area of greatest need. Indigenous men are involved with the Dept. of Justice 'Men's Mandated Behavioural Change Pilot Reference Group'—a critical working group that brings together a range of relevant stakeholder groups that aims to develop a model to pilot new intervention orders and legislation. This working group is also involved in the initiative to bring together a range of support services to men regarding protocols for the referring of male perpetrators of violence. They have also banded together to ensure that they are represented on the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Group and to provide advocacy for other men to the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services on men's issues.

A number of Indigenous men are having input into the training of Life Line counsellors dealing with Aboriginal men who are perpetrators of violence and individually support a number of men who are at crisis point in order to reduce the possibility of family violence occurring by providing counselling, individual support and referrals to specialists.

A more recent initiative has been discussions towards establishing a support group of mentors to assist with post release diversionary programs. This is a critical area because convicted family violence offenders need to be supported back into the community in a way which does not put at risk any family members but does assist with re-integration and provide counselling and support to minimise repeated acts of violence against women. A number of models to facilitate this are currently being discussed and considered.

Fifty three men were participants in the Statewide Men's forum held in December last year representing all regions of Victoria. A major report was produced that clearly identified a number of issues, barriers and strategies identified by men as important towards ensuring safer communities and families. Positive feedback was also provided in terms of the benefits of the forum.

The men have organised highly successful camps for fathers and sons and older and younger Koorie men with positive feedback. At these camps—there has been self disclosure by perpetrators of violence and significant self—esteem building, exposure to local cultural heritage sites and issues by Cultural Officers and access to qualified counsellors.

Ensuring that there are programs to support victims is of paramount importance in the family violence area because the victims are mainly women and children. However, if there is no focus on the perpetrators of the violence, the programs that are being run are only providing a band aid to the problem. As a community we cannot afford to keep putting bandaids on the situation, we have to attempt to solve the problem.

### **GAPS IN SERVICE DELIVERY FOR MEN**

The current focus is not on men or the rehabilitation of men, or programs for men, but rather on the impact of the family violence, mainly on the victims. There are no support programs to help men to get back into their families after the crisis, and no preventative programs. The few programs that are operating, mainly focus on the issues of alcohol and drugs, once again the symptoms of deeper problems.

### **REPRESENTATION**

During discussions at the Forum participants raised the following issues

- Men do not have equal representation on committees where family violence issues are being dealt with—they are tacked on
- There are no holistic programs for men where men are involved
- No Koorie culturally specific programs for men
- Alcohol and drug issues are dealt with in isolation to other men's issues
- Concerns about men's health issues
- Perpetrators of violence against women and children are ashamed of it, feel helpless to do anything to change their behaviour, are sickened by it, and feel like there is no support for them to change
- Men are concerned about their children and feel that there are not enough role models for the children who learn by example. Men need to lead by example
- Mental illness is increasing in Koorie communities, leading to more and more examples of family violence perpetrated against women and children
- The lack of educational qualifications lead to more serious issues for the children
- The Department of Human Services does not help or understand men's issues
- Current programs pit the women against the men—in order for a woman victim to get help, she has to go against the man—it then becomes a 'them against us' men versus women situation.

### **GAPS IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

- Programs for children to deal with the impact of family violence
- Men's programs
- Increase in the number of facilities to support the victims of family violence

## INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

The various men's forums have identified the need for the government to take a two pronged strategic attack to address men's issues over the next 3 years. One component of the strategy is to undertake a major research to build up specific information about what is happening with Indigenous men, the other is to develop Men's Resource Centres.

### 1]. MEN'S RESOURCE CENTRES

The Indigenous men have identified the need for one men's resource houses in the five regions of Victoria, where they would include the following services

#### A Crisis Response team:

Two counsellors would respond to men in crisis situations.

#### Family violence intervention officer

A Family violence intervention officer would be available for men who are in family violence situations. The officer would have negotiation and mediation skills.

- Family support worker
- Time out place
- Crisis accommodation
- Visiting specialists
- Run family programs
- Centerlink
- Job network
- Housing officer
- Health
- Access to Legal advice
- A Statewide counselling service
- This service would be a part of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and would be provided to Indigenous men as referred by Men's Resource Centres
- Register of culturally appropriate counsellors
- Research Officer-major projects
- Costing for time out model

### 2. STATEWIDE RESEARCH PROGRAM

This research program would be commissioned to look at the underlying cause of family violence and in particular questions such as:

- Why Indigenous men perpetrate violence
- Why Indigenous men can stop violence
- Why some Indigenous men are not violent
- What programs in prisons are culturally relevant
- Best practice models of men's behavioural change-local, state, national and international

## CURRENT BEST PRACTICE MODELS

Aboriginal men aspire to have a culturally supportive referral, support and advocacy centre on issues relating to family violence because 80% of family violence is perpetuated by men because any serious response to tackling the epidemic of family violence in the Aboriginal community must respond to the ideas and suggestions of Aboriginal men and perpetrators themselves.

The Men's group has made enormous achievements and advances in the area of effective family violence strategies, however, the group has been operating on an extremely limited resource base and has not received the necessary Government recognition and support for this work to be more adequately targeted and promoted. A number of submissions have been made for appropriate funding of this group in both the family violence funding round and the AAV capacity building.

It is recognised by men that any serious approach to family violence needs to be sustainable beyond a 12 month funding cycle and therefore a planned approach needs to occur to ensure that partnerships with a range of relevant service providers are examined and consolidated.

One of the very real frustrations identified by men who have been involved with the various men's support groups has been their view that there is absolute neglect of any real follow-up on issues and recommendations that have been made at numerous men's forums relating to family violence such as Warrakoo (1995), the National Men's Family Violence Forum (2000) and the Men's forum held in December last year. They believe that the same issues and suggested strategies are repeatedly raised but no attention or consideration is provided to ensuring the necessary policy changes and resources to implement these. Men want to become part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Activities that should occur for men's issues:

**A mapping exercise** to outline all relevant family violence projects and existing Koorie and mainstream services available to men throughout the State as well as continuation of the work in developing protocols needed across service delivery systems.

**The establishment of a Koorie Men's Support Group**—as an information, access and advocacy group.

**A series of eight information forums** held in metropolitan and regional communities over twelve months that will provide information, support, advice, referral information as appropriate to the needs of each community to selectively targeted Aboriginal men.

**Two state wide camps** that focus on strengthening cultural identity, self-esteem and addressing the underlying issues around family violence that will be promoted widely to Victorian Aboriginal communities.

**Availability to talk to a range of groups** (Koorie and non-Koorie) on effective strategies regarding family violence.

**Input into key advisory and decision making groups** and forums that relate to men's perspectives on holistic family violence prevention and management strategies.

**Statewide forums** held at the end of twelve months to report on the activities of the Men's Centre, provide an opportunity for Aboriginal men to further discuss and consider men's strategies, provide relevant information and direct support and referrals as appropriate to men and to consider future directions.

(Source: Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited)

## THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON INDIGENOUS ELDERS

During consultation visits Elders raised concerns about their diminishing roles in the community. They spoke about their roles as being carers, keepers of cultural knowledge and family histories. Almost all Elders visited believe that respect must be learnt and earned and that it starts at home. Many of the communities have expressed a need to promote Elders as leaders and role models, with a focus on support for children and youth.

Elders need to be promoted as leaders and role models. Strong family members need to be targeted as leaders in the development of family role model/mentoring programs.

The preliminary information sessions identified issues about the way Elders were being treated and from their perspective identified types of abuse that had been inflicted upon them—ie. physical, emotional and financial.

### Physical:

- Being sexually assaulted by a family member when that member was drunk or on drugs. Being too frightened or ashamed to speak up. Lack of confidence or support to make contact with anyone to address the issue. Felt that they wouldn't be believed if they spoke out about it and if the perpetrator found out about it they would have no where to go if they got 'kicked out'.
- Stood over by family members/partners for their pension and being 'slapped up' or being locked out of the house/home when refusing to give them any money.
- When their partner or family member has come home from the pub drunk, after being verbally abused, they have had to sneak outside when the perpetrator 'passes out' and therefore they have to spend the night in their garage or on the veranda and hide until the perpetrator goes to work or leaves the house.

### Emotional:

- Elders not telling anyone of the physical abuses that have been inflicted on themselves because of the 'shame'.
- Ashamed to speak up about the abuse in their own families, due to their own, the perpetrator and or the victims' status and standing in the community.
- Witnessing daughter/grandchildren or other family member being bashed by their partner or other family member and not being able to stop it, or contact the police or someone for help, due to physical frailty, threat of being evicted or 'kicked out' or being physically threatened.
- Not being invited or involved in family gatherings (that is: birthdays, Christmas, watching grandchildren playing sport).
- Diminished self-esteem, due to lack of respect and recognition of their status by family and community generally.
- Families don't really want to take responsibility for them.

### Financial:

- Not being able to afford accommodation at their hostel or nursing home because the family members managing their finances are not paying their way.
- Stood over by family members on pension pay day to give up all their pension and being locked out of home or bashed.

- Looking after grandchildren with no support from parents, who threaten to take the children if Centerlink are informed of any change in guardianship. Their needs to provide food, shelter, clothing, school requirements and pay utilities and rent, etc with no other means of support other than their pension. Some Elders have had to use their HACC support or Aged Care packages to cover some of their costs while supporting their grandchildren. The critical issue here is that Elders have not been willing to seek assistance or help formally, due to their concern about the children being taken off them and/or removed by child protection. There is a need to provide them with ongoing support for accommodation, transport, counselling to reduce their levels of stress and burden, from taking on this role and responsibility.

Elders believed that they provide a valuable contribution to the community in which they live, have confidence within themselves, are worthwhile people who should be treated with dignity and respect.

The only time Elders seem to be given recognition by their families and the Indigenous community is:

- during NAIDOC week celebrations,
- when outreach services are provided by the Aboriginal Community Elders Services (ACES),
- when specific Home and Community Care (HACC) activities that are managed and run on a regular basis around the state, or
- when the annual Statewide Elders camp was held as part of Senior Citizens Week for the past six years.

## Port Youth Theatre

(Yipti—fun with feelings) involved two programs. Warritti One was the production of workshop resources for Indigenous children. Four booklets provide a creative, fun and non-threatening way for Indigenous children to explore feelings through the use of cartoons and their own drawings. The booklets are written in English and three other Indigenous languages—Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna, and Pitjantjajara.

A second program was developed to teach children how to deal with conflict through puppet making and working together to create puppet plays and role-plays to act out emotions. Participants received expert tuition in making puppets and support from five Indigenous Workers over a five-week period. A steady group of eighteen children attended regularly, with numbers sometimes going up to twenty.

Anecdotal evidence shows that the project had a very positive response, with a number of groups commenting on the timeliness and uniqueness of the kit. Children have been reported to be responding very well to the kits.

Some of the key messages from project workers include:

- Don't underestimate or assume what children are experiencing and/or have knowledge and opinions about.
- Work on the best way to have fun and take time with children throughout all processes.
- Be committed to providing the children in need with support, as well as food and transport to ensure the project's success and the participants' well being [Successworks—literature review].

The Indigenous definition of family violence extends to the Elders of the community. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force places a strong emphasis upon the social and emotional well being of Elders. The Indigenous community has identified that it is Elders that possess the cultural future for Indigenous communities. The information sessions identified that unless respect is formed and the significance of the Elderly community is embraced then the cultural heritage of Indigenous Victorians may be lost. The Task Force believes that Elders need to be included within educational programs particularly when dealing with Indigenous youth as an opportunity to learn and to have social interaction with respected Elders in the community.

Involvement of Elders and Traditional Owners (not necessarily the same people) is crucial to establishing an authority of programs.<sup>10</sup>

Having respite activities that allow Elders to participate in the Statewide Camp provides them with the opportunity to unwind and 'feel safe, even if it's only for a short while'.

Elders highlighted that there were no ongoing support programs or activities accessible or available to them other than Home and Community Care (HACC) and Community Aged Care Packages (CAPS).

Communities don't take advantage of using Elders as support, they are not encouraged or able to participate in community activities unless invited or transport has been provided.

However, the Task Force believes that not enough focus is being placed upon the value of Elders particularly in terms of respect amongst younger generations and the need to promote Elders as leaders within the community.

The Indigenous definition of family violence extends to the Elders of the community. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force places a strong emphasis upon the social and emotional well being of Elders. The Indigenous community has identified that it is Elders who hold the family histories and cultural knowledge for Indigenous families and communities.

The information sessions identified that unless respect is formed and acknowledgment is embraced by the Indigenous community then the cultural heritage of Indigenous Victorians may be lost.

The Task Force believes that Elders need to be included within social, recreational and educational programs, particularly when dealing with Indigenous children and youth as an opportunity to learn and to have social interaction and support with respected Elders in the community.

Cultural practices of acknowledging and listening to Elders were a part of family life.

Elders would like to see:

- More targeted programs that they can participate in with families, children and young people.
- Giving Elders a voice and formal recognition through the establishment of a Statewide Elders Council.
- Community service providers to ensure that Elders are included in all levels of their programs and services.
- Support services that provide transport or access to services and programs from their home.
- Recognise that Rumbalara, ACES and the Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative as best practice models to be acknowledged by other Indigenous and mainstream HACC service providers to develop support programs and services for Elders at the local level across the state.
- Elders can't afford their own homes or to pay rent, because their families look to them for social and financial support, which has identified the need for Elders accommodation, including units, hostels and granny flats.

*"Indigenous family violence relates to the loss of traditional culture, particularly the diminishing role of men, the diminishing role and respect for Elders and changing roles of women".*

## OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSIONS FROM THE ELDERS SESSION AT THE VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE FORUM

*In traditional Indigenous society, Elders within the clan/tribal groups were held in high regard and were respected for their knowledge and experience and both men and women were involved in the handing down of the lore and laws by which Indigenous society lived by for thousands of years.*

*Since colonisation and the dispossession of traditional lands, the role of Elders, men and women within Indigenous society has changed. In today's contemporary Indigenous society a lot of the traditional values have been lost, including respect of Elders and the important role which Elders can contribute to their families, extended families and the community.*

*Elders/grandparents were once able to discipline children within the family and the community, but today you are ostracised if you say anything. Our community is now governed by white man's laws and in some case you are the one who gets into trouble if you try to discipline children. Cultural values and differences are not taken into account in these laws.*

*There has been a lot of discussion in the community as to who is an Elder. What defines an Elder? There is no simple definition. Each family, clan, organisation has a different view as to who is an Elder.*

*One opinion is that you should earn the right to be called an Elder. In some communities if earned the title of Elder is automatically given to you, it just happens that way when people start to call you aunt or uncle. Some families select their Elders and we have to acknowledge and accept that. However, there are some people in the community who have not been involved in good or acceptable activities in the past who are now being called Elders. This is disturbing for us as they don't deserve recognition as Elders because they have not acknowledged that what they have done is wrong, but who is going to confront or challenge them? This is one of the reasons young people don't have respect for their Elders.*

*If you give respect, you receive respect.*

*Now some of our Elders have experienced family violence themselves, from their own parents and family members and are now experiencing abuse from their own children and grandchildren. In some cases Elders will not venture out of their own homes because they still hold the memories of the past and are still fearful of authorities. Some of our Elders need counselling and support to help them to work on these fears from the past or they will continue to isolate themselves and continue to put up with the abuse. Expert support is needed for this and needs to be done slowly. Mainstream services are not always appropriate. We need to develop culturally appropriate services to meet the needs in this area.*

*Elders need to be given a high profile within the community by including Elders with the knowledge and experience of the things that have worked for families in the past.*

*Some Elders have chosen to leave their families and to live independently for their own health, safety and well-being. Others have gone to hostels or nursing homes. In one instance Elderly family members were relocated to a new outer suburb. Although they appreciated the peace and quiet for a while, they found that they became isolated from other family members and the community because it was so far out. Sometimes elders need to live independently for various reasons, but should be close to family and community.*

*The opportunity should be given to the Elders to pass on their cultural knowledge and experiences to the younger people in the community. If it is left too long this knowledge will be lost.*

*Elders telling their stories is one way in which they can release their fears and hurts of the past. In the old ways, grandmothers had the responsibility of keeping the cultural knowledge and family histories. Elders need to pass this knowledge onto their children and grandchildren and other young people in the community.*

*There are noted people who have made a big contribution to Aboriginal affairs in the past and now as Elders they are still contributing to our community, but we need to provide the opportunity for others as well.*

*There are grandmothers and grandfathers in our community who have done a good job of keeping their families together. They may not have been involved in organisations, but they need to be recognised and given the opportunity to tell their stories.*

*There is a need for programs where Elders and young people can participate together. A lot of young people today are more into the 'white way' and are not interested in hearing about the traditional ways. There is no discipline and no respect for themselves or others. There could be a Cultural School established that young people could attend—maybe on Saturdays or after school.*

*The community has a host of Elders who, if given the opportunity, would be willing to make a contribution in a variety of ways to and for the community as a whole.*

*Elders want and need to make a contribution rather than just going to Bingo or the pokies. There is a need for an Elders Council so that our voices can be heard and to have our needs met in a culturally appropriate way.*

*Elders should be included in everything that is happening and not just during NAIDOC Week.*

### PRIORITIES FOR ELDERS

1. A voice for Elders—A Statewide Elders Council
2. Housing Needs
3. Appropriate Transport
4. Addressing poverty
5. Register for Aboriginal Elders
6. Elders Camps and Respite
7. Elders working in schools with young people
8. A Cultural School
9. Trained mature age people to work with Elders that are frail



## THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Task Force members recognise that Indigenous people in same sex relationships also experience family violence and that specific service responses are needed to provide assistance and support when these situations occur. The Task Force understand that the needs of Indigenous men and women in same sex relationships may not be the same as for heterosexuals, however, this does not mean that their needs cannot be accommodated by existing Indigenous or mainstream services.

The Task Force agree that family violence in all intimate relationships is essentially about power and control, irrespective of the label attached to describe the relationship.<sup>11</sup> Vickers (1996) noted in his paper that:

*Partners who abuse often use homophobia and heterosexism as a weapon of control over their partner in a variety of ways:*

- *By 'outing' or threatening to out their partner to friends, family, employer, Police, church or others in the wider community.*
- *By telling a partner that no one will help him or her because the Police and the justice system are homophobic.*
- *By telling a partner that s/he will not be believed because homosexuals do not rape or abuse their lovers.*
- *By telling a partner that s/he deserves it because s/he is homosexual. This type of abuse is indicative of internalised homophobia or self hatred by an abuser.*
- *By telling a partner/he is not a 'real' homosexual because s/he used to relate to men or women, has male/female friends, is a 'breeder' or prefers certain sexual practices or behaviours, etc.*
- *Because of the pervasiveness of heterosexism, an abuser may attempt to convince a partner that the abusive behaviour is normal and that the abused party does not understand gay or lesbian relationships.*
- *Abusers can also rely on heterosexism and sexist stereotypes to hide abuse and increase power and control over their partner by portraying the violence as mutual or consensual combat.*
- *By telling a male partner that the behaviour is not domestic violence but an expression of 'masculinity'.*

In the Indigenous gay community the issue of family violence is endured in silence. As a minority group within a minority group, the gay community is even more isolated and less inclined to seek the support of the wider Indigenous community in being able to openly lay the issues on the table and seek solutions.

Comments made to Task Force members indicate that the gay community is rarely consulted on issues that equally affect their wellbeing. It was suggested that providing opportunities for them to raise issues faced by the gay community would ensure that consideration to specific support services is given at the policy development stage when designing/providing support programs to the Indigenous community.

Indigenous people in same sex relationships who participated in the community consultations and Family Violence Forum identified the following family violence issues as impacting on them

- Physical violence
- Emotional Abuse
- Shame
- Racism/Discrimination
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Jealousy
- Mixed relationships
- Experiences from family/parents
- Christianity

Indigenous people involved in same sex relationships suggested that **service** responses provided to victims of family violence should also be available to them (male and female) and put forward the following suggestions:

- Education/Awareness of this issue targeting the Koori gay community.
- Koori Liaison Officer to work with 'Outblack' on the issues confronting it's members on Koori same sex domestic violence.
- An holistic approach should also be used when dealing with Koori same sex domestic violence.
- Outblack representation on any future committee to ensure Koori same sex domestic violence issues are included at a state level through all policy and advocacy actions.

#### **SUMMARY:**

"In the black gay community we endure this issue in silence. A lot of stuff has happened to us and the way to change that is to take control. One of the ways for Outblack's members to bring about change is having a place where you are safe and have the same group support.

We need to build things around pride and respect for each other. Build up self-respect, which will impact on your life and do things for ourselves. I don't think that other people can do these things for us. We over this weekend have been generating information on Koori same sex domestic violence, these things do happen in our lives. Just to acknowledge that we also suffer from and endure this sort of violence is a huge step forward. Hopefully one of the outcomes of this retreat would be more support services available to us".

#### **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 19**

*That research is undertaken to identify the specific issues impacting on Indigenous people in same sex relationships and what action could be taken to address their needs.*

For me personally seeing my parents in domestic violence situations has made me look at how people treat each other. It was a learning experience.

To come to this workshop it is making me more aware of the issue and knowing that it exists helps me to cope with my feelings.

When I meet people I like to find out about them first as I don't want to judge them and look at their personality, etc—sussing them out.

I have been out for so many years and coming out officially was when I was 13–15. And in all that time I have had three relationships. The first was a woman. The second a guy for a few years and I got pissed off with him flicking his nose. And the third I had freedom within the relationship and not being told to be at home at a certain time, etc.

Having a lifestyle that I had, I used to travel back and forwards to the city as it was along distance relationship. And then I found myself trapped and did not know where to turn as there were not networks available—no refuges and no support networks.

I had gay friendly friends but not all the time could I rely on them. With him not knowing what is freedom, what is love and what is a commitment. This was not love but a relationship, a joining of two people. I believe it always takes two to tango.

Sometimes when I would do things I would wonder if I was to be verbally abused. Most times I would use alcohol to enjoy my life with other people and not my partner—not being like chained up and being able to do what I want to do.

Over the years push comes to shove and punches get thrown. I will fight, growing up with brothers and having a fighting family and having grown up in a rough neighbourhood you are always confronting violence.

No matter what size you are I will always hit back. I know that I am powerful—whether I am drunk or

sober. When I was in the army I was told by a corporal not to pick fights. You need to know your limitations to fighting.

Well just how much verbal abuse can you take? I like to take off when this happens—to get away. No matter what you do you always go back home.

I have given all responsibility up and just left the house to get away and I call it the 'battered wives syndrome' and coming home have the best sex and then there is nothing said. Then you don't know where you stand. This is where there needs to be a support service available for us.

I enjoy drinking and don't have a limit, don't need anyone telling me to stop and get home to be interrogated by my partner asking me who did I do it last night or on the weekend. I then look for another escape and just want to walk away from things and when it comes to physical abuse it hurts me as it probably affects both partners.

What screws my mind up is what happens now and what can I do and I keep myself occupied to stop thinking and sometimes lose the plot and wonder if you can change things. Commitments come into play and you become proud and want the freedom to deal with things. I like to leave a bit of a mark in this world. Losing focus is losing all the things you believe in.

Being mentally abused is more damaging than being hit by someone. Also sometimes it can be mistaken for love...

## THE IMPACT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY WORKERS

Workers in Indigenous community organisations (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) raised the issue of workplace violence on numerous occasions to the Task Force during the last two years. The Task Force are aware that Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers in community based organisations are frequently called upon to provide assistance to individuals and families who may have experienced a family violence incident in their community.

In many instances, perpetrators of violence often accompany their partners (who are the victims) to the local community organisation to receive medical assistance. There have been a number of occasions where the organisations have reported a perpetrator of violence being abusive and/or threatening towards staff because they are drunk or affected by drugs (or both).

Issues raised about this included:

- Challenges of being a worker verses being a community member
- Family politics creating factions at worker and at an organisation's board level
- Verbal abuse escalating into physical violence—especially where a person does not accept the response or decision made by the worker, Manager or Administrator/CEO
- Threats being made about going to the workers home or doing something to their children and other family members
- Alcohol and drug affected clients making a nuisance of themselves and refusing to leave the building
- People getting really angry because the workers won't give them a lift somewhere or take them home
- Additional costs being incurred by organisations as staff take stress leave which increases their Workcover payments and leaves them short a staff member
- Additional costs associated with hiring security to protect staff during working hours

The Task Force are aware that a small number of Indigenous services now have permanent 'security' staff on hand to monitor client activity and provide security for staff (and clients) if a violent situation occurs in their buildings. This raises questions about funding to cover costs associated with not only employing security staff but also putting in place security systems in and around buildings as well as policies and procedures for dealing with violence in the workplace.

The Task Force believe it is essential to provide safe and secure workplaces for all staff delivering services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients. A number of suggestions were received during the community consultations about organisations putting in place a 'Code of Conduct' advising clients and community members that 'Violence is not acceptable and will not be tolerated'. The Task Force supports this concept and encourages organisations to seek assistance from Commonwealth and State Governments to put these policies and procedures in place in Indigenous services.

The focus on healing, rather than blaming and punishment, is a key learning from the literature. Given the urgent need to address this issue, the healing of family violence workers drawn from communities must occur simultaneously with community healing. Projects need to build in worker support, counselling and debriefing at the outset, to allow them to address their own legacy of trauma rather than wait until workers experience burn-out.

It is essential that the healing of the providers be addressed either before or simultaneously to implementing the process. Good practice projects provided support and counselling to identified healers within the community.

## WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The level of trauma for children who live with violence is a major concern. This is now a crisis in communities across the state. Healing for children through a range of interventions is critical. Prevention programs need to integrate healing to be effective. Both types of programs can address issues relating to parenting skills and the building of self-esteem. When dealing with a child victim, point of contact providers need to be trained in identifying child abuse and be knowledgeable for the sensitivities surrounding child protection issues to Indigenous people.

The Task Force would also like to see a survey undertaken of Indigenous organisations to establish the nature and extent of workplace violence as part of the Strategy.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 20

*That a research project be commissioned to identify the impact of family violence on workers employed by Indigenous and mainstream services*

#### VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICE—COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

##### CRITICAL ISSUES OR PRIORITIES

1. *Identify level and nature of family/domestic violence in the community*
2. *Identify current models of practice*
3. *Skill workers to meet needs*
4. *Recognise staff stress in responding to traumatized people*
5. *Promote access to self healing*

##### SOLUTIONS

- *Build profile of extent of family/community violence impacting on the lives of community.*
- *Develop model of best practice*
- *Enhance staff capabilities to manage their stress levels in dealing with service users with a multitude of issues*
- *Provide options and healing modalities towards sustainable self healing, personal wellbeing and growth.*

##### KEY STATEMENT

THE VAHS WITH ADEQUATE RESOURCES WILL PROVIDE GOOD MODELS OF HEALING TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO THE NEEDS OF THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY AS A RESULT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY VIOLENCE.

## IMPACT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUGS ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

Alcohol is so often implicated in Indigenous family violence that the term 'alcohol violence' has been coined by researchers. [Memmott, p.26 cites]. It is universally acknowledged by researchers that alcohol does not cause violence, but 'unaccountability' remains a key component of Indigenous constructions of 'alcohol violence' (Memmott, 2001 p. 27).

Reser states that in many Indigenous communities, excessive alcohol consumption is used as an individual and collective way of coping with a spectrum of conflicts, contradictions and stressors. Such a coping response has devastating psychological and social costs and interferes with, indeed often precludes, the development of more adequate individual and community coping and problem solving strategies.

Amongst the identified stressors is the realignment of gender power relationships as an effect of colonisation, with the result that increasingly disempowered and angry men resort to the use of force to shore up their self-esteem.

*"Family violence relates strongly to alcohol and drug abuse. Many stakeholders stated that alcohol and drug use masks many deeper issues such as loss of culture, identity, the effects of racism, powerlessness, etc."*

The preliminary information sessions revealed a connection between alcohol and drug abuse and family violence. The issue of alcohol and drug abuse within Indigenous communities has been largely related to a number of issues including a lack of motivation, unemployment, dysfunctional parenting, crime, ill health and general concerns of violence within the Indigenous community. The use of alcohol and drugs within Indigenous communities has clearly been linked with a form of escapism from the realms of every day life.

*"Alcohol is so often implicated in the Indigenous family".*

The Task Force acknowledges that many programs have been funded to provide a cultural alcohol and drug service to communities largely from the Department of Human Services. A number of alcohol and drug hostels have been set up in conjunction with Aboriginal Hostels in other States/Territories to provide communities with access to a cultural detoxification centre.

The Task Force acknowledges the Statewide Alcohol and Drug Training Program such as the one delivered by Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative<sup>12</sup> in relation to training Indigenous people as qualified counsellors. The Department of Human Services also provides funding support and a statewide data base to monitor service responses to alcohol and drug use within the Indigenous community.

On advice from community the Task Force, however, is more concerned about the need for greater outcomes and the need to review existing program and service delivery to ensure that outcomes remain forthcoming and innovative in dealing with the issues within the community. It is essential that such services are accessible by all community members and not determined by community factions given the crucial need to assist Indigenous people back to sobriety.

A number of communities have raised concern about the age that young Indigenous people start drinking and using other drugs, with minimal encouragement for these young people to be linked into services.

The issue of 'youth drinking' has been identified recently as a major issue within communities in general, however for Indigenous communities many young people's health is in a poor state by the time they reach their late teens largely as a consequent of alcohol and drug abuse.

Communities are concerned that many Indigenous people present with major health issues associated with alcohol and drug abuse. This extends to financial strain, dysfunction amongst families and poor supervision and routine for children.

The Task Force is aware of the CAAPS (Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services) program in the Northern Territory that brings families back together with the alcoholic or drug addict and then live together under the supervision of the program until ready to be reintegrated into the community.

**Don is a Koori man of 59 living in the city. He was taken to hospital one night very drunk with a deep cut on his forehead and severe bruising all over his face and neck.**

**His partner Rob went with him to hospital and explained that Don had slipped on a step and hit his head. The hospital staff did not question Don further, they patched him up and sent him home with Rob.**

**A neighbour reported to a community worker the next day that Rob was very violent toward Don, and regularly beat him and kicked him.**

**Don was too scared to tell anyone, he said his drinking upset Rob and that it was his fault that he was bashed.**

### **Approaches taken in New Zealand**

In New Zealand programs must take into account Maori health needs and perspectives. Culturally appropriate practices and procedures must be adopted that engage with Whanau, Hapu and Iwi people. Partnerships must be developed with Maori providers and Maori personnel must be recruited and supported. The delivery of services should be underpinned by several principles: firstly that victim safety and protection is paramount; secondly Maori friendly environments should be provided, thirdly that local Iwi, Hapu and Maori communities must be engaged, fourthly there must be knowledge of the community, fifthly there must be intersectorial collaboration and finally there must be monitoring and evaluation of family violence interventions with Maori women and children (Family Violence Intervention Guidelines, 2002).

Holistic approaches must be used. There are several Maori models and frameworks that illustrate the Maori holistic approaches to health and wellbeing. The most well known of these is the Te Where Tapa Wha, which represents the aspects of health and wellbeing for Maoris. The strong solid walls of the house reflect the four dimensions of health and wellbeing: taha wairua (spiritual), taha hinengaro (mind), taha tinana (physical) and taha whanau (extended family).

In the spiritual aspect the capacity for faith and wider communication is the key focus and health is considered related to unseen and unspoken energies. The mental aspect is the capacity to communicate, think and feel and the mind and body are considered inseparable. The physical aspect is the capacity for physical growth and development whereby good physical health is considered necessary for optimal development. The extended family aspect is the capacity to belong, care and to share where individuals are considered part of a wider social system (Family Violence Intervention Guidelines, 2002).

## Consultation Report on Aboriginal Women & Children's Experiences of Family Violence within Victorian Aboriginal Communities

(Prepared by Elizabeth Hoffman House and VAHS Mother and Children's Unit, 29 June 2003)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The establishment of safe-houses for Aboriginal women and their children in each regional area across Victoria.
2. Police need to review their responses to Aboriginal women experiencing family and domestic violence. In particular, the focus on why Aboriginal women do not report family violence incidences.
3. Magistrates Courts need to recognise the difficulties faced by Aboriginal women and implement an Aboriginal specific support program that assists/supports Aboriginal people to understand the court processes.
4. Aboriginal community organisations need to promote publicly that their respective organisation does not accept family and domestic violence and should display a 'Code of Conduct' that outlines the steps that will be taken if an incident occurs
5. A review of sentencing of men who use violence against women should also be conducted.
6. Perpetrators who use violence against women should, as a component of an Intervention Order, be required to attend mandatory Anger Management sessions.
7. Perpetrators of violence against women, who have had more than one Intervention Order taken out against them, should be required to participate in a follow-up program that tracks the perpetrators for a 12 month period.
8. Improved access to legal representation for Aboriginal women applying for Intervention Orders should be considered by legal aid and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.
9. In the event that an Intervention Order court hearing is adjourned due to the woman not having legal representation, costs should be awarded to the courts and not to the women.
10. Government should recognise the levels and extent of family and domestic violence within the Aboriginal community and should provide funding according to need.
11. Aboriginal organisations should be encouraged to develop partnerships with non-Aboriginal organisations enabling Aboriginal women a range of options when dealing with the family violence issues.
12. Child Protection urgently needs to review their interventions into family violence situations particularly with families who come to the attention of Child Protection repeatedly.
13. Child Protection Services also need to review the types of services that they refer families to support them in resolving the family violence issues. Support services should include immediate children's counselling and family therapy.
14. Child Protection Services interventions should consider the removal of the perpetrator from the home rather than the women and children. One way this could be done is Child Protection could apply for a Sole Occupancy Order if the risks to children were substantial.
15. The Family Court of Australia also needs to consider the development of an Aboriginal specific position which supports/assists Aboriginal people to understand the different processes.
16. The Family Court of Australia need to establish an Indigenous Child Hand-over and Supervision Centre. This could be done in conjunction with VACCA.
17. A Community Education Campaign similar to that of the TAC campaign should be implemented across the nation within the aim of education people around family and domestic violence issues.
18. An Aboriginal specific Family Violence Education Campaign should also be conducted across the state targeting young people and children in particular.



## LEARNINGS FROM OTHER PLACES

### INDIGERELATE

Indigerelate (Bugalma Byhin 'Safe Healing Place') carried out counselling, training, mediation and education. The self-empowerment programs dealt with issues such as effective communication, crisis intervention, anger management, family living skills and assertive behaviours. A small but significant number of Indigenous clients attended relationship counselling, as this service was free and provided cultural safety. Many more clients discussed issues with the female and male Indigenous Coordinators in informal settings. They tended to feel freer to talk about family violence and other traumatic issues. Three Indigenous people, including the female and male Coordinators, attended formal training on healthy relationships. In addition, the service provided a weekly drop-in centre for Indigenous people.

In the service's own words, Indigerelate did the following:

*Indigerelate 'yarners' offer other Indigenous people and families the opportunity of working on personal Indigenous issues with professional Indigenous workers in a safe environment. This mode of delivery offers many advantages in that the Indigenous families and clients can feel free to express themselves honestly, without fear of being misunderstood through cultural diversity. Less time is spent with filling in the past, as there is an understood 'shared history.' Clients can feel free to talk in community 'lingo', creating a comfortable and honest space. These factors make a significant difference to Indigenous clients who are generally too afraid to access mainstream health services.*

In the conclusions to their June 2000 Report, the project workers stated the following:

*Indigerelate is holistic in its outlook with a vision of honesty, trust, communication and accountability... people perceive Indigerelate's service as befitting their cultural norms and as such can strongly identify with it. Indigenous people are holistic in their healing processes. Healing for Indigenous people differs, in that, where mainstream medical practices deal with the psychological, physiological and emotional, Indigenous people's self healing...extends to a cultural and spiritual aspect. Indigerelate's service encapsulates all four quadrants of self-healing... Indigerelate is focused on accommodation and self-determination rather than assimilation. Indigenous people are saying that they want to talk to 'yarners'... in a culturally safe environment.*

Key Learning's from the Indigerelate approach include:

- The two Indigenous Coordinators were not from the local community, which assisted with avoiding factionalism within the community.
- The history of Indigenous peoples has resulted in a wariness of non-Indigenous service providers. Safety and trust are paramount issues in working with Indigenous people.
- Intergenerational and transgenerational Post Multi-Trauma Stress appears to be a key underlying issue, due to the loss of culture.
- As Indigenous services come and go it is important to make a sustainable and honest commitment of support to the local people.
- Female and male coordinators are required to deal with women and men's business separately.
- Developing healthy relationships with opinion leaders, such as elders, lecturers and community health workers, results in more harmonious and productive service delivery.
- Ongoing formal and informal cultural awareness training is crucial. It is important not to interrupt an Indigenous person's story, even when the interruption is only to offer empathy or to seek clarification.

### **ABORIGINAL NARRATIVE THERAPY PROGRAM**

The Aboriginal Narrative Therapy Program (Palm Island Justice Group Aboriginal Corporation, QLD) provided a culturally appropriate program to Indigenous young people, aged fifteen to twenty-one years, in Townsville's Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. The therapeutic program, presented by an Indigenous facilitator, aimed to reduce family violence.

The group discussed the effect of family violence and the facilitator empowered them by assisting them to develop non-violent life-skills. The program comprised self-esteem issues, cultural identity, behavioural management, cognitive skills, and the impact of family violence and the development of non-violent life skills, anger management, leadership and empowerment skills.

Project outcomes included:

- Breaking down the local community's acceptance of the use of violence.
- Giving hope to community members that their young people might not go into an adult prison.
- Assisting non-Indigenous staff members to be more open to Indigenous workers presenting Indigenous programs.
- Reinforcing the need for culturally appropriate programs to be run in Detention Centres.

Key Learning's from the Narrative Therapy program include:

- Indigenous young people need to go through a process of healing and to gain a positive cultural identity in order to be part of the solution when addressing family violence within their community.
- Community support is crucial to the success of this project.
- Cultural issues and the time needed for participants to integrate the program content requires a long timeframe. Effecting attitudinal and behaviour change is a slow process.
- It was difficult to convince non-Indigenous stakeholders to see the importance of dealing with issues concerning cultural identity.

Successful Counselling and Therapeutic Models have the following features:

- 1) Counselling models that acknowledge and affirm Indigenous culture and experience.
- 2) A process of healing which promotes positive cultural identity.
- 3) Time frames that take account of cultural obligations.
- 4) Collaborative approaches.
- 5) Female and male counsellors to deal with women's and men's business separately.

### **MESSAGE PRINTS**

'Message Prints' is an exemplary project conducted by the Barkuna Neighbourhood Centre at Cessnock/Maitland/Port Stephens. It brought together young people and Elders in the production of artwork for use in family violence awareness education. Together they produced key rings, posters, post-cards, carry bags, a CD etc, each with a family violence awareness message. Participants became skilled users of computer technology and have established a website [www.aboriginalhunter.com/barkuna](http://www.aboriginalhunter.com/barkuna)

'Message Prints' has become a household name, the mention of which promotes ready discussion of family violence issues throughout the community.

## EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES

A number of initiatives that set out to 'talk' through domestic violence issues were aborted and reinvented themselves as practical activity programs:

- A therapeutic role play and discussion group for young people, while initially positive, deteriorated and was redeemed when the process itself became the subject of a video made by the participants. The young people recorded their making of the video and their own healing process in an integrated approach. This resulted in a product that they could own and show and which could be used as a learning tool in subsequent groups. The long-term outcomes in terms of young people's resilience and depression prevention cannot yet be gauged but the enthusiasm of participants was revived by this hands-on approach.
- A group of women in the "Cycle of Women" project became frustrated with 'talk' and went off to identify a 'safe house' location which they then worked to establish.
- The Lajamanu Community produced paintings that compared the traditional Aboriginal Dispute Resolution [ADR] model to the mainstream legal model. The resulting 'maps of community', which dynamically depicted community authority relationships and communication pathways, became the focus for discussions of how violence affects community members and families. This material, both in production and in subsequent usage, seemed to fit into community far better than written texts and western illustration materials.
- The Tiwi Family Violence Project also found that the production of culturally specific family violence awareness learning tools facilitated the healing process.
- The 'No Shame Project' combined storyboard narrative sessions for young people (engaging traditional narrative representation modes) with a 'history' project in which the young participants were required to gather community history from their Elders. This is a project that draws together a number of good practice elements and promotes 'ripple' effects.
- The Yawarra Meamei project engaged young women with grooming and self-care workshops and then incorporated family violence awareness, self-defence and self-assertiveness into the workshops.

Practicalities of survival have to be addressed before healing or awareness work can begin. For example, the "Port Hedland Sobering Up Project" provides breakfast with its meetings; groups that engage young women are more likely to succeed if they provide child-care/play groups and transport.

Other communities found that healing was facilitated by attending to the 'practicalities' of spiritual healing that regenerated pride in culture and respect for Elders and enabled participants to acknowledge and address grief and loss.

Reports to the Task Force during consultations about Indigenous family violence were alarmingly high and included:

- Elders abuse (physical, emotional, psychological, and financial).
- Youth abuse (within groups and assaults against Non-Indigenous young people)
- Spousal abuse
- Abuse within same sex relationships
- Assaults as a consequent of intoxication
- Increasing numbers of Indigenous people presenting at court on **assault** charges
- Sexual abuse
- Child neglect and abuse

Such stories of oppression are not fictitious. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Social Justice reports, the Bringing Them Home Report, and more recently, the Forde Inquiry into Institutional Abuse, all described the need to provide counselling for Indigenous Australians to enable them to deal with the effects of post-colonial experiences.<sup>13</sup>



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- 3 Cultural Officer Positions—Located with major Indigenous communities in protecting significant cultural sites and delivering cultural history to the community.
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- 6 Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, 2000 -2001 Annual Report, page 15.
- 7 Kenny Bedford, Family Violence and Child Abuse Project Worker, Through Black Eyes: Indigenous Family Violence, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Resources, 2002
- 8 Through Black Eyes: Indigenous Family Violence, 2002
- 9 Through Black Eyes: Indigenous Family Violence, 2002
- 10 Literature Review, 2003, pg 58.
- 11 Extracted from "The Second Closet: Domestic Violence in Lesbian and Gay Relationships: A Western Australian Perspective", Lee Vickers, 4 December 1996.
- 12 Ngwala has Indigenous Co-operatives in Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Metropolitan Melbourne all delivering alcohol and drug services to the community.
- 13 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report, QLD, March 2000





# SECTION 4

## THE PATH AHEAD

<b>ACTIVITIES TO BUILD CAPACITY</b>	
Independent Indigenous Family Violence Unit to Manage Regional Indigenous Family Violence Support Workers	
Mechanism/Process to Share Data & Other Information	
Research Projects focusing specifically on Family Violence issues to support Community Led initiatives	
<b>BUILDING ON EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	
A&D Resource Centres being used as 'Time Out Centres'	
Forming stronger linkages between community based Support Workers	Focus Existing Case Management & Planning on Family Violence issues
Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund	
<b>ACTION NEEDED</b>	

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## GOAL:

FOR GOVERNMENT TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES TO PUT IN PLACE APPROPRIATE MECHANISMS WHICH SUPPORT GRASS ROOTS 'COMMUNITY DRIVEN' APPROACHES TO DEAL WITH AND RESPOND TO FAMILY VIOLENCE.

Priorities	Focus
<b>Safety and Security for Victims of Violence</b>	<p>The protection of Elders, children, youth and women from abuse and violence—including sexual, physical, emotional and financial abuse</p> <p>Ensuring there is a choice for different types of services in communities that are accessible, culturally appropriate and supportive of the needs of individuals and families and which can provide an immediate response to victims of violence</p> <p>Support from Government to establish culturally appropriate mechanisms and processes in the justice system which provide a supportive and safe environment for victims of violence</p>
<b>Empowerment of Indigenous Communities</b>	<p>Government support to enable and empower Indigenous people, families, groups and local community based organisations to develop and implement community based approaches to address family violence issues occurring in their community</p> <p>Ensuring Indigenous specific data collected by Government can be accessed by local, regional and statewide Indigenous bodies and groups to support their planning and decision-making processes</p>
<b>Collaborative Planning and Decision-making based on 'Community Driven' Priorities</b>	<p>Government support to enable Indigenous communities to engage in local, regional and statewide planning processes which focus specifically on addressing family violence</p> <p>Ensuring equitable Indigenous representation from metropolitan and rural regions on consultative committees set up by Government to address family and other violence related issues occurring in Victorian communities</p> <p>Integrating planning and decision-making processes occurring in Government and Departments to support a strategic 'whole of government' approach to address family violence and other issues in the Indigenous sector</p>
<b>Strengthening Service Responses to Indigenous Family Violence</b>	<p>Government and Indigenous services working closely together to strengthen existing approaches and service responses to family violence in communities in the short, medium and long term</p> <p>Building up the capacity of Indigenous services to respond effectively to family violence through Government supporting initiatives to create sustainable long term solutions to priorities identified by Indigenous communities</p> <p>Developing stronger linkages between Government agencies to create a strategic integrated service framework to respond specifically to the needs of Indigenous people affected by family violence (victims and perpetrators)</p>
<b>Stronger Partnerships</b>	<p>Establishing closer working relationships between staff of Indigenous services and specialist Indigenous staff working in mainstream agencies to provide integrated case management to support victims of violence</p> <p>Strengthening working relationships between Government, Indigenous organisations and mainstream services to improve service outcomes for Indigenous people who are victims of family violence</p>



## THE PATH AHEAD

The Task Force recognise that 'community led' approaches are the preferred implementation model under the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. Information gathered by the Task Force during its term confirms that the resolution of problems and issues must focus on empowering individuals, families and communities for ownership to occur.

This will only be achieved if support is provided to individuals, families and communities to become engaged in the processes which focus specifically on creating an environment where people can feel safe and comfortable in raising, discussing and then dealing with family violence issues.

This was evident in the development and establishment of the nine Regional Indigenous Family Violence Support Officers and the nine Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups. The Task Force want to ensure that these Support Officers and Action Groups are appropriately resourced and supported over the next 10 years to continue their important roles to:

- Maintain 'community driven' initiatives at the local level.
- Effectively negotiate with the Victorian Government at the decision making level through representation on the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum.
- Ensure community momentum to continue to participate in 'community driven' approaches to address family violence related issues at the local level.
- Participate in a statewide monitoring and evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy over the next 10 years.
- Work in partnership with the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Working Group to develop the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence 'whole of government' response/strategy that addresses the Task Force Final Report Recommendations for Action over the next 10 years.
- Ensure that all Victorian Government Indigenous Family Violence decisions are discussed and negotiated in partnership with the Commonwealth's National Indigenous Family Violence Working Group and associated mechanisms to ensure that all Commonwealth funds allocated to address Indigenous Family Violence issues are equitable and accessible to Victorian Indigenous communities.
- Be fully informed on an international basis for receiving ideas to keep up to date on the latest developments to address Indigenous family violence in communities.

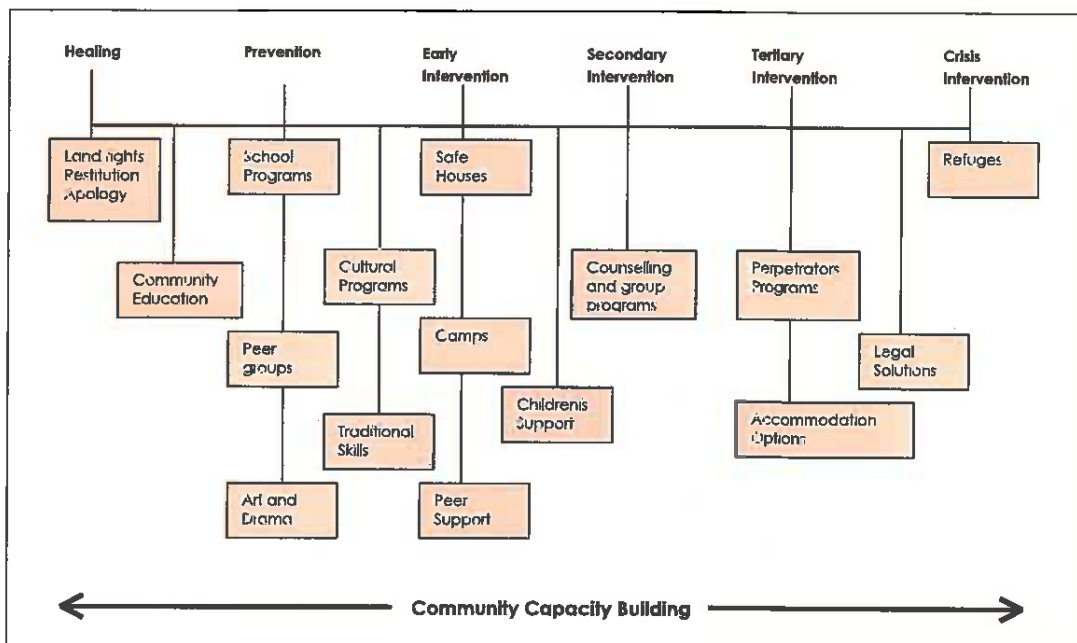
All Task Force members agree that the effectiveness of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy must be considered in the short, medium and long term. All approaches taken to engage with community organisations (Indigenous and mainstream) that have the responsibility for implementing the activities and programs on the ground must be sustainable and supported by the Victorian Government.

Actions taken under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy must include a process which has a foundation built on active 'community led' participation in the development and implementation of solutions—in the short and long term.

The Task Force also recommend that Government implement the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy in progressive stages over the next 10 years and that it makes incremental increases or additional allocations each year in its budget to support the activities and programs initiated under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

The suggested 10 year plan to address Victorian Indigenous Family Violence will aim to reduce other factors that contribute to Victorian Indigenous disadvantage. The Strategy will aim to do the following for Indigenous Victorians:

- Reduce the rate of Homelessness
- Provide for more affordable Housing
- Reduce the Unemployment rates
- Improve the Health status
- Reduce Alcohol and Drug abuse
- Improve Effective parenting skills
- Enhance community empowerment
- Reduce family violence
- Improve child safety and wellbeing
- Build Indigenous community capacity
- Improve the justice system
- Create safe and secure places in communities
- Improve relationships (focusing on perpetrators and those at risk of offending)
- Promote shared leadership
- Collaborative planning and decision making
- Strengthened service responses
- Stronger partnerships



**Figure 1: A Schema of Interventions**

As the schema demonstrates, there are a number of points at which interventions can occur. Clearly, the first point is in healing, which would address many of the underpinning causes of family violence. Community education is a key contributor in a prevention approach however, it needs to be carefully handled as poor approaches to community education can create even more problems.

Prevention programs have traditionally been seen as focusing on 'stopping the problem before it starts' while early intervention is designed to 'stop it before it goes any further'. Counselling and group support programs can be both prevention and early intervention, however, usually they are accessed following some incident. More recently the role of community capacity building has been seen as a more appropriate approach to intervening and preventing a range of social problems. Building individual and community resilience is considered to be a more effective strategy than always dealing with crises.

# HOLISTIC COMMUNITY HEALING

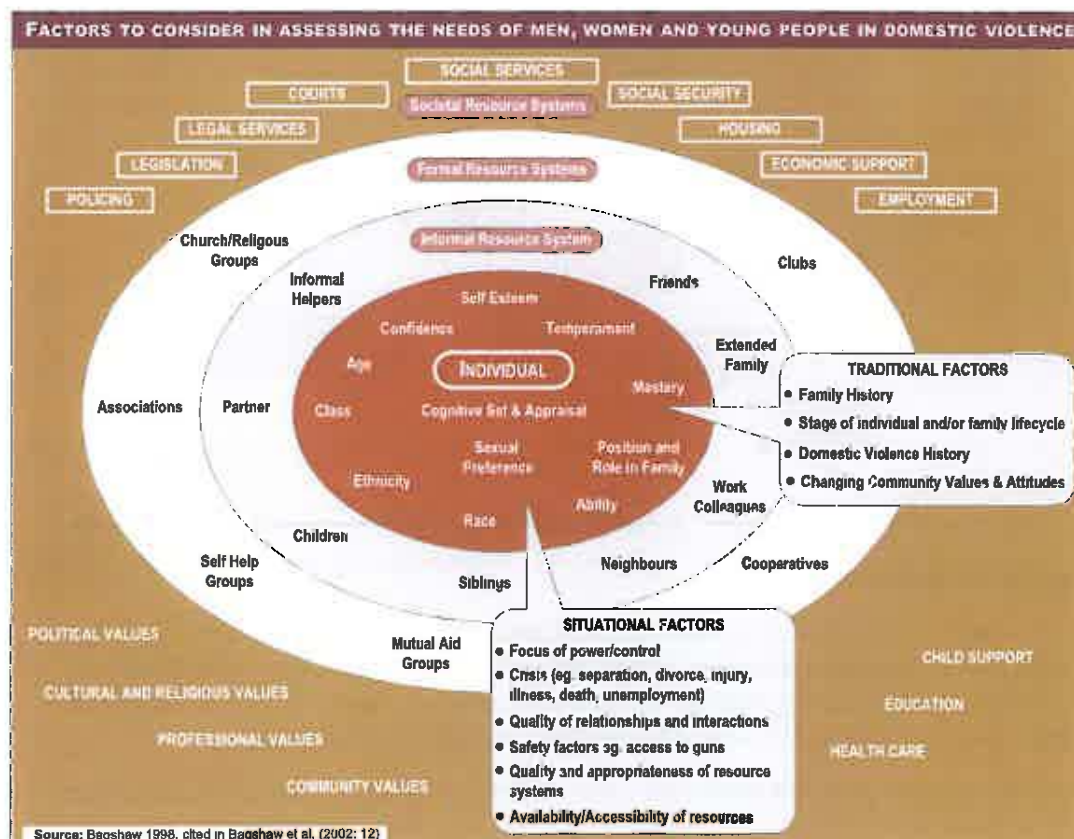
## FAMILY GROUP COUNSELLING

The Task Force recognise there are three key findings from a range of projects that have been modelled and piloted both in Australia and overseas:

- 1) That family violence must be addressed as part of a holistic community approach which has as its primary focus community healing;
- 2) That the safety of women and children is clearly identified as the primary goal; and
- 3) That men are held accountable and must take responsibility for, and change, their behaviour.

Indigenous women consistently emphasise the desire of women to keep their men in the community and emphatically rejected processes that imprisoned perpetrators or sent women and children to 'women's refuges' outside the community as a matter of course. Indigenous women insist that the emphasis of good practice family violence initiatives be on healing, rather than on blaming and punishing. Separating individuals from the community as the standard and limited response is seen as a repetition of the historic causes of community dysfunction and family breakdown that produce family violence.

Aboriginal Dispute Resolution and Customary Law processes have been actively engaged by a number of communities. The adoption of such processes has the advantage that they actively promote 'whole of community' healing by calling on communities to identify their own strengths, skills, principles and structures. Such processes revive culturally embedded community decision-making processes and produce ripple effects that regenerate pride and community identity.



The Task Force understand that developing specific solutions to address Indigenous family violence issues will take time. As mentioned previously, the main priorities arising out of community consultations over the past two years has been the need to provide counselling services to the victims of family violence as well as to immediate family members who may have witnessed the violence.

At the same time the term 'holistic community healing' has been raised by community members time and again because Indigenous people recognise that individuals are also part of a community as well as part of a family. Trauma in Indigenous communities often impacts on extended family members and others who may also be working in the services which operate in each community.

The Task Force acknowledge that Indigenous specific models and practices of healing have not been documented to the same extent as western models and approaches. However, this does not mean that Indigenous approaches are non-existent. Over the past two years the Task Force have started the process of gathering information which focuses on various approaches taken by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to address family violence. This process needs to continue as part of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and must include a mechanism to disseminate this information to Indigenous people throughout the State—individuals, families, organisations, representative bodies, etc.

*"The present victim/offender model used by Balanda (White/mainstream) institutions perpetuates the problem by taking individuals away from their families".*

The Raypirri Rom (Discipline): Healing Yolgnu Families project conducted by the Miwatji Health Aboriginal Corporation in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory was an exemplary project premised on customary law, culture and whole-community participation. The project report stressed that:

*"Yolgnu models instead involve the whole family in resolving family violence disputes".*

Raypirri Rom (Discipline) integrates customary law, restorative justice and Aboriginal dispute resolution processes, with an emphasis on intergenerational mentoring and on men taking responsibility for their own behaviour and for the well-being of their families, community and culture. It deliberately makes men aware of the effect that family violence has on their own children. The community recognised the need to integrate Raypirri Rom with Balanda law and agency processes.

In addition, this project developed 'best practice' by engaging the ALCAN Corporation in the project and by incorporating a post-funding continuity plan into the project.

Counselling and support provide important opportunities for Indigenous community members to speak about their experiences of trauma, racism and other life experiences in a culturally sensitive and safe environment. There is a strong underpinning in the Indigenous literature for such an approach where it is argued that individual healing is an essential part of community healing (Atkinson and Atkinson 1999) and that providing Indigenous communities with the cultural tools to work on healing in a holistic way is critical.

The narrative therapy approach can be used in combination with Indigenous methods to enable Indigenous stories to be told, valued and respected. These innovative approaches are consistent with broader understandings of healing the trauma and violence in the Indigenous community at the individual level with links to community change and regeneration.

The Task Force acknowledge that it is difficult at this point in time to clearly identify what resources will be required to provide counselling services to Indigenous people. Having said this, the Task Force believe it is imperative that counselling services be provided to Indigenous victims of sexual assault/abuse.

Assistance will also need to be provided to communities to develop 'community healing' practices which encourage families and members of extended families to confront and deal with family and community violence head on. Sufficient time will need to be set aside to develop these 'community led' approaches which may take three to four years before results begin to appear.

## **EDUCATION AND AWARENESS RAISING**

This component has been identified by the Task Force as a key factor towards addressing family violence in the long term. The Task Force will aim to encourage the development of education programs for Indigenous communities that family violence is not the traditional way and that communities must lead the process towards addressing family violence in a manner that does not consequent in community disarray.

The Task Force agrees that self-management and self-determination are key factors in empowering communities to begin addressing the issues and finding solutions for the long-term.

Furthermore, the Task Force has been advised that there needs to be a 'shaming' process for those who mistreat Elders and a general awareness within the community that this behaviour is being monitored and will not be tolerated. Although the Task Force identify Indigenous Elders as the leaders of the community, however in giving something back, communities and Task Force agree that community should support and advocate the rights of Elders when there is knowledge of this behaviour within the community.

*"Encourage people to speak out. Need to maintain momentum of "No to Violence"  
Education Strategy—It's not acceptable..."*

## **COMMUNITY HEALING PLACES**

The Statewide Information Sessions commissioned by the Task Force identified a need for greater access to safe houses within rural communities. At present Indigenous people wishing to escape family violence are transported to one of the two Indigenous refuges often located miles from their family, removing them from their cultural roots. Indigenous women have identified the need for safe houses within regional communities and respite care for children without the formal intervention of agencies such as child protection (for single parents, when child abuse is not the concern).

Elizabeth Hoffman House is the only Indigenous specific women's refuge in Victoria, located in metropolitan Melbourne. Current resources provided to this refuge only enable it to accommodate four families at any one time. The refuge receives referrals from within Victoria and interstate, however, Elizabeth Hoffman House currently receives state funding.

The Bairnsdale Women's shelter is the only other Indigenous identified refuge however this service is not Indigenous specific.

*"There is a need for Family Group Healing—don't separate the family as the solution. Refer the family for healing and support. We need a Healing Place for support, to build up self-esteem and be empowered"*

The information sessions identified Family Healing as a major component towards addressing family violence. The Indigenous community have stated that Family Healing is a process that takes time and is only effective when all members of the family participate and support one another within the healing process. Indigenous communities have discussed ideas around the development of 'Healing Centres' for families where they can come together to begin the healing process without outside distractions.

As previously mentioned the process of Family Healing has raised enormous interest Statewide during preliminary visits to communities. The Task Force is now interested in how communities believe Family Healing services could be best developed and ways in which families will be encouraged to attend such a program.

The Task Force acknowledges that many families involved with Protective Services and the Family Preservation Program have elements of family violence. Task Force members urge the Department of Human Services to explore the need for programs Statewide that address Family Healing from within the Indigenous community. The Task Force is aware that mainstream family therapy and mediation services exist, however, there is a greater need to place an **'emphasis upon Family Healing'** given this has been identified statewide, as a priority for Indigenous communities.

*"There is a lack of services in Victoria with only one Indigenous Specific Statewide Women's Refuge. There are no services for men's support/rehabilitation. Lack of housing options keeps families in a domestic violence situation. We need family centres as healing places to heal families as a whole"*

## EMPLOYMENT

This component reflects back to earlier comments surrounding the need for all services (Indigenous and mainstream) in working together in dealing with the underlying issues associated with family violence. This process will be enhanced by the Regional IFV Support Officer positions.

A holistic response to family violence requires not only the development of new initiatives but also a review of current programs. The community has identified that many programs exist but there has not been a noticeable reduction in alcohol and drug related crime, family violence, unemployment, education drop out, etc.

*"A holistic response is required to address the underlying issues contributing to family violence"*

The Task Force agrees that greater emphasis needs to be placed upon such programs as 'Wur-cum barra'—the Victorian Public Sector Indigenous Employment Strategy and the Victorian Government's Indigenous Scholarship Schemes. The Government's Indigenous Scholarship Scheme should target specific scholarships to Indigenous people interested in becoming qualified Counsellors.

More importantly these incentive schemes need to encourage younger Indigenous people to return to communities to work within mainstream organisations in addressing Indigenous issues once they have completed their studies.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 21

*That the Victorian Government's Indigenous Scholarship Schemes be broadened to cover Indigenous people who wish to undertake tertiary studies to be Counsellors*

## BUILDING ON EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

### STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS SERVICES

Each year, State and Commonwealth Government sign contracts and/or 'Service Agreements' with a number of Indigenous and mainstream service providers and community groups to deliver and/or provide a range of services, programs and/or initiatives to Indigenous people in various communities throughout Victoria. Recipients of funds understand that funding allocated is subject to 'Program Guidelines' which clearly outline the specific services or actions to be implemented during a set period under each 'agreement' signed.

Since it was established in October 2001, the Task Force has received many requests from various community members and representatives of Indigenous service providers to seek assistance from Government to increase funding to existing programs and services as well as acquire funding to put in place new services to respond to community needs which are/were not covered by existing programs. One obvious example (not directly related to family violence) was a request for service responses to address 'Chroming' abuse occurring amongst Indigenous youth in communities throughout Victoria.

The Task Force is aware that staff in many Indigenous organisations are under significant pressure from members of their community (and their Board) to deliver service responses specifically to individuals and families experiencing family violence. Information provided to the Task Force confirms that action has already been taken in some instances by Departments to allocate funding which specifically addresses family violence in Indigenous communities.

The Task Force is aware that in 2001 the Department of Human Services undertook an evaluation of the Victorian Healthstreams Program. In the Final Report of the Victorian Rural Human Services Strategy—Healthstreams Evaluation (March 2002), the following comments were made:

The role of the small rural hospital has changed over the course of several decades. Significant developments have been made in technology, clinical practice and improved communication and transport. Notwithstanding these important changes, the most significant change has been in the community's expectation of, and demands on, their health services.

The Healthstreams Program has been one of a number of policy responses from government to meet the emerging challenges. Healthstreams is characterised by the capacity of health care agencies to develop a broader and more appropriate range of services that better meet the health care needs of the local community by more flexibly applying funds that had hitherto being provided for discreet/segmented areas of service provision. The Healthstreams Program is unique to Victoria but shares many common characteristics with the Multi-Purpose Services (MPS) Program<sup>1</sup>.

The primary objectives of the Healthstreams Program are:

- Increased consolidation and flexibility of program funding to promote a greater degree of flexibility in health care services provided to the community.
- Increased community involvement, evaluation and feedback to promote a greater sense of ownership and loyalty to local health services and agencies.
- Increased planning for health pathways to provide better personal experience of health services used by clients and health outcomes for clients.
- Increased role in range of primary care programs to increase the number of health needs that are addressed in the community setting without requiring hospital admission.
- Increased preventive health and health promotion activities to decrease the incidence and prevalence of ill health in rural Victoria.
- Increased sustainability of participating agencies, to maintain and increase a core of relevant services to meet community need.
- Increased effectiveness in reporting and accountability requirements for participating agencies, to monitor and evaluate health service delivery.<sup>2</sup>

The Task force understand that the Department of Human Services released a discussion paper, Small Rural Health Providers: New service & Funding Approach (April 2002) which "provided a conceptual basis on which the future development of a model for small rural health and community services providers may be based. Specifically, the paper identifies:

- The principles on which a model should be based.
- A rationale to change to the current model.
  - Agencies that maybe incorporated into a new model.
- An outline of different potential models with accompanying advantages and disadvantages of each model.
- Key implementation issues for each model".<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2: Intervention Map**

At this point in time, the Task Force was not in a position to reach an informed conclusion about what specific changes should be implemented by Government (State or Commonwealth) to strengthen existing policies, programs or funding allocations made to build up the capacity of Indigenous or mainstream services to deal with family violence issues. It is clear to the Task Force that more information is required before appropriate action can be taken by Government to adjust existing or develop new policies, programs and initiatives which seek to address family violence in Indigenous communities.

The Task Force would like to emphasise that financial support must be provided to:

- Identify key strengths, weaknesses and gaps with existing service provision in relation to family violence service responses;
- Upgrade and/or further develop the skills and competencies of staff; and
- Update existing policies, procedures and work practices of management and staff.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 22

*That research is conducted into the current status of Indigenous service providers with a view to identifying the current strengths, weaknesses and service gaps relating to family violence service responses.*



## STRENGTHENING MAINSTREAM SERVICES

### CULTURAL AWARENESS AND SECURITY

Changing workplace culture is about ensuring that workplaces are aware of their capacity to isolate and overwhelm Indigenous recruits and that policies, programs and guidelines are developed to counter these effects. To attract and retain Indigenous people to family violence related positions within Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, service providers must be committed to the implementation of initiatives that reflect an appreciation of:

- Victorian Indigenous culture and history;
- The importance of family and community obligations;
- The impact of past policies and related affects on contemporary society;
- The relationship between personal experiences of individuals, families and communities and the impact these have on the attitudes, behaviours and problems of Indigenous people who require assistance, support and services today; and
- The diversity of the Victorian Indigenous community.

Such programs should include formal and informal interchanges of staff between mainstream and Indigenous Community Organisations and Indigenous Cross Cultural Awareness Programs.

These programs are a particularly effective mechanism for creating an improved understanding by non-Indigenous people of the issues that are important to Indigenous people and their communities.

They can assist organisations to improve communication with Indigenous people through:

- Understanding systemic disadvantage that has resulted from the dispossession of Aboriginal land and culture;
- Countering stereotyping and perceptions individuals may have acquired because they have never had any direct contact or first hand experience with Indigenous people;
- Changing participants outlooks on the significance of cultural diversity and the strengths diversity can create in a community from a social and/or economic perspective;
- Promoting a greater understanding of the richness of Aboriginal cultural heritage as it is today;
- Improving the delivery of programs and services to Indigenous communities; and
- Seeking opportunities for Indigenous people to contribute to education, training and employment programs within mainstream and Indigenous services organisations and agencies.

A number of cross cultural awareness programs are currently being delivered in Victoria to address the need to change workplace culture and understanding. The Task Force strongly encourages the establishment of Cross Cultural Awareness programs in all organisations, and where required, the expansion of existing programs to target the broadest range possible of non-Indigenous staff.

This issue has presented quite frequently during the Statewide Information Sessions and also during the first round of preliminary consultations. The Task Force has identified that it is not safe to assume that all Indigenous people wish to access services attached to Indigenous organisations, with many individuals identifying that they would prefer to have their issues dealt with by mainstream services in ensuring confidentiality.

This statement does not infer that Indigenous services do not enforce confidentiality practices, however, the Task Force is concerned with the relationship of clients to family members who are staff of Indigenous organisations. Many Indigenous people have identified that they would access mainstream services to alleviate any pressure upon the involvement of extended family members by keeping the matter confidential, but are concerned that there is a lack of Indigenous workers within mainstream services.

This matter highlighted the need for cultural training for mainstream service providers in dealing with Indigenous families, but more importantly the recruitment of Indigenous professionals to mainstream organisations. The Indigenous community also identified the need for cultural training to be relevant to the cultural systems of the local community.

*"Indigenous people are reluctant to utilise mainstream family violence services"*

More importantly, Indigenous people should have the right to choose which services they engage, hence the need for cultural awareness programs within mainstream agencies.



### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 23

*That specific cultural awareness programs about Indigenous Family Violence issues be developed and attended by staff of mainstream services who have contact with Indigenous victims of family violence, including staff at the Family Court, Police, Corrections Officers, sexual assault workers and counsellors.*

#### References

- 1 The MPS Model is a joint Commonwealth and State Government initiative that commenced in 1993. It was developed in response to the convergence of views that the traditional means of delivering services through hospitals was no longer appropriate in all cases and a more responsive and flexible model needed to be put in place, especially for more rural remote communities.
- 2 Victorian Rural Human Services Strategy—Healthstreams Evaluation Final Report, March 2002, KPMG Consulting Australia. Pg 1.
- 3 Victorian Rural Human Services Strategy – Small Rural Health Providers: New service & funding approach Discussion paper, April 2002. KPMG Consulting Australia. Pg 1.

## JOINING UP SERVICE RESPONSES

### ATSIC FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICE (FVPLS)

In 1998, ATSIC commenced funding to establish Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) across Australia. The aim of these services is to find solutions to family violence in Indigenous families and communities by providing culturally appropriate advice and information to assist Indigenous people in need of assistance. Each service operates within a Service model designed to meet the different needs of Indigenous clients in the communities and geographic areas they are intended to service.

The Task Force were advised that where these services have been established in other States/Territories they have made a significant difference to the levels of and attitudes towards domestic violence in their communities. Although they are a crisis service their prevention impact appears to have been significant and worthy of consideration as a model for Victoria.

FVPLSs established in other states appear to have achieved a high level of credibility within a relatively small space of time. These services also appear to be extremely cost efficient with each operating annual budgets of between \$280–320,000 and servicing between 300–700 clients per year.

The Task Force understand that the range of services provided by individual FVPLSs includes:

- Legal advice and representation
- Victims Support
- Mediation/Dispute Resolution
- Education and information programs for families
- Assistance with debt management and material aid
- Outreach Education
- Court Support

The Task Force note that while each service has its commonalities, each service operates, is auspiced and governed quite differently in each State/Territory, there are a number of issues that are relevant to all services. These include:

- Governance—Governance models, Indigenous representation, Gender, Conflict of Interest
  - Self Governance, non-Indigenous legal service or Indigenous organisations which have a greater or lesser involvement and interest in the service
- Operations—Management, Staffing Profile and Roles, Training and Supervision, Holistic Service Delivery, ATSIC Framework
- Client Service Delivery—Sexual Assault Services, Non-Indigenous Clients, Access to Material Aid
- Other Issues—Advocacy/Bridging role, Critical Relationships

The Task Force were advised that these services are accountable to the Indigenous community either through direct governance arrangements or through effective advisory structures that have the power to raise concerns and provide input into strategic directions. They were also advised that:

- Given the nature of family violence the majority of clients in FVPLS in other States/Territories have been women and children.
- If the services provided are not relevant or attractive to women, they will fail in their aim to support those affected by family violence.
- Women are seen as being central to governance and staffing.
- Each service has resources for a solicitor and that the solicitors position is seen as being vital in ensuring victims of family violence have adequate representation in court proceedings. Without this service victims are in an unequal relationship with perpetrators who are often represented by Aboriginal Legal Services.
- The employment of Indigenous staff is seen as being essential and that staff receive support to develop skills and competencies on the job.

### **VICTORIAN FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICE (VFPVPLS)**

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS) is a statewide Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation whose objectives are to:

- Provide immediate and culturally-appropriate assistance to victims of family violence;
- Reduce the incidence of violence and abuse in communities through community education and advocacy; and
- Facilitate long-term solutions to family violence and abuse in communities.

As at June 2003 the Victorian FVPLS have employed an Executive Officer, Office Finance Manager and a Community Legal Education Coordinator. The Unit will shortly advertise a Principal Solicitor position and seek Expressions of Interest to engage a consultant to develop the Unit's strategic plan.

As at July 2003:

- The Council Against Sexual Assault and Elizabeth Hoffman House coordinated, developed and delivered a 3 day training program held from 22-24 July, 2003, designed to meet the needs of Indigenous workers responding to sexual assault and family violence issues in the Indigenous community.
- Coordination of an exhibition of Indigenous women's artwork at the Queen Victoria Centre in Melbourne.
- Convened a Statewide Indigenous Forum on sexual assault for community members.
- Completed a research project to make recommendations to the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force on the feasibility of establishing a 1800 number service for victims of Indigenous Family Violence.
- Strategic plan to focus on information, support, referral, counselling and education services to victims of family violence.

### **FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICE**

#### **Critical Issues or Priorities**

- Community education and training
- Improve Access to Legal Representation for Indigenous women and children
- Adequately resourced Indigenous organisations dealing with family violence in Victorian Indigenous communities
- A variety of options for victims
- Broad Indigenous involvement in development of policy impacting on Indigenous communities

#### **Solutions**

- Development and delivery of appropriate education and training packages for Victorian Indigenous communities
- Adequately resourced legal service for women and children
- Partnerships with existing Indigenous and mainstream services
- Co-ordinated approach

#### **KEY STATEMENT**

*The FVPLS operates from the premise that a proactive approach is the most effective way to eliminate family violence within Indigenous communities. The FVPLS has developed innovative initiatives including various community education and training programs aimed at building the capacity of Indigenous communities to deal with this issue through the long term for systemic change.*

## REFLECTIONS BY THE TASK FORCE

Task Force members understand that family violence is a very complex issue and that it will be many years before there is a significant decrease in the number of family violence incidences occurring in Indigenous communities. The trauma experienced by victims of family violence cuts across many generations—from children to youth to parents, grand parents, uncles, aunts and Elders. The experience of people *who* were part of the Stolen Generation confirms that trans-generational trauma is a reality for many Indigenous people who still bear the scars of what happened to them.

The Task Force would like to acknowledge that the current 'whole of government' process is a new arrangement recently put in place by the Labor Government, and like all new initiatives it will be some time before results and outcomes happen at the 'grass roots' level.

The Task Force were encouraged by the level of commitment and support by Government to engage in direct discussions with Indigenous community leaders as part of its planning and decision-making processes.

**It must be acknowledged that this is the first time a Government has provided direct support to Indigenous communities to actively participate in Government processes that focus specifically on addressing the critical factors of Indigenous family violence before a comprehensive more detailed Strategy is developed or implemented.**

The Task Force acknowledges that the Government will need to set aside additional money in its budget each year to support programs and activities implemented under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. They also understand that it is not feasible to expect the Government to find all of the funds needed at one time as sustainable outcomes will require ongoing support over an extended period of time. For example—it may take 12 to 18 months to set up a program/activity in a community/region and an additional 3 to 5 years may be required to run the program/activity before changes in attitude and behaviour occur.

The Task Force also acknowledge that the main priority is to have Indigenous Counsellors in place and that to be qualified takes a minimum of five years. The Task Force have agreed to the 'whole of government' response to be finalised in mid 2004.

Ongoing programs will also need to be put in place to address specific issues related to family violence—such as men's behaviour programs, activities to support women, children, youth, men and Elders, etc. Why? Because a significant majority of Indigenous people and their families live on the poverty line and do not have the financial capacity to participate or engage in activities. It is also critical to note that ongoing support be provided as 'quick fix' solutions do not address the underlying issues which must be addressed as part of a 'whole of government' approach to this issue.

## DEPARTMENTAL INFORMATION

The following information has been provided by Government Departments as a status report of current programs. A full Government response will be provided in mid 2004.

### INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR VICTORIAN COMMUNITIES

#### OFFICE OF WOMEN'S POLICY

##### THE VICTORIAN WOMEN'S SAFETY STRATEGY

**The *Women's Safety Strategy* was launched by the Victorian Government in October 2002. It provides all Ministers and Government Departments with a single policy framework to coordinate responses to violence against women and ensure that they are driven by a shared set of principles and directions. The Strategy facilitates joined-up approaches within Government and a partnership approach with community-based agencies.**

The *Women's Safety Strategy* aims to reduce the level, and fear, of violence against women in Victoria. This co-ordinated approach reflects international best practice in improving women's safety. It is the first comprehensive strategy on violence against women by a Victorian Government for 16 years.

The *Women's Safety Strategy* will be informed by the outcomes of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy, recognising the Government has a role to play in developing a co-ordinated policy and program framework to support the development and implementation of holistic local community-driven responses.

Implementation of the *Women's Safety Strategy* is being driven by three Statewide Steering Committees which bring together Government and community stakeholders.

The **Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence** was jointly convened in August 2002 by Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy.

The **Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault** was jointly convened in June 2003 by Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy.

The **Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Violence Against Women in the Workplace** convened for the first time in June 2003.

A key component of the *Women's Safety Strategy* is the development of an integrated multi-agency approach to family violence. The Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV) is progressing this initiative.

To ensure that the work of the Steering Committee is cognisant and works in partnership with the work of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force, the membership of the Steering Committee includes the chair of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force.

#### THE AIM OF THE STATEWIDE STEERING COMMITTEE TO REDUCE FAMILY VIOLENCE IS TO:

To improve the effectiveness of responses to family violence, including the development of a more integrated multi-agency approach to family violence.

**DEFINITION:**

Family violence includes violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. This encompasses not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, property damage, social isolation and behaviour which causes a person to live in fear.

While child abuse and family violence are generally considered separately, it is important to acknowledge the inter-relationship between family violence and child abuse and that there are many benefits of these sectors working more closely together. Child abuse and family violence often co-exist, with violence being directed towards both women and children. It is also a form of psychological child abuse, if a child hears or witness's violence directed towards their mother or a sibling, even if that child is not a primary victim.

Family violence is predominantly, but not exclusively, perpetrated by men against women and children. However, family violence can be perpetrated by any member of a family against any other member. Violence can occur in any kind of relationship, including lesbian, gay and transgendered relationships and against people who are elderly or disabled.

**KEY ASPECTS OF THE WORK OF THE STATEWIDE STEERING COMMITTEE TO DATE HAVE INCLUDED:****Development of a Best Practice Framework**

The Committee has developed a draft Best Practice Framework to progress an integrated response to family violence in Victoria. The Framework articulates that the emphasis must be on ensuring an overall "systems" response that gives priority to the safety of women, young people and children. An appropriate legal framework, prevention and education activities, early intervention, and timely and appropriate responses from police, courts and specialist services must all be in place to reduce family violence. It is anticipated that the Best Practice Framework will be finalised by July 2004.

The development of the Best Practice Framework is underpinned by the principles that outlined that responses to family violence should take into account the needs and experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and communities, including Indigenous women.

Two subcommittees have been formed to progress key elements of the work:

**Community and Professional Education Subcommittee**

This subcommittee was formed to explore ways to improve professional and community education in the area of family violence. The sub-committee is monitoring a project being undertaken to:

- Conduct an audit of professional education and training undertaken by key occupational groups around Victoria
- Identify key gaps in existing family violence education and training.
- As part of the mapping project a literature review is being undertaken to determine the elements of high quality training in the family violence field.

**Children and Young People Subcommittee**

The subcommittee will provide advice to the Statewide Steering Committee on issues facing children and young people, that include:

- Clarification of the relationship, roles and responsibilities between Child Protection and family violence services;
- Improving responses to young people as witnesses and victims of family violence;
- Potential roles that schools and other educational institutions could and should play in preventing family violence; and
- Supporting children and young people who have experienced and/or witnessed family violence.

### DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS

The work undertaken by the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence is driven by the key partnership between Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy. It ensures that Government and community approaches to family violence will be developed through a joined up approach based on evidence and expertise. Key outcomes of this approach include greater understanding of the roles of agencies in responding to family violence; increased coordination between key sectors, and increased awareness of specific issues that have previously been marginalised or hidden.

### INDIGENOUS WOMEN GOING PLACES: THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC)

The IWGP MAC was established in June 2001 as a means of formal discussion consultation and liaison between Victoria's Indigenous women, their communities and the Victorian Government. The primary role is to provide a conduit of advice from Indigenous women throughout the State to the Minister for Women's Affairs. Specifically it will identify priority issues of concern to Indigenous women and their families and advise Government on these matters to enable appropriate responses (policy, program and services) with the relevant agencies.

To date the MAC has responded to a number of Government initiatives that have includes the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.





## INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The following response was provided to the Task Force by the Department of Education and Training.

Regional Koorie Education Workers, particularly Koorie Education Development Officers and Koorie Home School Liaison Officers work with school communities (Koorie students, their families and schools) to improve educational outcomes for Koorie students.

Low educational outcomes for Koorie students can sometimes be attributed to family violence. Koorie Education workers often see the results of family violence through low attendance and poor engagement which may result in lower levels of literacy and numeracy achievement, directly impacting upon retention rates. In these instances, most of their work focuses around the development of support strategies. This may include referrals of families and students to relevant services, assistance in liaising with schools and facilitating mentoring for students.

Regional Koorie Education Workers ensure they consult Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) when developing strategies to support improved educational outcomes for Koorie students to ensure appropriate input and consultation.

*Wurreker: the Koorie community and TAFE in Victoria in Equal Partnership* does not directly target family violence, but positive employment and social development outcomes have the capacity to reduce its incidence.

A Koorie Education and training Cross Sector Taskforce committee has been recently established and is chaired by the President of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and the Director of the Office of Portfolio Integration, Department of Education and Training.

The Taskforce comprises of VAEAI members and senior members of the Departments for Victorian Communities and Human Services.

The committee does not directly target family violence issues, but these issues may be addressed as the work of the committee progresses.

## PROGRESS TOWARDS OUTCOMES

PROGRAM TITLE	PROGRESS
Koorie Education Development Officers	760 schools indicated they delivered curriculum with an Indigenous perspective in 2002.
Koorie Home School Liaison Officers	Attendance data is collected from targeted schools (pre and post intervention). 2003 is the first year of full implementation therefore data will not be available until March 2004
<i>Wurreker: The Koorie Community and TAFE in Victoria in Equal Partnership</i> (description in policy section)	<i>Wurreker</i> is being implemented by the Office of Training and Tertiary Education in partnership with VAEAI. Eight <i>Wurreker</i> Regional Committees have been established (in each of VAEAI's eight regions) chaired by LAECGs and with representation from local training providers and employers. These Committees influence planning and delivery of training for Koories.
Koorie Education and Training Cross Sector Taskforce committee	The committee has met once and details as to the exact nature of issues to be addressed by the Taskforce have not been made clear to date.

## IDENTIFIED GAPS AND/OR LIMITATIONS IN DELIVERING SERVICES TO THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

ISSUE	CURRENT PLANNING
<p><b>Koorie Education Development Officers and Koorie Home School Liaison Officers</b></p> <p>Relative dispersal of Koorie students (and therefore families) across a large number of schools can result in difficulties in servicing students (and their families). For instance in 2002 there were approximately 5955.1 Koorie student enrolments across 980 schools.</p>	<p>Establishment of Koorie Home School Liaison Officers will assist in providing support to targeted schools.</p> <p>Improved coordination with mainstream DE&amp;T programs ensures Koorie education is viewed as a shared responsibility. As such it is envisaged that Koorie students will be able to access a range of program/initiatives that support improved educational outcomes.</p>
<p><b><i>Wurreker: The Koorie Community and TAFE in Victoria Equal Partnership</i></b></p> <p>In some areas the community's capacity to participate confidently and effectively will benefit from further development.</p>	<p>Community capacity building project to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with LAECGs to build their business, influencing, negotiating and meeting skills.</li> <li>• Develop protocols and processes to provide guidance to Koorie community members on participating in decision-making bodies.</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable LAECGs to build on their role as representatives of their communities through developing appropriate processes for community consultation on education and training issues.</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure LAECG members can have access to the tools and facilities required to operate effectively within their communities and at a level where they can meet administrative and reporting requirements.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>The project includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Development Programs to meet community needs, identified through consultation with LAECGs.</li> <li>• Annual conferences to capture and share the learnings gained through participation, both specifically in Wurreker and more broadly in arenas affecting the community.</li> <li>• Participation in the development of protocols and ethical processes to support effective decision-making.</li> </ul>

## INDIGENOUS PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE DEBRIEFING AND COUNSELLING TO SUPPORT WORKERS

Support is available to workers on a needs basis through funded counselling. In addition, the Koorie Education Strategy Team, within the Office of School Education, convenes four in-services a year for workers to provide professional development, support (including peer support) and assistance.

## ONGOING TRAINING AND SUPPORT FACTORED INTO FUNDING COMPONENTS TO INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS

The Office of School Education has a Service Agreement with the VAEA for the provision of education program and policy advice and the delivery of a mentor program. While training and support is not an identified funding item within this service agreement, opportunities exist for the provision of such assistance through the funded operation (including administration) component of the Service Agreement.

### **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

Continued support will be provided to regional Koorie Education Workers so they are able to assist Koorie students, their families and school communities in achieving improved educational outcomes.

The learnings and outcomes from the current community capacity building project led by Wurreker will influence the project's future developments.

Developing innovative strategies and initiatives aimed at improving student learning and employment outcomes for Koorie children, young people and adults will be the role of the Koorie Education and Training Cross Sector Taskforce committee.

The Taskforce will support integrated action on key educational issues affecting Koories. Integrated and 'whole of government' approaches will be used to improve the educational and employment outcomes of Koories, where issues such as family violence may be addressed. This Taskforce could therefore be useful in providing comment and advice on the detrimental educational impacts resulting from family violence.

### **PROCESSES USED WHEN CONSULTING THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN DEVELOPING NEW PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES**

The State Government and VAEAI have a partnership arrangement regarding Koorie education issues as evidenced by *Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium*. Yalca places the Koorie student at the centre of education policy and decision making and acknowledges that local Koorie communities through LAECGs are best able to determine local education and training needs. As such the VAEAI are presented on all committees relating to Koorie education initiatives, this includes chairing the Koorie Education Central Implementation Committee (monitoring School specific Koorie Education initiatives) and the Koorie Open Door Education Taskforce.

The Office of Training and Tertiary Education works in partnership with the VAEAI and they are the key advisory body to the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission on Koorie issues in VET. An annual performance agreement sets out the strategic policy and planning advice to be provided by VAEAI and a schedule of milestone dates. VAEAI has appropriate consultative structures in place for Victorian Koorie communities: Committee of Management, LAECGs, Wurreker Regional Committees.

### **DEPARTMENTAL POLICY RELATING TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE**

#### **Name of Policy**

*Yalca:* *A Partnership in Education and training for the New Millennium*

*Wurreker:* *The Koorie Community and TAFE in Victoria in Equal Partnership*  
Koorie Education Strategic Plan 2001-2004

#### **AIM:**

*Yalca* aims to ensure involvement of Koorie people in education decision making through a partnership between the State Government and VAEAI.

*Wurreker:* The Koorie Community and TAFE in Victoria in Equal Partnership is based on the belief that 'Involvement at all levels of decision-making is critical to increasing Koorie participation and outcomes in the education process and the subsequent social and economic development of Koorie communities.' (Wurreker 2000 p.3)

The Koorie Education Strategic Plan aims to build upon past initiatives and create further opportunities for successful outcomes in Koorie education in Victoria.

## DESCRIPTION:

As stated earlier, the State Government and the VAEAI has a partnership arrangement regarding Koorie education issues as evidenced by *Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium*. *Yalca* places the Koorie student at the centre of education policy and decision making and acknowledges that local Koorie communities through LAECGs are best able to determine local education and training needs.

VAEAI and the Office of Training and Tertiary Education have had a joint partnership since 1990 under the Partnership in Education: Koorie Education Policy (Koorie 2000 and *Yalca*). The partnership formed the foundation of a sound working relationship between the two organisations.

*Wurreker* is the outcome of extensive consultations across Victoria, which highlighted the need for:

- Greater involvement of Koories at all levels of decision-making in TAFE;
- A 'whole of government' approach when planning for Koorie training;
- Formal processes for gathering regional advice on Koorie training needs;
- New systems/processes for allocating resources to achieve better outcomes; and
- Training and further education that supports self determination, Koorie culture and identity, Koorie community development and the development of individual Koorie participants in training.

*Wurreker* supports these key principles and aims to improve completion rates, employment outcomes and Koorie community and social development through better planning and delivery of vocational education and training for Koorie communities in Victoria.

The Koorie Education Strategic Plan 2001-2004 was developed between the VAEAI and the Office of School Education. The Plan aims to build upon past initiatives and create further opportunities for successful outcomes in Koorie Education in Victoria. It reflects a continued partnership between VAEAI and DE&T, a continued focus on the schooling sector through the Koorie Education Strategy Team, including the Koorie Education Development Officers, and a Government commitment to social justice, Reconciliation and a 'whole of government' approach to Aboriginal Affairs. The Plan also lists strategies to achieve improved outcomes in Koorie education and related monitoring processes.

## OUTCOMES

### Office of School Education

- Enhanced involvement of Koorie people in education and decision making
- Improved educational outcomes for Koorie students
- Increased knowledge and understanding of Indigenous issues for all students

### Office of Training and Tertiary Education—Since July 2002

- Information sessions have been held in each of VAEAI's eight regions for:
  - Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups;
  - Koorie community organisations; and
  - Stakeholders including employers and education providers
- Eight *Wurreker* Regional Committees have been established
- Regional Brokers have been appointed for each of the eight regions. Brokers act as conduits between key stakeholders in their region
- Regional training plans have been developed by each of the eight committees. These plans have influenced the development of the Priority Education and Training Purchasing Schedule for 2004.

### Timelines

- *Yalca*: ongoing
- *Wurreker*: 2002/3 to 2004/5
- Koorie Education Strategic Plan operates for the 2001-2004 period

## INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

### FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES AND PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY THE NETWORK OF REGIONAL ABORIGINAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee Network (the RAJAC Network) is the Justice Portfolio's key partner in the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (the Agreement). Along with State Government representatives, the Network includes members from state-wide advocacy groups and primary local service providers.

Koori members of the Aboriginal Justice Forum, as reiterated at a workshop in September 2003, are of the view that the RAJAC plans provide the framework for addressing Koori disadvantage. The same plans are also providing a pathway for improved justice outcomes. Part of this approach acknowledges the need for communities and government to engage actively on a strategic and holistic basis.

A common theme identified in each of the Regional Plans is the role that Indigenous culture plays in reducing family violence and strengthening families:

- **The Grampians RAJAC** identified the break down of culture and the weakening of family and kinship ties.
- **The Gippsland RAJAC** outlines the direct correlation between high quality service delivery by community organisations and improved outcomes.
- **The Barwon South West RAJAC** identified the nexus between family breakdown and child protection as a core issue.
- **The Loddon-Mallee RAJAC** Plan highlights the relationship between the loss of culture and the increased levels of family violence and abuse.
- **The draft Metropolitan RAJAC Plan** indicates that an absence of proactive family education services for Koori families can have an adverse impact on family violence rates.

The following initiatives relating to family violence were identified in the Regional Plans:

- **Grampians**—Reference is made to the facilitation of Extended Family Seminars in Ballarat, Halls Gap, and Horsham. This will seek to provide opportunities for family groups to learn about strengthening families, experience cultural awareness activities and promote cultural re-connection. The seminars should provide a safe environment in which to explore the issue of families taking responsibility for their actions, as well as identifying and providing additional support and resources.
- **Gippsland**—The RAJAC is promoting community organisations to take a lead role in working with mainstream agencies to support families. An Indigenous Family Violence Reference Group will be established to participate in the Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Redevelopment Framework.
- **Barwon South West**—The RAJAC is seeking Commonwealth and State departments and agencies to come together to discuss the development of integrated action plans. Such plans are anticipated to address issues associated with alcohol, substance misuse, youth literacy, race relations, intra-community relations, family violence, child protection, transient housing, health and culture.
- **Loddon Mallee**—Reference is made to the development of locally based cultural mentoring and role model programs to promote family kinship and connection to land, culture and community.
- **Melbourne Metropolitan**—The convening of ongoing education forums targeting family and communities on family issues is viewed as a priority. The RAJAC is committed to working with a range of mainstream and community providers with the objective of decreasing the occurrence of family violence and to strengthen families

## RESPONDING TO THE KEY THEMES AS IDENTIFIED BY THE KOORI COMMUNITY

The following responses are based on the themes, as identified at the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Forum, held in March 2003:

### THEME ONE: PRE AND POST RELEASE PROGRAMS FOR PRISONERS

The following response is provided by Corrections Victoria:

**Aboriginal Well Being Officers and Indigenous Community Corrections Officers** play an important role in preparing prisoners for release and providing support to those released on parole.

- **Aboriginal Well Being Officers**—Five full time Aboriginal Well Being Officers are employed to provide advocacy and support for Indigenous prisoners across all Victorian prisons. This role includes establishing links with community organisations and preparing prisoners for release.
- **Indigenous Community Corrections Officers**—Six Indigenous Community Corrections Officers (ICCOs) were recruited to key locations through the State in August/September 2003. These Officers play a role in the supervision of Koori offenders on community orders, including those released on parole. They also play a key role in developing links and relationships with community organisations.

**Pre & Post Release programs** have been piloted, or are under development, focusing on various aspects of release preparation and post release support. These include:

- **Employment Pilot Program**—This is a voluntary intensive employment assistance program designed to help prisoners and offenders find and keep work. The program includes individual vocational training and advice, job search and placement services, follow up and support activities, and facilitating increased career options.
- Prisoners are eligible for the program up to 6 months prior to and 12 months after release. Offenders on Community Based Orders are eligible during their order and up to 12 months after the order is completed. Employers are encouraged to view the program as a benefit for both themselves and the participants.
- A post-release housing pilot is a joint initiative of Corrections Victoria and the Office of Housing. The program provides short-term accommodation and support for up to 6 months following release from prison. The program currently targets sentenced prisoners at Port Phillip Prison, Fulham Correctional Centre and Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. All Koori prisoners are assessed for their suitability, in recognition of their high rates of homelessness.

**The Corrections Indigenous Employment, Education and Training Strategy** is currently being developed and aims to reduce the high levels of re-offending rates of Koori prisoners and offenders through improving and increasing education and employment options. The Strategy will have the following objectives:

- In partnership with the Koori community and across Government to develop a strategy that improves access to, and quality of, education and training for Indigenous offenders and prisoners within the correctional setting and improves employment outcomes;
- To integrate existing education and training initiatives and strategies and develop viable pathways to employment for Koori offenders and prisoners;
- To identify and seek funding for implementation of the Strategy; and
- To investigate effective approaches to identifying and meeting offenders and prisoners education, training and employment needs and identify best practice applicable to the Victorian Correctional service system.

## THEME TWO: CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM RESPONSE

The following response is provided by Legal & Equity, Department of Justice.

**Family Violence Court**—The Attorney-General, the Hon. Rob Hulls MP, committed in November 2002, \$5.2 million to establish and operate Victoria's first Family Violence Division of the Magistrates' Court. The creation of the Family Violence division of the Magistrates' Court will build upon current initiatives across Government to facilitate better integration of criminal justice and service systems and a coordinated response to family violence.

The Family Violence Division of the Magistrates' Court will also seek to ensure that members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities affected by family violence will not face bias or discrimination in accessing justice through the court. The Family Violence Division of the Magistrates' Court will be informed also, by the recommendations of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force on whether the court is an appropriate model for the Indigenous community.

The Family Violence Court will also institute community education awareness campaigns to position the project within the wider community.

**Family Violence Men's Behaviour Change Pilot Program**—A four-year pilot program targeting men subject to intervention orders for family violence has been established. The pilot aims to enhance the safety of women and children through the provision of men's behaviour change programs.

A male subject to an intervention order under Section 5(1)(g) of the Crimes Family Violence Act 1987 can be directed to attend men's behaviour change programs, subject to eligibility criteria. The project will utilise this legislation and establish a pilot men's behaviour change program in both metropolitan and regional Victorian locations in line with best practice standards. Services will also be made available to women and children who have been affected by men's violence.

The project will be complemented by the Women's Safety Strategy, which has been developed to address violence against women in Victoria in the next five years. It will also be closely linked to other related Government initiatives on family violence, such as the Family Violence Court, and liaise with the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence which has responsibility for the development of an integrated response to family violence in Victoria.

The program will need to ensure that it is an appropriate model for the Indigenous community and that services delivered to Indigenous offenders are delivered in a culturally responsive way.

**Koori Magistrates' Courts**—As agreed with the Koori community, the Koori Division of the Magistrates' Court, presently operational in Shepparton and Broadmeadows, is currently excluded from hearing any Family Violence or Sexual Assault Matters. However, continuing consultations will occur with the respective communities on this coverage. In developing the Koori Courts', community representatives were strongly of the view that to include family violence in the early stages of the Courts' operation could compromise a successful implementation.

## THEME THREE: VICTORIA POLICE RESPONSE TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

The following response is provided by Victoria Police:

The following comments are provided in response to a survey undertaken by the Indigenous Family Violence Interdepartmental Working Group as part of an across-government mapping initiative.

Chapter 12 of the Victoria Police Operating Procedures Manual sets out the instructions and guidelines for Police when attending incidents of family violence. This policy is a generalist policy and it is applicable to any Victorian who seeks Police assistance. Furthermore, Police are instructed to make referrals to appropriate local services, which may include Indigenous specific or mainstream services. It is the view of Victoria Police that individuals have, and should maintain, the right to use either Indigenous specific or mainstream services. The choice should remain theirs.

Together with findings of the Victoria Police Violence Against Women **Strategy: A Way Forward**, in the context of an across-government and across-community setting, Police are working toward ensuring their response to family violence best fits the needs of Victoria's diverse community. For the Indigenous community, this means while ensuring the safety of the aggrieved family member(s) is paramount, there is also the need to make certain their response is as sensitive as possible to all parties' particular needs and circumstances. This process will include linking those involved to appropriate localised strategies where established within particular Indigenous communities.

**Activities Conducted by Victoria Police Specific to the Indigenous Community**—Current membership of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Working Group. Current membership of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, co-chaired by Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy, Department for Victorian Communities.

**Strategic Framework for Working with Indigenous Communities**—The Victoria Police Aboriginal Policy Reference Group (VPAPRG) is currently developing a strategic framework to provide a structure with which Victoria Police can further focus its efforts on developing closer relationships and partnerships with the Indigenous community of Victoria. VPAPRG's membership has representation across the major peak Indigenous organisations. Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody, the process of reconciliation and strategies of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement inform this strategic framework. The overall aim of this process is to improving justice outcomes for Indigenous Victorians.

**Aboriginal Community Justice Panels**—The Program was established over 15 years ago in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The role of the Panels is to liaise between the Indigenous community and Victoria Police when an Indigenous person is taken into custody. The Panel could assist that person throughout the judicial process. Panel members are volunteers (who do not currently undertake any formal training to cope with family violence or other difficult situations). However, Panel members are encouraged, through liaison with Police, to develop strategies for responding to any problems such as family violence and youth issues etc.

**Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers**—Victoria Police has developed portfolio positions for the Liaison Officers at Police stations in all areas where there are significant numbers of Indigenous people residing. Their role is to facilitate effective communication between Police and Indigenous people.

**Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLO)**—In discussion with the Koori Community, Victoria Police is currently considering the establishment of ACLOs across Victoria to help facilitate the further development of trust and respect, and improve understanding through better communication and the achievement of common goals. It is anticipated that the appointment of the ACLOs will increase the number of Indigenous people working within Victoria Police and support the existing structures and programs such as the ACJP. It is anticipated that the ACLOs will assist operational Police by facilitating effective linkages to appropriate and localised Indigenous networks and services.

**Local Initiatives and Local Priority Policing**—In line with the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, regular Victorian Police/Aboriginal meetings are being developed in areas where significant Indigenous communities exist. The PALOs and ACLOs will help facilitate these meetings.



## **INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

### **INDIGENOUS/FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE RESPONSES**

The following information has been compiled by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide an overview of policies and programs that target Indigenous communities and/or specifically address family violence.

It should be noted that the majority of initiatives are undertaken within the context of the Department of Human Services Aboriginal Human Services Plan. Other relevant references include the DHS Indigenous Whole of Government Report provided to AAV by DHS in August 2003 and the Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report November 1999-October 2002.

### **DHS ABORIGINAL SERVICES PLAN**

The overall aim of the Plan is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people, but more specifically to achieve a demonstrable reduction in the gap in health and wellbeing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people by:

- Understanding the factors contributing to the gap
- Maximising the use of primary and secondary services
- Minimising the representation of Aboriginal people in identified secondary and tertiary services.

There is a recognised need to 'talk with, listen and learn from the Aboriginal community about the best way in which we can work together to achieving shared goals. We need to act to improve the lives of children, families and young people and to improve the health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal Victorians.' This will contribute to the goal of achieving partnership in the planning and delivery of more responsive services to Indigenous communities.

## **COMMUNITY CARE FUNDED SERVICES**

### **KOORI EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM (KECEP)**

The Koori Early Childhood Education Program (KECEP) comprises three components:

1. Statewide Coordinator—State Government funded.
2. The Koori Early Childhood Field Officer (KECFO) Program—State Government funded.
3. The Koori PreSchool Assistants (KPSA) Program—Commonwealth Government funded.

KECEP was reviewed in 2002 to address concerns about participation rates of Indigenous children in preschool programs. The review endorsed the value of the programs and generated a number of recommendations relating to realignment of the programs to build the capacity of these programs through training and resource development.

The review also found that despite limitation with the data, preschool participation rates of Indigenous children is significantly below that of non-Indigenous children. In 2002, approximately 61.4% of Indigenous children were enrolled in preschool programs compared to the total of 96.4% of all eligible children. This is cause for concern, particularly in metropolitan areas, where participation rates are even lower than in rural regions.

It is acknowledged that there are many complex and interrelated factors that pose a barrier to participation. The KECFO program commenced in 1998 and the positions have continued to be extended for periods of six and twelve months since that time. Approximately \$350,000 recurrent funding is currently provided to Regions for the KECFO program. An additional \$0.29 million over four years (\$40,000 2002-03, \$80,000 in 2003-04 and 2004-05 and \$90,000 in 2005-06) was allocated in the 2002-03 State Budget to support Indigenous preschool participation. The additional funding was allocated to increase preschool participation of Indigenous children by 10% in 2003.

### **INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES UNIT, CHILD PROTECTION AND JUVENILE JUSTICE BRANCH**

The Indigenous Initiatives Unit was set up in Victoria within the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch in 2001, to address the issue of over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection and out-of-home care system.

A new protocol between the Department of Human Services Child Protection Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) was signed in April 2002. This protocol ensures on a consistent statewide basis, a culturally informed, engaged and effective response to Aboriginal children and young people who are notified to the Child Protection Service.

The Victorian child protection and care data shows that Aboriginal children are over-represented in all phases of child protection intervention including investigation, substantiation, court orders and out-of-home care placement. Aboriginal children are placed on protective orders at twice the rate of their non-Aboriginal peers and as a rate per thousand are 13 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children. At the same time Aboriginal children are also over-represented in the rates of re-notifications to child protection, which is generally considered a strong indication of under-intervention by Child Protection services accompanied with a lack of effective engagement with appropriate community support services.

DHS is looking to the partnerships between regional Child Protection Services and the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) to; improve decision-making concerning Aboriginal children and young people who have been notified to Child Protection; improve the engagement of Aboriginal families with relevant support services and; improve the involvement of Aboriginal family and community members in decision-making and care arrangements. Other outcomes may be expected as a result of better engagement and culturally informed decision-making such as a reduction in the rates of notification, re-notification, court orders and out-of-home placement as well as improved compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. The Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service, delivered by the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation in the local area and VACCA for the remainder of the state, was established in October 2002 as the lead initiative in implementing the new protocol.

A key priority is to reduce the number of Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home care. DHS is committed to ensuring that placement in out-of-home care takes place only as a very last resort and in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. Where placement away from the family home is unavoidable, effort needs to be made to ensure that Aboriginal children are placed within the extended family, with a relative, or an Aboriginal family from the local community.

A number of strategies are now being developed to strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal communities and services to care for Aboriginal children.

### **INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND PLACEMENT SERVICES**

The challenge around Child Protection is not unique to Victoria but confronts policy makers nationally and internationally. The Integrated Strategy for Child Protection and Placement Services is the result of extensive Victorian Government research into complex and chronic problems within some families and suggests that intervening earlier to prevent child abuse and neglect is possible.

### Indigenous Investigations 2002-03 by Region & Notifier Category, with Parental Domestic Violence Characteristic

Notifier Category	Total	Barwon-South Western	41
Community Service Organisation	134	Eastern Metropolitan	43
Education	41	Gippsland	113
Family	112	Grampians	26
Government	8	Hume	55
Health Professional	70	Loddon Mallee	165
Other	15	Northern Metropolitan	67
Police	186	Southern Metropolitan	72
Protective Services	37	Statewide Services	22
Unknown	26	Western Metropolitan	25
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>Grant Total</b>	<b>629</b>

### FAMILY SUPPORT INNOVATION PROJECTS

The Innovation Projects entitled 'Supporting Vulnerable Families' are one of several strategies for improving supports and services to families. As of June 2003 eight local government areas have been selected to establish twelve Innovation Projects. Four of these projects are Indigenous projects. These four projects are located in the LGA's of Shepparton, Darebin, East Gippsland and Latrobe.

The projects have two aims:

1. To divert Indigenous families from statutory child protection intervention to community-based services.
2. To minimise the progression of Indigenous children into the child protection system.

The projects facilitate the development of strong networks of local community-based services in order to promote greater collaboration and the delivery of integrated and flexible service responses. These projects will provide sustained and practical family support to maintain the wellbeing and safety of children and young people within the family and community network. Giving vulnerable families the right kind of support at an early stage helps give their children far better life chances.

Early results from the project sites are encouraging. Child Protection notifications across the initial six project locations (in the period July 2002–June 2003) are running at 5.8% below the equivalent period in 2001–02.

### BEST START

As part of the state-wide Best Start initiative several Aboriginal peak organisations, such as VACSAL, VAEAI and VACCHO, have been funded to undertake a research project called 'Giving Aboriginal Children the Best Start in Life'. All Best Start projects in Victoria are required to include Aboriginal representation in the partnership.

Best Start is shifting the focus to identifying children and families with special needs earlier—and offering them community-based support relevant to their specific needs. This is particularly important when it comes to dealing with family violence issues.

### MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHILD AND FAMILY SUPPORT

The Minister for Community Services the Honourable Sherryl Garbutt has established a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Child and Family Support to advise on a broad policy framework for vulnerable children and families.

This committee draws on individuals with appropriate expertise in relevant sectors. It provides advice to the Minister on key pieces of work, including the Public Parenting Report and Child Protection Outcomes, as well as implementation progress on a range of current initiatives.

Ms Muriel Cadd, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), and current chair of SNAICC, chairs this Committee.

### **INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE STRATEGY**

The Indigenous Family Violence Strategy arose from Government recognition that family violence is a significant issue for Indigenous communities. Joint responsibility for development of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy is shared between Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the Department. Funding of \$7.6 million over four years and \$1.9 million ongoing, through Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV), has been allocated to support the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

DHS's role and progress in achieving the key milestones of the Strategy includes:

- Employment of a Statewide Coordinator and nine Regional Indigenous Family Violence Support Officers by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to support the establishment of Regional Action Groups and undertake local consultations to inform the work of the Task Force.
- The development of Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups (RIFVAG) in all regions to develop and implement community based initiatives to address Indigenous Family Violence.

The work of the Task Force will culminate in the delivery of its Final Report to the Government in December 2003. A 'whole of government' response will then be prepared by May 2004 to address issues raised in the Task Force Final Report and to support the development of a 'community led' approach to reduce family violence within the Indigenous community.

### **FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES (FVSS)**

The Family Violence Support Services (FVSS) provide a range of preventative and support services for men, women and children throughout Victoria. This includes individual or group-based support as well as telephone counselling and court support. FVSS funding in the 2003/04 financial year is approximately \$3.3 million. The allocation includes:

- \$900,000 for regional Family Violence Networkers (including the \$500,000 per year over 3 years from the CSF);
- \$875,000 to statewide services and peak bodies;
- \$1.2 million to agencies providing direct services (such as individual counselling and group work to women and children); and
- \$300,000 to provide non-mandated individual and group services to men with a history of violence and abuse towards family members.

Services to women aim to enhance safety, confidence, life skills and independence and include information, education, individual and group support, telephone counselling and referral. The program also provides assistance to women seeking intervention orders through court support, advocacy and referral services.

Services to children and young people aim to break the cycle of violence for children or young people experiencing or recovering from family violence by enhancing their coping skills, self-esteem and the facilitating the development of non-violent life strategies. Services provided include information, education, individual and group support, telephone counselling and referral.

Service to men aim to assist men with a history of violent and abusive behaviour towards family members develop non-abusive behaviours and relationship and parenting skills. Services provided to men may include individual and/or group counselling, telephone counselling and referral and court support. This includes the funding for the Men's Referral Service telephone line.

The program also funds the regional family violence networks in each DHS region to aid the prevention of family violence by raising community awareness, coordinating professional development and training and assisting service coordination and linkages among community agencies.

Further resources are provided to the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre who provide research, resources and coordination and No To Violence, the peak body for men's behaviour change programs.

Whilst there are no Indigenous specific services, family violence support services are open to Indigenous clients. Currently no client data is available to indicate uptake of the service by clients from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

### **THE PROTOCOL RESOURCE GUIDE: A JOINT CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES PROJECT**

A Resource Guide has been developed to support protocols between Child Protection and Family Violence services to promote collaborative practice between the two sectors. The final draft of the protocols has been completed and will be published shortly. The Resource Guide will facilitate local collaboration and address regional practice issues in relation to family violence by the two sectors. Preliminary plans for implementation include the co-ordination of activities to:

- Involve Child Protection workers, family violence workers and other key personnel in the family violence area.
- Emphasise the development of co-operative relationships, through encouraging the establishment, or strengthening, of networks to promote interagency collaboration on family violence issues.
- Highlight the safety and wellbeing of the child as the common client.
- Promote the development of regionally based protocols.
- Improve practice by drawing on research, such as the impact of family violence on children.

### **RESEARCHING RECOVERY FROM FAMILY VIOLENCE PROJECT**

The Community Care Division (Department of Human Services) has undertaken participatory action research to examine the nature of women's recovery from family violence and identify the elements that maximise women's recovery. The final draft of the project has been completed and will be published shortly. The project was funded through the Commonwealth's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) Program.

### **OFFICE OF HOUSING FUNDED SERVICES**

The Office of Housing provides funding of approximately \$15 million in assistance to women and children experiencing family violence, through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The response includes women's refuges and family violence outreach services, statewide telephone information and referral, and agencies providing specialist client and service support, training and resourcing.

### **SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAAP) INCLUDING FAMILY VIOLENCE AND GENERAL CRISIS SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

- In Victoria, there are thirteen Indigenous SAAP funded services in six of the nine DHS regions. They vary from funding for one-worker models to larger multi worker services with multiple funding sources. The majority of these services provide transition support (65 per cent) with the remainder providing crisis support and accommodation (35 per cent).
- In addition, Indigenous people experiencing homelessness access assistance from mainstream SAAP and Transitional Housing Management (THM) services, as well as some specialist providers such as homelessness outreach services for people with a mental illness.

- Nineteen THM's are funded across the state to provide crisis and transitional housing and housing information and referral to people experiencing homelessness, including family violence
- 27 women's refuges and 18 Family Violence Outreach services across Victoria, including Elizabeth Hoffman House (Indigenous specific) and Willaneen Koori Women's Shelter (targeted to Koori women and children experiencing family violence).

In 2001–02, of all support periods provided to Indigenous clients by SAAP agencies, 21.8% were provided from services targeting women escaping family and domestic violence.

### **FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CRISIS PROTECTION FRAMEWORK**

The Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework provides a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of women and children experiencing family and domestic violence and a framework for enhancing service delivery, optimising collaborative planning between Government and non-government sector. It was launched in February 2002. The Framework is being implemented through the following mechanisms:

- **Statewide Implementation Plan**  
A Statewide Implementation Plan will set overarching directions to progress change at the regional level. It will develop the themes of the Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework, the Women's Safety Strategy and the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence.
- **Regional Working Groups**  
These ongoing forums bring family violence agencies and related services such as police together into constructive dialogue. In many instances this has been the first time dialogue has occurred between these key agencies. Maintaining a focus on the needs of mutual clients and the many dilemmas in responding to family violence has led to significant attitudinal shifts, new working relationships and increased referral pathways.
- **Regional Implementation Plans**  
Regional Working Groups are developing Implementation Plans specific to the local context. Key aspects of the plans include service provision that maintains connectedness for women and children and increases diversity of options for accommodation and support.

A complexity in planning for the implementation of the Framework has been the differential levels of readiness amongst Office of Housing funded family violence services across the State to embrace change and forge broader alliances in working with police and courts. Funding of the peak organisation for the sector (Victorian Women's Refuges and Associated Domestic Violence Services) was initiated in 2002 to assist with change management and communication across the system.

### **OUTCOMES:**

#### ***Improved service responses to women and children who have experienced family violence.***

A number of service innovations have developed since the launch of the Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework. Notable examples are:

- Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service (EDVOS) has allocated a specific worker to support women to remain safely in their home following family violence and to work with the Magistrates' Court to facilitate this. Eighty women and their children have avoided homelessness by being supported to maintain their existing housing while accessing legal protection and removal of their violent partner through an exclusion order. Only one woman has requested support to access alternative accommodation due to concerns for her safety.
- South East Family Violence Crisis Service recently commenced extended hours service delivery, including the co-location of family violence support workers in Narre Warren Police station.

- Middle South Response is in early stages of operation with the co-location of family violence outreach and refuge services with a young women's response providing new opportunities for women to access a wide range of family violence information, support and housing assistance.
- Gippsland Family Violence Service Co-ordination Project provides Police with 24 hour referral pathways to support options for family members affected by family violence. The project will be evaluated after a 3 month trial but strong support already exists for the continuation and replication of the project.

***Increased service options for women and children who have experienced family violence in their local areas:***

- A Private Rental Brokerage (PRB) program is being trialled in six locations across metropolitan and rural Victoria. The program provides a time limited rental subsidy to women and women with children who are escaping violence and who require housing. The program will assist an average of 340 women per year and in three locations is being delivered in conjunction with an enhanced specialist housing capacity, through the Victorian Homelessness Strategy Family Violence Pilot.

***Improved pathways and linkages between services.***

- Regional Working Groups have led to the formation of new and strengthened working relationships between family violence services, Police, courts and family violence prevention agencies.

***Increased collaboration between Government and non-government agencies in identifying and addressing needs and issues in relation to the provision of family violence services.***

- Regional Working Groups bring together family violence support agencies, crisis and transitional housing providers, local government, Police, courts, sexual assault centres, Indigenous and migrant organisations, health services, Centrelink, and others. This has fostered new and innovative approaches to service delivery through collaboration and integration.

**RURAL AND REMOTE FAMILY VIOLENCE INITIATIVE**

- Four Partnership projects established in between SAAP funded family violence agencies in collaboration with Indigenous services, to employ Indigenous family violence support workers to assist Indigenous women and their children experiencing family violence in rural and remote areas. Workers to liaise across the two agencies, enhancing referral pathways for clients, and gaining professional and cultural support from the combined resources of the two agencies in partnership.
- Loddon-Mallee, Hume, Grampians and Barwon South West DHS regions allocated funding.
- Similar initiative previously funded in Gippsland through the Victorian Homelessness Strategy Family Violence Pilot Initiative, see below, which has been developed with an Indigenous focus by Quantum Support Services.

Relationship building and resultant referral linkages between mainstream family violence services and Indigenous specific services has been very promising in the early stages, particularly in Robinvale and Echuca, where the initiative is value adding to limited Indigenous specific family violence services in these areas.

Recruitment of Indigenous family violence workers for the Rural and Remote Family Violence Initiative has required lengthy and diverse recruitment strategies through local and interstate indigenous networks. The project brief emphasised the need for recognition of informal skills and community connection with the provision of support, developmental and mentoring opportunities to appropriate candidates who may require some formal skills enhancement to meet the requirements of the position.

The Rural and Remote Family Violence Initiative is promoting and increasing **access** to family violence services for Indigenous women and their children who are experiencing family violence in rural and remote areas, through strengthening working relationships and referral pathways between Indigenous services and specialist family violence services. The model aims to provide culturally appropriate and specialist family violence assistance by combining the resources and knowledge of partner agencies in a cross-cultural context. SAAP funded family violence agencies in rural and remote areas are taking this opportunity to enhance their capacity to respond to Indigenous women and children, while it is providing an opportunity for Indigenous agencies for who family violence is a major aspect of their work, to access appropriate family violence referral networks for service users.

The development of a collaborative, co-ordinated, cross-cultural partnership model is encouraging new approaches to the development and delivery of crisis protection responses by mainstream family violence agencies, in the context of Indigenous family and community structures, and encouraging cultural and professional exchange between Indigenous agencies and SAAP funded family violence agencies. Importantly it also serves to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous workers within mainstream family violence agencies and provide mentoring opportunities and professional and cultural support for Indigenous family violence workers.

#### **VICTORIAN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY—FAMILY VIOLENCE PILOT**

Piloting and specialist housing referral capacity in three family violence outreach services, to improve opportunities for women and women with children experiencing family violence to access or remain in long-term, affordable housing. Gippsland Pilot has been developed with an Indigenous focus. The Indigenous focussed Family Violence Pilot has highlighted the specific needs of Indigenous women and children that require different approaches in the context of building strong networks of worker trust and service profile amongst the community, and the time it takes to achieve this foundation.

#### **VICTORIAN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY—INDIGENOUS HOUSING SUPPORT PILOT**

Indigenous Tenancies at Risk—an 18 month pilot to assist Indigenous tenants at risk of eviction to maintain their housing, through housing support workers, located in three Indigenous-specific services in Victoria. Providing culturally appropriate support for Indigenous people living in Office of Housing (OoH) or Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (AHBV) properties, in order to sustain tenancies and prevent people from becoming homeless.

#### **VICTORIAN HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY—INDIGENOUS SERVICE MAPPING PROJECT**

A project is underway to 'map' current responses to Indigenous homelessness across Victoria, to determine the nature of homelessness service responses that are currently provided to Indigenous persons (both targeted and generalist) and identify opportunities for service improvements. This work is intended to provide a firm understanding of the Indigenous population across the state, particularly those at risk of homelessness or those that are homeless. It will assist in identifying both geographic and sub populations of Indigenous homelessness and make recommendations on how to more effectively address Indigenous homelessness across Victoria



## INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES (FaCS)

FaCS delivers the following programs that specifically target Indigenous people and communities:

- Indigenous Parenting and Family and Well-being Initiative
- Multifunctional Children's Services (MACS)
- Koorie Play Groups
- SAAP Services
- SFSC Programs

FaCS does not have a specific program targeted to family violence but some family relationships and parenting programs as part of their service delivery may respond to family violence and family support issues.

FaCS makes linkages with other Commonwealth Government programs that are family violence specific:

1. Centrelink—Domestic Violence Strategy
2. Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Program (PADV)

### PROGRESS TOWARDS OUTCOMES

#### Program

##### Multifunctional Children's Services (MACS)

There are currently 6 MACS funded in Victoria:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Bunyarnda—Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust | 4. Lidji Child Care—Mooroopna            |
| 2. Echuca                                | 5. Robinvale MACS                        |
| 3. Gunai Lidji—Morwell                   | 6. Yappera Children's Services—Thornbury |

##### Indigenous Family Well-being and Parenting Initiative

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Burri Family Preservation parenting Program and Day Stay for young Mothers | Indigenous specific parenting program in the Shepparton Area for young and/or vulnerable families. |
| • Rumbalara Aboriginal Corporation   |  |

##### Parenting Support Group—Mildura Aboriginal Corporation

Increase support networks to assist in the development of parenting skills for vulnerable or 'high risk' families including those experiencing family violence in the Mildura area.

##### Wanjana Lidj Parenting Program—Morwell Quantum Support Services

Support to vulnerable Indigenous families in the Morwell area of Gippsland by running programs that prevent behaviours and/or familial and social developments that negatively impact on children, families and the community. It will provide increased access for isolated Indigenous parents to parenting programs.

##### Northern District Community Health Service Inc.—Kerang

The first component involves intense in-home support offered to individual family members as well as kinship groups. Specific parenting needs and referrals to local specialist services will be addressed and facilitated where appropriate. The second component involves the development of group work strategies within the Indigenous community.

**Koori Play Groups**

There are 5 Koori Play Groups:

1. Wathaurong—Geelong
2. Goolum Goolum—Horsham
3. Winda Mara—Heywood
4. Batdja—Shepparton
5. Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative

Many of these Play Groups are linked in with Koorie Early Childhood Field Officers—KECFO's.

**Stronger Families and Stronger Communities**

There are five projects being funded.

Some of these projects are concluding/or have already finished. It is expected that some final project reports will demonstrate key critical learning particularly around community strengthening and capacity building.

**Njernda Aboriginal Corporation—Grandmother's Parenting Group**

Final Report Completed.

**Central Murray Area Consultative Committee Inc—Finding Yourself Project—'At risk' Koori youth—working with Elders**

Early intervention leadership program for "at risk" young Aboriginal people from the Echuca/Moama subregion. Co-funded by the NSW and Victorian offices of FaCS.

**Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)—parenting and funding arrangement with DHS**

—To provide, in cooperation with other agencies and in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, a placement service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children.

**The establishment of an "Elders Mentor Program" for the younger grandmothers and aunts****Reach Youth Project—Geelong—youth project developing a publication on positive Indigenous role models****Upper Hume Community Health—Koori parenting and early Intervention project—Wodonga****VicHealth—Victorian Koori Community Leadership Projects—Community Based Leadership Programs based in Melbourne, Ballarat, Dandenong, Gippsland and the Goulburn Valley region****Support Agencies:****Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)—Support MACS and Koori Play Groups**

## IDENTIFIED GAPS AND/OR LIMITATIONS IN DELIVERING SERVICES TO THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

ISSUE	CURRENT PLANNING
Targeting to Indigenous communities and organisations—limited by funding and program guidelines.	Some programs are taking into account when designing programs—eg. Not using standardised application forms and working with communities in the development of proposals.
The capacities of NGOs to design, develop and deliver services to appropriate communities. Governance and accountability issues.	Acknowledgement on need to support organisations and work with communities.
Relationships between funders and communities Lack of coordination Long lead-in times in developing services.	Work undertaken in ICCP pilots—where efforts to join up programs—single service agreements—opportunities to streamline accountabilities and reporting.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

ICCP—what is learned and the outcomes of this process will influence the way Governments work with Indigenous communities.

## PROCESSES USED WHEN CONSULTING THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN DEVELOPING NEW PROGRAMS/INITIATIVES

The Commonwealth Government consulting approaches with the Victorian Indigenous community vary depending on the program area. A partnership approach is in place with the SFSC and Indigenous Parenting and Family Well Being programs.

## DEPARTMENTAL POLICY RELATING TO INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

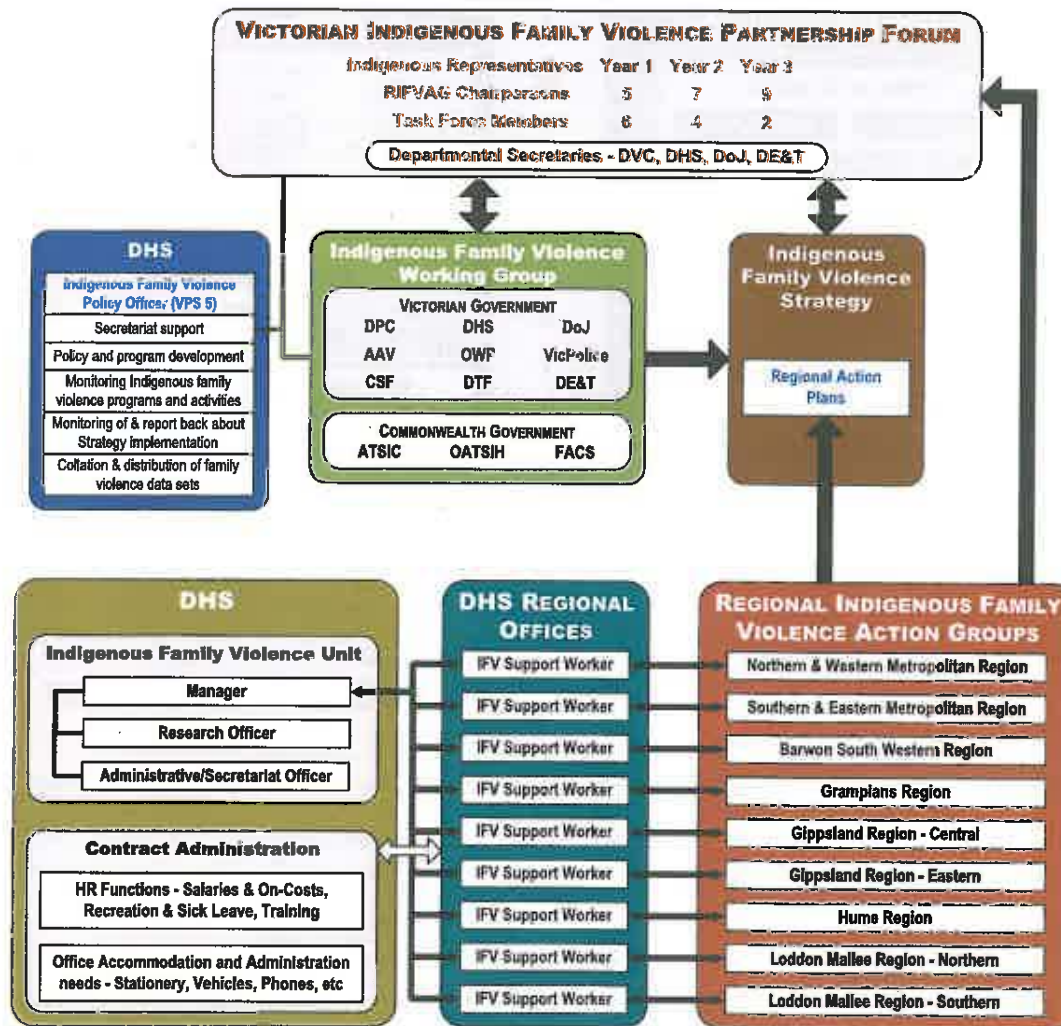
FaCS does not have a specific Family Violence policy but provides funding through Indigenous policies within SAAP funded service provision.



## WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT PLANNING

### VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE PARTNERSHIP FORUM

The Task Force recognise that further collaboration will be required between the Government and the Victorian Indigenous community. As mentioned previously, the Task Force propose that the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum be established to oversee all activities associated with developing and implementing the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. The key elements of the Partnerships Forum are shown below.



### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 24

The Task Force recommends that the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum be given the responsibility of overseeing the coordination and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy when it is finalised.

# INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Task Force members are aware that integrated, strategic, community driven, service responses are required in the short, medium and long term if family violence issues are to be addressed within the Indigenous community. The Task Force also understand that a number of critical elements will need to be considered when the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy is developed. To assist in this process, the Task Force has developed the following matrix.



**LEGEND** Key Issue or Component Critical Component In Place - Some Action Required Key Issue - Action Required Action Required

The purpose of the **matrix** is to identify the key areas that will need to be considered by Government, Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers, Regional IFV Action Groups and community. These include the following:

- The types of violence that occur in communities;
- The victims of family violence incidences that occur in communities;
- The consultation and decision making processes that need to be put in place to facilitate change,
- The role that education and awareness has in influencing the attitudes of victims and perpetrators;
- The need to have service responses for victims as well as perpetrators;
- Action that can be taken to build on existing infrastructure; and
- The need to put in place new programs and activities that support 'community driven' priorities to address family violence in local communities.

The Task Force has considered these issues and has grouped them into the following key areas under the matrix.

1. **Nature of Violence**—This component contains the key areas that Government will need to address as part of its implementation and action planning processes.
2. **Collaboration and Planning**—This component identifies the key processes that will need to be put in place by Government to build a strong partnership based on 'community driven' priorities.
3. **Services and Activities**—this component identifies the specific client groups and the services they will need.
4. **Action Needed**—These are the specific areas Government will need to consider when developing its 'whole of government' response to address Victorian Indigenous family violence issues.



## DATA AND EVIDENCE BASED PLANNING

The Task Force note that a 'key term' now being used by Government Departments is 'evidence based planning'. This term is based on the premise that service providers will capture data from clients when they receive a service response. Funding and Service Agreements signed with service providers (Indigenous and mainstream) contain a specific requirement that information will be captured which records various details about the client; the service, activity or program they received; and the outcome from the contact or interaction between the client and the service provider.

Information and data captured by the service providers eventually makes its way back into the electronic databases maintained by the funding body who then compile and analyse this information and data. These processes are in place to identify and confirm what is happening in relation to mainstream and Indigenous client demands.

However, the Task Force notes that although useful information and data is collected and collated, it appears that:

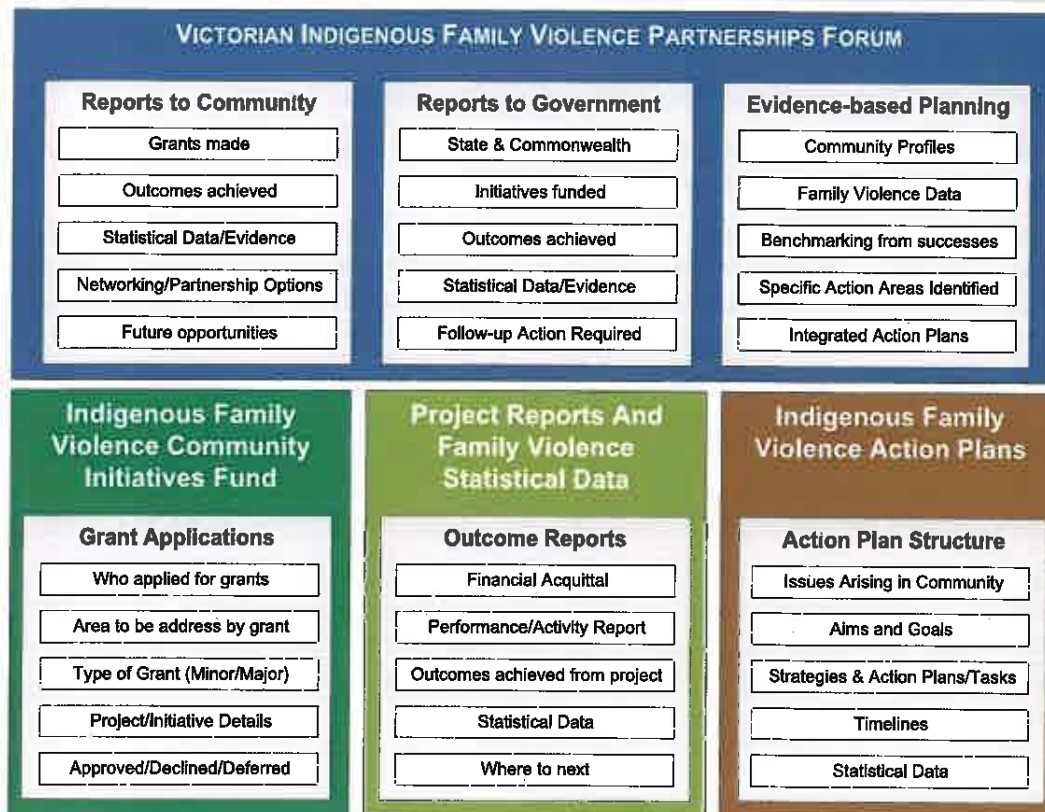
1. There are no arrangements currently in place within Departments for the information/data collected to be pooled and/or shared with different operational areas. That is, the area that collects the information/data does not share it with other operational areas nor are there any arrangements in place that will allow other operational areas to easily access this information/data. The only time information/data is pooled appears to be when there is a Ministerial or other request to provide a 'whole-of-department' report about Indigenous specific services, programs, activities or outcomes.
2. There are no mechanisms currently in place to provide access to the service providers who originally collected the information/data. That is, information/data is collected, collated and analysed by staff in Departments but it is not shared with or sent back to the originating source.
3. Regional and Statewide profiles created when information/data is collated and analysed is usually not shared with peak, statewide or regional groups. Sharing of this type of information usually occurs many months or years after it was collected. That is, there are no mechanisms in place to make practical use of 'real-time' information/data that is/has been collected.
4. Departments have not made any arrangements to provide the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups with access to the information/data collected in their regions. If this did occur, people participating in these groups could make informed decisions about what actions could be taken to address issues arising in communities in their region.

The decision-making processes occurring under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy will be greatly enhanced if a more strategic and cost effective information sharing framework or mechanism is put in place to provide support to the Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups established in each region as well as to the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group and the newly established Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum.

Task Force members recognise the advantages of having access to 'real-time' data and information as it is collected. The Task Force also recognise that there are strategic opportunities for individual Departments to put in place a collaborative or 'joined up' approach in this area—particularly where the development and on-going operational costs associated with this activity are shared between agencies.

The Task Force strongly believes that this approach will create an environment that will build capacity and confidence in Indigenous organisations about the actions they are taking to address family violence issues on a local, regional and statewide level. It will also enable Departmental staff to create a 'whole of government' approach to addressing issues in the Indigenous sector.

## Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy - Information Management Matrix



### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 25

*Government to consider the strategic advantages that can be achieved by putting in place integrated processes and mechanisms for gathering, compiling and distributing data and other useful information. This would create a common platform on which Departmental staff, Indigenous organisations and Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups can make decisions about Indigenous family violence matters.*



## MARKETING STRATEGY

Over the past two years, the Task Force has found that access to and dissemination of information is critical if community awareness about family violence issues is to be improved. It has also found that limited access to information about the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy by Departmental staff (centrally and regionally) has limited its capacity to effectively raise and discuss issues about the nature and frequency of family violence occurring in Indigenous communities in Victoria.

The Task Force understand there will be a cost involved when action is taken to raise awareness about family violence issues in communities and within Departments.

Information gathered by the Task Force through its own experiences, the Statewide Indigenous Family Violence Forum held in March 2003, the community projects and the 5 key research projects suggests that there are a number of steps that can be taken to develop 'community led' solutions to address family violence issues occurring in individual communities. The Task Force believe that support and resources need to be put in place to create sustainable 'community led' solutions to addressing family violence.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 26

*Task Force members recommend that Government develop a marketing strategy to support the activities and programs implemented under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. Further, that the marketing strategy includes the provision of information packages and education and awareness programs for specific Indigenous target groups: Elders, women, children, same sex couples, Torres Strait Islanders and community leaders.*

A critical factor will be ensuring access to information that can provide opportunities for individuals, families, staff working in community based and peak organisations, and staff working in Government Departments to build on successful practices and models occurring elsewhere—within and outside Victoria. The Task Force believe that a strategic solution needs to be developed to address this issue.

### TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 27

*The Task Force members encourage Government to invest in the development of a mechanism or tool that is not only accessible by all groups (community members, organisations and Government) but which also provides a common and shared framework to focus and support implementation of key elements of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.*

The mechanism developed should be designed to address the following issues:

- Information about the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy, its various components and the action being taken by Government to address family violence occurring in Indigenous communities in Victoria.
- Statistical data and other information related specifically to family violence issues that is non-identified and based on regional and statewide activities and outcomes.
- The activities of Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups and their Action Plans.
- The Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiatives Fund, the projects that have received funding and the outcomes achieved by communities and organisations that received funds.
- The services and programs (Indigenous and mainstream) which can be access by individuals, families and staff of organisations to respond to the needs of people who have experienced family violence—in their homes, in the community or at work.

The mechanism could also provide individuals and service providers (Indigenous and mainstream) with access to templates to create their own promotional and awareness campaigns about family violence. At the same time, it will also be possible to provide people with access to published research documents and other printed information that can assist them to put in place community based approaches to address family violence issues occurring in communities.

From a Task Force perspective, a critical issue arising out of the current arrangements is where Indigenous Family Violence issues cross over or converge. Specifically, how will the individual deliberations and actions being considered by each committee, working group or sub-committee translate into an integrated, strategic, holistic, 'whole of government' strategy and/or action plan for the Indigenous sector?

Task Force members believe a successful 'whole of government' response to Indigenous family violence issues will be dependent on the processes put in place by senior Departmental staff on these committees, working groups and sub-committees to share critical pieces of information not only with each other but also with representatives of Indigenous communities and Indigenous services.

The Task Force also recognise the importance of having dedicated staff in place (in Government) to support this function. The Secretariat and other assistance provided to the Task Force over the past two years reaffirms the need for dedicated staff to provide this operational and administrative support to ensure successful implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

#### **TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION 28**

*The Task Force recommends that Government invest in the development of an internet portal which has the functionality built into it to support the initiatives to be implemented under the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and which address the areas identified above.*

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This section contains a compilation of the specific recommendations made by the Task Force in its Final Report to the Victorian Government. These recommendations and those outlined in the Action Plan need to be considered by members of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group when preparing the 'whole of government' response for input into the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy

1. *That a separate Monitoring and Evaluation Plan be developed by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and that the outcomes of each initiative and project funded under the Community Initiatives Fund be reported on each year. That all projects be assessed against culturally relevant selection criteria where requests for ongoing funding are supported.*
2. *The Task Force believes that support needs to be provided to hold an Annual Statewide Forum so Indigenous people from each community and/or region can meet to discuss issues, share solutions with each other and gather new information. Information from these Annual Forums can then be used to build on activities, programs and approaches being implemented in their local area and region.*
3. *That a communication strategy be developed to guide all stages in the research, development and distribution of Indigenous family violence educational resource materials.*
4. *That the Youth Kits funded by AAV be developed in conjunction with the Task Force, Regional IFV Action Groups and Regional IFV Support Officers and the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC). Furthermore, the Task Force agreed that these Kits would contain a 'comic book' similar to the one developed by 'Street Wise' which is Indigenous specific.*
5. *That an 1800 Number service be established as a resource option for Indigenous communities to provide a link to culturally appropriate family violence services across the State.*
6. *That the Statistics and Data Research Project be readvertised and information gathered is presented to Indigenous Family Violence Working Group to assist in the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy*
7. *That the Family Violence Services Directory commissioned by the Task Force be included on the internet portal website.*
8. *That an Evaluation Plan be commissioned by February 2004 to support implementation of the 'whole of government' response developed as part of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.*
9. *That the Victorian Government considers reducing the overall number of family violence committees so that Indigenous representatives on the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum can make more effective use of their time when engaging in discussions, collaborative planning and decision-making about Indigenous family violence issues and responses.*
10. *That a research project be commissioned to establish what is actually happening in Indigenous families in relation to balancing work and family responsibilities. That this information then be used to assist and inform Government policies about how to deal with this issue from an Indigenous specific perspective.*

11. *That a research project be commissioned to establish the connection between family violence and alcohol and drug abuse occurring in Indigenous communities. That information gathered is then used to develop a Statewide Community Education Campaign focusing on the impact of alcohol and drugs on family violence in Indigenous communities.*
12. *That a Cultural Awareness Program dealing with family violence in Indigenous communities be developed for the Victoria Police.*
13. *That the Regional IFV Action Groups develop formal links with the RAJACs in their regions with a view to putting in place joint approaches and strategies to respond to family violence issues.*
14. *That a research project be undertaken to determine the merits and feasibility of establishing an Indigenous Family Violence Court and the changes needed to provide a culturally safe and secure environment for Indigenous family violence victims.*
15. *That 'Time Out Centres' be established in communities to provide Indigenous males and others with a place to go to calm down so that they do not commit a violent act against another person.*
16. *That the following service responses be put in place for Indigenous perpetrators of violence:*
  - a) *Culturally appropriate counselling, mediation and support services for Indigenous men mandated by the courts to participate in programs*
  - b) *Case Management Support Services for pre and post release prisoners that address alcohol and drug abuse, employment, housing, income and family relationships*
  - c) *Prisoner Support Program to assist in rehabilitation and re-entry back into society (post release)*
  - d) *Mental Health programs to address violence issues for men*
  - e) *Training Programs and packages for Interventions (Anger and Aggression management) for young people*
  - f) *Coordinated training programs to be delivered by Correctional Workers to be included as part of their roles and responsibilities*
  - g) *Counselling, mediation and support services both at community level and for men ordered by the courts to participate in these programs*
  - h) *Improved facilities to accommodate family visits to prisons*
  - i) *Rural and remote transitional facilities*
17. *That Government make arrangements to set aside places for Indigenous men in the 'No To Violence' program.*
18. *That a research project be commissioned to gather information specifically about the issues confronting Indigenous youth in relation to family violence in Victorian Indigenous communities. That the findings of the research project be considered by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and Working group in consultation with the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council when developing specific Indigenous youth responses under the Strategy.*

*That Regional IFV Action Groups engage in discussion with young Indigenous people in their regions to ensure that local and regional initiatives meet the needs of Indigenous youth in their communities.*

19. *That research is undertaken to identify the specific issues impacting on Indigenous people in same sex relationships and what action could be taken to address their needs.*
20. *That a research project be commissioned to identify the impact of family violence on workers employed by Indigenous and mainstream services.*
21. *That the Victorian Government's Indigenous Scholarship Schemes be broadened to cover Indigenous people who wish to undertake tertiary studies to be Counsellors.*
22. *That research is conducted into the current status of Indigenous service providers with a view to identifying the current strengths, weaknesses and service gaps relating to family violence service responses.*
23. *That specific cultural awareness programs about Indigenous Family Violence issues be developed and attended by staff of mainstream services who have contact with Indigenous victims of family violence, including staff at the Family Court, Police, Corrections Officers, sexual assault workers and counsellors.*
24. *The Task Force recommends that the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum be given the responsibility of overseeing the coordination and implementation of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy when it is finalised.*
25. *Government to consider the strategic advantages that can be achieved by putting in place integrated processes and mechanisms for gathering, compiling and distributing data and other useful information. This would create a common platform on which Departmental staff, Indigenous organisations and Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups can make decisions about Indigenous family violence matters.*
26. *Task Force members recommend that Government develop a marketing strategy to support the activities and programs implemented under the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. Further, that the marketing strategy includes the provision of information packages and education and awareness programs for specific Indigenous target groups: Elders, women, children, same sex couples, Torres Strait Islanders and community leaders.*
27. *The Task Force members encourage Government to invest in the development of a mechanism or tool that is not only accessible by all groups (community members, organisations and Government) but which also provides a common and shared framework to focus and support implementation of key elements of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.*
28. *The Task Force recommends that Government invest in the development of an internet portal which has the functionality built into it to support the initiatives to be implemented under the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and which address the areas identified above.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE VICTORIAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY THAT WERE CONSIDERED BY THE TASK FORCE

### ACTION PLAN

This section of the Final Report contains a summary of the recommendations made to the Task Force by members of the Victorian Indigenous community since it was established in October 2001. Information contained in this section is outlined under the following headings to provide a context for community and Government which reflects the broad areas explored by the Task Force over the past two years:

- Service Responses for Victims
- Service Responses for Perpetrators
  - New Programs, Activities and Service Responses
- Community Education—Raising Awareness about Family Violence Issues
  - Building On and Strengthening Existing Infrastructure, Activities and Service Responses
  - Research Activities

It should be noted that under the 'Recommendations—Actions' Section, some suggested actions and/or recommendations may appear more than once (even though they may contain different wording and context).

The Task Force gave a commitment to the Victorian Indigenous community that the Final Report would include key issues raised and solutions proposed to address Victorian Indigenous Family Violence during consultations, forums and meetings coordinated by the Task Force over the last two years.

Task Force members are aware that some actions listed in this section of their Final Report may have already been addressed by Government and/or community since October 2001. The Task Force anticipate that the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group will note this and make the necessary arrangements to provide appropriate advice to members of the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups.



## SERVICE RESPONSES FOR VICTIMS

### WHAT WE WANT

**Respond to the needs of women, children, same sex couples, youth, Elders and men who have experienced and/or witnessed family violence**

- Enhanced Counselling, mediation and support services for Indigenous women and their families who have experienced family violence.
- The number of counselling sessions for victims of crime should be based on the individual needs of women and children who have experienced family violence and or sexual assault, rather than just five sessions. Given the low crime reporting rate of Indigenous communities, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure Indigenous victims of unreported crime get increased access to services. Increased from 5 sessions to a greater number to reflect the true need of victims of crime.
- Sexual Assault Healing Programs which focus specifically on:
  - Family Support
  - Child Advocacy
  - Family Violence specific Case Management practices
  - Training for workers in sexual assault, physical assault and trauma counselling
- Women and children should be offered choices across a range of accommodation and support options, with levels of security that match their expectations and needs for both physical and psychological safety.
- Options should ensure a range of mainstream and Indigenous specific responses are available, including:
  - Assistance to remain in the home
  - Crisis supported accommodation
  - Privately Purchased Short Term Accommodation
  - Transitional Accommodation Options for victims of family violence
- Ensure the provision of resources and specialist staff within key Indigenous organisations to respond to and meet the needs of same sex couples.
- Ensuring that Indigenous organisations to have a range of housing options for those experiencing family violence.

## SERVICE RESPONSES FOR VICTIMS

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish an Indigenous Rape/Sexual Assault Crisis Centre and Response Service to coordinate service responses to meet the needs of Indigenous victims of sexual assault—in metropolitan and regional Victoria. Research to be conducted into the feasibility of such a centre.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training to community members and staff of Indigenous services to equip them to respond to sexual assault or sexual abuse.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish specific family violence related culturally appropriate Counselling Services for Indigenous victims of crime and Support (including reported and unreported) and to respond to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the specific needs of children</li> <li>victims of sexual and physical assault</li> <li>Indigenous people suffering trauma and grief</li> <li>Indigenous people who have alcohol and drug dependency issues</li> <li>Indigenous people with mental health and physical health issues</li> <li>Indigenous people in the correctional system</li> <li>Indigenous people who live in remote and isolated locations in regional Victoria</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	DHS, DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To establish Indigenous Safe Houses in regions where the number of family violence incidences are at critical levels.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing an Indigenous Sexual Assault Steering Committee which feeds into the Victorian Sexual Assault Task Force to consider the nature and extent of sexual assault and abuse occurring in Indigenous communities.</li> </ul>	All Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the range and type of family violence crisis services and strategies available to Indigenous women and their children who experience family violence.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the accessibility and responsiveness of family violence services to Indigenous women and children experiencing family violence. In areas of high Indigenous populations mainstream family violence services should be required to employ Indigenous workers as part of their funding and service agreement.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holding Regional Forums on sexual assault for women, men and children.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Protection Services urgently need to review their interventions into family violence situations—particularly with families who come to their attention repeatedly. They also need to review the types of services they refer families to so that they support them in resolving family violence issues. Support services should include immediate children's counselling and family therapy.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Protection Interventions should consider the removal of the perpetrator from the home rather than the women and children. One way this could be done is for Child Protection to apply for a Sole Occupancy Order where risks to children are substantial.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved access to legal representation for Indigenous women and children experiencing family violence issues for example Family Violence Act, Family Law Act, and Children and Young Persons Act when applying for Intervention Orders.</li> </ul>	Victorian Family Violence Legal and Preventative Unit, VALS, Legal Aid



## SERVICE RESPONSES FOR PERPETRATORS

### WHAT WE WANT

#### Comments from the Family Violence Forum

An equal approach to understanding and responding to the needs of victims and perpetrators of family violence is critical. The Forum recognises that victims require the protection and support of the whole community in making them feel safe and secure within their community and family environments and that appropriate crisis services are in place to support victims to deal with their immediate needs.

The Forum recognises that perpetrators may have themselves once been victims of family violence and that dealing with the needs of these perpetrators is one of the factors in reducing and preventing family violence within the community.

Although the Forum identified that predominantly the victims of family violence are females, there needs to be an equal input and resources for services and programs for men. The Forum also distinguishes the difference between perpetrators, paedophiles and offenders in relation to family violence and sexual assault.

#### Service responses for perpetrators of violence

- Culturally appropriate counselling, mediation and support services for Indigenous men mandated by the Courts to participate in programs.
- Case Management Support Services for pre and post release prisoners that address alcohol and drug abuse, employment, housing, income and family relationships.
- Prisoner Support Program to assist in rehabilitation and re-entry back into society (post release).
- Mental Health programs to address violence issues for men.
- Training Programs and packages for Interventions (Anger and Aggression management) for young people.
- Community Based Programs.
- Develop incentives for successful post release outcomes through the arts, etc.
- Coordinated training programs to be delivered by Correctional Workers to be included as part of their roles and responsibilities.
- Maintain family contact with Indigenous people in the prison system.
- Improved facilities to accommodate family visits to prisons.
- Rural and remote transitional facilities.

## SERVICE RESPONSES FOR PERPETRATORS

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That 'Indigenous Time Out Centres' be established in communities to provide Indigenous males, females, youth, Elders and others with a place to go to be removed from a potential volatile situation and be provided with support to deal with their issues in a culturally appropriate manner.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making it mandatory for perpetrators of violence who have Intervention or Protection Orders issued against them to participate in counselling and/or mediation sessions and assessments before orders end.</li> </ul>	DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing specific education programs for perpetrators of violence to reinforce the message that any form of violence is not acceptable and not a part of Indigenous culture, values or beliefs.</li> </ul>	DHS, DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing culturally appropriate Indigenous Men's Behaviour Change Programs which deal with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Acceptable Male Behaviour</li> <li>– Conflict Management including Managing Anger and Aggression</li> <li>– Health and Education focusing on Alcohol and Drug issues and Mental Health</li> <li>– Relationship Counselling including Parenting Skills and Gender Roles</li> <li>– Justice Issues—including the Family Court and Intervention Orders</li> <li>– Employ and train Indigenous Facilitators</li> <li>– Operate within existing Victorian Best practice standards set by the 'No To Violence' program and support for similar programs ie. Indigenous Men's Shed in Morwell supported by the RAJAC and funded through the Department of Justice, Indigenous Initiatives Fund</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	DHS, DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perpetrators of violence against women who have more than one Intervention Order taken out against them should be required to participate in a follow-up program that tracks them for a 12 month period.</li> </ul>	DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-Release transitional support being provided to Indigenous prisoners re-entering families and communities.</li> </ul>	DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing Indigenous Specific Diversionary Programs with a priority focus on the provision of services to Indigenous women.</li> </ul>	DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police to adopt a universal practice for obtaining After-hours Orders which is efficient, culturally sensitive and on which 'conditions' are appropriately worded.</li> </ul>	DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a process that offers options to place Indigenous perpetrators of violence into a suitable emergency hostel or similar accommodation which is culturally sensitive and appropriate. This process to be supported by suitable conditions; being imposed on offenders when they are bailed.</li> </ul>	DoJ

## NEW PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### WHAT WE WANT

Programs and activities that target specific groups in Indigenous communities—such as women, children, youth, men, Elders and same sex couples. This must be coordinated through a holistic approach that focuses on community healing.

Innovative models need to be used incorporating Indigenous methods to enable Indigenous stories to be told, valued and respected. These innovative approaches are consistent with broader understandings of healing the trauma and violence in the Indigenous community at the individual level with links to community change and regeneration. Need to acknowledge that traditional counselling interventions may not be culturally appropriate and the need for practical activity programs is required.

- Social and Emotional Well-being (Respite/Healing Centres) to be established to address mental health needs; enhance cultural, spiritual, emotional identity; and other needs in relation to Indigenous accredited models employing professionally trained workers.
- To build up the capacity of Indigenous service providers to respond effectively to families in their communities experiencing family violence.
- Establish 'Youth Centres' and/or 'Youth Drop-In Centres' in metropolitan and regional areas.
- Counselling and Support services that:
  - Are culturally appropriate around the issues that affect victims of family violence
  - Are provided at no cost to community
  - Facilitate a process of healing which promotes positive cultural identity
  - Operate within time frames that take account of cultural obligations
  - Are accessible immediately regardless of geographic location
  - Respond to individual needs—including crisis, short, medium and long term responses
  - Incorporate one-on-one, group, family, men, women, children, youth, Elders and same sex couples
  - Specialise in grief, alcohol and drugs, sexual assault, behaviour change programs, psychiatric and psychological issues
  - Are provided to Indigenous people in the correctional system
- An annual reporting and monitoring program be adopted by Indigenous community organisations related to Indigenous family violence statistics.

## NEW PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing assistance to Indigenous Self-Help and Support Groups established in each community so they can implement activities and programs which focus specifically on family violence issues:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Camps for women/girls, men/boys, Elders, same sex couples, children and youth</li> <li>– Life Skills Courses—which cover self-esteem, assertiveness, communication and listening skills, presentation and public speaking, budgeting/financial planning, healthy eating, sexual health, mental health and managing stress, etc</li> <li>– Youth Camps and Youth Forums—to develop leadership skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance to establish an Indigenous Elders Leadership, Role Model and Mentor Program which will provide support, advice, assistance and education about Indigenous cultural and family values to Indigenous youth, families and community members.</li> </ul>	DHS, DoJ, DVC (AAV)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional funds for Indigenous services to employ gender specific staff (male and female) who will deliver family violence support services and community awareness education programs and activities in communities.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional funds provided to mainstream services to employ gender specific Indigenous staff (male and female) who provide support to Indigenous people who require assistance to deal with family violence issues—specifically:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Female staff in the Police and referrals area to respond to the needs of Indigenous women</li> <li>– Indigenous Correctional Officers (male and female)</li> <li>– Indigenous Correctional Support Workers (male and female) to support pre and post release programs for Indigenous prisoners</li> <li>– Indigenous Police Liaison Officers (male and female)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	All Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 24 hour—7 days a week 'Indigenous 1800 Family Violence Help Line Service' established to provide family violence victims and perpetrators with advice and assistance.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and Life Skills Programs developed which are delivered to Indigenous young people who are in Youth Detention Centres.</li> </ul>	DoJ, DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Indigenous Women's Leadership and Role Model Program developed to support existing leadership initiatives being implemented in regions.</li> </ul>	DHS, DVC (AAV)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Reunification Services and Programs established to support and assist Indigenous families who want to reunite include access to Mediators who have received appropriate Cross Cultural Awareness Training.</li> </ul>	DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial support provided for Indigenous community members to participate in meetings, networks and forums which have a specific focus on Indigenous family violence issues.</li> </ul>	All Government Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to establish a Victorian Indigenous Elders Council to provide mechanism for Indigenous Elders to raise and discuss issues affecting them—such as family violence.</li> </ul>	DVC (AAV)

## NEW PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### WHAT WE WANT

#### Recommendations from the Family Violence Forum

- That an Elders Council be established in Victoria.
- That the Elders Council be established through a forum convened by ATSIC, AAV and Aged Care (DHS).
- That resources be directed to prevent Elders abuse and to develop programs that bring youth and Elders together to provide mutual respect and understanding.
- That Healing Centres and Time Out Centres be established within all regions in Victoria.
- That Government provide land and infrastructure necessary for the establishment of healing centres on country and the provision of programs that reconnect community with their land and culture.
- That government consider the return of Crown Land within Victoria to provide a resource base to enable communities to consider the development of programs and services that address family violence.

We seek support from the Forum and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to fund a men's unit to support, initiate, coordinate and develop men's issues and programs that are culturally relevant to Indigenous men.



## NEW PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Indigenous Male and Youth Violence Prevention Education Kit developed which contains information and material focusing specifically on:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Acceptable Male Behaviour</li> <li>– Conflict Management including Managing Anger and Aggression</li> <li>– Health and Education focusing on Alcohol and Drug issues and Mental Health</li> <li>– Relationship Counselling including Parenting Skills and Gender Roles</li> <li>– Justice Issues—including Police powers under the Crime Prevention Act, the Family Court, Intervention and Protection Orders</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | DHS, DoJ        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Magistrate Courts to recognise the difficulties faced by Indigenous women when attending court to apply for Orders and implement an Indigenous-specific support program that assists and supports Indigenous people to better understand court processes.</li> </ul>   | DoJ             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Family Court establishing an Indigenous Hand-over and Supervision Centre to provide a safe and secure environment for Indigenous families to meet.</li> </ul>  | Family Court    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing an Indigenous Social Justice Commission to coordinate Government responses to Indigenous justice issues and monitor social justice outcomes being achieved for Indigenous people.</li> </ul>  | Government      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Indigenous Violent Offenders Database set up which can be accessed by communities over the internet.</li> </ul>   | DoJ             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healing Centres.</li> </ul>  | All Departments |

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION—RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES

### WHAT WE WANT

Programs which provide information to Indigenous people about the justice system and family violence issues—such as the Child Protection Act, Family Law Court proceedings, Intervention and Protection Orders, Police powers, the Crime Prevention Act, etc.

### Recommendations from the Family Violence Forum

- A Communication Strategy should be developed to guide all stages in the research, development and distribution of Indigenous family violence educational resource material.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION—RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To hold an Indigenous Family Violence Forum each year where individuals, staff of Indigenous and mainstream services, Government personnel and others can meet to:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Present and discuss current information and practices relevant to addressing family violence issues—from a Victorian, National and International perspective</li> <li>– Discuss and explore topical issues relevant to addressing service responses being implemented to address family violence incidences in communities and in the workplace</li> <li>– Identify and discuss what changes need to be made to State and National Family Violence Strategies, policies and programs, and service responses (Indigenous and mainstream) from a local, regional, state and national perspective</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	DVC (AAV)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting Indigenous specific Family Violence Education Campaigns across the State which specifically target young people and children which may include using radio and television advertising.</li> </ul>	DHS, DoJ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention, Intervention and Support Programs to assist communities to raise awareness about Elders abuse.</li> </ul>	DHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued support being provided to the Community Legal Education Program and expanding the program to include the provision of 'Family Workshops' which focus on meeting the needs of individuals, extended family members and the broader community.</li> </ul>	DoJ

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION—RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

- | RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION  | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|----------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Family Violence Information Kits developed which contain the following information and/or materials:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Victoria's Justice System</li> <li>– Police Powers under the Crime Prevention Act</li> <li>– The Family Law Court—What it does and how it works</li> <li>– Where to obtain legal advice about family violence issues</li> <li>– Support services which can be accessed to respond to family violence issues</li> <li>– Daniel King's 'Mirror Images' video, Education Package and Workbook</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | DoJ            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Mapping of Family Violence Services Package to raise awareness about family violence issues which includes the following information and/or materials:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Fridge Magnets</li> <li>– "Z" Information Expanding Cards</li> <li>– Information posters, cards, stickers, mugs, T-shirts, caps, etc</li> <li>– Family Violence Support Services Mind Map</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | DVC (AAV)      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention Program containing information and materials about the following:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The impact of antisocial behaviour</li> <li>– How to manage anger and aggression</li> <li>– The harmful effects of alcohol and substance misuse</li> <li>– Healthy lifestyles (sexual, physical and mental health)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | DHS            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A School-based Gender Awareness Package containing information and materials about:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Health Issues</li> <li>– General Education</li> <li>– Safe Sex Education</li> <li>– Child Development Issues</li> <li>– Young Men and Women's Relationships</li> <li>– Human Rights, Child Advocacy and Family Violence</li> <li>– Life Studies, Independent Living and Parenting Responsibilities</li> <li>– "Hear Me Now" PADV Booklet for Schools</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   | DET            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop community awareness and information packages for Indigenous family violence situations which are locally initiated and written in a user-friendly format with appropriate language.</li> </ul>   | DoJ            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Indigenous 'Know Your Rights' workshops in conjunction with the Community Justice Panels, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Victorian Family Violence Prevention Legal Service and Department of Justice (Indigenous Issues unit).</li> </ul>  | DoJ            |



## BUILDING ON AND STRENGTHENING EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### WHAT WE WANT

- Ensure that Koorie Mediators through the Justice program are **linked** into both mainstream and Indigenous mediation programs statewide.
- Effective linkages need to be made between all Indigenous Government officers and workers in Indigenous community organizations—in particular within the regions (ie. RAJAC's IFVSO's, etc).
- Improved and culturally appropriate Police, Court and legal **responses**.
- Review Police Protocols in relation to dealing with victims and perpetrators of family violence to ensure a 'duty of Care' process is considered from a culturally appropriate perspective.
- Review all government policy for Aboriginal children in care including a review of the 'Out of Home' Care program.
- Employment, career pathway and mentoring programs to be developed for young Indigenous people and existing programs to be reviewed.
- Strengthen family and community participation in programs that encourage Indigenous children and young people to actively participate in their school environment through social competence, life skills, recognition of achievements and positive life events.
- The Government's Indigenous Scholarships Program to include targets to support Indigenous students to be sponsored to undertake training as Psychologists or Psychiatrists, Counsellors (Children's Counsellors, Financial Counsellors, etc), Statisticians and **Nutritionists**.
- Remedial teachers in schools to meet social and learning needs in acknowledgment of the learning difficulties that may be experienced by Indigenous children and young people who have been affected by family violence.
- Indigenous Men's and Women's Post Release Programs—supported pathways to reintegrate into community and with their families (if requested by families).
- All developed and established programs, services and initiatives to be funded on a long term basis (not in an ad hoc way) in accordance with the Family Violence Task Force's Final Report—10 year Action Plan.
- Information needs to come from the grass roots people, ordinary people, not just Government officials.
- Develop an Elders Register that celebrates their life, knowledge and experiences.

## BUILDING ON AND STRENGTHENING EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

• That mainstream family violence and CASA workers participate in Cross Cultural Awareness Training Courses to improve their understanding of Indigenous culture, values, beliefs, family structures and kinship relationships.	DHS
• That mainstream teachers participate in Cross Cultural Awareness Training Courses to improve their understanding of Indigenous culture, values and beliefs.	
• That teachers have regular contact with Indigenous families to address the needs of Indigenous children.	DET
• Assistance provided to Indigenous services providers to review and update existing policies, procedures and work practices to incorporate integrated service responses and case management processes for victims of family violence.	DHS, DoJ
• For Indigenous and mainstream services who provide specific or related family violence services to ensure that legal advice, counselling and other support is provided to all family members affected by family violence incidences.	Indigenous and Mainstream Services
• Arrangements made to provide ongoing funding to support the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council.	DVC(AAV)
• Procedures put in place to ensure that Indigenous children placed in 'Out of Home Care' are not assaulted or abused—physically, sexually or emotionally.	DHS
• Policies and procedures put in place to screen adults who participate in activities involving Indigenous children and youth to ensure a safe and secure environment.	All Departments
• Protocols put in place to provide integrated service responses to Indigenous people and families living in towns located close to but across the borders between Victorian and New South Wales, and Victoria and South Australia.	DHS, DoJ
• Critical Incidence Debriefing Training provided to workers in community organisations who provide service responses to victims of violence.	DHS
• Professional Debriefing Services provided to employees of Indigenous services who come into contact with Indigenous clients who are victims of violence.	DHS
• Professional Debriefing Services provided to Indigenous people employed by mainstream organisations who come into contact with family violence victims.	DHS
• Partnership Agreements and Memorandums of Understanding between Indigenous and mainstream services updated to confirm what actions will be taken to specifically deal with the case planning and management processes, procedures and service responses provided to Indigenous people affected by family violence—including accommodation, counselling and de-briefing.	Indigenous and Mainstream Services
• The Counselling Working Group convened by the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force to be maintained and take lead responsibility in developing an Indigenous Family Violence Counselling Framework focusing on the provision of counselling.	Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum

## BUILDING ON AND STRENGTHENING EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### WHAT WE WANT

- Improved access to transport for Elders particularly for medical and social support services.
- Active perpetrators to be removed from the community and placed in a Diversionary Centre.
- Improved access for Indigenous women who have experienced family violence to government funded long-term accommodation options—eg. Public housing that comes directly from crisis and transitional accommodation.
- Commitment from government Departments to distribute and promote information programs and policies throughout their organisation including regional offices.
- Consideration to be given that traditional Indigenous communities are not defined by government regions and that cross border service collaboration will be required in some areas.

### Recommendations from the Family Violence Forum

- That Government provide a recurrent funding base and an increase in resources for capacity building within Indigenous communities. This would enable Indigenous organisations to take control of the development and delivery of family violence related programs and other services and effectively plan for the future of their community needs.
- To ensure the overall wellbeing of our workers is considered by providing adequate training, debriefing and strategies to deal with critical incidents as well as being able to access counselling services.
- That the Family Violence Task Force support funds for the development and implementation of the "Hear Me Now, Strengthening Young Koori's" kits for all children from early childhood, primary and secondary school levels (funded through the PADV program).
- That the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force and the community members of the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee pursue the expansion of such initiatives to include Indigenous communities on the NSW/VIC and VIC/SA Borders.

## BUILDING ON AND STRENGTHENING EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

• Develop an Indigenous Family Violence Cultural Audit to confirm the cultural appropriateness of counselling support services in mainstream agencies.	DHS
• Expanding the role and eligibility criteria of Indigenous Alcohol and Drug Resource Centres to include service responses to family violence through Residential Rehabilitation Programs—address staffing issues and professional support people to be employed in specialist programs (ie. Psychologists).	DHS
• That formal links are established at a policy and program level to further explore the relationship of substance abuse to the occurrence of family violence in Indigenous communities to determine opportunities for further additional funding for partnership opportunities between services and cross sectoral training. This may include an expansion of eligibility criteria to ensure that indigenous alcohol and drug resource centres can respond adequately to issues of family violence.	All Departments
• Establishing an Indigenous Strategic Framework to tackle underlying issues contributing to family violence in a holistic manner and which reflect 'whole of government' processes.	All Departments
• Continuation of the Koori Mediator Program being piloted by the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria and expanding its focus to include the provision of training to address family violence disputes occurring in Indigenous communities.	DoJ
• Increasing the number of Koori Contact Officers in the Magistrate's Courts to include the Children's Court, County Court, Supreme Court and the proposed Family Violence Court.	DoJ
• Develop a RAJAC Plan for each region to address information needs and to include an information kit about Indigenous people and the Law.	DoJ
• Establishing formalised processes for selecting and allocating Police Liaison positions throughout Victoria ensuring that training, tenure and support issues are addressed.	DoJ
• Family Violence training to be given to meet the specific needs and requirements of the Police Family Violence Liaison Officers which includes comprehensive information about local Indigenous issues and protocols.	DoJ
• Victoria Police to formally recognise good performance of the Police Family Violence Liaison Officer's role.	DoJ
• Each Police District to develop a protocol between the Police and the principle family violence provider in their District about the provision of after-hours service delivery and the notification of support agencies.	DoJ
• Local Aboriginal Justice Advisory Panel to establish protocols with local Police for responding to Indigenous family violence situations.	DoJ
• To develop an Indigenous Victims of Crime Information Kit, that identifies programs and services that victims can access from their communities and options for accessing victims of crimes compensation fund to support applications claims from individuals and service providers.	All Departments

## BUILDING ON AND STRENGTHENING EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE RESPONSES

### RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION

### RESPONSIBILITY

- | RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION  | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|----------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate what options (changes) to access compensation/tribunal fund needs to be considered if accessed by victim that is unwilling or too frightened to charge a perpetrator, which is a requirement to access support.</li> </ul>   | DoJ            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Police and DHS Child Protection Services to develop an integrated training package applicable to each Police District with the training being based on the 'Protecting Children Protocol' and the 'Violence Against Women Strategy' and which includes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– An overview of the Statutory responsibilities of Child Protection</li> <li>– A brief outline of the Victorian Risk Framework</li> <li>– An understanding of the Notification process for Child Protection</li> <li>– A brief outline of Indigenous family kinship relationships and the role of extended family</li> <li>– A brief overview of child development and the influences of family violence</li> <li>– A best-case practice model to be developed with the local Police and the local Child Protection Unit</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | DoJ            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model client-focused interagency communication protocols to be developed between Police and service providers, including Child Protection reporting requirements.</li> </ul>   | DoJ            |

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

### WHAT WE WANT

- An evaluation of new models funded as a result of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FAMILY VIOLENCE FORUM


- That the Task Force direct the State Government and ATSIC to undertake an analysis of all properties that have been purchased for communities. This should be done with the view of improving the utilisation of those properties for community projects and programs such as family violence, substance abuse, strengthening families, other programs relevant to local community, and in particular the future management and utilisation of Camp Jungai.
- That comprehensive mapping be undertaken of all Indigenous specific programs, services and policies across the Victorian and Commonwealth Government that:
  - Contain details of all programs including objectives, funding implications, contact details and personnel
  - Is updated every 12 months and to be provided at no cost to all community organisations and service providers
  - The mapping exercise to include services being delivered by the NSW Government in relation to southern NSW and SA

**RECOMMENDATIONS—ACTION****RESPONSIBILITY**

• That a research project be undertaken to determine the merits and feasibility of establishing an Indigenous Family Violence Court and the changes needed to provide a culturally safe and secure environment for Indigenous family violence victims.	DoJ
• To commission research to evaluate the effectiveness of services provided in the education system which provide support to Indigenous students who may be experiencing family violence—in their home, in the school or in the community.	DET
• To review existing policies, procedures and rules for Women's Refuges and Safe Houses to determine what changes and other alternatives to communal living models could be made to allow young males 12 years and older to be with their mothers and other siblings.	DHS
• To commission research into current response times for dealing with family violence incidences to identify what changes could be made to reduce response times to an appropriate level—such as no more than 48 hours.	DHS, DoJ
• To commission a research project to determine the nature and extent of family violence in same sex relationships.	DHS
• To conduct research to determine the merits and feasibility of establishing an Indigenous Rape/Sexual Assault Centre to provide a culturally safe and secure environment for Indigenous family violence victims.	DHS
• To develop an Indigenous Family Violence Resource Guide which contains specific information about sexual assault services victims can access from their communities.	DHS
• Police to review their responses to Indigenous women experiencing family and domestic violence focusing on why Indigenous women do not report family violence incidences.	DoJ
• Conducting a review of sentencing of men who use violence against Indigenous women and children to identify the effectiveness of current judicial processes.	DoJ
• Reviewing current Police work practices regarding Indigenous victims applying for family violence Intervention Orders to identify what changes could be made to make service interactions more culturally sensitive.	DoJ
• In light of Indigenous Court practices, conduct a review of sentencing practices to identify breaches of family violence Orders and Bail conditions that recognise the seriousness of offences.	DoJ

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aboriginal	The term Aboriginal is used in this Report when referring to Aboriginal organisations.
Action Plan	A term used to describe the Task Force recommendations to Government to develop the 'whole of government' response to family violence in Victoria.
Community Led and Community Driven	Terms used to describe the approach to be taken in Victoria to address family violence which involves active participation and suggestions made by individuals and community groups to develop and implement local solutions to family violence.
Framework Document	A document developed by the Victorian Government outlining the framework to be used to develop the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy and the approach to be taken by the Government to complete this task.
Holistic Healing	A term describing approaches that involve responses to family violence which consider and incorporate multiple aspects of service provision that focus on victims and perpetrators, family and extended family members, Indigenous and mainstream services; and which are predicated on all parties being active participants in programs and initiatives implemented to address family violence in a community.
Indigenous	The term Indigenous is used in this Report as the Government's Indigenous Affairs policy, 'Reconciliation and Respect' has adopted this term to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Interim Report	A Report published by the Task Force in October 2002 containing a summary of their findings to date in relation to family violence in Victorian Indigenous communities.
Koori or Koorie	A term generally used to describe Indigenous inhabitants of southeast Australia.
RIFVAG's	Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups which has representatives from Indigenous communities in each DHS region.
RIFVSO's	Regional Indigenous Family Violence Support Officers working from Department of Human Services Regional Offices.
Statewide Coordinator	Employed by the Community Care Division of the Department of Human Services to oversee the development of IFV Regional Action Plans in response to the actions developed as part of the Strategy.
Statewide Forum	A Forum convened by the Task Force in March 2003 at which community members and representatives from Indigenous and mainstream services as well as Government Departments were present to discuss issues related to Indigenous family violence in Victoria.
The Strategy	The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy which is to be developed by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Working Group in partnership with the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Forum and representatives from various Indigenous communities and groups.



The Task Force	Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force established by the Victorian Government to undertake and oversee research and community consultations related to family violence issues.
whole of government	A term used to describe the approach used in Victoria by the Government as part of its partnership with Indigenous communities.
whole of community	A term used to describe the approach preferred by Indigenous people which involves active and ongoing engagement and conversation with individuals, families, groups and organisations.
Working Group	A term used to describe the Indigenous Family Violence Working Group established by Government to respond to the Task Force Final Report. This Group consists of senior officers from various State and Commonwealth Government Departments.



## ACRONYMS

A&D	Alcohol and Drug/s
AAV	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACES	Aboriginal Community Elders Service
ACJP	Aboriginal Community Justice Panel
ACLOs	Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers
ADR	Aboriginal Dispute Resolution
ACSASS	Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AHBV	Aboriginal Housing Board Victoria
ARKEC	Aboriginal Regional Koori Education Coordinator
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIWTF	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force
CAAPS	Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services
CAPS	Community Aged Care Packages
CASA	Council Against Sexual Assault
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CIF	Community Initiatives Fund
CJP	Community Justice Panel
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSF	Community Support Fund
DE&T	Department of Education and Training
DHS	Department of Human Services
DNRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
DoJ	Department of Justice
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DSG	Departmental Secretaries Group
DTF	Department of Treasury and Finance
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
EDVOS	Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service
EHH	Elizabeth Hoffman House
FaCS	Commonwealth Family and Community Services
FVSS	Family Violence Support Services
HACC	Home and Community Care
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICCO	Indigenous Community Corrections Officer
IFV	Indigenous Family Violence
IFVSO	Indigenous Family Violence Support Officers
KECEP	Koori Early Childhood Education Program
KECFO	Koori Early Childhood Field Officer
KODE	Koori Out Door Education
KPSA	Koori PreSchool Assistants
KSIS	Koori Services Improvement Strategy
LAECG	Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
LGAs	Local Government Authorities
LPP	Local Priority Policing
MCATSIA	Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Of Celebration
NIWG	National Indigenous Working Group on Violence
NSPLS	National Centre for Preventative and Legal Services
NTV	No To Violence
OATSIH	Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
OoH	Office of Housing
OWP	Office of Women's Policy
PAAC	Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council
PADV	Partnerships Against Domestic Violence
PAOL	Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer
PRB	Private Rental Brokerage
RAJAC	Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RIFVAG	Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups
RIFVAP	Regional Indigenous Family Violence Action Plans
RIFVSO	Regional Indigenous Family Violence Support Officers
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAC	State Advisory Committee
SME's	Small to Medium Enterprises
SNAICC	Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
SSCRFV	Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence
TAC	Transport Accident Commission
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
THM	Transitional Housing Management
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VACCHO	Victorian Community Controlled Health Organisations Incorporated
VACKH	Victorian Aboriginal Council of Koori Health
VACSAL	Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VAHS	Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
VAJA	Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement
VALS	Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
VCCAV	Victorian Community Council Against Violence
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIFVS	Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy
VFVPLS	Victorian Family Violence Prevention Legal Service
VIFVTF	Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force
VIYAC	Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council
VLRC	Victorian Law Reform Commission
VPAPRG	Victoria Police Aboriginal Policy Reference Group
VPS	Victorian Public Service/Sector
WSECG	Women's Safety Executive Coordination Group
WSS	Women's Safety Strategy

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*Family Violence is not part of traditional Indigenous culture*

**Family Violence Strategy**

The centre piece is of a family that is going through hard times such as Drug, Alcohol and Violence. The white figure represents an ancestral figure watching over them through these hard times. The shapes with markings on them represent message sticks which suggest the access that is needed to gaining help for these families. The white dots represent the community, which is linked together with pathways, suggesting that there is a change in attitude towards one another and that everyone is working together as a community to strive for the good of all.

**Artist:** Robert Waits (Gunditjmarra)



