



**Royal Commission  
into Family Violence**

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH ELTRINGHAM**

I, Elizabeth (Libby) Eltringham, Policy and Legal Worker, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) of 292 Wellington Street, Collingwood in the State of Victoria, say as follows:

1. I am authorised by DVRCV to make this statement on its behalf.
2. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

**Current role**

3. I am a Policy and Legal Worker at DVRCV. My role encompasses policy, community legal education and training, and advocacy in relation to family violence issues.

**Background and qualifications**

4. I trained as a teacher and taught for a period of time, before being recruited into regional and State-wide development roles in the Disadvantaged Schools Program. I also worked as State-wide coordinator of the Australian Traineeship System Awareness Scheme with the State Training Board of Victoria.
5. In the early 1990's I completed training in counselling techniques, and took up a community development role at Bendigo Community Health Services. In that role I was part of a group that developed a regional strategy plan for reducing family violence. I subsequently worked for two years as a counsellor advocate at the Loddon Campaspe Centre Against Sexual Assault.
6. In 1997, I returned to Melbourne and took a locum position at Thornbury Women's Neighbourhood House coordinating a volunteer peer support program for isolated women living in the North.

7. I took up a position in the family violence sector as a family violence network coordinator based at Berry Street in 1998. My role was to support and maintain regional family violence networks made up of professionals from family violence services; community health centres; housing services; court support programs; counselling, awareness and advocacy programs; and community legal service providers.
8. In my role I convened a regional family violence network advisory committee bringing together representatives from the seven family violence networks in the Northern metro area of Melbourne (including local government areas of Whittlesea, Hume, Moreland, Darebin, Banyule, Nillumbik, and Yarra). While networks had all initiated a range of family violence prevention activities within their own LGAs, with the establishment of the regional advisory group, regional prevention campaigns were developed.
9. At this time, and prior to the election of the Bracks government in Victoria, there was very little activity or State government policy work happening in relation to family violence. There was no funded peak body for women's family violence services. In my role at Berry Street, and together with other networkers across the State, we worked with DVRCV (then DVIRC) to develop State-wide campaigns to increase awareness and to ensure that there was some consistency in the messages that were being sent out about family violence.
10. DVRCV has continued to be very active in trying to help build coherent State-wide responses to family violence. For example, in 1999 DVRCV produced a booklet called "Is someone you know being abused?" DVRCV worked with family violence networkers to develop a State-wide campaign on the theme of 'Family and Friends', that included radio ads; posters; large tram ads and a distribution strategy. The booklet was accompanied by region-specific family violence resources and was produced in different languages. It was the first of its kind in Victoria and that booklet is still in demand today.
11. In 2001, I started working at DVRCV. While I was employed as a community legal worker the political climate and changes that were being flagged led to my role being expanded to encompass systemic advocacy on family violence. 'Policy and legal worker' better describes my role today.

12. In my role at Berry Street and later at DVRCV, I consulted with the Office for Women's Policy in relation to its Women's Safety Strategy, released in 2002. The release of the strategy came shortly after Christine Nixon's appointment as Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. The Women's Safety Strategy recommended the establishment of three State-wide steering committees, enquiring into family violence, sexual assault and violence in the workplace. The release of the Women's Safety Strategy marked a significant period in the development of reform of family violence responses in Victoria. Ms Nixon's leadership was invaluable.

### **The development of a common risk assessment tool**

13. In my role at DVRCV I became an inaugural member of the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence that first met in 2002. The Committee was made up of government and non-government members, who worked together to develop a vision for reforming the family violence system in Victoria.
14. In 2005, the Office for Women's Policy released a report from that Committee, entitled "Reforming the Family Violence system in Victoria". I understand that report has been produced to the Royal Commission by Assistant Commissioner Wendy Steendam. The report set out a vision for reform and advocated the development of an integrated family violence response. It recognised that this would require the development of governance arrangements, codes of practice, common approaches and tools within the family violence sector. In particular, it recommended the adoption of a common approach to risk assessment.
15. Following the release of that report, the Office for Women's Policy contracted KPMG to develop a common framework to assess family violence risk. A reference group was appointed to work with KPMG in developing the framework and tool. The reference group included both government and non-government representatives. represented DVRCV on that reference group.

### **CRAF**

16. In 2007, the Office for Women's Policy released the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework, commonly known as the Common Risk Assessment Framework (**CRAF**). CRAF is the central tool for assessing and responding to family violence risk across different sectors and settings in Victoria. It serves as one of the most significant pieces of collaborative work to reduce family violence harm in the State.

17. The purpose of CRAF was to provide a foundation and a guide for consistent approaches to family violence risk assessment and risk management, as well as to support the development of an integrated family violence system in Victoria.
18. CRAF is a framework and a tool. It comprises six components to guide effective risk assessment and risk management:
  - 18.1. a shared understanding of family violence;
  - 18.2. standardised risk assessment;
  - 18.3. referral pathways and information sharing;
  - 18.4. risk management – continual assessment and case management;
  - 18.5. data collection and analysis; and
  - 18.6. quality assurance.
19. Risk assessment is basically a process of working with a woman who is experiencing family violence to identify, and make an assessment of, the level of risk present, using the same approach as others working with clients experiencing family violence; and thinking systematically about steps to ensure safety.
20. CRAF invites the worker to approach risk assessment through a conversation with the woman to identify the presence of risk factors (not limited to physical violence, and including coercive, controlling behaviours), and ask about her level of fear of the likelihood of future violence. The worker then combines the information available to inform their professional judgement about the risk of future harm, including serious or imminent risk.
21. Once risk has been identified and assessed, CRAF recommends processes for enhancing safety: a planning process to decide on next steps; creating safety plans with the woman; and risk management strategies that will involve information sharing and referral pathways. CRAF requires the worker to communicate their assessment of the level of risk with the woman, and work with her to manage risk through safety planning and risk management strategies. It is a process of the worker doing risk assessment *with* the woman, rather than *to* her. CRAF can help to increase a woman's own awareness of the risks she may be facing.

22. CRAF adopts a 'structured professional judgement' approach which combines three elements to determine the level of risk:
  - 22.1. the victim's own assessment of their level of risk – recognising that she knows the perpetrator better than anyone else; can often predict when things are going to get worse and when the violence is escalating and becoming more severe;
  - 22.2. evidence-based risk indicators – operating as an Aide Memoire; and
  - 22.3. the practitioner's own professional judgment.
23. While different models of family violence risk assessment operate in different jurisdictions, the evidence based risk indicators outlined in CRAF are consistent with most other tools and frameworks used elsewhere.
24. CRAF underwent minor review with Edition 2 released in April 2012.

#### **DVRCV's role in CRAF training**

25. In 2008, the Victorian government contracted DVRCV, Swinburne University and No To Violence to develop CRAF training programs. I was a lead member of the team that developed the training proposal. Under that contract, DVRCV developed modules and training materials including a training DVD, to reflect the three levels of risk assessment outlined in the CRAF:
  - 25.1. Practice Guide 1: Identifying Family Violence;
  - 25.2. Practice Guide 2: Preliminary Assessment; and
  - 25.3. Practice Guide 3: Comprehensive Assessment.
26. In addition to training modules developed to reflect the three practice guides, DVRCV also developed tailored training programs for:
  - 26.1. Maternal & Child Health Nurses; and
  - 26.2. Magistrates' Court Registrars.
27. DVRCV co-delivered CRAF training with Swinburne between 2008-2010 and 2011-2013. We delivered a one-day program in *Practice Guide 3* for specialist family violence workers; a 4-hour *Practice Guide 2* program for other professionals who

come into contact with family violence and play a role in initial risk assessment, but for whom family violence is not their core business; and a *Train-the Trainer* program for regional family violence workers in delivery of *Practice Guide 1*.

28. More than 6,000 Victorian Service providers have attended training programs delivered under these contracts. A further 500 have attended CRAF training delivered separately by DVRCV since 2013.

29. Employees from a wide range of professional groups have been involved in training to date, some on a 'whole-sector basis', but many on an individual, local/ regional or ad-hoc basis. Participants have come from:

- Specialist family violence services;
- Sexual assault services;
- Victoria Police;
- Maternal and Child Health Nurses;
- Housing and homelessness services;
- Community health, mental health services and drug and alcohol services;
- Aboriginal Co-ops and other Aboriginal services;
- Specialised services for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities;
- Magistrates' Court staff, including Registrars and Magistrates;
- Community Corrections Officers;
- ChildFIRST service providers;
- Child Protection;
- Family Support Services;
- Hospital emergency department workers;
- Disability services;

- Counselling and mediation services; and
  - Men's behavioural change programs.
30. Clients enter the family violence system in many different ways. CRAF provides a framework that can help to build shared understandings of family violence and of risk across sectors and settings. Having a broad range of professionals attend family violence and CRAF training increases the likelihood that people experiencing violence will receive skilled, consistent coordinated responses regardless of where they've entered the system. CRAF builds 'risk literacy'. Once you have done risk assessment training, and you know the risk factors, you tend not to forget or "un-know" them.
31. The risk factors become a lens or a filter for what the worker hears in a woman's account of what's happening in the relationship, and can help to guide the conversation. CRAF training emphasises asking direct questions and seeking more detail to allow the worker to undertake effective risk assessment. That detail can easily be overlooked if a worker is not properly trained in responding to family violence.
32. A worker who is familiar with the risk factors in the CRAF Aide Memoire, may hear a woman say, for example, that "he gets a bit rough". That worker will know to ask for further details about what he does when he "gets a bit rough". She may then disclose, for example, that he grabbed her by the throat and pushed her against the wall; or that he raised a beer bottle above her head as if about to hit her with it. Choking is a 'red flag' risk factor in the CRAF Aide Memoire; as is use of a weapon. The worker who understands risk factors and 'red flags' will know to ask for more information about the incident and the nature of the violence that is occurring; and will be more able to make an assessment of level of risk present, and then work with the woman around safety planning.
33. Rather than questioning whether professionals should be trained in CRAF, we should instead be asking what level of CRAF training is required for different professional groups, and how best to embed CRAF into their practice. Ideally, following a review that is urgently required, CRAF should become a universal risk assessment and risk management framework and tool for Victoria.

### **What CRAF has achieved**

34. Evaluation and feedback received by DVRCV suggests that CRAF has had a significant impact on practice in Victoria over seven years of implementation. We believe that there is now a need for the framework to be reviewed to keep up to date with emerging issues and changes in the sector. However, it is important to recognise that CRAF does do a number of things well. CRAF has provided a means for building shared understandings of family violence and risk across Victoria. It is a good foundation document.
35. CRAF has contributed to a growing understanding that early intervention through risk assessment; safety planning and referral can make a significant difference to the lives of women and children affected by family violence. It has become widely known across Victoria. Other States have developed and/or adapted their own risk assessment frameworks, with acknowledgment to CRAF.
36. With increasing public awareness around family violence, improved media reporting, and a number of high-profile domestic murders, demand for CRAF training has increased considerably. The broader service sector is now alert to the necessity for workers to be trained in CRAF. DVRCV was recently contracted by DHHS to provide another 59 sessions of CRAF training, with 29 sessions scheduled between July-December 2015. These were advertised on Thursday 9 July 2015. Of the 725 places available, 487 had been filled by Tuesday 14 July 2015.

### **A review of CRAF**

37. After seven years of CRAF implementation and training roll-outs across Victoria, it is DVRCV's view that it is time for a review of CRAF and of the linked training packages. The particular areas for attention in such a review are addressed in detail in DVRCV's submission to the Royal Commission. Attached to this statement and marked "EE- 1" is a copy of DVRCV's submission to the Royal Commission.
38. In summary, a review of CRAF is necessary to:
  - 38.1. better understand how CRAF is currently being implemented, the extent to which it has been embedded into agency and sector policies and practices, and to evaluate the suitability of levels of risk assessment for various professional groups and settings;



- 38.2. develop benchmarks for risk assessment practice, and make recommendations about who should be using CRAF and when;
  - 38.3. address content gaps that have been identified within CRAF since its development and implementation State-wide; and
  - 38.4. establish an effective authorising environment to ensure consistent implementation, including mandating the use of CRAF by core services in the family violence service system and others who frequently provide responses to family violence to use a revised CRAF, and embedding CRAF into organisational policies and practice.
39. While CRAF is described as a risk assessment and risk management framework, it is incomplete. Direction around its use is inadequate. CRAF does not give enough guidance for example around risk assessment of children; and it does assume a minimum level of expertise in family violence. CRAF needs to be reviewed and enhanced to become a more complete, coherent guiding document for universal application across Victoria.
40. At pages 31 to 41 of the DVRCV submission, we set out in detail the ways in which CRAF requires revision and additions and the ways in which its use and usefulness could be improved, including through changes to training and a more effective authorising environment which embeds the CRAF principles into the work of specific organisations. I commend those recommendations to the Royal Commission.



**Elizabeth Eltringham**

Dated: 17 July 2015