

ATTACHMENT [HH-1]

This is the attachment marked “[HH-1]” referred to in the witness statement of Heather Margaret Holst dated 13 July 2015.



Hanover Welfare Services and HomeGround Services Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

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Executive Summary

Hanover and HomeGround thank the Commissioners and the State Government of Victoria for the opportunity to contribute to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

The evidence detailed throughout this submission portrays a stark and disturbing reality; one that demands a better response for women and children fleeing family violence.

Hanover and HomeGround's combined 70 years' experience in delivering housing and support services to people experiencing homelessness has clearly demonstrated the causal connection of family violence to homelessness. The homelessness sector sees many people utilising services as a result of family violence, both perpetrators and victims, and that homelessness sector is vital in connecting these victims into legal services and specialist support.

The data contained in this submission demonstrates that many women and their children do not access police, court and family violence services for a variety of reasons and in effect, homelessness providers such as Hanover and HomeGround have become first response agencies for many women and children fleeing violence. It is therefore imperative that homelessness services play a role in connecting these victims into legal services and enabling them to access the specialist support they need.

Homelessness agencies are supporting a large number of women who are traumatised by violence, including a large number of children (mostly younger than 12 years) displaced from their homes due to family violence. The links between homelessness, specialist agencies and education providers need to be strengthened to ensure the effects of children's education and development is not compounded by the responses available to victims of family violence.

Given this, it is imperative that we are able to provide rapid and appropriate links to specialist supports and legal services. For this to occur, long term housing is considered a fundamental platform for responding to family violence, either by safely and affordably retaining the existing home or by offering a rapid rehousing response to a new home.

To ensure women and their children are able to remain in the family home, an appropriate supply of immediately available emergency/crisis accommodation is needed which is suitable for men removed from the family home as perpetrators of family violence.

Further research is needed to understand the experience and effects of violence on children, Indigenous communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The current poorly-integrated approach to data and reporting requirements across a range of sectors that work with people experiencing family violence does not paint a holistic picture of the nature, quantum and full scale effects of family violence. It is imperative the Family Violence Index recently announced by the State Government is embedded across a broad range of datasets to build a true picture of the breadth and effects of family violence in our community.

Hanover and HomeGround are committed to engaging with the Commission to develop lasting solutions to addressing family violence in our community.

1. Introduction

Hanover Welfare Services and HomeGround Services welcomes the opportunity to provide this joint submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

In completing this submission, we have focused on those issues directly relevant to our expertise and experience. It includes evidence of the experience of FV from a case-file audit and personal stories. Critical policy issues and un-met needs are also identified through the extensive knowledge of our dedicated case-workers. Effective practice tools, risk assessment strategies, specialist services and partnerships are outlined. We conclude with a detailed list of policy recommendations (section 11).

2. Agency Profiles

About Hanover Welfare Services

Hanover Welfare Services (Hanover) aims to make a practical difference in the lives of people experiencing homelessness or facing a housing crisis. Established in 1964, Hanover is a not-for-profit company with an annual budget of \$17 million and a staff of over 160 people located at multiple sites across metropolitan Melbourne and providing assistance to 6,500 people experiencing homelessness each year, including 2,500 children.

Hanover's mission is to empower people who are homeless, or at imminent risk of becoming so, to enable them to take greater control of their lives. Hanover also aims to stimulate and encourage change in Australian society to benefit people experiencing homelessness.

Hanover's work encompasses three inter-related areas:

- Support - the provision of high quality individualised tailored support to assist clients to address issues impacting on homelessness.
- Accommodation - access to a range of accommodation and housing options, including 79 singles and couples crisis accommodation beds, 12 families' crisis units, 14 rooming house beds, 255 transitional housing properties and 9 long-term properties.
- Research and advocacy – robust, targeted and timely homelessness research, and the provision of high-level advocacy and policy advice to state and federal governments, community sector agencies and the community. Hanover values integrity in all its relationships, intelligence in its processes, the intrinsic worth of each individual and development and nurturing of community participation.

About HomeGround Housing Services

HomeGround Housing Services' (HomeGround) vision is to end homelessness in Melbourne. Every week HomeGround works with the most disenfranchised people in the community as well as with people who unexpectedly find themselves in housing crisis.

Last year, HomeGround assisted over 10,000 households experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. HomeGround is committed to working in partnerships with government, corporations, philanthropic

organisations and the community sector to tackle this problem. This includes involvement in research projects and strategic advocacy on critical issues.

HomeGround champions and advocates evidence based approaches to end homelessness. This has included leading the introduction of Common Ground Supportive Housing into Melbourne and developing affordable and supportive housing projects across Melbourne.

HomeGround's services are delivered across a large geographic area in metropolitan Melbourne that ranges from the outer north east to the inner and middle south. Our mission is to get people housed and keep people housed. We offer:

- Support – programs focussed on supporting households to access suitable, affordable long term housing, and assisting them address support needs to enable them to maintain their housing.
- Housing –management of over 500 properties within the Transitional Housing Management portfolio and HomeGround Real Estate.
- Advocacy and Innovation – HomeGround has been at the forefront of introducing innovative solutions to homelessness, including Elizabeth St Common Ground, Melbourne Street To Home, and HomeGround Real Estate – the first not for profit real estate agency in Australia.

About Launch Housing

In July 2015 a merger between Hanover and HomeGround will create Launch Housing. The new organisation will be Victoria's largest independent voice on homelessness with a mission to end homelessness in Melbourne and beyond.

With a combined 70 year history Launch Housing comes from a strong shared position of:

- Delivering high quality housing and support services
- Providing a strengths based approach by investing in peoples' skills, abilities and talents
- Undertaking research for evidence informed practices; and
- Influencing change through advocacy to governments and the community.

Launch Housing will provide services that cover 13 local government areas: Hume, Whittlesea, Moreland, Darebin, Yarra, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington, Glen Eira, Bayside, Monash, Kingston and Greater Dandenong. Launch Housing will operate services from 15 sites across metropolitan Melbourne with the capacity to deliver support and housing to around 20,000 of Victoria's most vulnerable. Launch Housing will have over 350 staff working in the organisation and around 85 volunteers. Launch Housing is served by Chief Executive Officer, Mr Tony Keenan and governed by a skill based board of volunteer directors who come from corporate, government, academic and not-for-profit backgrounds.

2.1. Organisational responses to family violence

Hanover

In 2013 managers of Hanover's crisis services became concerned about the high number of clients presenting as homeless as a result of family violence and the instance of family violence incidents within our residential facilities. It was clear that the response of frontline staff to family violence was

inconsistent. While Hanover had a policy on family violence in place, there was no procedure, which meant that different staff were responding differently to family violence incidents.

Recognising the need to have a consistent organisational response to family violence, a Working Group was established in August 2013 with representatives from across the organisation. The focus of the Working group was to:

- Review Hanover's Family Violence Policy;
- Develop an organisational Procedure to respond to family violence;
- Align the organisational response to family violence with the Police Code of Practice and the Common Risk Assessment Framework;
- Build partnerships with the local police, family violence integration officers, women's family violence services and men's behavioral change programs;
- Consult the peak body Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service to discuss the organisational policy and procedure;
- Seek input from the key stakeholders (noted above) on the revised policy and new procedure to ensure service integration and a commitment to work together.

Partnerships and service integration

Partnerships have been central to developing an informed approach to dealing with family violence within the homelessness context.

Hanover acknowledges the importance of maintaining partnerships with the police, local women's family violence services, men's behavioral change programs and peak bodies such as Domestic Violence Victoria and No to Violence. These partnerships and integrated services ensure a more comprehensive response for people experiencing family violence that includes support needed to recover and live free of violence.

Hanover has been part of the Integrated Family Violence Services Network since 2006, and provides the crisis accommodation service for male perpetrators of violence who are removed from the family home in the Outer South metropolitan area of Melbourne.

Practice tools

As part of the process, Hanover developed practice tools including: a safety plan and two factsheets - one for people experiencing (including witnessing) family violence and one for those committing family violence. This family violence pack included additional information such as the Power and Control Wheels (based on the Duluth model) and Safety Plans in several languages.

Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) – Training for all operational staff

CRAF (DHS, 2012) was designed to assist practitioners to understand and identify risk factors underlying family violence and to respond appropriately.

The organisation recognised the need for all staff to have ongoing training on CRAF as it is the key part of the assessment process outlined in the new family violence procedure. It is paramount for all staff to feel confident and equipped to respond to clients who have experienced (including witnessing) family violence.

Hanover's revised policy and new procedure on family violence was finalised and circulated to staff in November 2014.

HomeGround

Increasingly, HomeGround programs are having contact with women and children who are subject to, or have survived family violence, and are left with the psychological, physical and financial consequences. HomeGround recognises the need for frontline staff to be equipped with the skills to identify and respond appropriately to the risk factors associated with family violence. HomeGround's approach to date has involved two key approaches – ongoing training for frontline staff in both initial assessment and case-management; and developing key referral and secondary consultation relationships with specialist family violence agencies.

Common Risk Assessment Framework training has been a part of HomeGround's mandatory program of training since 2012, and is offered twice a year to all staff. This has also ensured that initial assessment practices are aligned with the key principles of the CRAF.

The second key strategy was to develop partnerships with local specialist agencies to provide clear referral pathways for staff to utilise as well as an important source of secondary consultation and support. In the Inner South, HomeGround has a formal referral partnership with Inner South Domestic Violence Service, and in the North with Berry St.

In addition, HomeGround has been part of the Integrated Family Violence Services Network since 2006, and provides the crisis accommodation service for male perpetrators of violence who are removed from the family home.

Corporate Partnerships

HomeGround has also entered into a significant partnership with REA Group, who have provided generous funding for a Rapid Re-Housing Brokerage Program, which is designed to financially assist women and children to either relocate to safer housing, or maintain current housing on the private rental market. The program is delivered in three capital cities with the assistance of partner agencies in Brisbane and Perth.

3. Development of submission

This submission is informed by Hanover and HomeGround's extensive experience in delivering services to women, including women and their children, who access specialist homelessness services as a result of family violence. The evidence for this submission is collected from the following data sources:

Case file audit

The audit of administrative data in each Hanover client's case file was completed during a one week snapshot period, from the 21st to the 27th April 2015. The audit of HomeGround clients occurred over a 2-day period in May 2015.

Interviews with clients

Aiming to present the lived experience, face to face interviews were undertaken with 5 clients receiving support from Hanover who were homeless as a consequence of family violence. Interviews were completed between the 21st April and 4th May 2015.

Focus group with staff

A focus group with several staff from across both organisations, representing a range of programs occurred on 29 April 2015.

Program Case Study – Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service (HCSSS)

An example of promising practice - a case study of one of the few programs in Victoria, delivered by Hanover in the Southern Region, specifically targeting children who are homeless and have experienced family violence.

4. Case file audit

The audit focused on the interaction with police and family violence services for those who experienced family violence; specific questions included:

Did the client have involvement with a family violence service in the past 2 years?

Did the client have a Family Violence Intervention Order against a partner (ex-partner) in the past 2 years?

Did the client have a Family Violence Intervention Order against a family member in the past 2 years?

Was the client subject to a Family Violence Intervention Order in the past 2 years?

To your knowledge, does the client attribute their experience of homelessness to their experience of family violence?

Workers across the organisation completed the audit for every client in their caseload. The audit yielded a total of 598 client case files. Overall, among this group of clients:

- 64% of clients were women,
- 50% were families with children – these were mainly lone parents,
- 45% were single with no children,
- 20% were young people aged 17 to 24,
- 4% were at the opposite end of the scale aged between 65 and 75.

5. Prevalence of family violence

Whilst both agencies acknowledge family violence can be perpetuated by any member of a family against another, it is significantly more likely to be perpetrated by men (predominately by a woman's current or ex-partner) against single women and women and their children. It should be noted the case file audit did not differentiate between those who have used FV and those who have experienced it. The figures noting men's experience of family violence is likely to include that of a perpetrator.

Among the total of 598 case files audited, 351 clients had experienced family violence (FV); this represents 59% of all clients who received support from Hanover and HomeGround during the snapshot period.

The characteristics of the 351 clients who experienced family violence are detailed in Table 1 and show that:

- More than three-quarters were women (77%);
- 56% had children, but they were mostly parenting on their own; and
- 40% were single and had no children.
- Almost half (47%) were under 35 years of age; the youngest person was just 17 while the oldest was aged over 75.

Table 1: Selected characteristics of clients who experienced family violence (N=351)		
<i>Gender (N=349)*</i>		
Women	268	77%
Men	81	23%
<i>Age (N=351)</i>		
17 – 24 years	68	19%
25 – 34 years	100	28%
35 – 44 years	114	32%
45 – 54 years	44	13%
55 – 64 years	18	5%
65 – 75 years	7	2%
<i>Family type (N=351)</i>		

Lone mother with child/ren	165	47%
Couple with child/ren	31	9%
Couple no children	15	4%
Single no children	140	40%
<i>*Missing gender details for 2 cases</i>		
<i>Source: Case file audit</i>		

5.1. Family violence and gender

Consistent with the fact that family violence is perpetrated by men against women, 77% of case files indicating family violence were women. The typical client who had experienced family violence and was supported by both agencies during the snapshot period was a lone mother aged in her early 30s with 2 young children (under 12 years). Overall, there were more than 3 times as many women affected by family violence who were supported by Hanover and HomeGround.

5.2. Family violence and the loss of home

Family violence was a major driver of homelessness. Of the 351 clients impacted by family violence, 65% experienced homelessness as a result.

The loss of home due to family violence was just as common for women (66%) as it was for men (62%). The combined agencies' experience in delivering services confirms that the drivers for the loss of home for men and women in this instance are very different. The loss of home for women represents fleeing a violent parent for safety reasons. The loss of home for men is largely due to being removed from the family home as a perpetrator of violence.

5.3. Perpetrators of family violence

Identifying perpetrators was difficult because of the nature of the question used in the audit, which asked about being 'subject to' rather than about who was responsible for the violence. Again our experience suggests that men have taken out a FVIO in retaliation for a partner securing a FVIO on them.

Overall, of the total of 351 cases, 15% were the subject of a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO):

- Men (26%) were more likely to be subject to a FVIO;
- 45% were men with children

6. Family violence and specific groups

This section highlights the prevalence of family violence among specific groups including: young people, single women and families.

6.1 Young people

Among the 68 young people aged 17 to 24 who experienced family violence:

- 74% were young women and 26% were young men;
- 79% attributed their experience of homelessness to family violence;

- 65% were single without children; and
- 28% had children (thus 19 young people, who were mostly lone parents, had a total of 27 children between them).

6.2. Single women

Of the 140 clients who were single with no children (Table 1), around two-thirds (64%) were women. Further, among this group:

- Ages ranged from 17 to 75 years with more than half (56%) aged younger than 35 years;
- 5% were aged between 65 and 75;
- 65% attributed their experience of homelessness to family violence;
- 11% were the subject of a Family Violence Intervention Order.

6.3. Families

There were 196 parents who had experienced family violence (Table 2), the vast majority of whom were mothers (n=165) and a relatively small number were fathers (n=29).

Between them, these parents had 304 young children and 112 teenagers (Table 3), totalling 416 offspring. This means that family violence actually affected a total of 612 family members (Table 2) of which more than two-thirds (68%) were children (including teenagers).

Additionally, by including clients' children in the total numbers of those affected by family violence, Table 3 shows that, overall, there were 767 individuals who had experienced family violence; more than half (54%) were children.

Table 2: Families who experienced family violence		
Total number of parents	196	32%
Women	165	84%
Men	29	16%
Total number of children/young people	416	68%
Aged under 12 years	304	73%
Aged 12 – 18 years	112	27%
Total number parents plus children	612	100%
<i>Source: Case file audit</i>		
Table 3: Adults and children who experienced family violence		
Number of children	416	54%
Number adult case files audited	351	46%
Total number adults plus children	767	100%
<i>Source: Case file audit</i>		

7. Engagement with Police and Family Violence Services

Overall, analysis indicates relatively poor engagement with police and family violence services. In more than two-thirds of cases, there was *no* Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) against a partner/ex-partner, and/or *no* involvement with Family Violence Services.

As shown in Table 4, of the more than 300 clients who experienced family violence, just over half (51%) had police involvement in the past 2 years, indicating that nearly half (49%) had none. Women were more likely to have police involvement than men.

However, relatively few clients (29%) had a FVIO against a partner/ex-partner; FVIOs were more often reported by women. Further, only 30% had involvement with Family Violence Services; engagement with such services was more common among women.

Table 4: ALL - Contact with Police and Family Violence Services in past 2 years	Women (n=268)	Men (n=81)	Total (N=351)*
Police involvement for FV	55%	39%**	51%
FV Intervention Order against partner/ex	35%	9%	29%
Involvement with FV Service	37%	9%	30%
<i>*Gender – missing info for 2 cases</i>			
<i>** Includes involvement with Police as a perpetrator</i>			
<i>Source: Case file audit – Percentages do not sum to 100 as these services are independent</i>			

7.1. Young people

Young people may experience family violence from a partner/ex-partner, or from a family member such as a parent or sibling. Among those 68 young people (aged 17 to 24) who had experienced family violence, there were 49 who did not have children. For this group of mostly single youth, Table 5 shows that:

- 35% had *police* involvement due to FV in the past 2 years and
 - young men were less likely than young women to have contacted police; and
 - young people (35%) overall were less likely to have involved police than either older adults (51%), or families (60%);
- Only 8% had a FVIO against a partner/ex-partner;
- 31% had involvement with a *family violence service* in the past 2 years
 - young men (6%) were less likely to be involved with family violence services than young women (41%); and
- Only 10% had a FVIO against a family member (parent or sibling) - *all* were young women.

Table 5: YOUTH - Contact with Police and Family Violence Services in past 2 years	Young women (n=32)	Young men (n=17)	Total youth (N=49)
Police involvement for FV	44%	18%	35%
FV Intervention Order against partner/ex	9%	0%	8%
Involvement with FV Service	41%	6%	31%
FV Intervention Order against a family member	13%	0%	10%
<i>Source: Case file audit - Percentages do not sum to 100 as these services are independent</i>			

7.2. Women

As shown in Table 6, among the 89 single women who had experienced family violence:

- Just over half (51%) had police involvement in the past 2 years due to family violence;
- FVIOs were relatively uncommon – only a quarter had a FVIO against a partner/ex-partner; while
- 12% had a FVIO against a family member; and
- 31% had involvement with a Family Violence Service in the past 2 years.

Table 6: WOMEN WITH NO CHILDREN - Contact with Police and Family Violence Services in past 2 years	Women (n=89)	%
Police involvement for FV	45	51%
FV Intervention Order against partner/ex	22	25%
Involvement with FV Service	28	31%
FV Intervention Order against a family member	11	12%
<i>Source: Case file audit - Percentages do not sum to 100 as these services are independent</i>		

7.3. Families

Among the total of 196 parents, 60% had police involvement in the past 2 years due to family violence (Table 7); this was common among mothers as well as fathers.

In contrast, FVIOs or contact with FV Services were less common. For example, around a third of parents had FVIOs (38%) and/or involvement with FV Services (36%). Mothers were more likely than fathers to have a FVIO and/or contact with FV Services.

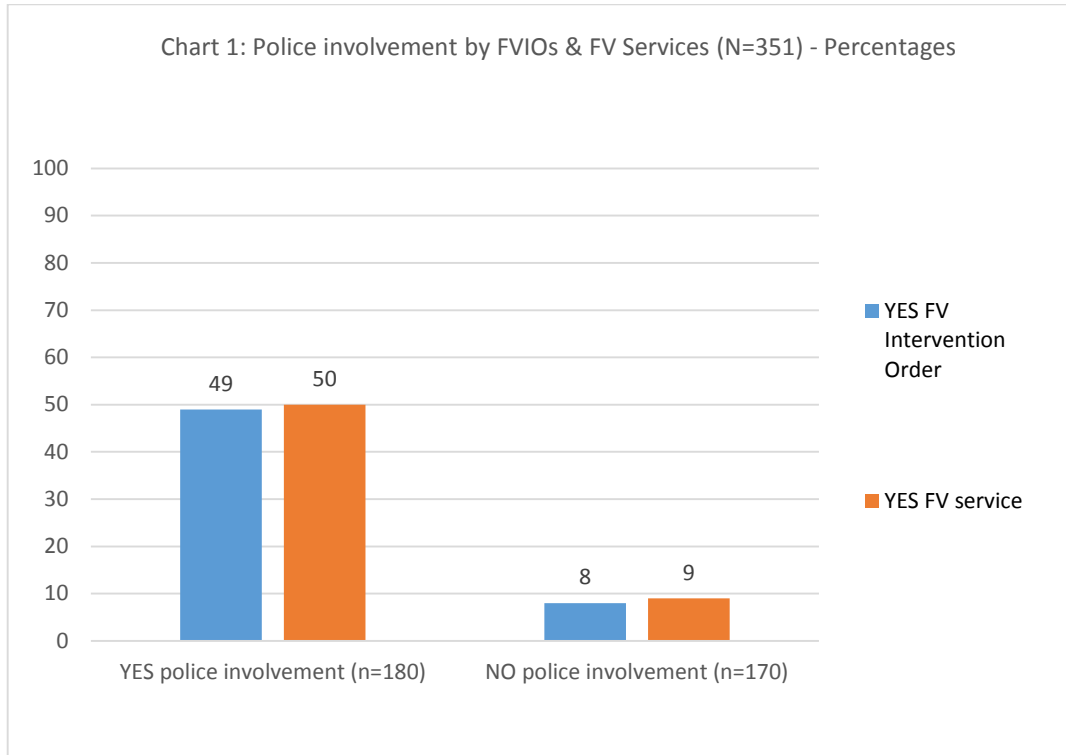
Table 7: PARENTS - Contact with Police and Family Violence Services in past 2 years	Mothers (n=165)	Fathers (n=29)	Total parents (N=196)*
Police involvement for FV	60%	59%	60%
FV Intervention Order against partner/ex	42%	17%	38%
Involvement with FV Service	40%	14%	36%
<i>*Gender – missing info for 2 cases</i>			
<i>Source: Case file audit - Percentages do not sum to 100 as these services are independent</i>			

7.4. Police involvement – positive or negative?

On the face of it, the findings suggest a lack of police involvement when it comes to FV in around half (49%) of the cases audited. It appears that, in most circumstances, FVIOs were not pursued on behalf of those affected, or provide follow-up to family violence services. The reasons for the lack of engagement with police, courts and family violence services are not clear however the in-depth interviews suggest a lack of faith in the response may be attributable to a reluctance to engage with these agencies.

However, analysis indicates that police involvement is critical. Chart 1 illustrates that among those who had police involvement (n=180), around half had intervention orders and/or had contact with

family violence services. In contrast, for those who had no police involvement (n=170), only 8% had intervention orders and only 9% had contact with family violence services.



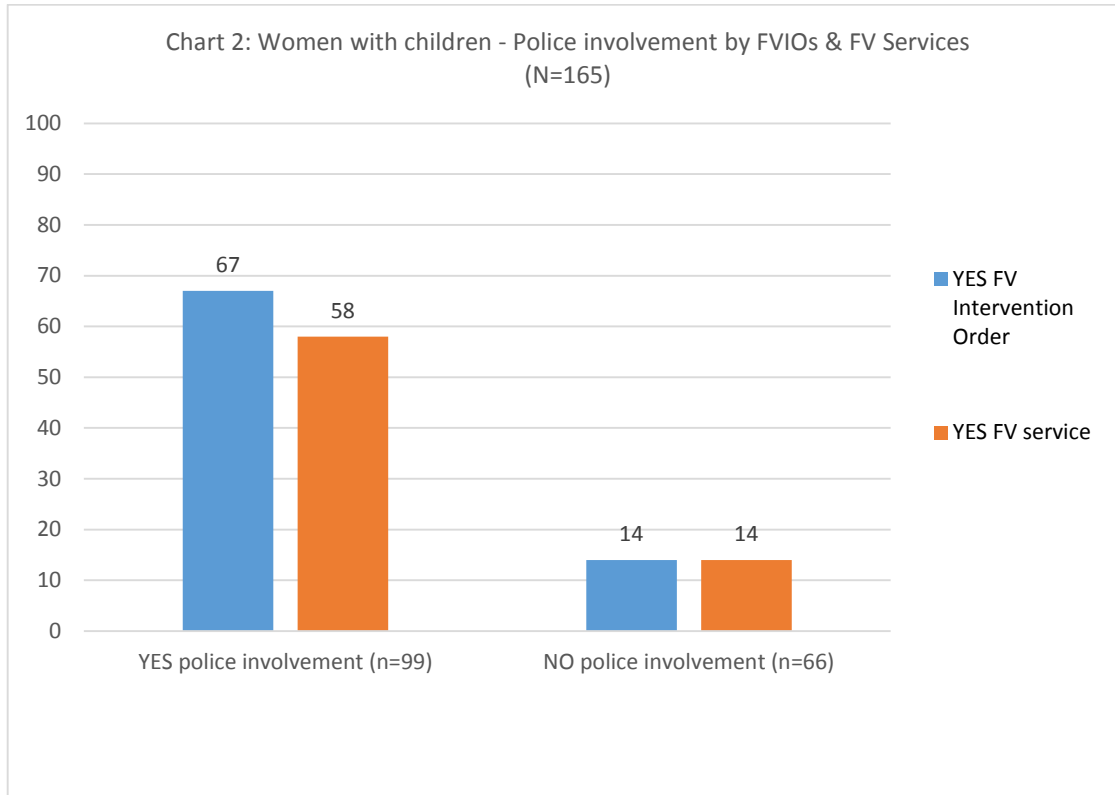
In the absence of police involvement, people affected by family violence were not engaged with family violence services. This may mean that people did not know about such services, or that they were able to seek an intervention order on their own behalf. Some people may have relied entirely on family or friends for support and help.

7.5 Women with children

The importance of police involvement is especially illustrated when it comes to families. Focusing on the group of women with children (n=165), Chart 2 shows that those who had contacted police were more likely to have an intervention order and/or contact with family services than those mothers who had no police involvement.

To some extent, this is reassuring because it suggests that police have taken action in FV situations, especially when mothers and their children are involved. However it is also disturbing because it indicates that for a third of mothers (and their children), police involvement left them without protection (no intervention order and/or no contact with family violence services).

Given the data are based on a snapshot audit of client files over one week rather than client interviews, the findings do need to be interpreted with caution.



8. Lived experience and consequences of family violence

During April 2015, in-depth interviews were conducted with five women identified by their case workers as having become homeless due to Family Violence (FV). All were women (aged 27-41 years) with school-age and/or younger children.

All had been subjected to intimate partner violence for a number of years (2-12 years) before fleeing and seeking help from crisis welfare services. All needed emergency accommodation, many other critical services and ongoing support. All had lost their homes, belongings and paid jobs and were struggling psychologically and financially, as were their children.

These five case studies present specific stories and issues (see 4.7) and then timeline summaries (see 4.8). Before presenting the case studies, the main commonalities are noted (see 4.1 to 4.5), followed by a summary of the barriers to moving forward with their lives (see 4.6).

8.1. The nature of family violence

Onset: Abuse by an intimate partner (FV) mostly started during or just after pregnancy and always involved controlling behaviour – financial and social – as well as physical abuse. FV was directed against the woman as it seemed to be an ‘ownership’ issue. While children were not directly targeted, they were present and have suffered as a result.

Fear and safety: Usually after the couple had separated, there were death threats, so it was not safe for the woman and her children to return to their home either to gather belongings or to live there. Therefore, they had to ‘disappear’ so the violent partner could not find them. This was costly and difficult and meant that even after ‘escaping’ the women had to be constantly vigilant, always looking over their shoulder and shielding their children. There was also constant trauma and fear for the children concerned. Some had lived *all* their lives with a violent father-figure.

Abuse by “in-laws”: Often, the ‘in-laws’ and mutual ‘friends’ took the side of the violent partner and were also hostile towards the mother and children. Most had no contact with their ex-partner, but for those who did, it was necessary to constantly “manage’ his behaviour – to appease him by not pursuing court orders or Child Support – to have any chance of (some) peace.

Intergenerational: There were also three cases of intergenerational violence – two by their own father, then their partner and one of child abuse by a partner’s father.

8.2. Devastating impact of FV on children

Child abuse: The five women interviewed had, in total, 11 children. Given the extent and duration of the FV against these women, most especially the death threats in all cases, these children are necessarily also victims of psychological abuse as witnesses of FV. As such, there were five adults plus 11 children, making 16 individuals suffering the consequences of FV within the following five case studies.

Loss: Children also faced the loss of a familiar home, neighbourhood and non-school activities and friends. Due to sudden poverty, mothers could not afford to pay for social activities, sports, toys, clothes and treats for their children.

Schooling: Most children had abruptly left their school and fewer than half were now coping well academically, as they had lost school continuity, teachers and school friends. Their mothers were also unable to pay for school fees, excursions or camps.

Constant fear: School-age children had been traumatised and psychologically damaged by living in constant fear and feeling unable to protect their mother. Mothers said their children needed counselling and special programs for children damaged by abuse. There was also fear by some mothers that their violent partner would snatch the children and relocate.

Parent-child relationship: Women said they put their children's welfare ahead of their own and were extremely concerned about the trauma suffered by their children, who effectively had only one parent. They felt guilty because their children were exposed to the violence and very defensive of their future. Some said children became very emotionally reliant on them, for example, wanting to sleep with their mother and experiencing separation anxiety or bed-wetting. Older children were angry and guilty because they felt they had failed to protect their mother (e.g. Ms E). The mothers themselves were emotionally damaged and often on medications, so parent-child relationships were under even more strain (e.g. Ms E's drug use).

8.3. Police, legal and court involvement

FVIOs: While dedicated, specialist FV response teams are located in all 24 hour police stations in Victoria¹, they are needed in all police stations. All the participants had been granted a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) against their violent partner but these orders were generally regarded as ineffective in keeping them and their children safe in their home because police were often slow to respond or did not respond – and some jurisdictions were reported to still not be taking FV seriously.

Constant breaches: For all women interviewed there were constant 'breaches' of FVIOs with little or no consequence (perpetrators were either not charged and taken to court, or it took several years for this to happen and/or those charged received little or no penalty).

Lawyers and Legal Aid: Only some of these women received Legal Aid funding for Family Court of Australia (FCA) matters, generally because their violent partners applied for aid before them. Some lawyers were very helpful and worked for a low fee or even worked 'pro bono'.

Family Courts: Some lawyers gave incorrect information based on the *Family Law Act* (FLA) Part VII, 2006 'Shared Parental Responsibility' clauses about 'hostile' parenting and the illegality of relocating with children – which do not apply in cases involving violence. Some women were afraid to apply for FCA orders as they allow the offender to know the women's whereabouts and could potentially formalise contact (access) to children by their violent father.

Victims of Crime: Two participants had considered applying for compensation to the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT). One (Ms A) had not yet proceeded because of legal advice that she would have to publicly justify her actions in staying in an abusive relationship, while the other (Ms E) had lodged a VOCAT application but said the process was taking a very long time.

8.4. Welfare agency assistance

Wide-ranging: Varied and concurrent emergency assistance was vital in supporting these women, including financial, material, housing, furniture, counselling, children's care/programs, legal and assistance in liaising with bureaucracies.

Immediate help: Also, they needed an immediate response from welfare agencies, preferably with no 'up-front' cost involved, since they had no financial resources and were in emergency flight.

¹ https://www.police.vic.gov.au/files/documents/464_FV_COP.pdf

Coordination: Having one dedicated case worker was also crucial because the women and their children were disoriented, dislocated, emotionally fragile and often with no informal support network to fall back on. A coordinated approach and nearby, accessible services for referrals was essential. These women often regarded their case worker as a personal friend and one said the welfare agency was “my refuge, in every way”.

8.5. Housing, financial and health issues

Assets and income: Severe financial hardship was a consequence of family violence. All the women lost their jobs when they had to flee, so had no personal income (only one had regained part-time work, the only professionally trained person). They had also typically lost their home and contents, children’s toys, bank accounts and cars. Three women had been owners/purchasers of a house or unit. One was left with a tenancy dispute because she had to flee a shared flat where her name only was on the lease.

Homelessness: For these women, their home is no longer safe. Even if the offender leaves, they reported partners would come back and damage property, posing a constant threat. Some women initially stayed in hotels or with a relative, but they needed ongoing, stable accommodation for themselves and their children. The immediate need was for crisis accommodation, followed by stable private or public housing

Physical and psychological health: As well as physical injuries (there were examples of broken jaws and slash wounds), the damage to mental health was perhaps most profound because of the constant threat in their lives. There was unceasing worry for their own and their children’s safety (death threats, hiding, false identities) as well as feelings of guilt and disgust about themselves for exposing their children to the FV. Some psychological damage was inevitable and they all spoke of the need for counselling for both themselves and their children. The mothers commonly needed a Doctor’s medicare rebated Mental Health Plan and medication for anxiety and depression.

8.6. Barriers to moving forward

Given the common issues indicated above, there are clear barriers to making a new life: continuing threat of violence; financial hardship/unemployment; service access barriers; ongoing legal, bureaucratic, housing and social support difficulties; and ongoing psychological support for traumatised children.

Lone parent poverty: All of these women are sole parents and some have very young children or children with medical conditions needing ongoing care and hospitalisation, so committing to paid work is difficult. They also have little or no family help with the children, so paid work hours would be very constrained.

Relocation: Escaping from a violent ex-partner meant a new address (and sometimes a new identity) which poses problems for job references, banking and rental/credit histories. Relocation to a strange suburb or state also meant the loss of neighbourhood, friendship, work and/or family social support networks – all of which can be vital for parenting and good mental health. This void then needs to be initially filled by welfare agencies and other formal organisations, but support is often needed for extended periods (or multiple episodes).

Legal hurdles: Specific problems included gaining Legal Aid (if an ex-partner claims Legal Aid first, it locks out the other partner) and the threat that a FCA parenting order could prevent relocation to be near family support or indeed give the violent partner formal access to children.

Children's needs: The costs of psychologist's consultations and 'family reports' on the condition of children for FCA hearings could be prohibitive for women. There were also deficiencies in ongoing or affordable counselling or activity-based programs for children traumatised by FV. Staff interviewed also described difficulties and inconsistent responses in accessing new schools necessitated by moving areas to escape violent partners.

Secure housing: Owners/purchasers of houses who flee but can't return cannot access public housing and can be left with large debts to repair damage to property or ongoing mortgage payments without the benefit of residence. They may also have no rental history so it can be difficult to secure private rentals. A lack of stable housing meant accessing the range of legal, medical, financial and counselling services was made more difficult due to area based eligibility criteria, or waiting lists that exceed the tenure of temporary accommodation.

FV responses: In certain states or jurisdictions there was reported "lack of education" around the reality and consequences of FV. There was also some difficulty accessing overloaded, understaffed, unresponsive or even hostile law enforcement or specialist FV services.

8.7. Case Studies

Case study 1: Ms 'A'

The case of Ms 'A' highlights the crucial need for swift access to a Women's Refuge and responsive Domestic Violence units within the police force since she (in common with the other four cases below) received death threats from her ex-partner which were taken seriously by police. However, also in common with the other cases, the police were unable to enforce the FVIO. Ms A's case also demonstrates Centrelink and the FCA giving appropriate exemptions due to family violence.

Breaching the FVIO

In late [REDACTED] after 7 years of physical and psychological abuse which began when she was pregnant, Ms A went to the police, who gained an FVIO against her de facto partner and he left. However, the FVIO had no effect on her partner's violent behaviour. He breached the order "every week", leading to a total of 93 reported breaches, which "I think got him in remand" (at time of interview, he was in prison):

He used to just rock up whenever he felt like it, the intervention order's a piece of paper, it doesn't mean anything to him and he told me that, he goes, "You think a piece of paper's going to keep me away?"

Early on the police and court responses were insufficient:

I mean, some nights they would do a drive by to make sure he wasn't around in the area after I've reported him. But that's it, they don't go in to my back yard to make sure he's not in there or anything ... [and each breach] takes months to go through the Magistrate Court, and it's not like he's in trouble immediately for the breach...

However, later on, Ms A and her child were removed by police and placed in a women's refuge:

[Ex-partner] was going through FCA, and we had the first step which was round table mediation, and he said some alarming things in that, and the round table mediator made a police statement; and then the police pretty much broke into our house, because we were asleep, and told us we're leaving, so it was, like, in the middle of the night.

This meant that she and her child could never return to their home for belongings - another common outcome. However, because the violence had been ongoing for some time, Ms A had seen

a case worker in a women's refuge previously and had all her personal documents packed ready to go:

We went through risk assessment management plan [RAMP], and because we were at risk I was talking to a lady through [Service], this was before we left, and she pretty much told me to have a bag just in case as our safety plan; so I had my folder with everything that was easy to grab

Family Court and Centrelink dealings

Her ex-partner had sought a FCA order for parenting so, being the Applicant, he rather than she received Legal Aid. Even so, Ms A gained free legal advice and was exempt from appearing:

But my barrister and my lawyer went pro bono for me. - ... We got a Legal Aid grant at the start of it but that only covered so much, and then when that finished they told me they're going pro bono.

He threatened the barrister or something before FCA happened, and the barrister called me and told me not to come in. She said turn around and go back home - ... and they've just kept all my FCA [input] over the phone. They didn't trust what he would do after.

Another common problem was loss of employment due to emergency relocation. Ms A had to leave her job to avoid a known (work) address where her violent ex-partner could find her. The consequence of losing a home, belongings, joint bank accounts, income and sometimes a car is, of course, financial hardship: Ms A says that she now lives on government benefits and is 'just getting by'.

Yep, so I lost my job. Then Centrelink was on my case because I needed to find work, that's when they linked me in to [Agency]. ...They just review what I'm doing and make sure I'm still studying.

Centrelink has also exempted her from Family Tax Benefit (FBT) penalty in failing to claim Child Support:

[T]hey said, "We'll make sure that you're exempt from child support." And I'm like, "Okay then." I just went along with it, and then I'm thinking, "Why am I exempt, shouldn't I be getting money." And then they said it's a form of power if he thinks he's paying something he deserves something, and she said, "You're better off without it."

Impact on the child

Ms A and her child have now lived in government subsidised 'transitional housing' for around 1 year, arranged by the welfare agency which also provides counselling and study/work advice. Her child has lived her whole life witnessing FV:

... she's witnessed so much that a child shouldn't witness, and she wouldn't cry or anything, she'd go get me an ice pack from the fridge, like, that's how- she became the adult in the situation.

The child was initially in a special program for children who witness FV, which Ms A found very beneficial, but this had ceased due to a second housing relocation:

[W]e went there and it was all play, and then yeah, we only went to that one session, but it seemed really good and she- my daughter opened up in that one session, she made that connection which she doesn't usually do. Probably because it was play based. So that was good for her.

The child now has a 'learning delay' so changing schools was detrimental and Ms A is worried about her child's social and academic progress:

I think I've been a bad role model for her as well, because I haven't taught her the right way to deal with conflict. I mean if she's playing tiggy, like, chasey at school, if someone touches her too hard she'll cry and she'll get upset over it, she doesn't- she has no idea of how to deal with conflict, she takes it out in her own way which is usually crying. She can't stand up for herself yet. But I've been helping her with that and the school's been strategising with her.

Ms A's case worker wants her to apply for victims of crime compensation to help pay for her child's needs but her lawyer warned her that she could be openly accused of abusing her child:

I don't think I'm ready for ... questions like, "Why did you put your daughter at risk?", and stuff like that. That's - I don't know how to answer that; I did put her at risk by staying in an abusive relationship, but...

Case study 2: Ms 'B'

The case of Ms 'B' highlights the extreme fracturing of the lives of a mother and children who had to move interstate and assume new identities due to death threats. It also illustrates the extreme importance of a 'one-stop shop' welfare agency with a dedicated case worker for someone who has no social network for support, but at the same time highlights state differences in access and resources of crisis help-lines and welfare agencies and legal advice.

In 2014, following many years of psychological, financial and physical abuse, Ms B fled her home, went to the police, and gained an FVIO against her husband. She and her two primary school-aged children then flew to another state the next day, to a relative's home. The FVIO has been breached, with harassment of Ms B's family members, death threats against her and an attempted suicide by her ex-husband:

I never had access to my salary. A lot of incidents and physical, always emotional abuse, but it was escalating so I'd started working full time [so] he had to make the control more intense because of that. [After they left] He started sending messages that indicated a murder suicide..... [and] I knew that something big was going to happen.

'Begging' off charities

Due to this long-distance relocation, Ms B lost her full-time professional job and income, the children moved schools and they all lost their friends and informal support network. She was a middle-class home owner who has lost all her assets and had to 'beg' off charities. The children have also been emotionally affected, with her older child displaying extreme separation anxiety and bed-wetting. Much anxiety revolves around keeping their identities secret (the children are enrolled under a false name at school and so on). Obtaining a job reference has also been difficult for Ms B:

So you have to, you know, when you applied [for a professional reference], you have to say, "Can you please put a highlighted confidentiality on my screen." You have to do that at the school. For example, school photos, they weren't allowed to appear in the photo, they weren't allowed to appear as absent, just in case. The kids all have their own iPads at school. I have to go and have a meeting with them to reinforce that they realise that nobody is allowed to take photographs.

Ms B and her children lived in crisis accommodation in their new state for nearly 3 months but she managed to get some part-time work and they are now in private rental. She emphasised how important it was to have a case worker organise a full range of housing, financial, practical and psychological services. The case worker is "my friend" and she cannot speak highly enough of her.

Nevertheless, a funding cut to a government program has made private rental more difficult:

And then during that time I actually was accepted into another program, which would have been fantastic, but eh funding was cut. That was a...program where [welfare agency] would obtain private rental for you and take on the lease for two years - they'd pay 34% of your rent regardless of your income.

Other barriers to moving forward

For some time prior to fleeing, Ms B had unsuccessfully tried to gain help in her home state:

I had actually tried to call [FV outreach service] myself on a number of occasions and I could never get through. I understand that they're very under-resourced. [Also] I rang the Domestic Violence hotline and I could only ever get through to them probably after midnight. I rang them a couple of times. But yeah,

they were always too busy. The legal services that I accessed would be under-resourced as well. You'll get up and you start ringing straight away at nine o'clock trying to hope to speak to somebody.

Also in her home state, just before fleeing, she had a bad court experience when applying for the FVIO and received disturbing advice from a lawyer:

I ended up hiring a private lawyer - [relative] paid for it - to go...with me in [state]. That experience of Court in [state] is terrible. Basically you sit with other women behind a screen that's just like something you'd see at the library, a noticeboard. The men are calling out abuse. When you walk to the Court room you have to walk amongst the jeers of men saying that it's illegal to be annoying these days.

[Services were] under-resourced and the perception of violence or what constitutes violence, the lawyer in [state] said to me, "What you've done is wrong. There's insufficient evidence. Unless you've had a knife to your throat in front of a police officer, you can't just take children." [And] she went on to say "Women use protection orders to keep their partners from seeing the children". In [home state] [they need] a lot more education into what constitutes violence.

Ms B now has Legal Aid and is preparing a FCA application for parenting matters (for 100% custody). However, she has hesitated to lodge this because her husband will then know where she lives.

As soon as I file, he'll know we're in [state] and he'll come. So I won't feel safe after I file. ...I just want a FCA arrangement that says legally that he doesn't have access, and it has delayed me from filing. It's been a catch-22 because I've been so frightened of a recovery order all the time and I've also been frightened that he would file in [state], which would mean flying back there to Court and basically not being safe.

Finally, having to pay for a psychologist to assess the children for the FCA has also been a hurdle:

[B]ut there was an out of pocket expense for the psychologist, and also the psychologist reports were, one was \$800 and one was \$400 ... to give a professional opinion as to what the children have experienced, I guess, to give them a bit of a voice through a professional.

Case study 3: Ms 'C'

The case of Ms 'C' was one where the FVIO being in place proved beneficial initially. However, it also highlights the lengths to which a mother will go in order to appease her violent partner so he won't apply for formal access to the child or escalate the violence ("Keeping him happy" to manage his bad behaviour by not seeking a second FVIO, not pursuing Child Support and not applying for formal FCA orders). It also shows the therapeutic importance of good formal child care to help a young child who was further traumatised by an abusive grandfather.

Ms 'C' has full care of her young child. Her ex-partner became violent when she was pregnant and she only lived with him until the child was one. Ms C had to quit her job after the birth because, although her partner was unemployed, he refused to look after the child so she could work. Financial, physical and overbearing controlling abuse led to an FVIO being gained in late 2012 and her ex-partner left their home soon afterwards. Unlike the other women interviewed, Ms C said this FVIO had initially been beneficial to her during the first 12 months' duration:

And it was so nice while I had that intervention order and he wasn't living with me. It was like a breath of fresh air, because the moment he put his foot wrong or I could feel that something was about to start, I straight away grabbed my phone and he had to leave. It was actually like a weapon against him. It would be like, "You've got to stop." And he would literally run out the door.

Impact on the child

Ms C has lacked informal support for her parenting, with no help from her own parents: "They've actually never babysat my [child]" ... "They're just very weird". Since she is now studying a certificate course, this means full-time subsidised day care is extremely important. However, Ms C says this child care is essential both for her child's social development and as a therapeutic response to FV. Apart from witnessing FV to his mother, his paternal grandfather has also abused this child. The couple reconciled for one week in late 2014 but due to abuse from both her partner and his father, Ms C took her child back to their previous location and sought help.

His dad became very aggressive with my son. Like, smacked him, terrorised him. ... All of a sudden, after two days of being there, he was having night terrors five times a night. Constipated, wouldn't eat. Like, this boy was terrorised. It was horrific to see.

[When we moved back] ... I took my son straight to his childcare centre that he used to go to last year, and even they said-- I didn't tell them exactly what had happened. I never mentioned anything about what I call abuse on him. I just said the move has been very traumatic on him. They were devastated, because they could see straightaway that something was wrong. It took him a couple of months, but he got back.

Consequently Ms C does not want to have a FCA order that gives her ex-partner any formal, regular or overnight care of her young child because she does not want her violent (de facto) father-in-law to have access to the child because "-- it's the grandfather that, like, I'm really scared of".

To avoid him applying for formal access to the child or escalating the violence towards her, Ms C has to constantly appease her violent partner by allowing him to have the child for a few hours on the weekends in a local park (she cannot let him know her new address) and by not seeking a second FVIO and not pursuing him for any Child Support:

And it's good, though, because, like, when [child] does spend time with the father, it's just at the park, having fun, that's it. Plain and simple. There's no crabbiness, arguments. There's no abuse. There's no anything that [child] sees...

The Child Protection Agency had also visited after the FVIO was put in place, to check on the welfare of the child, but all was deemed satisfactory:

Yeah, they spoke to the maternal health nurse and she basically vouched for me and said, "Look, [child] is so healthy." There's no signs of any [abuse] —they saw the home...

Welfare support

Ms C received two months' crisis accommodation from [welfare agency] and is now in subsidised transitional housing. She has received all forms of practical, emotional and financial assistance from this agency. Her case worker has helped with the child care and helped her into her study course (though no employment yet). She says she is managing financially at present due to all the agency assistance and government benefits and subsidies, but will need paid work to gain private rental – hopefully when her studies are completed.

Due to the constant stress of concern about her child's welfare, Ms C has also had depression and suicidal thoughts which led to physical health problems. Her case worker also organised a psychologist "and just talking to her made me feel better".

Case study 4: Ms 'D'

The case of Ms 'D' illustrates direct intergenerational FV, by her father and then by two partners. As with Ms C, this demonstrates the lack of informal support from a dysfunctional family background and thus a desperate need for help from welfare agencies. However, it also highlights the complexity of police involvement, since Ms D was regarded as both a victim of FV and a criminal accessory by (forced) association with ex-partners' illegal activities. The case therefore also demonstrates a barrier to employment due to a criminal record and the ongoing difficulty of providing financially for her children's needs and for future rental housing.

Ms D has had two violent partners and has full care of her three children. She was also a child witness of FV by her own father:

My Dad's been an alcoholic all my life. I've lived with domestic violence because of him. They're still together and they're still full of domestic violence. He still just yells and screams at my Mum ..

Her story relates to her second violent partner, where a FVIO was gained in late 2013 due to severe physical and psychological abuse. They were buying their own home unit but had to sell in early 2014 due to his heroin addiction and unemployment. They then separated and Ms D moved into private rental with her 3 children while her ex-partner went overseas. Ms D says he used all the equity from their unit for travel and drugs, leaving her and the children with nothing:

[H]e was fine until I wanted to break it off. We had to sell, we owned a three-bedroom unit in [suburb]. We ended up having to sell that because he lost his job and was spending over \$1,500 a week on heroin. --- As long as I was placid and accepted it there was no problems --- the money [from their home sale] went into his Mum's bank account.

Damage and death threats

Although he returned and lived with his mother, the ex-partner continually broke the FVIO by harassing and abusing Ms D and damaging her rental home: "Basically it became 12 months of absolute hell". He has spent a few short periods in prison during 2013-14. Due to escalating violence and death threats, Ms D and her children fled that rental home in 2015 and lived in crisis accommodation for two months before attaining another private rental with the agency's assistance. She hopes to keep her whereabouts secret this time because, due to her ex-partner's criminal record and stints in prison, Ms D says he has no qualms about killing her and being convicted.

He's told me before, "I'll do 20 years for you." So you know, like, I don't know, I'm frustrated, I don't know what to do.

As with the other cases, there was no consideration of the effect on the children of being violent towards their mother or indeed killing her. Children just seemed to be an inconvenient by-product of a relationship for such men and it was one of the reasons why the women so much wanted to protect their children and enrich their lives with special programs, good schools and child care. The older children have been adversely affected emotionally and Ms D is financially struggling. The welfare agency has provided a case worker and a full range of housing, financial and practical services. She is another mother who considers her case worker her best friend.

Children's special needs

Although her children had moved schools, Ms D had moved them back to their old school and back with their friends. Also, two children have ongoing medical conditions – the elder quite severe - which require frequent hospital visits, so Ms D needs to be near the doctors and hospital. This made the idea of moving far away from her violent ex-partner impracticable:

It might be an idea - but there's a big, it's a huge move for me because my son's medical issues, everything. He's in...hospital daily, like it's just not practical, my family's here, my support's here --- I've got my niece, she can look after my child. My niece is the only family I talk to out of the whole family though...

Barriers to Ms D gaining employment are therefore her children's frequent illness, medical appointments and hospital visits. She also has a criminal record by association with theft and drug offences of both previous partners.

They [police] actually came to [welfare agency] and arrested me out of the refuge in front of my children because he left a box in my car -- which had stolen goods that I had no idea about. --- Now police don't see us as victims, they see us as criminals. As far as I'm concerned, I have been nothing but, like, being treated like a criminal by the people that are supposed to protect us.

Ms D is not considering a Family Court application for parenting matters because neither of her ex-partners is interested in the children. Like Ms A, C and E, there were Child Protection assessments over the past few years (notified by police when a FVIO is issued) but the children were deemed to be fine in her care:

Yes, yes, but it's all closed off because they are happy with me. They can see my kids are dressed well, they're fed, they're happy, there's no drugs in the house, there's no alcohol...

Case study 5: Ms 'E'

Ms E's story has much in common with the four cases already discussed. As with Ms 'D', this final case illustrates intergenerational FV by father, ongoing death threats, a desperate need for welfare agency help and the damage done to her older children. Also, in common with Ms B and Ms D, this case illustrates a home owner who has lost her house but still technically owns it, so cannot access public housing and is liable for thousands of dollars of damage done to that home and a subsequent rental property by her violent ex-partner. A Victims of Crime application has been made for financial compensation.

FV, property damage and police response

Ms E grew up with a father who "was violent to everyone". She has four children and gained the first FVIO against her second partner in 2011 due to physical and psychological abuse and property damage. She had bought her own home (in a country location) prior to this abusive relationship, but had to flee to a 'safe house' (refuge) in 2012. A second FVIO followed in 2013. Although she returned to her partner several times, Ms E was critical of the generally slow response and lack of sincerity of country police regarding FV. She had already sent both her (older) children away to live with family members for safety:

The partner I was with at the time was a little lost, and I guess I made excuses for him. A lot of violence involved --- I still feel stupid now for going back all those times, but the mental hold. It's indescribable. - -- He controlled everything. --- Like smashed up houses, smashed up cars, stolen cars. Like every car I got, he stole, wrote off so I couldn't get anywhere, you know. . .

During 2013 Ms E's ex-partner was in prison for 12 months for FV and other offences but it had taken nearly three years of constant breaches of the FVIOs before he was charged:

He was constantly charged, but before the magistrate took - I don't know whether they don't take it seriously or whether they - but I totally understand why women end up dead.

While he was in gaol, Ms E's involvement with DHS (Department of Human Services) secured for her a "full custody" order for the younger two children. Then, in 2014 she obtained the full range of assistance from an urban welfare agency, including two months crisis accommodation, followed by transitional housing. As with the other women, she has found the services of a dedicated case worker invaluable: "she checks in with me every day".

Damage to the children

Ms E is extremely concerned about the damage done to her older (teenage) children and their long term future, since both have had severe school and behavioural problems:

[They] witnessed the sort of stuff, and they were getting dragged out of bed at three o'clock in the morning to flee the house and stuff like that ... [Child 2] is an angry little boy. Like he started year seven at the start of the year, and he's been expelled from the school. We have to relocate him because he got bullied... He always gets the rough end of the stick. And so he got over it one day and elbowed this kid in the mouth and now...

The elder teenager had recently been "in trouble" smoking "pot" and petty theft. Ms E says they need their own case worker and ongoing counselling and special programs, especially the elder child:

I think [Child 1] still blames himself a little bit that he couldn't protect me. --- He's a beautiful kid and he's just damaged now...he lasted the first 12 months [in his new school] and then it just started going downhill, and then I think he's had the last eight months off. I've only just got him back into school.

There have been ongoing DHS / Child Protection assessments (due to Ms E's former drug use and the FVIOs) but she has never lost custody of her younger children.

Victims of Crime compensation

Although Ms E still owns her house in the country, she cannot move back there. She has had legal advice and submitted a claim for Victims of Crime (VOCAT) compensation. She hopes to repay a relative thousands of dollars lent to repair her damaged country home, damaged or replaced cars and several relocations – all these expenses were due to her violent ex-partner.

Eventually I had to get my house packed up without me being there, and they had to get it moved up there. I got it moved to a friend's house and then the friend wanted her garage back, so then I had to pay for it to get moved down here and then storage here. I had to repair the house, the damage to the house --- I owe [relative]... a crazy amount of money --- paid to fix up my house so that renters could go into it.

Also, financial hardship has resulted from Ms E losing her job. In common with some of the other women, this was in part due to the job being linked to her ex-partner (she met him at work):

And then so I was working, and then when the violence started he was the leading hand at the place I was working. So of course intervention orders made it impossible to continue working, which then led to like mortgage problems ...

8.8. Timeline Summaries for 5 Case Studies

Abbreviations: FVIO = Family Violence Intervention Order; FCA = Family Court Australia; CP = Child Protection; DHS = Department of Human Services; VOCAT = Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal.

Ms A has 1 child

2007-2012	2013	2014	2015
* 6 years FV by de facto partner started when pregnant	* Police obtain FVIO * CP assessments * Police remove mother and child * Lost job and home	* 5 weeks in a women's refuge * Constant breaches of FVIO * 'Transitional housing'	* Transitional housing * 12 months of FCA proceedings * Ex-partner in prison (FVIO & other)
6 years unsafe housing	2.5 years homeless		.

Ms B has 2 children

2002-2006	2007-2014	2014	2015
* 4 years FV by husband. Ms B left briefly but returned	* 8 years more FV * Unable to access FV services * Husband attempts suicide – Psych assessment (2014)	* Left home * Police obtain FVIO * Fled interstate * Lost job	* 90 days crisis accommodation * Private rental 2 months (No CP visits – FCA application pending)
14 years of unsafe housing		4 months homeless	

Ms C has 1 child

2012	2013	2014	2015
* Start of 2.5 years FV by de facto partner started when pregnant * Police obtain FVIO	* Partner left, Ms C stayed in home * Constant breaches of FVIO * CP assessments	* FVIO expired * Moved back together briefly * Ms C fled * Lost job	* 60 days crisis accommodation * 2 months in "transitional" housing (No FCA applications)
3.5 years homeless or unsafe housing			

Ms D has 3 children

2000-2008	2009-2012	2012-13	2014	2015
* 8 years FV by first de facto partner	* 5 years FV by second de facto partner	* Police obtain FVIO * Sold home unit * Separated - Ms C in private rental	* Constant breaches of FVIO * Damage to rental home * Fled / Lost job	* 60 days crisis accommodation * 2 months private rental (No FCA applications)
14 years unsafe housing;		6 months homeless		

Ms E has 4 children

2010-2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
* FV by de facto partner * Police obtain FVIO * Constant breaches * CP older kids	* Older kids go to relatives * Left own home * Lost job * Several women's refuges	* Ms E Rehab for drug use * Ex-partner in prison (FVIO & other) * DHS gets FCA order: 100% care	* 60 days crisis accommodation * 5 months transitional housing * CP younger kids	* 4 months transitional housing * Lodged VOCAT application for \$ compensation
3 years unsafe housing;		3 years homeless		

9. Dealing with family violence – experiences of frontline staff

This section presents findings from a focus group held on 29 April 2015 with several Hanover staff, representing a range of programs from across the organisation. Discussion focused on what staff saw as the critical issues when dealing with clients experiencing family violence, the challenges, what was worked, what didn't work, and what would lead to better outcomes.

Educational needs

- Education for adults and staff about FV and healthy relationships and cultural relevance
- Non reporting because of intergenerational normalising of FV or stigma
- Men's behaviour change programs – however, men's programs provide funding for accommodation for men who leave their household because of perpetrating family violence – this support is not mirrored for women who leave the home
- Early education for children around FV and healthy relationships:

“[We need] some preventative work. Now, that's getting in early at schools, obviously, with children, but also for us now with the adults that we have here, is looking at doing some healthy relationships and some understanding of what family... Because you ask our clients, they've got no idea what family violence is and if you explain it to them, they're, "That's not family violence”.
- Teachers not trained to deal with FV
- Resources needed for training in FV response in welfare sector and mainstream services

Lack of integration between legal, child protection and police

- Non reporting of FV due to belief that Police or FV system cannot keep them safe
- Emphasis on getting a police escort to the home (and removing perpetrator from home at this time) so woman can get some belongings, this could be better coordinated and supported by funding for storage of belongings
- Some inconsistency regarding police escort:

“Whenever we've asked for police escorts to escort the victim back to the home they've organised for the perpetrator to be removed while the victim went back. I don't know if it always happens but in my experience I've never had an issue”, and another worker:

“We haven't been so lucky with the escort side of things of getting people home to get their stuff... “.

Inconsistent and fragmented service response

- Ongoing and consistent support for families experiencing FV is not provided
- Lack of resources (housing, support, follow up, enhanced MCH resources)
- Waiting times for refuges are long, so people can end up in the 'crisis' system (Q p.20)
- Lack of basic resources – relocating people without food vouchers, mobile phone, money, clothes, bedding etc:

[Client] had a two-year-old child who she'd removed from the home, she had nothing with her, anything. In that split instant where she goes, "I've got to get out and I've got a five-minute window" and so she gets out and they pick her up in a taxi and they take her, but she's got nothing, and no nappies, nothing. So she said, "I just had to turn around and go back." And potentially the [partner] is a very high risk of killing her.

- Need a better response that might include addressing the woman's financial issues in the first week so that this isn't a reason for her to return home, put steps in place so that the perpetrator cannot use tools that they would normally use to control the woman

Housing responses

- The housing response service is dislocated
- Access to crisis accommodation varies – emergency response varies from 6-48 hours:
 - “And for us as a female-only service, like, if we have rooms we advertise them, we give 24 hours for people to get referrals in and then it takes another 24 hours for a decision to be made. So you could go in and do an assessment and go, "Come back in two days and I'll let you know whether you've got in or not" so what do you do for those two nights? I know here it's, what, two hours; they advertise vacancies two or three hours, or whatever, but ...”
- Clients had to book into hotel first and assess them later:
 - “...any families which present homeless we'll do a quick screening in terms of safety, book them into a motel, get them to come back the following day or two days later for an assessment. Because often at that point you're not even going to get any valuable information, there's too much going on. Just get them accommodated, they can get some sleep, have something to eat, have a shower, come back another day.”

Counselling

- Lack of counselling for couples, singles and children (high waitlists)
- Lack of outreach counselling programs, both for adults and children:
 - “Within the children's programme in terms of what's working well, the creation of the Stream 4, the outreach counselling for kids, so we've got a psychologist within our team who can do outreach counselling for any child who's experienced family violence within Hanover. That's just been amazing because, as you know, there's very few specialised programmes within the southern metro region for children that will do outreach as well. Because it's just not feasible to get children to appointments and psychologists.”

Children's needs

- Children fall through the gaps in instances of FV (not picked up by schools):
 - And my husband is a lead teacher in a school and he said, "Well, what are we expected to do when we hear about family violence?" and I said, "You ring DHS or you ring the cops or you go down and..." and he said, "You know, we are given no training around that whatsoever.”
- Variation of school outreach support, some schools have no capacity to follow up on why children are not at school, others do follow up, and there is no standard approach across school as to how to follow this up
- More specialised psychological/support services are needed for children:
 - “[we need] more specialised services for children. Because we're only a team of four for the whole southern metro region; often we can't work with children because of our waitlist, it's

a long time after the violence has occurred and the trauma just... is a lot worse, the impacts of trauma..."

- Children – education, health and development, lost learning time (over 50% of school aged children at [crisis accommodation] are not enrolled at school):
 - “In terms of children, I guess, the flow-on effect of family violence, the huge impacts on their education and health and development. The lost learning time, the education is just huge, and then health and development, massive delays in development because they’re so transient in receiving vital health checks, not seeing ...maternal child health nurses...”
- Lack of resources (one enhanced maternal and child health nurse servicing the whole of City of Port Phillip)
- Child protection don’t respond to non-school attendance alone:
 - “...so the kids have been taken out of school and we've been told, "It's not a Child Protection issue" having been gone for a good part of 12 months. But the school did notify because, at a certain point, like at the end of term or something, the principal needs to notify the Education Board, but nothing seems to have happened since then.”

Client safety within the homelessness sector

- FVIOs are self-reported (there have been instances where a couple have been housed at a crisis service without staff knowing they had an intervention order out on each other)
- If staff find out that they are housing a couple where one has a FVIO on the other they will remove the person who has the order against them
- Services need to make it really clear the organisational view on FV and try and educate residents on arrival and make clear what the expectations are
- Duty of care to the wider community and to children if they are involved
- People who have been exited from refuges for breaking rules, they are exited with no support, they need support to continue the education around FV and with safety planning

10. Addressing the needs of children

This section profiles a program specifically focused on the needs of children affected by family violence and homelessness, the 'double whammy' of disadvantage (Spinney, 2012).

While children's needs have, in the past, been overlooked by homelessness and family violence services, the growing awareness that children have specific issues which need to be addressed is slowly gaining momentum (Barker et al, 2013; Nette & Mallett, 2013).

Family/domestic violence is one of the main triggers of homelessness ([Australian Government, 2008](#)) and the main reason why women and children escape from their homes in Australia (AIHW, 2012:14):

- For 33% of all children in a specialist homelessness service, family/domestic violence was recorded as the *main reason for seeking assistance* (AIHW 2012).

The data (case files and interviews) presented in this submission reflect a disturbing reality; in particular the in-depth interviews illustrate the extent to which children suffer from the impact of family violence.

'A child who lives with violence is forever changed, but not forever 'damaged' – and there is a lot we can do to improve their future prospects.'
(Baker/Cunningham, 2007)

Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service – a case study

The Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service (HCSSS) is one of several service interventions in Victoria arising from the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* (NPAH). It is a child specific service in Melbourne providing support to children and young people aged 18 years and under who have experienced homelessness and/or family violence. Hanover Welfare Services oversees the delivery of the service in the Southern Metropolitan region.

The program aims to provide a flexible and immediate service response for children through a combination of intensive one-on-one case management support, therapeutic group work and psychological support. The service model consists of four integrated streams of support that address the needs of children and families:

- Stream 1 - Assessment and case planning support
- Stream 2 - Enhanced case management for children with multiple and complex needs
- Stream 3 - Group work for children
- Stream 4 - Psychological Assessment and Intervention for children (including Educational Assessments) – this component is partly funded by School Focused Youth Services through the City of Stonington and Launch Housing.

Number of children supported by HCSSS

Between July 2014 and April 2015, HCSSS supported 133 children (Streams 1 & 2). Half of these children had experienced family violence.

Over March/April 2015:

- 31 children aged between 9 months and 16 years (18 girls & 13 boys) were supported by HCSSS (Streams 1 & 2)

- Of these, 22 experienced family violence
- Almost two-thirds were primary school aged (5 to 12 years)
- Almost all were from lone mother families

Of the school-aged children supported by HCSSS - Stream 4, many needed educational support and/or counselling (From Oct 2014- April 2015):

- 27 were referred for *Educational Assessments*
 - 14 of these children had experienced family violence
- 26 were referred to *Outreach Counselling*
 - 17 of these children have experienced family violence

Impacts of family violence on children supported by the HCSSS program

Overall, HCSSS workers have observed the profound impact that family violence has on children including:

- Post-traumatic stress symptoms and health and wellbeing challenges (stress, anxiety, behavioural issues),
- Mental health issues relating to their experiences of trauma,
- Disengagement from school (including lost learning time/multiple school moves and a negative impact on social and academic development,)
- Disengagement from health services including maternal child & health nurse and general practitioner services leading to missed health checks (dental, optical, respiratory, vaccinations) and the negative impact this has on the child's physical and emotional development,
- Difficulties with the parent-child relationship as the protective parent's capacity to parent is compromised, and
- Disconnection from the peers, extended family and the broader community.

How innovative practice by HCSSS address ongoing challenges in the service system

Challenge 1:

There is limited support to reduce the negative impacts of family violence on children's education. These impacts include lost learning time and absenteeism from school, expensive costs when moving schools frequently, and lack of support for parents on how to navigate the education system and long waitlists for educational assessments.

Between July 2014 and April 2015, a total of 136 school-aged children were in crisis accommodation in the City of Port Phillip. HCSSS workers found that more than one-third of these school-aged children affected by homelessness and family violence were not enrolled in education.

HCSSS response:

With the flexibility to respond relatively quickly, HCSSS developed the *Education Development Program* to work with families in collaboration with local schools in order to reduce the time that the children are absent and/or not enrolled in school.

Funding for this new Program has recently been secured. This will enable the Program to be implemented over the next several weeks, just as soon as recruitment of a dedicated Education Development Worker is finalised.

The dedicated Education Development Worker will provide invaluable support to students who have experienced lost learning time or are disengaged from education. Resources to support students will include:

- Educational Assessments,
- funding for private tutors, and
- advocacy for schools to implement student individual learning plans etc.

Furthermore, information sessions are offered to caregivers in order to build their capacity and confidence with supporting their children:

- with homework tasks,
- socialization at school and
- building positive relationships with teachers.

Within Stream 4, a qualified psychologist provides free full educational assessment packages, including cognitive achievement testing for children and young people. Timely testing ensures children receive the support they require as soon as possible.

The educational assessment package consists of six sessions:

- 1 x 60 min initial appointment with caregiver/s of child/young person,
- 2 x 60 min sessions for cognitive testing,
- 2 x 60 min sessions for achievement testing, and
- 1 x 30 min meeting with the child/young person, caregiver/s, teacher/s and school welfare coordinator to discuss report and recommendations.

Referral/s to other services if required can also occur after testing, as well as follow-ups with teachers and caregiver/s to discuss outcomes; this usually happens several weeks after testing.

Challenge 2:

Gap in psychological services available for children that were child-appropriate as well as affordable and accessible to parents; and limited access to outreach counselling for mental health support

HCSSS response:

Many children supported by the HCSSS display anxiety and behavioural issues associated with trauma and their exposure to family violence.

HCSSS appointed an in-house psychologist who provides **bulk billed outreach counselling** sessions for children affected by family violence. The sessions are held at a mutually agreed location and time. Focus is to assist children to build healthy relationships, encourage positive behaviours and increase resilience, as well as creating a safe space for children to talk about and share their feelings and experiences.

Challenge 3:

Limited access to Maternal Child and Health Nurse services (MCHN). For example within the City of Port Phillip there is one enhanced MCHN to support all children in the area. This often means that young babies are prioritised as they have increased vulnerability whilst toddlers wait for long periods for assessment and appointments.

HCSSS response:

HCSSS identified a significant number of pre-school aged children residing in crisis accommodation displaying developmental concerns. Many children experiencing transience due to family violence miss vital health checks by MCHN which can have a severe negative impact on the child's development and well-being.

Therefore, in March 2015, HCSSS partnered with Inner South Community Health Service (ISCHS) speech pathologists and occupational therapists to trial the **delivery of developmental screenings for children**.

ISCHS now provide regular fortnightly appointments at a local family and children's centre to families residing in crisis accommodation. Caregivers are provided with a written summary report of the session that contains recommendations and referral pathways to enhance their child's development. The HCSSS also assists with material aid to enable caregivers to purchase the required equipment and toys the child may need.

Challenge 4:

More primary prevention group work required in primary and secondary schools to challenge and change entrenched views on gender stereotypes, expectations and norms.

HCSSS response:

Primary prevention interventions are those that seek to prevent violence before it occurs. Violence prevention and respectful relationship education programs with children and young people are central to the State Governments approach to primary prevention of family violence.

Intervention with students when they are young is crucial to develop their understanding, skills and help-seeking behaviour as they grow older.

The Primary Prevention Program, facilitated by the HCSSS Group worker and City of Port Phillip aims to:

- Provide students with information about gender stereotypes and norms and the rigid gender roles present within our society and the impact that these have on identity and relationships,
- Promote gender equity and respectful relationships between women and men, girls and boys,
- Highlight gender-based violence present in our society.

The HCSSS aims to facilitate the Primary Prevention Program at all schools in the City of Port Phillip.

Challenge 5:

There is limited information and resources available to caregivers to enable them to support their children and manage difficult behaviours post family violence.

Many family violence resources are available for professionals to utilise with children in case management settings, however many are not suitable for caregivers to use with their children.

HCSSS response:

HCSSS developed an innovative resource called '**Bouncing Back**', which was written in 2014 by the HCSSS Team Leader and funded by the City of Port Phillip.

Bouncing Back provides information as well as practical tools that parents/caregivers can use with children to talk about their feelings and what they have experienced.

Bouncing Back has been distributed throughout the Southern Metropolitan region to family violence services, family services, youth services and homelessness services. As one family violence worker commented:

I have read through the booklet and think it is a great resource for parents. It is easy to read and well written...I like is *'Things parents can do to help a child affected by family violence'* as it gives parents something they can do right away which can make a huge difference to these children.

Sector capacity

Importantly, HCSSS also seeks to enhance the understanding and capacity of the homelessness and family violence services systems to respond to the needs of children. This component is key to ensuring children's needs are recognised and responded to across the service system not just within child specific programs. This was summed up by a co-case manager at Inner South Community Health Centre who stated:

- 'I was reminded of the importance of the need for someone within the care team to take responsibility for focusing on children's needs and to communicate progress with other members of the team'.

Importance of partnerships

HCSSS is a collaborative approach demonstrated in the partnerships developed with:

- schools,
- health centres,
- local councils and
- psychological services.

Outcomes - highlighting promising practice

An evaluation of HCSSS conducted in May 2012 by an external consultant concluded:

The evaluation found the HCSSS program delivered benefits to a children/young people accompanying their parents/care givers into homelessness, over the period July 2011 to December 2012, including:

- *Helping children deal with and process the trauma associated with homelessness/family violence.*
- *Playing a role in strengthening family coherence and unity.*
- *Improved confidence on the part of referral agencies in identifying and responding to the needs of children experiencing homelessness and family violence.*

This is significant, given the complex and disadvantaged nature of the majority of the clients referred to the program. (Nette, 2012).

Conclusion

This profile of the HCSSS program has highlighted the innovation, creativity, timely and appropriate practice response to children experiencing family violence.

Critically, the HCSSS program gives voice to children's experiences and recognises the child as the primary client.

The work of the HCSSS demonstrates the importance of child specific services and interventions delivered by specialist workers to ensure that children and young people receive the support they require to recover from the trauma of family violence.

It is crucial that children's voices are placed at the centre of the debate on family violence and a consistent framework for children is implemented not only in Victoria but across Australia.

11. Recommendations

The recommendations detailed in this section relate to several key themes that include: the crisis response, an integrated response, a housing response, the specialist needs of children, prevention and early intervention, and research.

Crisis response

There are a number of measures that will improve the system response to women and families who are in crisis and fleeing violence and have suffered financial ruin due to loss of property and assets.

It is recommended that:

1. Long term housing is considered a fundamental platform for responding to family violence, either by safely and affordably retaining the existing home or by offering a rapid rehousing response to a new home.
2. The after-hours response for people fleeing family violence be funded at a level to meet demand including so that it coordinates with the after-hours homelessness response.
3. An appropriate supply of immediately available emergency/crisis accommodation is needed which is suitable for mothers with children (under 12 years) and for single women who are victims of family violence.
4. An appropriate supply of immediately available emergency/crisis accommodation is needed which is suitable for men removed from the family home as perpetrators of family violence.
5. Opening Doors access points are adequately funded to supplement the specialist Family Violence system in providing immediate safe crisis accommodation as a priority for those escaping FV, with follow up specialist Family Violence assessment and support within 24 hours.
6. Financial grants and financial counselling are needed to address the complete financial ruin experienced by women escaping FV.
7. Each child accompanying a parent to a homeless service because of Family Violence should be assessed for psychological trauma and behavioural problems.
8. Appropriate referrals need to be made to medical and/or psychological professional services that are able to address adult (parent) trauma resulting from FV.

Integrated response

Many of the women and children who use Hanover and HomeGround services flee violent situations fearing for their lives. In addition many of them (around two thirds from the sample) have had no contact with police and do not have family violence intervention orders out against their violent partners.

The policy response needs to recognise that those who experience family violence may not be known to police or family violence services. For some families, a homelessness service is often the first agency they will contact, usually in a time of crisis. This highlights the importance of an integrated response to the issue of family violence across a range of key agencies and sectors.

Family violence Intervention Orders have too often failed to keep women and children safe. Many experienced an inconsistent enforcement of FVIO's. This undermines the capacity of women and children to remain safe in their own homes and increases the risk that they will become homeless.

Improving the consistency and appropriateness of the response to family violence by the police and legal system will enable women to stay safely in their own homes and prevent homelessness.

It is recommended that:

9. Child Protection, police, schools, family violence, sexual assault, medical and homelessness agencies need to work to together.
10. Legal advice (lawyers) with family law expertise be embedded within homelessness services.
11. There are stronger penalties for physical assault, threats and repeated breaches of FVIOs.
12. There is a timely, appropriate and consistent response to breaches of family violence intervention orders by police across all areas of the state.

Housing response – critical importance of safe, secure and permanent long-term housing.

Many of the women and children who seek help from homelessness organisations like Hanover and HomeGround live with the psychological trauma as well as, financial ruin and social disruptions caused by family violence for some time. Data from HomeGround and Hanover suggests that many families wait for years before they have stable, long term housing and often move from crisis housing to various forms of transitional housing. This uncertainty and the anxiety it induces can exacerbate the harm associated with family violence, particularly for children, who have their schooling disrupted, sometimes with long term negative consequences with the impacts felt over their entire lives.

It is recommended that:

13. That women and children fleeing family violence are resettled quickly in long term housing to minimise the disruption and maximise safety, including of school education for children.
14. Private rental brokerage programs be scaled up across Victoria to rapidly rehouse victims of family violence.

Specialist needs of children

The Homeless Children's Specialist Service provides support for children to recover from the impact of family violence and homelessness. It is important that both State and Commonwealth governments recognise the importance of this program in ameliorating the impacts of family violence.

It is recommended that:

15. the Homeless Children's Specialist Support Service (HCSSS) be expanded to be located at each Opening Doors homelessness entry point.

Early Intervention

Early and appropriate interventions have the potential to reduce some of the harms associated with family violence, for example preventing homelessness, maintaining financial stability and preventing the disruption to school attendance for children.

It is recommended that:

16. Education of key 'first contact' professionals (police, teachers, General Practitioners, Centrelink staff, lawyers) is essential to ensure a consistent and appropriate response.
17. Targeted assistance² can prevent homelessness associated with family violence. While these approaches are quite new, they should form part of the Government's policy response to the Royal Commission.

Research

It is recommended that:

18. With the recent announcement by the Victorian State Government to develop a Victorian Family Violence Index³, it is essential that the development of the Index is not restricted to measures, statistics, or data used in the family violence sector and hospitals, but are informed by a range of agencies; importantly, homelessness agencies need to be involved in the process.
19. More work is needed to understand the experiences of family violence for a range of groups including: Indigenous communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and fathers who have care of their children.
20. There is a need for research and evaluations of programs that specifically address the needs of children who have experienced both homelessness and family/domestic violence.

² Families@ Home is an early intervention, holistic program for families in the City of Whittlesea at risk of homelessness due to family violence developed through a collaboration between Kildonan Uniting Care and the Salvation Army Homeground Services. A primary focus is to enable women and their children to remain safe in their homes through assistance to resolve early difficulties and the provision of services including; assessment, co-case management, socio-educational group-work, community engagement, housing advocacy and financial support. The program provides a culturally sensitive, integrated package of service responses aiming to achieve sustainable changes in the circumstances of individuals and families. Community partnerships and networks are used to support families and individuals.

³ <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/world-first-index-to-measure-family-violence>

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