

ATTACHMENT JB-1

This is the attachment marked "**JB-1**" referred to in the witness statement of Jocelyn Bignold dated 13 July 2015.

**IT TAKES A SPLIT SECOND
TO HIT A WOMAN...**

Submission to the Royal Commission
into Family Violence (Victoria)
May 2015



McAuley Community
Services for Women
A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

**...AND A LIFETIME TO
UNDO THE DAMAGE.**

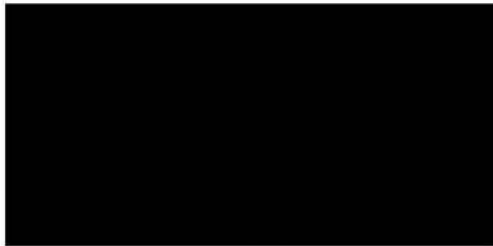
Foreword

McAuley Community Services for Women welcomes this Royal Commission into Family Violence as a critical and ground-breaking step towards ending the pandemic of violence towards women and children in the Victorian community.

We also congratulate the Andrews Government on its appointment of the first ever Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence and the commitment to making family violence a high priority in its first term agenda.

As an organisation committed to advocating for a better, safer and just society, we support the broad terms of reference that have framed this inquiry and the resources that have been allocated to ensure it is thorough and effective.

Recent community and political attention to the social and economic impact - and the unacceptable prevalence - of family violence is unprecedented and must be harnessed to create lasting change. McAuley Community Services for Women looks forward to contributing our knowledge and experience to the work of the Commissioners and in delivering solutions that will significantly reduce and eventually eliminate violence against women and children across Victoria.



Denis Moriarty

Chair, McAuley Community Services for Women



McAuley Community
Services for Women
A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

Acknowledgements

McAuley Community Services for Women would like to thank all those women who contributed their personal stories and voices to this submission. In addition, the 80 people who form our board, staff and volunteers who work every day on these issues and have contributed in various ways to this submission, particularly framing our answers on the existing service system, gaps and providing suggested solutions.

The work of our various fundraisers has been essential to our service delivery, and we would like to particularly acknowledge the volunteers who have run the fundraising Cocktail Party over the past 11 years to keep our safe house open and accessible for women around the clock every day of the year.

Thank you also to the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG) for their ongoing support and for establishing Victoria's first and only 24/7 family violence crisis service.

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

Context

McAuley Community Services for Women (MCSW) is a leader in the provision of services to women and their children who experience homelessness and family violence. Based on evidence and twenty five years of experience it is our strong view that the Royal Commission into Family Violence can only achieve its wide ranging goals if Governments at all levels and the broader community work together to address the following fundamental structural issues in our society:

The **critical shortage of affordable and safe housing**, including long term options, temporary and transitional housing, and emergency housing and shelters for women experiencing violence;

Shortage of effective and appropriate support services, funding and lack of coordination between already existing services for women experiencing violence;

Increased economic disadvantage and discrimination as a result of unequal access to employment opportunities, persistent gender pay gap, and the burden of unpaid care work borne by women. The cumulative impact of this gender based inequality remains a significant causal and risk factor in many aspects of family violence;

Gross under-representation of women in high level decision making and leadership positions within a broader cultural context of misogyny and sexism.

Along with many other family violence and homelessness services, we have contributed submissions to countless inquiries and Ministerial Advisory Committees over recent years. While recent reforms in government policy and service systems have delivered some positive changes, the current response remains under resourced and piecemeal and is grossly inadequate given the scale and scope of the problem. In addition, while high profile public awareness campaigns have contributed to some shift in community understanding of family violence, it is clear from the high (and in some cases increasing) rates of homicide, assault and abuse against women and children that family violence remains an unacceptable epidemic within our community.

The social and economic burden of family violence causes greater harm to Australian women than any external threat such as wars or terrorism – and yet the total Federal budget devoted to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women is only \$25m per year ([Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, 2014](#)).

Recommendations

1. **Fund a comprehensive, fully resourced Safe at Home service across Victoria, which includes:**
 - Trained and adequately resourced police response.
 - Integrated court responses similar to that of the magistrates courts and recommended Family Violence Courts.
 - Intervention orders are prioritised over other legal matters, such as family court.
 - Coordination of safety and high risk management.
 - Technological and practical safety measures such as [SafeT cards](#)
 - Rent assistance and brokerage for additional safety measures.
 - Support to return to work and school.
 - Counselling and victims of crime support.
 - Children's needs responded to separately.

2. **Fund additional Crisis Accommodation facilities for women and their children leaving family violence** which includes:
 - Funding for 50 additional beds per night that include support.
 - Modelled on the 24/7 crisis accommodation and support model, as demonstrated by MCSW.
 - An assessment and support to return women home safely where possible.

3. **Invest in additional temporary/transitional supported accommodation for women and children where they can be safe, stabilise and plan for either returning home safely or re-location.** Accommodation should include:
 - Choice of options such as supported, transitional and long term housing.
 - Case management support based on best practice as outlined in the '[Evaluation of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service](#)', such as financial counselling and employment/education programs.
 - Children's support from infants through to young people up to the age of 18yrs.
 - Group work and peer support programs.
 - Funding for [Integrated Post Crisis Support](#) capacity in family violence services.

4. **Extend the Federal Government's HOME (Household Organisational Management Expenses) Advice program to family violence services** to assist in maintaining independent housing and preventing homelessness.

5. **Negotiate a National Affordable Housing Strategy with the Commonwealth Government** as recommended through the Senate Economics Reference Committee paper '[Out of reach: The Australian housing affordability challenge](#)' (May 2015).

6. **Enhance support for children facing family violence** by funding:
- Demonstration projects to establish mechanisms for hearing from children and young people about their experience of family violence and homelessness.
 - Case management for all children in crisis; refuge and temporary accommodation.
 - Practices such as infant and child attunement; mother/child bonding and therapeutic play in crisis and refuge settings, as outlined in the [‘Babies in refuge’](#) resource. (Bunston & Sketchley, 2012)
 - Adequate levels of counselling and other health related needs such as speech therapy and children’s psychiatry.
 - Specific research on the needs of young adolescents experiencing family violence who are falling between the gaps of service provision.
7. **Fund an enhanced legal response to women and their children experiencing family violence**, which includes:
- Adequate resourcing and training for Police and Magistrates
 - Adequate resourcing of court support work to cover all presenting cases
 - Case coordination for all subsequent legal matters following the original application for an intervention order.
 - Extended legal aid for all family violence matters.
 - Directing the national inquiry into the drug ICE to look specifically at the link with family violence to help to establish best practice.
 - Establish Family Violence advisory units in all police stations to build expertise.
 - Introducing the MCSW, [Court Children’s Support Program](#) state wide.
8. **Actively link the new Commonwealth Women’s Employment Service to women experiencing family violence**, including:
- Removing exclusionary eligibility criteria that prevents women from accessing this service.
9. **Raise community awareness and capacity**, specifically:
- Fund development of a benchmark training program to support professionals to identify and respond to the needs of women and children experiencing, or at risk of Family Violence. The program should target ‘first to know’ occupations including health professions, educators, religious, sporting groups and employers. The program needs to be tailored to suit different service delivery contexts and be integrated to professional development schemes or each occupational group.
 - Fund community development projects appropriate for specific cultural groups.
10. **Support community campaigns and initiatives at a local as well as state wide level:**
- Recognise the significant contribution individuals make to support family violence programs through innovative fundraising and awareness raising programs, such as ‘FedUp Lunch’ [FedUp Lunch](#)).
 - Fund MCSW to expand its new ‘Champions for Change against Family Violence’ program to be state wide.

- Fund MCSW to expand its '[Engage to Change](#)' program as a state wide employer education program to increase workforce retention of women affected by family violence.
11. Apply the Victorian Department of Human Services '[Best interests case practice model](#)' (Miller 2012), in the development of policy and programs to embed **gender analysis in forming all family violence related policy and resource allocation.**
 12. **Prepare an annual report card on the progress and outcomes of the National Plan, ([National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women](#))**

Introduction

About McAuley Community Services for Women

McAuley Community Services for Women (MCSW) provides accommodation, support and advocacy for women and their children who are homeless, primarily as a result of family violence or mental illness. We currently support around 650 women and children each year through our wrap around accommodation and support, within 0 bed capacity. We are Victoria's largest women only integrated family violence and homelessness services and we are the only service in Victoria that welcomes women every day, at any hour of the day or night into safety.

We are a ministry of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Our mission is to provide accommodation, services, advocacy and support for women who are homeless and women and their accompanying children, who experience family violence. Through our services, McAuley Community Services for Women is committed to advocate for a better, safer and just society. In our daily lives we offer women the opportunity for empowerment in their own lives.

Our Seven Pillars of Success



Factors that distinguish us from other similar service providers are:

1. Providing crisis and transitional accommodation and support to access long term housing.
2. Providing holistic support for women who have experienced family violence and/or homelessness through complementary support and development programs.

3. A focus on prevention, connectedness and sustainability of housing choices, that establishes a community that supports relationships and an employment and training program (McAuley Works), to promote economic self sufficiency and social inclusion. The MCSW 'Women in Community' program includes a highly successful peer support program.
4. Providing immediate and inclusive care, by offering a 24/7 crisis service and allowing male children up to the age of 17 years to be accommodated with their mothers.
5. McAuley Care is also the only crisis accommodation service with a specialised children's program and playroom, which has recently extended into the Sunshine Court.
6. Providing a service dedicated to women, in a funding environment that often favours programs dedicated to 'rough sleepers', and is therefore inherently biased towards male homelessness.

Submission Outline

This submission outlines the unique and innovative ways in which we currently respond to family violence and homelessness for women and their children.

Part A puts forward our proposed 'Foundations for Change' which answer many of the questions posed in the Royal Commission's Issues Paper in an integrated manner.

Part B includes responses in more detail to some of the Royal Commission's Issues Paper questions not covered elsewhere.

We have not repeated data on the prevalence of family violence or known facts that are already contained within the Royal Commission Issues Paper and elsewhere.

Methodology

To ensure that women with lived experiences were able to share their stories and experiences of the legal system, support services and our program, constructed conversations were held with a series of women currently utilising our services. Women were provided with a summary of the project description, aims, and the questions they would be asked. Consent forms were provided indicating issues around anonymity, withdrawal from the project at any time, and the security of their written responses. Two staff members previously unknown to the women, who were not involved with their care, conducted the conversations and recorded their responses. Their stories are included throughout this submission.

This submission applies a gender lens to family violence and homelessness which recognises the ways in which gender inequality in society contributes to the greater rates of family violence against women, and limits the choices of women wanting to leave a violent relationship due to their social and economic inequality.

This submission is also informed by, and referenced, to current literature.

PART A: Foundations for Change

Seven key initiatives have been identified that would have a substantial impact on outcomes for women and children facing family violence, and could form a foundation or change across the family violence sector and broader community. They address the following:

1. **Keeping women and children safe in their own homes**
2. **Providing cost-effective crisis accommodation** and better outcomes for those forced to leave
3. **Providing a range of appropriate housing options** for women who choose or are forced to leave their family home (including supported accommodation)
4. **Provision of specialist children's programs** within family violence responses
5. **Further education and resourcing of the legal system**, including additional support for women and children during court processes
6. **Long term financial security and independence** through specialist job ready programs for women affected by family violence and greater support in the workplace
7. **Support community campaigns and initiatives at a local as well as state wide level** in order to change our cultural acceptance of violence

As an alternative to embarking on further 'system reform', we believe that better outcomes could be achieved through focusing on enhancements to the current service system in the following ways:

Initiative 1: Keeping women and children safe in their own home

Inadequate safety measures and resources are currently forcing large numbers of women and children to leave the family home or to remain trapped in violent homes. While progress has been made over the last decade by successive government reforms, the reality is that the response is inadequately resourced, and laws to keep women safe are inconsistently applied.

Gap	Solution
<p>Support options: When Police attend an incident of family violence, they fax a referral to the relevant men's and women's services to enable follow up support to be offered. MCSW works in partnership with other Western Region Women's organisations who together manage around 900 referrals per month, and of these only around 30% (270 women) are assessed as safe enough to remain home.</p> <p>Many women say that they would like to stay in their home but fear for their safety. The current 'Safe at Home' response is piecemeal and inadequately resourced. Successful Safe at Home programs (unfunded) occur where the perpetrator is removed and safety measures and coordinated supports are put in place. Only around 10% of women who come to MCSW crisis service each year, leave to return home, and of them, only half with adequate protection.</p>	<p>Safe at Home response: Comprehensive, fully resourced Safe at Home service implemented cross Victoria that includes the improved responses mentioned below for Police, Legal and Financial capability.</p> <p>Evaluation of all Safe at Home schemes (University of Melbourne, 2014) identifies no preferred single approach to safe at home interventions. Instead they have identified best practice components that have been evaluated as effective in a number of models, for example: BeSafe (WHGNE, 2011), Staying Home Leaving Violence (Edwards, 2004) and more recently, Safety in the Home (Safe Futures Foundation, 2014). These practices need to be incorporated to future safe at home responses.</p>

<p>Police response: Victoria Police report that family violence work takes up an average of 50% of all police work across the state, and in some areas it is as high as 90%. Despite high levels of awareness, inconsistent response by Police and lack of resources means that women can not rely on Police to remain safe. For example, it can take up to 3 weeks for Intervention Orders (IVOs) to be served – a time at which risk of violence is greatest.</p>	<p>Police response</p> <p>Greater resources are required to enable Police to respond to, and follow up on, the increasing number of family violence matters.</p> <p>Continuous professional education on family violence, and quality assurance of police responses, is required.</p> <p>Evaluate the recently announced trial of an App to apply for IVO without being in court, and consider extending the trial.</p>
<p>Legal response: Women face a range of problems when dealing with the legal system as a result of family violence, as well as various court matters being dealt with in separate courts, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) When Police are prosecuting IVOs no legal aid is available to women. This is an issue for women appearing in court following a recent incident of violence, confused and frightened and unsure of what decisions to make next. She can often be required to appear before a magistrate and be questioned on the incident with the perpetrator in court. (b) Additionally there is no coordination for women with various ongoing legal matters in different courts. For example, a woman experiencing family violence can find herself up against the perpetrator in the initial IVO proceedings, again in the family court (with different legal representation) and again in a civil court to deal with a property settlement. (c) A breach of an IVO is a criminal matter and therefore a higher level of evidence is needed to prove guilt. To date, it has been difficult for women to collect evidence that will satisfy court requirements. New technology is assisting to remedy this situation. <p>Current court support services have the capacity to assist around 15 women per day, yet courts are regularly dealing with between 50 – 60 matters daily.</p>	<p>Legal response</p> <p>Legal Aid should be available to all women</p> <p>Case coordination is required for women dealing with legal matters in different jurisdictions (Family Court, Magistrates Court, Criminal Courts, etc) so that the presence of family violence can be taken into account in subsequent decisions.</p> <p>Technological solutions need to be included in any Safe at Home response so that evidence can be gathered and used reliably in court. An example is The SafeT card, used in the recent Safe Futures trial which can record and safely store evidence</p> <p>All areas of court support need to be extended and adequately resourced</p>
<p>Financial security: While the law enables women to stay at home, Safe at Home policies and funding do not take into account women's financial capacity to stay and pay rent/mortgage and bills. If a woman allows a partner to return to assist with financial</p>	<p>Financial supports</p> <p>Provide additional Rent Assistance to women who are either choosing to remain home without a violent partner</p>

<p>support she risks being blamed by Police, Courts and Child Protection for failing to protect herself and her children. If children are removed as a result, her income further reduced and she is unable to afford accommodation to bring them home.</p> <p>In addition to evaluated safe at home programs, another early intervention program found to be effective is the Federal Government's HOME (Household Organisational Management Expenses) Advice program, which was designed as an early intervention program to prevent homelessness. HOME Advice is situated in homelessness services with Centrelink co-located. The model has a brokerage component that can be used to resolve immediate problems and buy specialist services. Importantly, program participants can return to HOME Advice if they are at risk of homelessness again at a later stage.</p>	<p>or relocate to alternative accommodation.</p> <p>Effective elements of evaluated Safe at Home models are outlined in the respective evaluation recommendations and must include measures that ensure safety and financial capacity to maintain housing.</p> <p>Consider extending the HOME Advice program to family violence services. Introduction of tailored employment programs to re-engage women with the workforce and help with workforce retention, would assist the financial capacity of women to remain at home, and should also be included. (see Initiative 6 below: McAuley works)</p>
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Initiative 2: Providing cost-effective crisis accommodation

Currently due to inadequate crisis accommodation facilities, the primary response to women and children in crisis is to place them in motel accommodation. The outcomes of this response are poor, with research showing that between 37–50% of women and children leaving the motel and returning home to a violent partner ([QLD Gov. 2015](#)). MCSW reports only 5% of women return to the perpetrator from the 24/7 crisis accommodation. In addition, the costs of the motel response are high not only with the initial costs of motel accommodation, but in the subsequent likelihood of further cycles of violence; further police and courts response; and additional trauma to women and children. Additional crisis accommodation facilities represent a far more effective solution in terms of both cost and outcomes.

Gap	Solution
<p>The State wide referral service, Safe Steps, estimates that approximately 50 motel rooms are needed every night, and that cost women remain for 5 nights. (Safe Steps, 2014)</p> <p>When accommodated in motel rooms, women report that they receive minimal support from services, usually only a phone call. They still feel unsafe and are isolated and unable to manage the emotional and material demands of children at that time. In addition the women have no space to think</p>	<p>Funding is required for an additional 50 crisis beds per day with 24 hour support, a more effective alternative to motel beds. Well resourced crisis services can move families either back into their own homes via a Safe at Home program if appropriate, or into refuge or other medium term accommodation where children are linked back into school, health (mental and physical) and dental services, and other types of support.</p> <p>For example, MCSW provides a crisis service model which operates 24/7 and is a more effective alternative to motel accommodation. This model provides an average of six days stay. During that time, all material aid is provided with on site 24 hour support. Children are catered for with a facilitated play room and staff are trained in the practice of creating</p>

clearly while remaining in state of trauma and chaos, and are unable to begin to plan next steps effectively. For accompanying children, the trauma continues as they watch their mothers under continued stress.	space for children to have their say. Short term case management is provided to ensure women are connected with legal, court, financial, health (mental and physical) and housing support. Importantly, the extended one week stay, with all needs being met, allows women to rest and make considered decisions about their next steps.
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Initiative 3: Providing appropriate housing options for women who need to leave the family home.

Lack of access to a range of safe and affordable housing options is a critical factor in women either staying in violent relationships or becoming homeless when they leave. Family violence is the main reason why women, children and young people seek support from homelessness services. Without additional supply of safe and affordable housing options, in all forms, the family violence crisis will go unaddressed.

Gap	Solution
<p>A recent study by Australian Justice Equality Rights Access (JERA), revealed that among the top four issues for Australian women was a critical shortage of affordable, appropriate and safe housing (including emergency housing and shelters) for women experiencing violence. (http://jerainternational.org/)</p> <p>If women and children are unable to remain or return home safely, it is critical that a full range of options is available to meet the variety of needs. These options include from crisis accommodation as mentioned above, to supported, transitional or refuge accommodation (time limited), to long term housing (public or community housing or affordable private rental).</p> <p>In keeping with other published data, MCSW data shows a high prevalence of mental illness in women who have experienced family violence (around 40-60%). Women with chronic mental and physical illnesses, resulting from years of abuse often express a preference for supported housing (short to medium</p>	<p>A National Affordable Housing Strategy needs to be negotiated between the commonwealth and states which includes funding or full range of housing options.</p> <p>Additional investment in short term (6-12 month) supported housing, transitional housing, long term public and community housing is needed.</p> <p>New supported housing is required. Elements of effective supported housing models include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation, either communal or dispersed housing Meals or self catering facilities Support inclusive of case management; peer; social and recreational; educational and employment related. Independent living and social skills development Access to afterhours and week end support when needed, inclusive of respite accommodation <p>Various housing options need to be matched with appropriate support models (including longer term) in order to prevent recurrence of violence and homelessness. Investment in post crisis support programs required for those women needing ongoing support after their return. See the MCSW Integrated Post Crisis Support model as an example.</p> <p>For an example of a supported accommodation facility</p>

<p>term) rather than have the additional pressure of establishing new permanent housing during this traumatic period. For women assessed as low risk from ongoing violence, and who choose not to enter a high security refuge, supported accommodation facilities can provide a critical place of recovery and rebuilding while legal, financial and other supports are being put in place. (Parcell & Moutou, 2014)</p>	<p>tailored for women experiencing family violence, see Appendix B.</p>
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Initiative 4: Providing specialist children’s programs as part of family violence response.

Children experience family violence differently to adults, therefore require a different and tailored response. Currently, children and young people’s voices are not included in the development of responses to family violence.

Each year, MCSW accommodates and/or supports around 150 200 children. We see the direct impact of violence on these children ranging in age from infants to young people aged 6 – 18 years, including:

- children as young as 3 years old trying to run away from home;
- 6 year olds exhibiting distress at being unable to protect their mothers;
- school aged children too frightened to go to school while their mothers are at court; and
- children expressing relief when they know that they are included on their mother’s intervention orders.

Gap	Solution
<p>While there are some existing responses across the family violence service system, there are major gaps in resourcing responses for children:</p> <p>currently the services offered to children consist only of case management and some counselling</p> <p>no attention is given to supporting or repairing the mother child bond during and after family violence.</p> <p>an international literature review (Humphreys, Houghton & Ellis, 2008) highlights how men use violent and abusive tactics to deliberately attack the bond between mothers and their children. Rebuilding that bond can help prevent long term damage and an escalation into youth homelessness that arises when youth have lost the bond with their mother out of</p>	<p>A State wide response to children impacted by family violence is required.</p> <p>More data/evaluations are required for information about what is most effective for children in order to develop knowledge and practice around needs of children and respond to specific gaps in service response.</p> <p>Every opportunity to interact with children must be seen as an opportunity to engage with them about their experience of violence.</p> <p>Case management for children is needed in all women’s refuges (with quality assurance and monitoring) to focus on the individual child as well as rebuilding/repairing family trust and bond.</p>

<p>want to live with their violent fathers.</p> <p>We are aware through our involvement with schools that they are struggling to deal with the impact of family violence, and have had reports of primary school aged children are commonly moving schools from 3 – 7 times per year.</p> <p>Children experiencing family violence need to know that someone at the school understands family violence and that they can speak with them.</p> <p>The impacts of violence commonly result in developmental and learning delays and in limited but necessary access to psychologists, dentists and speech pathologists</p>	<p>MCSW, through the leadership of expert, Wendy Bunston, sees the round reaking practice of attunement between mothers and children, where workers are invited to observe and be curious about infants who have experienced family violence and to allow space for children’s voice to be heard.</p> <p>The MCSW <i>‘Babies in Refuge’</i> training resource developed for refuge staff, provides an example of the type of approach required. Developing resources is not sufficient however. Funding to promote and train workers is needed. (Bunston & Sketchley, 2012)</p> <p>Funding is needed for the development of a benchmark training program to support professionals to identify and respond to the needs of women and children experiencing or at risk of family violence. The program should target ‘first to know’ occupations including health professionals, educators and sporting groups. The program needs to be adaptable for different service delivery contexts and be integrated to professional development schemes for each profession group.</p>
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Other best practice examples at MCSW:

Facilitated playroom at MCSW’s 24/7 crisis service (chance to play, time away from mother during her support sessions).

Activities such as baby massage and sand play are being used to enable mothers to connect with their babies and children to express their feelings in a supported environment.

([Bunston & Stone, 2015](#))

Initiative 5: Enhance women’s safety and legal outcomes by providing additional support for women and children during family violence related legal processes.

While reform has occurred in recent years of both the legal and police systems, there remain significant gaps in the integration and resourcing of responses. Innovation is a key role to play, and we support the recently announced trial of a new online app by the Neighbourhood Justice Centre for adults to apply for an intervention order without attending court as reported in, The AGE

24/5/15. Initiatives such as this will address the distress that appearing at court can cause and could assist in reducing workloads. In addition, better responses and support for children in the court process are highlighted by our casework experience.

Gap	Solution
<p>Legal response: Foremost concern is the lack of resources for women's legal services, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific responses.</p> <p>Overall reforms of the legal system have allowed greater access to Intervention orders, but inadequate resources and inconsistent practice by police and courts limit benefits for women seeking them.</p> <p>Police</p> <p>Police resources compared to the volume of police work taken up by family violence matters (mentioned above). Melbourne University research (Crinall et al 2014) reports a very high breach rate of intervention orders. Where these are reported, it is often the case that there is insufficient evidence to prosecute successfully. Police have the power to prosecute family violence cases in order to protect women. Whilst this power is protective, it can also lead to women being required to attend court after a recent incident of violence without any other legal support. In these circumstances, women are often bewildered by the processes and are afraid and unable to make clearly informed decisions. We now that police/courts are managing as many as 50 – 60 matters per day and can only spend short periods of time with affected women. Once intervention orders are granted, Police can take up to three weeks to serve them as they have too many to attend to, or can not serve them as the offender is homeless/no fixed address.</p> <p>Courts - general</p> <p>Courts dealing with family violence matters are overwhelmed by the number of applications. Magistrates report that they have inadequate assistance and are struggling to complete their workloads. Court support workers are similarly overwhelmed. Normal support capacity per day is around 15 cases – as mentioned above, 50 – 60 case may present on any given day. Magistrates often (erroneously) think that women are coming into their courts are well prepared and represented. In some courts the physical layout of spaces is too small and poorly laid out; making them unsafe for all court users</p>	<p>Legal</p> <p>Provide additional funding for women's legal services, at a minimum to offer all women attending court access to a duty lawyer or support legal rights of safety. Greater resourcing throughout the legal system is required.</p> <p>Police</p> <p>Provide additional resourcing to support prosecution of IVOs and breaches. Enable Police to seek Intervention orders for up to 12 months with no requirement for the woman to attend court. Continuous education on family violence and how tactics of control are used. Provide additional quality control and monitoring required to support good practice is needed.</p> <p>Courts - general</p> <p>Fund additional resourcing for Magistrates and Court Support networks and staff. Fund continuous education for all court staff. Extend quality control to ensure consistency of decision making. Audit courts for safety of women and children. All court facilities to be designed to include safe physical space for children</p>

<p>including women and children (eg Werribee) Remote witness video facilities are available in many courts, but in practice some Magistrates will not accept evidence from witnesses in secure locations. Of further concern is that the Family Court as a Federal jurisdiction can override intervention orders in place for children, with potentially devastating impacts for children and mother.</p> <p>Children in Courts Lack of childcare and support for children in the court environment is affecting women's ability to access justice. court protocol rightly says children should not be present in courtroom and magistrates do not allow children attendance, even if alternative care is unavailable. The unintended consequence is that women are unable to follow through with an IVO.</p>	<p>Case coordination provided for all legal matters following an original application for an intervention order including to ensure that an intervention is not overridden by subsequent proceedings)</p> <p>Children in Courts Fund the expansion of a specialist children's worker in court to assist women at the point of contact with the court system can help ensure women receive appropriate orders/protection and provides a critical point of engagement for further supports for children. An example of this model has been developed by MCSW. See Appendix C.</p>
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Initiative 6: Addressing financial security needs of women to assist in leaving family violence and becoming financially independent.

Lack of adequate income and financial insecurity keeps many women trapped in violent relationships, and prevents them successfully establishing a new home/life once they leave. Part time, casual and low paid work are the most typical patterns of women's employment, and they are more likely to be primary carers. Effective ways of retaining workforce engagement and developing new employment opportunities are critical to addressing these issues. Gendered analysis is critical to developing workable solutions around financial security and independence.

Gap	Solution
<p>Workforce retention Known gap for women in workforce facing family violence but no assistance currently available. Estimate 100,000 reports of family violence per annum and 1/3 of respondents in first Australian study showed in workforce (McFerran, 2011).</p> <p>MCSW experience is that women are being performance managed out of the workplace when crisis occurs. This often leads to no reference being supplied, impacting future employment. The trauma of family violence is compounded when</p>	<p>Workforce retention Provide specialist employer education programs (such as MCSW's engage o change program) to support women's retention in employment. Better understanding by employers (and colleagues) about the prevalence and impact of family violence on their staff, workforce productivity and options to retain and support staff that are experiencing family violence. This will enable women to maintain economic viability and workforce attachment, which is a known</p>

<p>women are forced to resign or poor performance affects their employment.</p> <p>Employment programs Women experiencing family violence are encountering gaps in mainstream employment services – generic job service agencies are actively discouraging women from seeking assistance because they are unlikely to ‘translate’ into an employment outcome in the short term. Other barriers to employment include: immigration status childcare accessibility/affordability impacts of trauma, physical injury, low self-esteem lack of appropriate employment seeking skills etc</p> <p>The newly created Commonwealth program ‘Job Pathways for Women’, appears to be a good new initiative that needs to ensure zero exclusions and mitigate a poor reference from previous employer; be available when she is ready to work; undertake risk assessments for workplace and women/children/employers involved.</p>	<p>factor in improving choice and reducing the risk of homelessness.</p> <p>Employment programs Fund tailored employment and training programs with the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outreach case management • employment focused • zero exclusion • integrated with support to address other barriers • jobs alignment with consumer preferences • financial and welfare benefits counselling <p>This model is demonstrated by the McAuley Works employment program and in a number of other agencies such as BSL’s Individual Placement & Support and Toll Holdings’ Second Step program, and should be funded and expanded.</p>
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Initiative 7: Support community campaigns and initiatives at a local as well as state wide level in order to change our cultural acceptance of violence

Gaps	Solutions
<p>The tendency of governments to fund advertising and promotional campaigns on family violence at the expense of critical service delivery and infrastructure support.</p> <p>The use of government funds to support advertising campaigns focused on themes of awareness raising but not supported with resources to effectively resolve or provide support to family violence victims.</p> <p>The risk that large scale, high cost campaigns attract resources at the expense of pioneering best practice grassroots and business engagement programs that are being undertaken. These programs have capacity to</p>	<p>Fund service provision at a corresponding rate to need.</p> <p>Recognise the significant contribution individuals make to support family violence programs through innovative fundraising and awareness raising programs</p> <p>Recognise the role that initiatives like the FedUp Lunch, and wider programs, play in delivering grassroots advocacy, social change and community mobilisation by supporting an expansion of this model state wide.</p>

<p>become national leaders in supporting the prevention of family violence with funding and support being channelled to direct service delivery versus more funding for single-issue advocacy campaigns.</p>	<p>This model is supported by MCSW, which has inspired its new 'Champions of Change against Family Violence' program. This is a state-wide initiative to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a movement within the business and wider community sectors to get momentum and accelerate our impact on family violence support and advocacy; • Act on a shared purpose, clear priorities and public commitment to using individual and collective leadership and resources to advance family violence prevention and support programs; • Listen widely and develop personal insights into the issues and opportunities for improvement; • Work together to identify and implement progressive, high impact actions that disrupt the status quo and create meaningful and lasting change. <p>Fund these initiatives and expand the program of Champions for Change</p>
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Additional Information regarding Champions for Change.

Following the highly successful women's leadership program spearheaded by Elizabeth Broderick, the Sexual Discrimination Commissioner, called 'the Male Champions of Change', MCSW has recently launched a similar campaign for family violence support.

The business model for the gender equality campaign led by the Male Champions for Change, involves men of power and influence forming a high profile coalition to model and promote change on gender equality issues in organisations and communities.

Women's voices:

Case study: B■■■

B■■■ came to MCSW via another agency, which told her about the crisis centre. She left over a weekend when her partner was away. She packed little and went to a motel where she stayed for a week before moving to our safe house.

"I almost had another breakdown – I was feeling depressed and lonely; he locked me in and now I was locking myself in."

B■■■■ said she would never have left her home had it not been for MCSW. She was too scared despite the fact she described herself as a prisoner and spent a lot of time in bed, *“black and blue.”*

She has had two separate IVO's that she says are *“just a piece of paper.”* Her experience of going to court for the IVO was frightening because she did not want to be in the same room or for him to be able to see her.

B■■■■ will never return home (even with a comprehensive safe at home response). For her, there is no chance that the house could be made safe; she is afraid of his affiliates who have connections with drugs (ICE). She has had to foster her cats out permanently. She and her partner were living in a rental property with the agreement in her name. She is concerned that lack of payments will damage her rental history.

“Victorian women need more places like this (the 24/7 accessible safe house), rather than having to go to motels in between. Staying in a motel adds to the fear – you feel trapped, embarrassed and scared. I didn't want to leave my room.”

Case study: R■■■■

R■■■■ has few friends and limited social support. She is recovering from a drug addiction and has stopped contact with friends who continue to use.

She came to MCSW's 24/7 crisis service via Safe Steps after her former partner attempted to run her over in a car at their house. The partner had a gun. The police were called and removed her from the house immediately due to safety concerns.

She had never attempted to leave her partner before, citing not wishing to put the children at risk and not thinking he would be that dangerous. Without the MCSW 24/7 crisis service, she would not have left because she had nowhere else to go. She could not stay with her family because it would have been too risky.

Once she leaves the safe house, she will go to a refuge. She has no intention of returning home. It is too unsafe not only due to her former partner but also his associates.

R■■■■ has a temporary, six month intervention order (IVO) in place and needs to return to court to extend it. Her former partner has breached the IVO, using technology to get around it. He created a fake Facebook profile to send intimidating and threatening messages. She believes that perpetrators who breach IVOs should be served with jail sentences. She also suggests that people experiencing family violence should not have to go to court to apply for an IVO: *“An application should be active immediately.”*

She has three primary school aged children who are living in foster care. They were taken away due to the violence and drugs. R■■■■ is now working hard to have the children back with her.

"They were taken away to protect them. If I am not safe, then they are not safe. I cannot visit them at the moment because it could put them, the foster carers and workers in danger."

According to R■■■■, the children are safe now. The youngest wasn't speaking and now he is. The school-aged daughter is blossoming at school. The young boy shows signs of violence but is being helped with this.

Case Study: L■■■

L■■■ was staying at a motel before she came directly to a McAuley Care refuge. She left a controlling and violent relationship after ■■■ years of abuse. When L■■■ left the first time, she tried to commit suicide. When she found out her partner had become violent with the children she returned home so that *"he would take it out on me rather than on the kids"*

The children are now in foster care. As a result, L■■■ has been able to leave her partner knowing her children are safe. She is working closely with her workers to get her children back.

L■■■ has had four separate intervention orders (IVOs). On her most recent court appearance, she was lectured for over 30 mins by a Magistrate about not leaving the violent relationship and *"that it was all [her] fault"*. The Magistrate decided she was a 'serial' IVO applicant and told L■■■ not to apply for another one as she wouldn't get it.

L■■■ and her worker left the court under the impression that the IVO had in fact been granted in full. However, when her partner called and threatened to kill her she realised she had minimal protection and no right to report him of a breach of the IVO.

L■■■ would like to tell the government to *"make family violence a priority"*. People need to be educated about the issue and why women don't leave a violent relationship.

L■■■ says she is safe now, but will *"probably never live without fear"*.

Case study: A■■■

A■■■ has lived in transitional housing through McAuley House for nearly two years. She came via MCSW's safe house and due to the circumstances and difficulties with her ex-husband; A■■■ no longer had her ■■■ children living with her.

This was a very painful time for A■■ and by the time she came to McAuley House she had lost hope and didn't think she would ever be able to be reunited with her children or get her life back together.

The case workers helped with filling in forms for public housing, arranging legal aid to begin the process to get access to her children again, and the employment worker helped A■■ prepare to go back to work. In the time spent at McAuley House she finally got to see her children again, and build a relationship with them. She also found work through the help of the employment worker, firstly in catering 5 days a week, then in aged care catering. A■■ also began to study retail and childcare, and received a certificate in these.

After moving into transitional housing, A■■ now has her children living with her. She also now volunteers in childcare at McAuley Care, 24/7 crisis service

Case study: E■■■

E■■■ is a ■■ year old sole parent with ■■ male children under ■■ years. She came to McAuley Works having experienced recent family violence with an intervention order in place against her former partner. E■■■ has visa restrictions, as she arrived in Australia on a Spousal Visa from ■■■■ with her husband. The visa restrictions meant she was ineligible for Centrelink and/or Job Services Australia assistance. At the time of engaging with McAuley Works E■■■ was facing homelessness and was highly distressed about how she would be able to support her two children.

Staff from McAuley Works updated E■■■ résumé, assisted her in sending out application letters and helped her with cold calling, as well as direct marketing to employers for housekeeping and cleaning work, which were identified as her target industries. E■■■ was also assisted with obtaining her Learner's driving licence as the client identified this as one of her major goals.

As a result of E■■■ engagement with McAuley Works, she commenced work in a housekeeping role, obtaining permanent shifts that fit around her caring responsibilities. E■■■ has stated that she is feeling very positive that she can now move on with her life after family violence and is confident in her capacity provide for her and her boys' future.

PART B: Additional response to the Issues Paper

In this part of our submission, McAuley Community Services for Women (MCSW) is responding to other questions in the Royal Commission's Issues Paper that fall outside the 'Foundations for Change' framework outlined in Part A of the submission.

Goals of the Royal Commission into Family Violence

1. Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

We support the stated goals in the Royal Commission's Issues Paper and believe that it should, in addition, adopt the following:

- address as a separate issue the needs and interests of children impacted by family violence;
- prevent, interrupt, and respond to economic abuse as a key form and outcome of family violence;
- include the business sector, schools, unions and other community sectors in developing responses – not just the specialist family violence and homelessness sector.

What has been done so far?

2. The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered.

3. Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?

National Reforms

The introduction of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2010-2022) was welcomed by MCSW, which has the specific aim of changing social attitudes to reduce family violence over the long term. We support the broad preventative focus of this plan, yet believe the focus on raising community awareness can be dangerous if it is not matched with additional resources to support the service systems to which women are now turning in record numbers. We also remain concerned at the limited funding to support this plan, and the piecemeal way in which Action Plans are developed and reported on.

The establishment of the new Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) is also an excellent initiative that can support and promote research and best practice in reducing violence against women and children.

These positives are however outweighed by concerns about funding cuts to a range of housing, homelessness, family violence and other programs that assisted women and children escaping violence and will without doubt undermine the efforts of the National Plan.

Another concern at a national level is that responses to homelessness (particularly at the crisis end) continue to reflect the stereotype of single adult males representing the typical face of homelessness, at the expense of women and children. A simple example is that a national target to reduce the numbers of rough sleepers favours responding to men because they are more likely to be sleeping rough – whereas women are more likely to be in the 'secondary homelessness' category of couch surfing with family and friends. Crisis accommodation shelters also continue to be heavily skewed toward men only services.

State Reforms

We defer to the submission made by Domestic Violence Victoria, into which we have had input, or analysis of the effectiveness and gaps in recent state reforms around family violence.

Based on our experience at MCSW, we would like to make the following additional observations and recommendations:

- The Family Violence Protection Act (2008) was essential in that it defined family violence; named gender as a factor in family violence; allowed provisions for removing perpetrators of violence from the home and provided the necessary legislation to empower the police force and legal system to act. It also do further have funding for the Victoria Police, which could and should set the base for additional and ongoing training across all areas of the justice system.
- We support the VicHealth Framework which recognises that (primary) prevention of violence against women is best guided by promoting equal relationships between women and men, promoting non violent social norms and reduce the effects of prior exposure to violence (particularly in children) and providing access to resources and systems which support women and their children.
- We support the establishment of family violence divisions in the Magistrate's Courts at Heidelberg and Ballarat, and the provision of specialist family services at other Magistrate's Courts but believe that further improvements are required, including more resourcing for women's legal services and additional support for children in courts.
- While some Safe at Home funding has been allocated, its effectiveness is undermined by the limited resources, piecemeal coverage and adequate coordination with the broader service systems.

Gaps in recent reforms – opportunity for expansion and improvement

- Early intervention and preventative measures can, and should, be incorporated into any response to people experiencing family violence and should be built into funding models in order to take advantage of every opportunity for engagement and prevention.
- Silos and gaps are evident in the whole of government approach to family violence, particularly in relation to funding through different government departments which compartmentalise eligibility criteria and works against an integrated service model. In addition, as funding is highly targeted toward perceived highest need (that is, the tertiary end of service delivery), the community service sectors are unable to take advantage of early intervention opportunities as mentioned above and ‘forces’ people seeking help from community service organisations to emphasise their deficits.
- Need for adequately funded specialist family violence services: Like other family violence services, we have specialist expertise in managing and identifying risk, in addition to specialist responses to support women and children to stay safe from violence. Currently our capacity to provide a quality crisis and prevention response is threatened because of scarce resources. The under funding of specialist services is risking the overall effectiveness of Victoria’s integrated response system. At an integrated systems level, the role of specialist family violence expertise is crucial, not just in action but also their experience of ‘what works’. However while the government, Victoria Police and others acknowledge this, lack of investment into the services appears not to value these same services.

6. What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?

7. What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?

17. Are there specific cultural, social, economic, geographic or other factors in particular groups and communities in Victoria which tend to make family violence more likely to occur, or to exacerbate its effects? If so, what are they?

Through our work MCSW has identified specific needs and causative factors within different cohorts of the population affected by family violence. The following identifies the key factors that contribute to ongoing and persistent violence for these groups and effective ways of addressing their needs.

Children and young people

- Due to the vastly different needs of children presenting with their mothers, specific responses are needed for children at different ages (0-2 year, 3-5 years, 6-12 years, and 12 years+).
- Children should be involved (where appropriate) in safety assessment and planning.

- It is important for children to be protected by a legal instrument (for example, children often express 'relief' at knowing they are part of a court intervention order alongside their mother).
- Specific health issues need specialist responses and resources (for example, delayed speech from violence induced trauma may require speech pathology).
- Many women report to us that part of their experience of family violence was an active undermining of their parenting abilities by an abusive partner; therefore it is important to recognise this parenting relationship as requiring attention alongside the many other practical needs that present when women and children have finally managed to escape a violent household.
- Critical importance of working on and maintaining a mother/child bond as part of the immediate and ongoing support required, as well as ensuring siblings are kept together wherever possible.
- High rates of family violence amongst young people resenting homelessness services in the North West Metropolitan Area LASN (Local Area Service Network) recent data snapshot showed 61% of young people had experienced family violence, and this was the primary cause of homelessness for nearly 40% of the young people supported in the region.
- Consistently our data shows that only around 10% of the children and young people who accompany their mothers into our family violence crisis service are aged 12 years and over. We understand this to be because:
 - Young people have already begun moving into youth homelessness; or
 - They have remained at home with fathers, believing them to be strong and powerful and their mother as weak with lesser rights. For these reasons, we are concerned about this group and believe they are not receiving a family violence response by any existing service system.
- There is a gap in service provision between family services and youth services.

Women and children with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

- Women and children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounders make up around 7% of all those accommodated in our crisis and refuge services.
- Discussions with women from these backgrounds highlight what is already common knowledge: that the definition of the nature and forms of family violence within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are broader than those in non Aboriginal communities and include emotional and spiritual abuse.
- At MCSW there is not specialist knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. What we do know from client feedback is that the level of support provided to women and their children in the safe house is found to be practical and helpful. Many also viewed the safe house as a place of 'healing.'
- Services such as ours provide women a choice between mainstream and ATSI services.

We defer to Victoria Police and its work with the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria which are trialling protocols across Victoria, including Ballarat, Shepparton and Dandenong, aimed at reducing family violence.

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

- Approximately 50% of all women and children who see the services of MCSW are from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

- From July 2014 to March 2015 we assisted 195 women and 163 children in our safe house, with 110 women (56%) coming from CALD backgrounds. These women and children come from around 30 different countries with those from India, Vietnam, Pakistan, Iraq and Sudan representing the largest cohorts.
- Access to interpreters (including AUSLAN) is critical. Even when women seem to have a reasonable command of the English language, we find differences in comprehending concepts and encourage the use of interpreters. English as a Second Language (ESL) is a deterrent to seeking help. Funding for community development projects to overcome this barrier within specific communities is critical.
- CALD women indicate that they face significant personal and structural barriers – isolation, cultural and religious barriers, as well as language barriers, and an inability to access information about women’s rights. Issues of shame specific to their own cultural expectations and norms can compound the sense of isolation making it extremely difficult for them to seek help when living with violence. In addition for women without employment or access to family income, they can’t access the homelessness service system because they don’t have the financial capacity to pay rent – therefore there is no housing exit available. Critically, they often do not have access to established family networks, support systems or resources.
- Women from CALD backgrounds more typically do not report to, or seek assistance from, police about family violence because police may be perceived as agents for corruption, and persecution, and women do not believe the police possess the skills or sensitivities to handle family matters. Further, the mono-cultural nature of the criminal justice system and stereotyping by criminal justice staff and other service providers acts as a barrier to seeking assistance.

Case study: F [REDACTED]

F [REDACTED] was staying at another refuge before coming to the MCSW 24/7 crisis service. She had experienced sustained violence from her husband who kept her locked up at home, and she was not allowed to study or to work. Her husband’s brother also lived with the couple and began to pressure her for sex.

F [REDACTED] came to Australia from [REDACTED] with her husband. Her family remain in [REDACTED] where they are anti-Government. Her father and sister are missing. Her [REDACTED]-year-old son remains overseas despite her husband previously promising to bring him to Australia. She has no access to her passport and visa so would be unable to leave even if she would like to. She has applied for a protection visa.

For F [REDACTED], family violence is all about power and control. “Women can do anything, we are equal. Our husbands are not treating us like we are equal. I need freedom; I don’t want my husband controlling me.”

Women with no permanent residency visas

- Women without permanency residency (PR) visas face additional barriers in leaving violent homes as their ineligibility for income support also places restrictions on accessing homelessness services. It is our understanding that most refuges have a policy around only accepting one woman without PR at a time primarily due to the lack of housing exits and additional expense it creates for the agency (her inability to pay a service fee, fund medications, food and transport for example, means that the support agency bears those additional costs) and its impact on meeting their government contract targets.

- Women from New Zealand face particular barriers to accessing support since the early 2000's when the Federal government 'closed the back door' to Australian migration.

Case study: R■■■■■

R■■■■■ currently lives in one of the five refuge homes that MCSW manages. She met her husband in ■■■■■ at a wedding. They married over the Internet and she joined him in Australia on a spousal visa. Her husband is on a study visa.

R■■■■■ is pregnant. She went to a motel after being pushed to the ground and kicked in the head and stomach. The physical violence started because her husband did not want the baby once it was established that they were having a girl. Prior to that, the violence had been unrelenting verbal abuse.

She left the house, and travelled by train to the police station before calling a referral service. She stayed ■■■■ nights in a motel before going to another crisis service. She had ■■■■ weeks there before coming to the MCSW crisis service.

Her visa is restrictive. She has no entitlements to Centrelink or Medicare and she is not able to work or study. Since she moved into refuge, her husband has cancelled her access to their private health insurance, which is a requirement of his study visa. She may be in debt to the RWH for approximately \$30,000.00 if she is unable to access Medicare.

Staff at MCSW have connected R■■■■■ to the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre where she is being helped through the legal process by. She is eligible for a protection visa and has received an acknowledgment. In the meantime, a bridging visa is being organised but this is not valid until the student visa runs out next year. Her baby will go onto her visa.

Now safe, R■■■■■ says she can begin to see the future, for herself and her baby.

Women with disabilities

- Our data highlights a steady reporting of women coming to our safe house and refuges with mental illness. In the last year 98 women (or 50% of the 195 women who came to us from July 2014 to March 2015) reported mental illness, mainly anxiety and depression.
- Given this high comorbidity of mental illness and violence, there should be even greater focus on providing integration and coordination between these service systems. Funding cuts to the community mental health system is making it difficult for women to access post crisis support.
- We defer to any submission made to the Royal Commission from Women with Disabilities Victoria. Currently we are unable to accommodate women and children with physical disabilities as our refuges are not accessible. We have requested assistance to upgrade our facilities from the state government; however, to date no funding is available for physical upgrades.

Case study: K■■■■ (extended violence for woman with Disability and/or Mental Illness)

K■■■■ has an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) from injuries sustained in a car accident caused by her former partner. She is currently on methadone to relieve pain and is diagnosed with depression. Despite experiencing violence over the years, she remained with her partner because she "... did not know that places like this (safe houses) existed".

In the most recent incident, K■■■■ was held for ■■■ days as a hostage. She was beaten and raped and set on fire. The police had to kick the door in to find her. She was hospitalised and during this time she was encouraged to contact a referral service that connected her with MCSW.

After time at the MCSW crisis service, ■■■■■ hopes to be housed in a refuge. However, she acknowledges there are few options for women who are single and on methadone. She has young school children who are not in her custody. She wants to reconnect with them and has met the DHS rehabilitation requirements.

She will not return home. K■■■■ has a temporary IVO for six months. She applied while in hospital and did not have to go to court. She has had IVOs before; the last of which was breached ■■■ times.

Pregnant women

- Currently around 10% of women entering our crisis service are pregnant. We also regularly receive women with new born infants sometimes directly from maternity hospitals. ABS data reveals that 54 per cent of women report experiencing violence from a previous partner during pregnancy, and 22 per cent report it by a current partner (ABS, 2012).
- Given the research on the impact of family violence on parenting and the observations of staff on the mother/child bond, it is suggested that the medical profession, especially midwives, have a critical window of opportunity to intervene early in the trajectory of mothers and children's relationships.

Case study: C■■■■

C■■■■ was referred to McAuley Care when she was eight months pregnant, and with other young children in her care. She was seriously assaulted a couple of years ago by her husband which resulted in her being hospitalised. She also suffered partial hearing loss. C■■■■ returned to the relationship but over time saw signs that the abuse was returning, including financial abuse. This time she decided to leave with all the children, despite her late term pregnancy.

C■■■■ moved to one of our refuges, where she lived for about ■■■ weeks. She then went to live with her parents who were able to look after her and the children while she had the baby.

Staff of MCSW were able to assist in addressing C■■■■'s financial situation, access Centrelink, put in place safety measures, gain an intervention order, give her community-donated Christmas presents for the children and re-engage the children at school. Once C■■■■ moved out she was referred to

another family violence outreach program.

Women with alcohol/ drugs/ ICE issues

- Our data shows that over the past nine months, 60 women have cited the use of ICE by the perpetrator as the tipping point for leaving. In addition, 10 women have resented drug and alcohol issues, including methadone. This has correlated with higher than usual notifications to child protection.
- The national inquiry into ICE should be directed to look specifically at the link with family violence, and further research on this issue.
- The prevalence of drug and alcohol issues amongst women seeking assistance is important to note because it is a common community misconception that only perpetrators of family violence have alcohol and drug issues. Our discussions with women reveal a correlation between alcohol and drug abuse with mental illness that has been induced by family violence.
- It is our observation that alcohol abuse only increases the likelihood of violence when someone already held beliefs that supported violence, rigid gender roles or gender equity.

Women and children with family pets

- Casework identifies that women often remain in dangerous, volatile situations because of concerns that the family pet may well be abused, or suffer further abuse, if they leave
- Perpetrators can use threats of extreme violence against pets as a means of controlling women and children
- Provision of temporary care for family pets should be considered as part of the case management response for women seeking assistance.

General questions

20. Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to improve policies, program and services which currently seek to carry out the goals set out above?

Prevention at every stage...

The experience of MCSW is that family violence will only be tackled effectively within our community if preventative approaches and strategies are built into all aspects of the response. It is not enough to rely on community awareness and education programs to prevent violent behaviours, or rely on behaviour change programs to prevent a recurrence of the violence. The causal factors and impacts of family violence are so complex that prevention must be built into every point of contact as well as into the overarching policy and program levers that control service delivery.

How we build prevention into our work at McAuley Community Services for Women:

- **Preventing financial duress and instability.** We work with women directly to assist them to develop pathways to employment and financial independence so that they will be safe (from violence); secure (housed); financially independent (employed or studying).
- **Preventing community disengagement and apathy.** We engage the community through working with employers and employees, teaching them to recognise, respond and refer women who are facing family violence. This program is also our first social enterprise venture and aims to break even by 30 June 2016.
- **Preventing homelessness and further violence.** We house women and children who are homeless due to family violence. We provide crisis accommodation and temporary accommodation for women at the point of need eg: discharge from hospital.
- **Preventing further damage to children.** We attend to children's experience of family violence which is different to their mothers and often goes unrecognised. We provide a Court Children's Support program to enable mothers to complete their orders and access their legal rights.
- **Preventing future youth homelessness.** We work to improve the bond between mothers and children for the prevention of later youth homelessness.
- **Preventing reoccurring homelessness.** We provide pathways to employment and education, and ongoing access to social and recreational opportunities. This leads to independence, wellness, permanent housing, and greater financial security. We support women to maintain their housing.

Appendices

Appendix A: Integrated Post Crisis Support model

In 2011, MCSW partnered with Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services to research and develop an integrated service model to meet this gap – the resultant Integrated Post Crisis Response Service (IPCRRS) was aimed at providing a range of longer term, women centred, case management and support options for women and children who have experienced family violence and are in the process of rebuilding their lives.

The intention was for this activity to be funded and added to all family violence agencies providing a response to women and their children experiencing family violence, and allows for a case mix of short and long term support. Currently, most resources are diverted to the ‘front end’ of service provision so that women receive a response when they first make contact, which is critical.

The post crisis model comprises of:

- Dedicated post crisis case management support for up to two years delivered as needed, when needed (i.e. multiple support periods over time)

- Brokerage funds to provide flexible support packages

- Peer and group work support program

- Partnerships with relevant family violence support services and other community based resources and organisations to facilitate social opportunities (such as community health, neighbourhood houses and learning centres).

A post crisis response aims to sustain the changes women have already made in their lives and improve outcomes for women and children, especially reducing the burden on service systems (family violence, homelessness, emergency services, child protection) by preventing their return to crisis. It will also have significant benefits for the clients through a strengthened capacity to participate and connect with the local community, improved housing and financial situation, improved health outcomes, enhanced parenting capacity and improved education and employment links and outcomes.

Our women’s housing service, McAuley House, combines this approach of providing longer term support alongside appropriate housing options.

Details of the full program model are available at:

http://www.goodshepvic.org.au/Assets/Files/FTG%20Service%20Model%20FINAL%20PP%20_26_03_11_cp_edit_FINAL.pdf

Appendix B: Pickett House Supported Accommodation and Community Hub

Construction has begun on a new state of the art building in Footscray that will provide safe and secure medium term housing for women to recover from the impact of homelessness; frequently due to family violence, poor health (physical and mental), extreme social isolation, poverty and unemployment.

The new building is a 25 bed facility on Pickett Street, Footscray. This site was selected because of the high need in the West of Melbourne, proximity to public transport and complementary facilities including hospitals, government services and community facilities

The purpose built hub will pioneer programs and services sensitive to women's specific needs. Services will include education and employment, health, social and recreation programs. The facility will be staffed on a 24 hour basis and allow for afterhours and weekend community contact and support.

Purpose of new building:

- To provide a community hub which will deliver accommodation support and services to current and previous residents and to women living in 'dispersed' transitional housing through MCSW
- To provide accommodation for women from diverse backgrounds and with different levels of need

What the hub will feature:

- A model based on a 'hub & spoke' approach: the community hub houses women with the most immediate and high needs and supports transition into more independent living arrangements (the spokes)
- Graduated and tailored support offered on site according to need and tenant choice, or example all board inclusive of meals or self catering capacity
- Independent living skills activities to assist women move to their own accommodation
- Staff offices including sleepover capacity
- Commercial kitchen and shared kitchens
- Common dining and sitting room
- Meeting spaces for education and employment programs, recreation and social services

Architectural Design:

- The selected architectural design promotes health, wellbeing and social cohesion
- It embeds our commitment to supporting women to rebuild their lives and realise their potential and respecting and contributing to the local community and the natural environment
- The design incorporates
 - Safety and security features
 - Flexible and accessible space
 - Environmentally sustainable design features
 - Energy efficient systems
 - Green spaces including kitchen roof garden, individual balconies and a reflection garden

Appendix C: Court Children's Support Program

In the past year MCSW has introduced Victoria's first Court Children's Support program through funding from the Barr Family Foundation, enabling over 100 women to obtain intervention orders who would not have otherwise.

For many years Sunshine Magistrates Court personnel and agencies supporting women, including MCSW, have observed that early intervention is often not possible to complete an intervention order because of lack of appropriate childcare on the day of her court hearing. This left the woman and her children unprotected at this dangerous time. It is likely that this experience is replicated in at least six other courts across Victoria, impacting on a minimum of 100 women and their children each year.

The Court Children's Support Program was introduced at Sunshine Court in response to the number of children accompanying mothers for family violence intervention orders. Women are unable to access the usual range of childcare options because day care is not accessible throughout the day, and occasional care only allows for four hour stays. Family and friends often cannot be called upon to help out with children for a variety of reasons (for example, fear for their safety, or they haven't been told about the violence).

As the key resource for this program, the Court Children's Support Program is an outreach service operating three days a week, with the following objectives:

- Assist women to successfully complete their family violence related legal proceedings.
- Minimise further trauma to children by offering them safe and positive diversion.
- Accompany children through the court process and monitor their safety and wellbeing.
- Provide referrals to support services within court and for child focused support services for external counselling and play therapy for children if needed.
- Advocate for the rights of children attending court; this has contributed recommendations to the Sunshine Court Manager on child focused approaches to court procedures.

In the first months of the program (August 2014-January 2015), 207 children engaged with the Court Children's Worker, with the majority of children between the ages of nine and eleven years, and up to sixteen years of age.

What works

Some of the issues that have been identified during the first six months of operation include the need for appropriate spaces to be made available for the play activities to occur, whilst ensuring the safety of the worker and children in a setting where the perpetrator is in attendance. Demand has been overwhelming with the capacity to support only around 15 of the 65 women in attendance at the court each day – an assessment plan has been implemented which assists in focusing on the most vulnerable families.

At least two more courts that are very keen to take up this model, and MCSW would like to see it extended across other courts where there are appropriate space and security provisions.

Appendix D: McAuley Works Employment Program

“A job is my way out of this nightmare. A job means I have money to pay the rent, buy food and clothes, pay the bills...it is a ticket to sanity and freedom”.

Client of McAuley Works

To ensure the safety of women as well as for purely economic reasons, it is vital that the intersection between family violence and sustainable employment be addressed.

Women who are financially independent are less likely to be in a relationship with a violent partner, and if they are in a violent relationship they are more likely to leave the perpetrator. Some women may find themselves in a vicious cycle where their financial independence may be the path to freedom from violence but the violence may prevent them from becoming financially independent.

Family violence affects women in different ways but the experience commonly contributes to their sense of worthlessness, shame and lack of confidence. Seeking or maintaining existing employment can play an important role in their recovery and may also contribute to a sense of stability and purpose at a time of instability. This requires intensive and consistent support in relation to her experience of family violence, her sense of self, her need or wish to work and her ability to find work. (Kleimaker, 2012)

McAuley Works is an employment program aimed at providing meaningful employment to women experiencing family violence, and/or homelessness and/ or mental illness. There is no other program like McAuley Works that works specifically with women who have experienced family violence to find employment. The group of women we work with is highly disadvantaged and may be either unemployed (on Newstart) or not in the labour market – that is, they receive a Disability Support Pension due to their mental illness or on Parenting Payment if they have young children and are not expected to work. An independent evaluation completed in 2012 found that it was valuable in engaging and working with women who had experienced family violence and who required a sensitive, individualised and holistic approach to achieving employment outcomes.

Case study: E■■■

E■■■ is a ■■■ year old sole parent with ■■■■ male children under ■■■■ years. She came to McAuley Works having experienced recent family violence with an intervention order in place against her former partner. E■■■ has visa restrictions, as she arrived in Australia on a Spousal Visa from ■■■■ with her husband. The visa restrictions meant she was ineligible for Centrelink and/or Job Services Australia assistance. At the time of engaging with McAuley Works, E■■■ was facing homelessness and was highly distressed about how she would be able to support her two children.

Staff from McAuley Works updated E■■■'s résumé, assisted her in sending out application letters and helped her with cold calling, as well as direct marketing to employers for housekeeping and cleaning work, which were identified as her target industries. E■■■ was also assisted with obtaining her Learner's driving licence as the client identified this as one of her major goals.

As a result of E■■■'s engagement with McAuley Works, she commenced work in a housekeeping role, obtaining permanent shifts that fit around her caring responsibilities. E■■■ has stated that she is feeling very positive that she can now move on with her life after family violence and is confident in her capacity provide for her and her boys' future.

The program was established in 2010 and since that time has assisted nearly 300 women with almost half of these finding jobs through McAuley Works. Compared to other job programs, our approach is cost effective with an average cost per client of around \$5,000. Since 2010 taxpayers have been saved in excess of \$1 million due to women gaining and retaining employment rather than being forced onto government benefits.

McAuley Works has already achieved sustainable employment for many of the women it has supported, fulfilling a goal that has been identified by a number of government strategies including *The Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 – 2019*, *the Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2020* and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*. In 2013 the program was a finalist in the National Homelessness Services Achievement Awards for ‘Excellence in supporting pathways to employment or education’, awarded by the Hon. Peter Dutton.

Client profile

- Over one third of clients are either homeless or at risk of being homeless and have mental health issues, almost half of the clients are either homeless or at risk of being homeless and have experienced family violence, and almost one quarter of clients are either homeless or at risk of being homeless, with mental health issues and have experienced family violence.
- Of the known qualification background of the clients (n = 50; 60% of total), 16 (32%) have a TAFE level qualification and 16 (32%) have a University qualification.

The gap and our approach

[Crawford, Brown, Walsh & Pillar](#), (2010) found that family violence services in Australia have traditionally focused on short term crisis intervention such as accommodation, and that there has been “little funding provided for systemic planning in areas such as job search and career development as a means to independence for domestic violence victims”. Page 1.

Based on these findings our model focuses on empowerment by developing interventions aligned with self efficacy, outcome expectations and goal attainment. We have supported women who have actively been discouraged by Centrelink in requesting a referral to employment services. The requirements of Job Services Australia (JSA) rarely seem to match the needs of women experiencing family violence and some women have found it difficult to negotiate with JSAs in order to access funding for training or employment.

Job Services Australia (JSA) also works with women with multiple and complex barriers to employment; however in our experience JSA has the following limitations:

- JSA Case Workers have very large case loads and are unable to provide intensive, individualised or reactive assistance or to provide outreach support, practical support such as transport, holistic support to address a client’s barriers to employment or advocacy
- Clients are forced to participate and there are penalties for non compliance
- Employment agencies are funded based on outcomes and are therefore more motivated to assist clients who attract greater funding – i.e. not voluntary participants such as women on a Disability support pension or parenting payments

Key components of McAuley Works

The McAuley Works model incorporates the following components:

1. **Intake:** referrals are received from MCSW programs, as well as external programs. Women may also self refer. The program is voluntary and there is a zero exclusion policy – all women who wish to participate, may participate. Women are contacted by phone within 24 hours of a referral being received
2. **Initial assessment:** this is the first stage of the support relationship and involves explaining the program parameters and having an initial discussion with the woman about her goals, work history, qualifications and skills
3. **Intensive support:** the support offered will depend on the goals and needs of the woman but it will involve the provision of intensive, outreach support with a focus on employment (including addressing any barriers to employment). This may involve:
 - **Goal or career planning:** incorporating identification of career goals, the steps or strategies required to achieve the goal and reviewing goals and progress, in conjunction with other support providers, if involved
 - **Coaching/mentoring** to help women navigate their own pathway to employment. By offering an objective perspective McAuley Works assists women to identify their strengths and weaknesses, guiding them toward their career goals through skill development and career counselling. Many women experience anxiety about obtaining employment; coaching helps to normalise their feelings/fears and increase self efficacy
 - **Advice and information** – about vocational training, developing a resume, applying for jobs, etc
 - **Advocacy** – assisting women to navigate systems and Government and mainstream services. For women with complex and multiple issues mainstream employment services provide a daunting and unforgiving environment.
 - **Resume creation & application writing** – the process of documenting skills on paper not only provides a practical tool for women, but increases their self confidence
 - **Job search strategies** – including:
 - Self marketing (how to present yourself at interviews)
 - Reverse marketing (where a worker approaches employers on behalf of participants to seek employment. This is suitable in limited circumstances – e.g. where a woman has specific skills or experience, and is done with consent and with known employers)
 - Cold canvassing (where a participant approaches employers directly)
 - **'Benefits counselling'** – providing information and advice on the impact of employment on Centrelink benefits and entitlements
 - **Referral:** wherever appropriate, McAuley Works actively links women to their local employment services provider to increase their access to vocational training and assistance. If necessary, the McAuley Works worker attends appointments with the women to help them negotiate the services and advocate on their behalf. The woman's resume and employment strategy is shared with the provider to ensure that everyone is working toward the same goal. McAuley Works instigates requests for Job Capacity Assessments and interviews with Centrelink to ensure that the woman gets the service referral she is eligible for. McAuley Works also makes referrals to and work in conjunction with support services assisting women with support needs such as mental health, drug and alcohol issues, housing, legal, health, etc.
4. **Vocational Training and Education**
5. **Placement support**
6. **Post placement support:** women will continue to receive support after they have achieved their placement and as long as they need it. Support may also be offered to the employer if appropriate and required.

Case study: K

K was referred to the McAuley Care safe house seeking refuge from her violent husband of months. The violence began soon after they were married when she protected his pregnant sister from his abuse. Her husband was verbally, emotionally and physically abusive to her throughout their marriage. The violence had escalated to him hitting her in the face with a boot and her inflicting self-harm to stop him from being violent.

She had an interim Intervention Order put in place and a court date for the final Intervention Order, but needed court assistance. The final Intervention Order was granted and as her husband attended court, it was deemed served. K's husband had kept her totally isolated and dependent on him. She had never previously lived alone, had never gone shopping or even bought a train ticket. However, she did have a job and her employer was keen for her to continue working.

K spent four days in the McAuley Care crisis service during which she was referred to the McAuley Works Employment Program. McAuley Works facilitated a risk assessment with her and her employer at her workplace to ensure she could return to work safely. She was also referred to a family violence service in the area that assisted her with temporary accommodation while they worked with her on her long-term housing needs.

K is now living on her own in temporary housing, using public transport and doing her own shopping. She has asked her Human Resources Manager to be her workplace mentor, and she is having driving lessons. Without this early intervention response, it is likely that K would have gone into a women's refuge, lost her job due to being too afraid to return to work and become reliant on unemployment benefits. It would have taken her a number of months to find alternative accommodation and a new job. Given the level of distress and uncertainty K exhibited at court, she may well have decided that the cost of leaving was heavier than the cost of staying.

K has been happy with the support offered to her throughout this experience; as such, she has reported that she is more likely to assist her sister-in-law to seek help, thereby preventing further violence to another woman and child.

Appendix E: Engage to Change Program

Engage to Change is the first solution-based program in Australia addressing the link between women's employment, the prevention of violence and economic independence.

How does Engage to Change work?

Engage to Change educates employers and staff about family violence, its impact on business, what can be done to support women experiencing violence and how to do it.

Specifically the program assists employers to:

- Recognise when family violence might be impacting an employee;
- Respond appropriately; and
- Refer employees for support while they maintain their employment.

Engage to Change is comprised of:

- 90 minute Fact to Face facilitated session for senior managers and staff, tailored to a company's needs, led by an experienced facilitator. We are training a pool of sessional facilitators to keep up with an increased demand.
- Purpose built 20 minute e learning module or widespread distribution to multiple employees. This is the **first** of its kind in Australia.

Engage to Change is **preventative** – keeping women in the workforce while they navigate the difficulties of family violence. During this time, employment plays an important role in recovery, both in self esteem and financial independence.

It also aimed to **cultural change** within the workplace: two in every three women in work are experiencing family violence and need to receive emotional and practical support in order to maintain their job. Cultural change includes changing attitudes about prevalent social sexism and the power/ control dynamic between the sexes.

Rationale for the program

Our experience is that employers have a varied awareness of what family violence is and are mostly unsure of what to do. There is a distinct gap between management's knowledge of the issue, being able to support an employee through such a period and being confident about existing company policy and what action to take.

We know that family violence costs Australian business around \$13.6 billion each year (with Victoria's share estimated at around \$3.4 billion). This is based on lost productivity, increased sick leave, poor performance, absenteeism and additional recruitment costs. ([KPMG, 2009](#)). By 2021 this figure is expected to rise to \$20 billion.

In Victoria, we have estimated that around 1,000 reports of family violence are coming from people engaged in the workforce each year. This is based on Victoria Police and Safe Steps reporting, and evidence that two out of three people reporting family violence are employed ([Domestic Violence Workplace Rights and Entitlements Project, 2011](#)).

In 2011 MCSW initiated a ground breaking education program for employers around understanding and dealing with the impact of family violence in the workplace. The program has been developed in partnership with women with lived experience of family violence whilst trying to manage in the workplace.

Pioneering

Engage to Change program is pioneering for a number of reasons:

- We are the only service responding to women and children in Victoria with a program concentrating on employers and their employees
- Our program offers practical work place strategies for employers, not just awareness raising (compared with White Ribbon, CEO Challenge for instance)
- Engage to Change plugs a major gap in the system in that it makes the connection between family violence, employment and cultural change.

Why is it different to other awareness raising programs?

Engage to Change applies a gender lens to family violence. The formation and thrust of the program is directly based on our experience of working and supporting women who have had to leave the workforce due to family violence.

Their reasons for leaving include: being managed out of a job because of lack of productivity or absenteeism without the employer or manager questioning either, and often no reference provided in order to help with getting new work. In order to overcome financial dependence, the issue of access to ongoing employment is crucial.

Within the spectrum of employer programs, Engage to Change is unique in that it provides training and practical strategies for assisting women who are living with family violence while they remain connected to the workplace. Other programs such as the CEO Challenge and White Ribbon Day are aimed at awareness raising at a leadership level and amongst the general workforce rather than specific strategies for those affected.

Engage to Change also complements initiatives such as the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House resource booklet *Domestic Violence and Workplace Rights Project (2011)* and sample EBA clauses developed by unions that are used to negotiate the inclusion of family violence specific clauses in EBAs. The Surf Coast Shire Council was the first to include 20 days leave for victims of family violence in 2011.

Funding

The program has received no government funding. Development of the program has been covered by MCSW and philanthropic trusts. Most recently, the Baker Foundation has funded a business development manager position to promote Engage to Change for one year (Dec 2014 – Dec 2015) to a wide range of employers. There is the potential of extending this philanthropic funding.

Achievements

The training has prompted participating organisations to **review their family violence policies**. The local government authorities have been working with various family violence service providers on their EBA but acknowledge more work needs to be done in terms of policy and procedure around avenues of disclosure and subsequent support.

One organisation that has undertaken the training and introduced the e learning module has reported that two **employees impacted by family violence have come forward and sought**

assistance since the start of the year. This is unprecedented within this workforce, with the HR Manager noting this is the first time in his 30 years in that role that this has occurred.

Staff are reporting feeling positive that they had the resources at their fingertips to engage appropriately and assist these employees. Feedback highlights the importance of helping the leadership team understand the importance of recognising the signs and to have the courage to ask the right questions – “The simplest one is ‘U OK?’”

Lessons learned

The roll out of Engage to Change is revealing, in terms of much needed cultural change that is required to address the issues, language used, and also community attitudes.

Understanding about family violence varies from not recognising family violence as an issue for a business, through to managers believing family violence to be a private matter only. Many businesses are open to learning more but are wary about what it may mean and are not sure what to do.

Local and State Government authorities and hospitals which we have worked with have since been proactive in developing policies and procedures around employees who are experiencing family violence. The barriers that we have experienced are mainly around the fear of “opening a can of worms” rather than the price.

Appendix F: Gender Analysis

Why a gender analysis on social policy and responses is critical?

‘Sex identifies the biological differences between men and women. Gender identifies the social relationship between them). Gender, therefore, refers not only to men and women, but to the relationship between them, and the way this relationship is constructed socially, economically and politically. The gender implications of policies and programs must be analysed for the possible differential impact they may have for women and men.’ ([McLaren 2000](#)).

In the Department of Human Services publication, *Best Interests as Practice Model*, the Victorian Government acknowledges that a gender analysis is a critical component of good practice, and urges practitioners to be aware of the dynamics of power imbalance and gender inequality in their work ([Miller, 2012](#)). Yet policies and programs all too often ignore the underlying inequalities of the gender wage gap, women’s greater primary carer role, lower workforce participation and casualisation of female employees, and also the power imbalances that result from women’s economic dependence on men or the state. While policies remain ‘gender neutral’ in their design and implementation, the intrinsic gender inequalities that exist in society will be masked and ignored.

As an example, in *The Road Home – A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, 2008 the then Rudd Federal Government set out two key objectives on the reduction of homelessness, one being to ‘offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020’. These key objectives influence where resources are allocated. At that time, rough sleepers’ made up only sixteen percent of the national homelessness population (and eleven percent in Victoria) – however men made up around 60 per cent of the rough sleeping population and were less likely than women to seek support through funded homelessness services ([ABS, 2008](#)). In addition, there are far greater crisis accommodation services for men than for women. This is despite the evidence for several decades that homelessness for women and children has been growing and that family violence is one of the greatest causes of homelessness.

Women’s Health Victoria identifies that a gendered approach to policy and service provision can assist in giving equal weight to the knowledge, value and experiences of both men and women, and can lead to better responses and outcomes ([Johnstone, Brown & Beaumont, 2001](#)). In the case of family violence, it can also help explain the age old questions of ‘why don’t women just leave?’ and ‘why do they let the perpetrator return?’. The reality is many cases show that power imbalances are created and perpetuated due to economic dependence and societal expectations. The application of a ‘gender lens’ can therefore only assist in better understanding and responding to the causes of, and responses to, family violence.

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A Tribute to the Sisters of Mercy

In 1988, the Sisters of Mercy established the first 24/7 safe house in Victoria for women and children seeking refuge from Family Violence. Initially, opening up their home to provide a safe space for one or two families, this service, now known as McAuley Care, is part of McAuley Community Services for Women, and has proven to be an invaluable asset to the state of Victoria, providing a safe haven to thousands of women and children. Special tribute is made here to the ground breaking work of Sisters Sheila Heywood and Wilma Geary, who recognised the need for women and children to be supported and kept safe as a result of an increasing trend of family violence in the community. Their pioneering efforts provided a way forward in moving family violence from within the privacy of the family home into public consciousness.



**McAuley Community
Services for Women**

A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy