



## Royal Commission into Family Violence

### WITNESS STATEMENT OF MICHAEL GERARD BRANDENBURG

I, Michael Gerard Brandenburg, Manager, Family Violence, Family Relationship Services & Housing of Child and Family Services Ballarat, 115 Lydiard Street North, Ballarat, in the State of Victoria, say as follows:

1. I am authorised by Child and Family Services Ballarat (CAFS) to make this statement on its behalf.
2. I refer to and rely on CAFS' submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (**Royal Commission**) dated 28 May 2015, which includes 27 recommendations in response to the Royal Commission's Issues Paper. Attached to this statement and marked "MB-1" is a copy of CAFS' submission.
3. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, unless where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

#### CAFS

4. CAFS is a large community based welfare organisation providing services and programs across the Grampians region. CAFS employs over 185 staff and has an annual operating budget of \$16 million. CAFS operates from offices in Ballarat, Ararat, Bacchus Marsh and Daylesford.
5. Our vision is to ensure wellbeing, respect and safety for all children and families. We work to ensure all family members have access to high quality, responsive and coordinated programs. We support over 5,000 individuals and families each year.
6. CAFS' programs are delivered through three management streams:
  - 6.1. **Family Services:** working with parents and children in their homes when there is a concern for the wellbeing of the child. Specific programs include parenting groups, support and education for parents with infants, Child FIRST intake and referral service, and support for people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

- 6.2. **Out-of-home Care:** providing care and support for children and young people who have been removed from their families due to child safety concerns. This is delivered through foster care, residential care, kinship care and adoption and permanent care programs.
- 6.3. **Family Violence, Family Relationships and Housing:** providing both client focused and community development programs aimed at preventing family violence, supporting family relationships and reducing homelessness. Within the family violence programs area services delivered include counselling, group work, intensive case management and housing support for men removed from the family home due to their violence and abuse.

### **Current role**

7. I am the Manager of the Family Violence, Family Relationship Services and Housing stream at CAFS. I have held this position since July 2013. This position is an outcome of an agency restructure that saw housing added to this management stream. I have been Manager of Family Violence and Family Relationship Services since 2004.
8. In my role as Manager Family Violence, Family Relationship Services and Housing, I am responsible for managing 30 staff and program requirements including budgets, employment, reporting, program development and implementation. My role ensures program standards and performance requirements are met and agency strategic plans are implemented. My position is part of the senior management team overseeing agency performance and development. My position includes implementation of the White Ribbon workplace accreditation program including training for all staff on White Ribbon. The workplace accreditation program recognises workplaces that are taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women.

### **Background and qualifications**

9. I have worked at CAFS since 1990. I have worked as a Youth Worker in the youth support program, as a Foster Care worker, Team Leader of the Men & Family Relationships Program, Manager Family Violence and Family Relationship Services and now currently Manager Family Violence, Family Relationships and Housing. Since 1994 I have been a Men's Behaviour Change group facilitator and currently fill in when required. I have held positions as the Chair of the Grampians Integrated

Family Violence Committee and the Ballarat White Ribbon Committee and currently attend the Central Highlands Crime Prevention Committee and the City of Ballarat Community Safety Committee.

10. I hold the following qualifications:

10.1. Bachelor of Arts from University of Ballarat;

10.2. Advanced Diploma of Business Management from University of Ballarat;

10.3. Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training from University of Ballarat; and

10.4. Graduate Certificate in Male Family Violence – Group Facilitation from Swinburne University.

### **Family violence work at CAFS**

11. CAFS is established as a leading family violence service in Victoria. CAFS offers a comprehensive range of family violence services to families with a specific focus on programs that engage and work with men who perpetrate family violence.
12. CAFS provides support services for women and children impacted by family violence. These services include partner contact, women's and children's support groups and individual counselling. CAFS also works closely with women's family violence services across the region.
13. CAFS has completed White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation and is an active member in the community addressing violence against women. The White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program recognises workplaces that are taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women.

### ***Men's behaviour change program***

14. Men's behaviour change programs are a crucial component of addressing family violence. Family violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men and behaviour change programs play an important role in increasing the safety of women and children, holding men accountable for their violence and abuse, and working with men to change their behaviour.

15. CAFS has been delivering various forms of men's behaviour change programs since the early 1990s. In this time CAFS has trialled, developed and implemented a number of different models of program delivery, including 12 session group programs, 22 session group programs, 14 session group programs, both closed and open group session and support groups for men.
16. One of the challenges in men's behaviour change group work is that there is limited evidence, particularly in Australia, of specific models that achieve the best outcomes. This remains a relatively new field of research. In many ways it is only in the last 10 years that men's behaviour change groups have been seen as an integral part of the service system response.
17. Defining outcomes or successes remains a contentious issue in the men's behaviour change work. At CAFS ensuring the safety of women and children by working with men is our priority. In addition to this, the men's programs at CAFS aim to challenge men's attitudes and beliefs around power and control with the intent that this will drive change. The family violence sector remains unsure about defining outcomes with funding bodies also seeming confused. Funding bodies and others seem to define success based on completion of a program. At no time does CAFS use completion as a measure of success.
18. The difficulty is that there is little evidence to suggest which model of program delivery is the most effective. CAFS believes that evidence should strongly inform program development and implementation and that consistency across the men's behaviour change program sector is required.
19. The current minimum standards for the delivery of men's behaviour change programs (administered by No To Violence) require an immediate review. The minimum standards were released around 2006. Significant change in the men's behaviour change sector has occurred in the last 10 years. These changes include:
  - 19.1. changes in the police response to family violence;
  - 19.2. the introduction of the specialist family violence courts in Ballarat and Heidelberg giving powers to the court to direct men to attend men's behaviour change programs by imposing counselling orders;
  - 19.3. the need to try different models to achieve the best outcomes; and

- 19.4. the overwhelmingly increase in demand for the programs.
20. The standards have by the nature of time and change in the sector become outdated. This is not to say the standards are not a valuable resource and an important guide to the work at this current time of change and development.
  21. Currently CAFS receives funding from three sources to deliver men's behaviour change programs: the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (through Court Services Victoria), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Corrections Victoria.
  22. The Magistrates' Court program is for those men where an intervention order has been served on them and they have been mandated through the Specialist Family Violence Court Division to attend a Family Violence Court Intervention Program. Men receive a counselling order that requires them to complete up to 50 hours of counselling including men's behaviour change group work.
  23. DHHS provides funding for men's behaviour change programs with referrals coming from Child Protection, the Family Court, community based organisations and self-referrals.
  24. The Corrections Victoria funding is to work with men on community based orders that have a condition to attend men's behaviour change programs and is based on payment for each individual client who participates.
  25. Receiving funding from three different sources with varying contract requirements can and does raise challenges for program delivery. All three funding sources require programs to be delivered within No To Violence standards; this ensures consistency of practice and content. Some of the challenges that arise for program delivery at CAFS include
    - Compliance expectations. For example, Corrections Victoria case managers follow up on group absences of men on community based orders, CAFS follows up on court referred client absences and Child Protection follow up on absences of men who have been referred by Child Protection.
    - Depending on where you are referred from, eg, Magistrates Court, Corrections, Child Protection or self-referral will determine whether you

have access to individual work prior to group or individual work while in group.

- While CAFS currently provides the same group work model for all clients (14 weeks) irrespective of who is providing the funding, proposed changes to the model to increase the number of sessions offered will potentially raise issues regarding sufficient funding.

CAFS believes that consistent models of practice across funding bodies and agencies delivering Men's Behaviour Change Programs is essential in achieving the best outcomes

26. CAFS staff complete a comprehensive intake assessment with all men referred to the men's behaviour change program. The intake form includes risk assessment, the man's suitability, readiness to participate in group work and safety planning. All CAFS family violence programs focus on increasing the safety of women and children, holding men accountable for their behaviour and working with men to change their behaviour. CAFS staff will make contact with the partners/ex-partners of the men referred and will offer them support services including risk assessment, safety planning, ongoing support and referrals to other support services as requested.
27. CAFS receive referrals for its men's behaviour change program from the Specialist Family Violence Magistrates' Court, Corrections Victoria, Child Protection, community based organisations, Victoria Police, No To Violence and self-referral.
28. CAFS is currently funded to assess 100 men referred from the specialist family violence court and 140 men through the DHHS funded program each year. CAFS currently receives approximately 800 referrals each year for the DHHS funded program with approximately 700 of these coming via the police L17 form. The L17 form is the document used by Victoria Police to record their preliminary assessment of risk and safety for a victim by considering a range of victim and perpetrator characteristics that affect the likelihood and severity of future violence.
29. Based on the volume of referrals received from the police, CAFS uses a priority list to make contact with men. CAFS will 'cold call' the man listed on the form and attempt to speak to him about participating in a men's behaviour change program. Making contact with the man and getting him to engage in the program is difficult. I



would estimate that of the 700 police referrals CAFS receives each year, CAFS will have contact with approximately 350 of these of which approximately 50 will progress through the program. The L17 referral system requires a review.

Community organisations like CAFS have become administrators of paperwork and require resources to meet the need not to just process paperwork but to spend time engaging men. CAFS would explore different models of engagement if resources permitted. We know from experience men generally engage in a service at a point of crisis, for example at the time of an incident or at the time of separation. We also know that when the crisis reduces men's motivation to engage reduces. Resources permitting CAFS would, for example, attend with Victoria Police to the family violence incident to try and engage with the perpetrator in person.

30. As CAFS delivers a number of family violence programs for men we are able to cross reference L17 referrals we receive from Victoria Police against our existing client base. For example, we can find out whether a man is already attending a behaviour change program. He may already be attending our court mandated program. This assists us build a picture of where the man is at in terms of taking responsibility, adhering to orders, his capacity and willingness to change and escalation of behaviours. Significantly it gives us the opportunity to reassess safety for his partner / ex-partner and children. Coordination of the service system is essential in achieving best outcomes.
31. At CAFS it takes approximately 4-8 weeks from the date of referral for a man to commence in the program. Once intake and assessment is complete the man is allocated into one of the groups CAFS currently delivers 3 rolling groups each week in Ballarat and 1 closed group in Ararat. This rolling group model minimizes the waiting periods for men to access group work. The program we currently offer is a two hour program running for 14 weeks however this model is currently under review with an intention to increase the number of weeks to 26. 24 weeks of structured content and 2 weeks of review and maintenance. Any man who has participated in the program at any time can attend the maintenance group. CAFS has been looking at current models and research available with much of this information supporting longer group work programs. For example, I am aware of a program in New York which is delivered over 26 sessions with no more than 1 session per week. In Los Angeles programs are accredited to deliver 52 week programs. Currently a number of behaviour change programs in Victoria deliver their programs using the Duluth model and are delivered over 24 weeks. CAFS

supports a review of the program minimum standards moving away from the current minimum requirement of 12 sessions totalling 24 hours and increasing these significantly.

32. Currently once men have completed the structured program, they are offered access to an ongoing support group. Few men take this offer up. The revamp of the program model will replace this with the maintenance group.
33. One important feature of the Magistrates' Court funded program is that it provides resources to deliver an Intensive Response Program (IRP) to men who are resistant to taking responsibility, resistant to addressing their behaviours, resistant to group work. The Intensive Response Program is a one-on-one counselling model delivered over three sessions.
34. CAFS' experience is that the Intensive Response Program has an impact on engaging men with behaviour change work and has contributed to successfully addressing resistance. CAFS believes that the Intensive Response Program model should be a core component of all men's behaviour change programs. CAFS is fortunate to have resources through the court mandated program to do this work. Currently other funding streams do not fund this work.
35. Those men who may be deemed unsuitable for group work usually fall into one or more of the following categories:
  - 35.1. Learning disabilities that restrict their capacity to learn in group;
  - 35.2. Mental health issues that limit their capacity;
  - 35.3. Men who are highly resistant to group work and if placed in group would be difficult to manage and/or have negative impacts on other men;
  - 35.4. Men with significant drug and alcohol issues that impact on their capacity;
  - 35.5. Men who are just don't want to address their violence and abuse.
36. It is critical for the safety of women and children that we keep men engaged in a service response. CAFS believe that men's behaviour change programs should be funded to provide alternative models of delivery other than group work to increase the safety of women and children and to keep perpetrators of family violence engaged in the system. Those men assessed as not suitable for group



work can still be catered for in other settings. CAFS will, when resources permit, deliver the group work program on an individual basis.

37. CAFS is a strong supporter of the specialist family violence court model that has the capacity to engage men at court and refer them to behaviour change programs. As an outcome of the court referrals, CAFS program staff believe there is a lower non-attendance rate at group for these men in comparison to referrals from other sources.
38. It must be remembered that completion does not equate to change of behaviour. The discussion on how long a program should be continues. As mentioned previously recent conversations suggest the longer men and women are involved in programs the increased chances of reduced violence. I am aware that models in the United Kingdom refer to men completing a minimum 60 hours over 6 months. The Mirabal project in the United Kingdom has shown a decrease in violence over a 12 month period for those men in longer term programs.
39. It is also important that the longer the man is engaged in the program, the longer risk and safety assessments can occur to increase the safety for partners and children.
40. In addition, the compliance element of the Magistrates' Court program works well. If a man on a counselling order doesn't attend the behaviour change program, there is a procedure in place for non-compliance of the counselling order. This is reported to court through a Certificate of Non Attendance. The matter is brought back to court as a breach of the counselling order.
41. Compelling men to attend a program through court directed orders appears to be a driving force for attendance as opposed to men who attend the program voluntarily. CAFS sees court referrals as a pathway into men's behaviour change work and an important component of an integrated service response.

#### *Men and Family Relationships Service*

42. CAFS receives Commonwealth funding to deliver a Men and Family Relationships Service. The service aims to improve family functioning, safety and child wellbeing through counselling, group work and community programs. The service has a focus on engaging and working with men, however many of the programs include all family members.

43. A particular area of need we have identified is providing support to men who have recently separated from their partners. A women's process of separation is different to a man's. For many men, when the physical separation happens they are not aware or accepting that this was going to occur and it is a massive shock. The risk to partners and children in these early weeks is considered high. We believe men's emotional and behavioural response to the separation increases the risk of them hurting others and themselves. Ensuring the safety of women and children in the immediate post-separation period is a crucial area of CAFS' work. This program has strong links with the family violence services and cross referrals occur to address some of these issues.
44. We offer individual counselling sessions to men who have recently separated, and we also offer some couples counselling to support couples address issues in their relationships. If the counsellor identifies family violence within the relationship, the counsellor will normally make a referral to the family violence program.
45. Another aspect of the Men and Family Relationships Service is providing support to men in their role as fathers. We explain the impact of family violence on child development and appeal to the man's connection to his children to try and change his behaviour. Many men are more concerned about the impact of family violence on their children than the impact their behaviour may be having on their partners.
46. The Men and Family Relationships Program has the capacity to work with men who are victims of family violence whether the perpetrator is a female or male. The worker's assessment will explore the victim / perpetrator dynamic to ensure they are not colluding. Experience tells us that many men accessing our services as a result of family violence will not take responsibility for their behaviours and will blame others. Experienced staff completing good assessments will unpack the stories of the clients to ensure appropriate counselling work can occur.
47. CAFS' Men and Family Relationships Program also participates in a workplace program called Act at Work which is run jointly with Women's Health Grampians. Staff from CAFS and Women's Health Grampians visit local workplaces and run training sessions about preventing and responding to abuse and violence in the workplace. As a result of this program workplaces have become more aware of violence against women including family violence. Prevention type programs such as this one are crucial in the change process of our communities. Most of the

people involved in these projects do not appear in court and are not likely to access services in the community.

48. The Men and Family Relationships Program also provides relationship based programs to new parents, children and adolescents. The work with new parents is crucial in assisting parents to understand the changes that will occur to their relationship. The program is also aware that there is an increased potential for family violence to occur in these families at these times. The work with children and adolescents and their parents largely occurs in the school settings. This work focuses on healthy relationships including the roles dads play in modelling respectful relationships.

#### *Post Separation Cooperative Parenting Program*

49. CAFS' Post Separation Cooperative Parenting Program is designed to encourage separating and separated parents to channel their energies towards the best interests of their children.
50. It is a four hour program delivered in one session aimed at educating parents about the impact of separation on their children. Referrals are made from the Family Court, solicitors, community based services and self-referrals. Many of these families are in high conflict and family violence is prevalent. The program has been very successful because it moves the focus onto the needs of the children and encourages parents to respond from the position of "what is in the best interests of the children." Contact and access with children can be a strong motivator as an anger management tool.
51. As with other programs at CAFS it is not uncommon to have parents referred to, or already accessing other services at CAFS. Strong referral pathways into support services can increase a parent's capacity to better manage situations. This in turn can reduce the potential for violence and abuse.

#### *Children's Contact Service*

52. CAFS' Children's Contact Service provides a safe and nurturing environment for children to maintain contact with a parent who is no longer living with them. The service assists families where a history of conflict, stress, violence, abuse or parental separation may have impacted on a parent's ability to achieve regular, safe and healthy contact with their children.

53. Approximately 90% of CAFS' referrals for this service come from the Family Court. We offer a supervised contact service whereby resident and non-resident carers can come and access a "family room" at CAFS' Ballarat office and contact will be supervised by a CAFS worker for 2 hours. We usually provide six supervised visits, and then if we believe the parents are managing well, we encourage them to move to supervised change-overs and eventually self-management. This is currently a free service for families.
54. Again, like other programs mentioned above, some families using this service are linked into our family violence programs and other services at CAFS.

*Adolescent Violence in the Home Program*

55. Over the past three years, CAFS has rolled out an Adolescent Violence in the Home program which is targeted at both adolescent males and females who perpetrate violence against parents, carers and siblings.
56. In 2012, CAFS was awarded a grant through the Ian Potter Foundation to pilot an adolescent program, and that program has since received additional funding from DHHS. CAFS is now one of three providers delivering this program in Victoria.
57. The program is designed as an early intervention program that works with adolescents and their families with the aims of reducing and preventing adolescent family violence and increasing the safety of all family members.
58. The program is targeted at adolescents aged 12 -18 years who are:
  - 58.1. living in the Ballarat area;
  - 58.2. living in their family home at the point of referral or are intending to return home;
  - 58.3. using violence against their parent(s) / carer(s) and / or sibling(s) that is frequent and ongoing;
  - 58.4. at risk of experiencing family breakdown and / or homelessness;
  - 58.5. have not been charged with a family violence related criminal offence; and
  - 58.6. not currently subject to violence perpetrated by their parent(s) / carer(s).

59. The program works with adolescents and their parents / carers using a therapeutic skills development approach. It includes:
  - 59.1. Outreach based engagement where staff contact families referred to the program, help them to understand the focus, approach and potential benefits of the program for them and encourage them to engage in the program;
  - 59.2. Intensive family case management where staff work with adolescents and their families individually and in combined sessions to identify key support needs, help them to develop and implement strategies to prevent intimidation and violence, address behavioural issues and provide referrals to external support services; and
  - 59.3. Group work focused on behavioural change and skills development. Adolescent and parent / carer group sessions are run concurrently so that some activities can be completed together (with both adolescents and parent(s) / carer(s) from a range of families) and others can be completed separately (with just adolescents or parents).
60. An initial evaluation of the program conducted by the Ian Potter Foundation found that:
  - 60.1. the majority (59%) of adolescent clients who participated in the program are victims of family violence; and
  - 60.2. 46% of the adolescents who participated in the program had experienced childhood trauma.
61. These statistics show the high rate of intergenerational violence and highlight the importance of early intervention.
62. The Ian Potter evaluation concluded that, on the basis of the data available at that time, the program appeared to be helping to:
  - 62.1. Reduce frequency of family violence incidents;
  - 62.2. Increase perception of family wellbeing and safety;
  - 62.3. Improve parental capacity to manage adolescent's behaviour;
  - 62.4. Improve parenting skills; and

62.5. Improve family relationships.

63. A copy of the Ian Potter Evaluation is attached to this statement and marked "**MB-2**".
64. A subsequent evaluation is being conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology and I understand a preliminary report has been released to DHHS.
65. The adolescent programs are relatively new to the sector and workers are still developing experience in this work. Anecdotal evidence sourced internally at CAFS is showing a high proportion of family violence existing in the families participating in the program. While the initial service response has been to address the adolescent violence, CAFS' assessment is discovering family violence occurring amongst parents, with the father in most cases being the perpetrator of the violence. This has highlighted the importance of having skilled workers with a solid understanding of family violence. It also raises the question of why family violence is not being picked up and addressed in other service responses such as Child Protection and Family Services.
66. CAFS' program data has also found that a significant proportion of mothers of adolescents who participated in the program (52%) have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. These women are often socially isolated.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Gerard Brandenburg', is written over a horizontal dotted line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Michael Gerard Brandenburg

Dated: 21<sup>st</sup> July 2015