

**IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION  
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

**STATEMENT OF SENIOR SERGEANT FIONA SUZANNE ALEXANDER**

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Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria  
Prepared by:  
Victorian Government Solicitor's Office  
Level 33  
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I, FIONA SUZANNE ALEXANDER, Senior Sergeant, Victoria Police, SAY:

1. I am a Senior Sergeant of Victoria Police and the Officer in Charge of the Integrated Response Team Initiative – Taskforce Alexis. I have held this position since April 2015. Between November 2013 and April 2015, I performed duties as the Acting Senior Sergeant of the Proactive Policing Unit and the Family Violence Unit in Division 2 of the Southern Metropolitan Region (**SD2**). I am stationed at the Moorabbin Police Headquarters.
2. I have been a member of Victoria Police since November 2000. I have held various roles inclusive of frontline response, crime scene services and frontline supervision duties. Specific to family violence, I have performed the roles of Family Violence Liaison Officer, Family Violence Advisor, Family Violence Court Liaison Officer, Officer in Charge of the SD2 Family Violence Unit and now Officer in Charge of Taskforce Alexis.

**SCOPE OF STATEMENT**

3. I make this statement in response to a notice from the Royal Commission into Family Violence pursuant to s 17(1)(d) of the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Vic) requiring me to attend to give evidence at the Royal Commission and to provide a written witness statement.
4. In this statement I respond to a request by the Royal Commission for information regarding Module 13: Intervention Orders - Monitoring and Enforcement. In particular, I have been requested to give evidence regarding the operation of Taskforce Alexis in SD2.

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## TASKFORCE ALEXIS

5. Taskforce Alexis is a pilot located at the Moorabbin Police Headquarters. It commenced operation on 1 December 2014. I attach a confidential Project Brief in relation to Taskforce Alexis prepared by the Salvation Army in September 2014 (**Confidential Attachment FA-1**). I also attach the Multi-disciplinary Unit Project Initiation Paper for Taskforce Alexis, which outlines its background and objectives (**Attachment FA-2**).
6. In summary, Taskforce Alexis provides an immediate response and ongoing oversight and management of high risk and recidivist family violence, mental health and youth offending cases within SD2. This is achieved with the involvement of a Salvation Army Family Violence Services social worker (**the Key Worker**) and an inter-agency, cross-sectoral coordination team (**the Coordination Team**). This team ensures that victims and offenders engage with partner service agencies to reduce the incidence of repeat victimisation and perpetration of family violence.
7. Taskforce Alexis comprises three teams:
  - 7.1 Family Violence Response Team;
  - 7.2 Mental Health Response Team; and
  - 7.3 Youth/Crime Prevention/Victimisation Response Team (more commonly known a Proactive Policing Team).
8. An organisational structure for Taskforce Alexis is **Attachment FA-3**. Taskforce Alexis is comprised of the following personnel:
  - 8.1 Divisional Commander for SD2, Ross Guenther;
  - 8.2 Investigation & Response Inspector;
  - 8.3 Officer in Charge, Operations and Strategy;
  - 8.4 three Sergeants, each of whom is responsible for one of the three teams referred to in the preceding paragraph;
  - 8.5 three officers of other ranks in the Mental Health Team, as well as a mental health clinician employed by Monash Health;

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- 8.6 five officers of other ranks in the Family Violence Team, as well as the Key Worker; and
- 8.7 ten officers of other ranks in the Proactive Policing Team.
9. While members may be assigned to either the Mental Health or Family Violence Teams, these teams are cross functioning and work across both areas. There is often a mental health element involved in family violence matters and a PACER Unit (a police officer and a mental health clinician) from the Mental Health Team will often respond to family violence incidents.
10. The day to day work of the Taskforce is guided by the Victoria Police *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 2014) (**Code of Practice**).
11. In addition, the work of the Taskforce is guided by:
  - 11.1 the Victoria Police Manual Policy Rules (VPMP) – Family Violence (**Attachment FA-4**);
  - 11.2 the Victoria Police Manual Procedures and Guidelines (VPMG) – Family Violence (**Attachment FA-5**);
  - 11.3 the VPMG – Holding Powers (**Attachment FA-6**);
  - 11.4 a set of Standard Operating Procedures specific to Taskforce Alexis that are designed to guide the compliance with the Code of Practice at the local level by the members of Taskforce Alexis.
12. I have not attached the Standard Operating Procedures specific to Taskforce Alexis to this statement as they have evolved over the first eight months of the Taskforce's operation and are in the process of being updated. I describe the key aspects of the operating procedures of the Taskforce below.

#### **Family Violence Key Worker**

13. The introduction of the Key Worker role was a response to an identified gap in the provision of services to victims of family violence in SD2. Service providers would contact victims following receipt of referrals from police by way of the L17 forms, but many victims and perpetrators did not want to engage with these service providers. The Key Worker provides an immediate and independent point of contact, which is critical in encouraging families to engage with service providers.

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14. The Key Worker's role is to:
  - 14.1 assist with daily triage assessment of family violence matters in SD2;
  - 14.2 provide assertive outreach services to identified recidivist and high risk families;
  - 14.3 provide linkages to relevant family violence services;
  - 14.4 make referrals to men's behaviour change programs; and
  - 14.5 as required, provide a case coordination oversight for complex client families in order to provide greater family violence service uptake and bridge any identified service gaps.
15. A copy of the Position Description for the Key Worker, prepared by the Salvation Army, is **Attachment FA-7**.

#### **General operation of Taskforce Alexis**

16. Family violence incidents are referred to the Taskforce by:
  - 16.1 the first response team of Victoria Police officers attending a family violence incident; or
  - 16.2 daily review by a member of the Taskforce of the L17 forms entered onto the LEAP database the previous day or overnight.
17. A first response team of police officers attending a family violence incident will call on the Taskforce when the perpetrator is known to them as a recidivist perpetrator. Families being managed by the Taskforce are flagged on Victoria Police's LEAP database. To ascertain whether an address or person is managed by the Taskforce, members in the divisional van or response car will check LEAP on the mobile data terminal, alternatively, members can request a location check and/or a name check via radio communications.
18. The Taskforce response crew also monitor the radio and will acknowledge over the air if an identified address or individual is being managed by the Taskforce. In these circumstances, the response crew will notify that they will take carriage of that family violence incident.

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19. If a family violence incident is of a serious nature, the Taskforce response crew will attend in the first instance, regardless of whether there is a first time or recidivist offender, and will take over the investigation of the incident. The response crew will take statements and complete the L17 forms, may arrest and interview the perpetrator and may undertake a number of civil options in accordance with the Code of Practice, VPMP - Family Violence and VPMG - Family Violence (for example, issue a Family Violence Safety Notice).
20. The Taskforce response crew may make an application to remand the perpetrator under the *Bail Act 1977*. Police will remand perpetrators whenever it is appropriate to do so. Since commencing operations on 1 December 2014, the Taskforce response team has remanded 52 people following family violence incidents.
21. Each weekday, the Key Worker is rostered with a member of the Taskforce to review all L17 forms received overnight and to cross-check them against the Victoria Police LEAP database to ascertain whether any of the parties involved is a repeat victim or recidivist perpetrator of family violence. The Key Worker does not have access to the LEAP database and so the interrogation of that database must be done by the police officer.
22. The Key Worker also checks the parties named in the L17 forms against the Salvation Army database; some women who are victims of family violence may have previously reported to the Salvation Army and not the police.
23. The Key Worker makes contact with repeat victims and victims of a recidivist perpetrator, and can also contact other members of the victim's family, including the perpetrator and any children involved. The Key Worker attempts to make contact by telephone in the first instance and then attempts to arrange an in person meeting as soon as possible, usually that day or the following day.
24. If the Key Worker cannot make contact with the victim by telephone, the police officer and the Key Worker will attend the person's home.
25. Where matters do not involve repeat victims of family violence or a recidivist perpetrator, the Key Worker generally does not contact the parties unless there is something specific to that matter that warrants the Key Worker's involvement.
26. Families are then selected for continued case management by the Sergeant in charge of the Taskforce Alexis Family Violence Team, in consultation with me. Selection is

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based on police intelligence and other identified risk factors. A police intelligence brief is also compiled. This brief provides a succinct narrative of the family's history with police and outlines a range of factors, such as the number and seriousness of the incidents and other risk factors, including pregnancy of the victim or a recent birth in the family.

27. The Taskforce manages approximately 50-60 families at any time. The Taskforce takes on cases that have been identified as high risk, recidivist, or which involve a first incident that has occurred in serious circumstances. A risk assessment is conducted to determine whether a family meets one or more of these criteria.
28. Each police member of the Family Violence Team has about six families with whom they interact. They are expected to do at least one proactive visit with one of their families every week. Any more visits often risks being counter-productive. The purpose of these visits is to monitor the safety of the victim, that the respondent has not breached an intervention order or bail condition and that the victim is not inviting contact from the respondent if the intervention order or bail conditions include an exclusion order. Each interaction is recorded on the Victoria Police Interpose database. If the Taskforce determines that it will manage the victim or perpetrator, a management plan is put in place to identify risk factors and determine the appropriate process.
29. The Key Worker's ongoing role is limited to cases involving recidivist incidents. This is formally defined in section 6.5.7 of the Code of Practice as incidents involving a victim or perpetrator who has been involved in three or more family violence incidents within a rolling 12 month period. However, members of the Taskforce exercise some professional judgement in relation to this. In practice, if the incidents are of a minor nature, the Taskforce will not manage the family and the matter will be managed by the Family Violence Liaison Officer at the local station.
30. The Key Worker can engage and operate as a conduit to external services. These services may include drug and alcohol counselling, gambling counselling, mental health services, housing services and any other service relevant to the particular needs of the family.
31. In cases where the Key Worker does not have an ongoing role, the Key Worker will still refer the victim and the perpetrator to other relevant service providers.

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32. As part of the ongoing role, the Key Worker follows up with the victim or the perpetrator and with the relevant service providers to see if they are engaging with the service provider. If a risk assessment (conducted by the police member in addition to the Key Worker's Salvation Army's own risk assessment process) indicates a low risk to the personal safety of the Key Worker, the Key Worker will conduct these follow up visits on their own. Where the Key Worker has an in person meeting, this is normally conducted in a coffee shop or other public place. Otherwise, the Key Worker will conduct follow up visits accompanied by a police officer.
33. If the client is not engaging, the Key Worker will maintain contact and attempt to assist the person or family to see the benefit of engaging with service providers in order to change their behaviour. The Key Worker needs to 'think outside the box' when it comes to engaging clients who are not receptive. In some cases, the Key Worker can offer incentives to engage. For example, in one case, the Key Worker offered a female victim of family violence supermarket vouchers provided by the Salvation Army in order to encourage her to attend three counselling sessions.
34. Once a person or family is willing to engage, the Key Worker will introduce that client to one of the partner agencies for ongoing support. They will often conduct a face to face introduction. There is no set time frame for the duration of the Key Worker's involvement.
35. It is not within the scope of the Taskforce to manage every person that is referred to it. The Taskforce does, however, assist frontline police members in encouraging lower risk persons to engage with our partner services. Where the family is engaging with partner service providers, the Key Worker will close their file on that family.
36. The Key Worker is currently managing 17 clients. The average duration of support provided by the Key Worker lasts 37 days. After that, the Key Worker's file on the client is either closed because there has been no further offending or because they have been handed over to a partner agency to manage.
37. The Family Violence Team will continue to manage a perpetrator's behaviour for a further 3-6 months.

#### **Taskforce Coordination Team**

38. The Taskforce has a Coordination Team, which consists of representatives of:
  - 38.1 Victoria Police – Taskforce Alexis, including the Key Worker;

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- 38.2 DHHS Child Protection;
  - 38.3 Salvation Army Family Violence Services;
  - 38.4 Inner South Community Health;
  - 38.5 Family Life Family Violence Service; and
  - 38.6 a number of associate members who attend Coordination Team meetings on an as needs basis, including representatives from Safe Steps, Moorabbin Justice Centre, Corrections Victoria, Youth Justice, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Moira Disability Support, Homeground Housing Services, the Office of Housing, Monash Health, the Drug and Alcohol Taskforce and the Jewish Taskforce.
39. From February 2015, the Taskforce Coordination Team has met on a monthly basis to identify issues impacting on recidivism for the victim, children and perpetrator in a number of families. The purpose of the monthly meeting is to facilitate coordination between the partner service agencies, to ensure appropriate support is being provided and to identify issues affecting successful referral and engagement with service agencies. The Taskforce management team will hold a monthly meeting, prior to the Coordination Team meeting, to identify families who require significant and coordinated case management. Members of the Taskforce can nominate families they are managing. Twenty-four families have been case managed over four meetings since February 2015. As the Officer in Charge, I chair these meetings. These monthly meetings are the means by which the service providers are held accountable for ensuring that the families are continuing to engage with them. **Attachment FA-8** is a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Taskforce Coordination Team.
40. Information about victims and perpetrators of family violence is disclosed during Taskforce Coordination Team meetings. The confidentiality regime relating to this information is set out in the Terms of Reference (see **Attachment FA-8**, above). This information is treated as law enforcement data, as that term is used in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic), and its use, storage, handling, and disposal is subject to the Law Enforcement Data Security Standards.
41. Coordination Team members must agree to maintain the confidentiality of all information received by them during Coordination Team meetings and agree that they



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will only use, copy or reproduce the information for the purposes of carrying out the work related to the Coordination Team. Members attending the meetings sign a confidentiality agreement that sets out their obligations and responsibilities (**Attachment FA-9**).

42. Additionally, at the beginning of every Coordination Team meeting, I read the following privacy statement:

“Those present are reminded that this meeting is strictly confidential. Information discussed during the meeting should not be shared outside this meeting unless directly relevant to the management or execution of the Action Plan. Copies of the minutes and the Action Plan and other documentation shared at this meeting will only be disclosed to parties who are signatories to the local agreement or who attended the Coordination Team meeting. Agencies will agree to store and dispose all information in a confidential and appropriate manner.”

43. The Key Worker advises victims and perpetrators that the Taskforce has the primary management of their case and as such will discuss the information gathered in relation to them at the Coordination Team meetings, subject to their consent. In addition, as the cases managed by the Coordination Team are all high risk cases, the disclosure of personal information relating to the victim or the perpetrator is permitted under Information Privacy Principle 2, which permits disclosure where an organisation reasonably believes it is necessary to lessen or prevent a serious and imminent threat to an individual's life, health, safety or welfare.

#### **Closing management of a case**

44. If there are no further incidents within a period of approximately 3-8 months and the risk of family violence is assessed as low, the Taskforce will close its management of a case. This may involve handing over responsibility for that case to the Family Violence Liaison Officer at the local police station. If there is a further incident reported to police, the Taskforce may again manage the case. The Key Worker may continue to engage with the family even if the police members of the Taskforce are no longer managing that family.
45. When a case matter is closed or a decision is made to transfer the matter to the local Family Violence Liaison Officer, the parties to the matter are advised.

### **Perpetrator accountability**

46. One of the aims of the Taskforce is to ensure that perpetrators are held to account. One of the ways we do this is to create a sense of urgency and accountability in relation to breaches of family violence intervention orders in any of the cases we manage. We know that many breaches are not reported. Accordingly, when an incident is reported, we will attend that day or the next day and we will prosecute every breach where there is sufficient evidence.
47. Where there are multiple breaches, for example, a respondent sending a large number of text messages to a victim, we will charge every breach individually. We will also charge perpetrators with the indictable offence of persistent breach of an intervention order for repeated (three or more) breaches of intervention orders within a 28 day period.

### **Quarterly Magistrates Court meeting**

48. I attend a quarterly meeting with the Moorabbin Magistrates' Court and all of the users and providers of the Court's family violence services, including the Court Registrar, applicant and respondent support workers, police prosecutors and others. These meetings are used to discuss any ongoing issues, such as the security of victims at court and any special procedures that might be adopted.

### **Benefits of the Taskforce Alexis pilot**

49. As the Taskforce pilot commenced operation in only December last year, there has not yet been any formal evaluation. The pilot will be subject to an independent evaluation by RMIT commencing later this year. This will be an ongoing evaluation over a three year period, meaning that as issues are identified that could be improved during the life of the pilot, they will be reported and, where possible, changes will be implemented straight away. The evaluation will monitor all the clients being managed by the Taskforce.
50. In my view, the Taskforce has already demonstrated a number of benefits. Since it commenced operation on 1 December 2014, data sourced internally by Victoria Police indicates that the Taskforce has managed a total of 64 clients and the Key Worker has engaged with 56 of those individuals. The Key Worker and police have conducted a combined total of 187 home visits, with an average of 3.3 visits per client. Twenty-four families have been case managed by the Coordination Team over

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four meetings since February 2015. Our experience has been that the number of L17 forms being issued in relation to these families has reduced significantly since the Taskforce commenced.

51. The family that was connected with the highest number of L17 forms in SD2 has, since being taken on by the Taskforce, not been the source of any known family violence incidents for three months.
52. Of the 56 clients with whom the Key Worker has engaged, more than 40 have been victims and about 10 have been respondents. They have come from 21 families and have had a total of 52 dependents.
53. In the 12 months prior to the Taskforce commencing, those 56 clients had a collective total of 290 L17 forms relating to them, an average of 5.3 L17 forms per individual. Since engaging with the Taskforce, the 56 clients have had an average of two L17 forms relating to them (albeit over a shorter period of eight months).
54. Of the 56 clients with whom the Key Worker has engaged, 37 files have been closed. Of those 37 clients, the average number of L17 forms submitted since engaging with Alexis has dropped to less than one L17 form per client. That equates to an 84 per cent reduction in recidivism.
55. Further, 80 per cent of the victims involved in these 56 cases had not engaged in support from the Salvation Army support services prior to Taskforce Alexis. Some of the reasons for this included incorrect information being provided in relation to the victim, the victim did not want to engage with the service or the victim was unable to be contacted.
56. Taskforce Alexis also provides oversight and direction to regular police members in relation to family violence and has had a positive influence on the culture of policing in SD2. Members are aware that the Taskforce carries out a daily review of every L17 form issued in SD2 for compliance with the Code of Practice. If something has not been done in accordance with the Code of Practice, we will contact the police member involved. I have seen a significant improvement in the quality of L17 forms and in the work conducted by individual police members within SD2 as a result. Data produced by the Victoria Police Intelligence Unit also indicates an increase in family violence safety notices issued, intervention order applications and charges of breach of intervention orders.

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57. The Taskforce Coordination Team meetings have also produced significant benefits. Through these meetings, we have developed a smoother interface for clients working with multiple agencies and improved our service delivery. Collaboration and goodwill from the partner service providers has increased and they have adjusted their intake process to accommodate for the increase in clients referred to them through Taskforce Alexis, thus fast tracking intervention and support. The meetings have strengthened relationships and collaboration between the partner service providers themselves. The external partners are engaging with each other, outside of these meetings, which in my experience did not always happen prior to Taskforce Alexis.
58. The Salvation Army has recognised the benefits of the Key Worker role and are considering whether they could fund a Key Worker to work in Division 1 of the Southern Metropolitan Region (Pahran).

#### INTERACTION WITH SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION RAMP

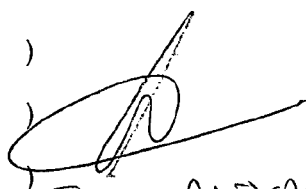
59. I understand that the Risk Assessment Management Panel (**RAMP**) pilot program is in the process of being implemented across the State. There will be a RAMP in the Southern Metropolitan Region. The RAMP is intended to provide an integrated response to women and children identified as being at imminent and high risk of severe harm and/or death. Taskforce Alexis will align well with the RAMP as we aim to provide an integrated early intervention response to families where there is recidivism but the risk has not yet escalated to the point of requiring RAMP intervention.
60. Taskforce Alexis will be able to nominate the most serious cases for RAMP management. The middle-level cases in terms of the seriousness of the risk to the victims will continue to be managed by Taskforce Alexis in SD2. The less serious cases will be managed by the local police stations and service providers themselves, with the assistance and guidance of the Taskforce.

Signed by

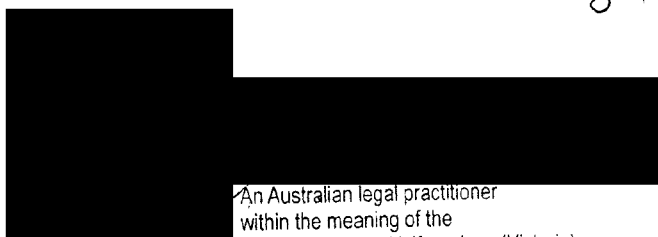
FIONA SUZANNE ALEXANDER

at Melbourne

this 5<sup>th</sup> day of August 2015

)   
 ) Fiona ALEXANDER  
 ) Senior Sergeant

Before me



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