

Royal Commission into Family Violence



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Dedication

This submission is dedicated to the memory of Janice Peterson who held the position of General Manager, Outer South Homelessness Services at WAYSS Ltd.

Janice Mary Peterson, Our friend and colleague who dedicated more than 20 years to improving the plight of homeless women and victims of violence. Driven by her passion to ensure highest quality of practice, she leaves a lasting legacy of innovation and service development that will be long remembered.

We seek to extend her legacy by providing the Royal Commission with a direct service perspective of the complex and multi-faceted issues surrounding family violence.

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WAYSS is pleased to provide a response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence from the perspective of a direct service Women's Services team in a funded specialist family violence environment.

The information presented within this submission has been derived from direct consultations and a comprehensive questionnaire distributed to all WAYSS Women's Service staff.

Their input, feedback and articulation of their day to day experiences in working with women and children who are family violence clients has been collated to form the basis of this submission.

Identified themes and some case scenarios have been included to respond to Questions 4, 7, 8 and 11.

Our Recommendations are made acknowledging the work that has been done to improve responses to Family Violence, to encourage and support those who seek to provide a holistic service to women and children escaping family violence and to educate the wider community to the impact and cost to the individuals and society of any act of violence.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are made acknowledging the work that has been done to improve responses to Family Violence, to encourage and support those who seek to provide a holistic service to women and children escaping family violence and to educate the wider community of the impact and cost to the individuals and society of any act of violence. They recognise the need for a broad range of responses, from crisis to ongoing support and for the need to break the intergenerational pattern of family violence.

The scope of Intervention Orders to be changed by reform and amendment of existing Legislation or by development of new Legislation that would address the following Recommendations.

- That provision is available for a person experiencing family violence to lodge an *Intervention Order Affidavit Application* to the Court in the form of a sworn Affidavit prepared by a Solicitor. This would open two avenues of application, either by the current system which requires securing a booking for an appointment with a Registrar of the Court in a much overloaded system, or by lodging the Affidavit with the standard application form with the Registrar.
- That Victoria Police must apply for an Intervention Order as Informants in every instance where a woman has made a statement to police at a police station about an incidence of family violence.
- That Intervention Orders include prohibition of the Respondent using drugs and alcohol.
- That *Ancillary Furniture Orders* are granted which prevent a Respondent from removing furniture or property from the home.
- That *Furniture Orders* are granted that allow a woman who is forced to leave the family home to take furniture and goods from the home. This would include a condition on the Order that allows an AFM to have a designated day to undertake this with Police assistance.
- That strict adherence to intent of Family Violence Legislation with no consolidation of multiple breaches into one charge, warnings or excuses and breaches are dealt with swiftly and with significant consequences.
- That where an Intervention Order is in place, an AFM would have access to information from police and the Courts about the Respondent when there is any potential increase of risk that comes to their attention, i.e. release from prison, new criminal charges.
- That the introduction of a *Respondent Relocation Order* (similar to a Drug Treatment Order) is achieved. This would include the mandatory removal of a perpetrator of violence from the home. Rather than use the term "exclusion", this order would enable a Respondent to be referred to a designated homelessness and support service for accommodation options that are linked to re-education and support services, where a Respondent would be expected to engage in the context of obtaining and sustaining the tenancy.

- That mandatory removal of a perpetrator of violence from the home is accepted practice. Rather than use the term "exclusion", a condition of the Intervention Order must state that the Respondent is required to leave the home and find alternative accommodation, and provide the Court with evidence of this new accommodation within 10 working days.
- That an Intervention Order is **Condition Limited**, not Time Limited. The Order would be indefinite until such time as either party could make an application to have the Order struck out. For a Respondent to take action to have the Order struck out, he would have to provide to the Court evidence of completion of a mandated Men's Behaviour Change Program and Re-Education Program, a mandated Parenting after Family Violence Program (based around effects and consequences of family violence trauma on children) and evidence of no breaches being prosecuted against the Intervention Order.
- That Men's Behaviour Change Programs, Men's Re-Education Programs, and Parenting after Family Violence Programs be mandatory for all Respondents who have an Intervention Order granted against them.

Family Violence Courts

- That establishment of Family Violence Courts occur that hear only matters pertaining to family violence. This would include separate entrances and waiting rooms for victims and defendants and a child friendly environment.
- That swift processing of Intervention Orders is achieved.
- That a prioritisation system for applications and hearings is developed.
- That security and police protection is strengthened for women at risk of harassment from their abusers both inside and outside the courtroom.

Safe At Home

- That priority is given to women and children experiencing family violence to remain safely in the home, with safety, security, protection and support.
- That it become accepted practice within the integrated family violence service system that women and children are maintained within their own home and the perpetrator of family violence is removed/excluded from the property, regardless of the legal ownership/right to the property. Sufficient funding and safety measures would need to be allocated to maintain safety.
- That there is an expansion of funding and brokerage to specialised Family Violence Services to operate a Safe At Home Program and provide clients with access to technology to modify a family home with security equipment.
- That there is immediate review of the severe income reduction that women on Centrelink Parenting Payment currently face when their child turns eight and they are moved from Parenting Payment to New Start Allowance. This income drop increases the poverty trap that women experience when there is a change in their financial circumstances because

of family violence, they need to be able to maintain the cost of keeping a roof over their heads.

- That additional funding be allocated to rent relief programs such as Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) and Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) to assist women and children maintain their tenancy thus avoiding becoming homelessness.

Accommodation Options for men

- That referral pathways and viable accommodation options be developed for men who are relocated from the family home under the terms and conditions of an Intervention Order or a Respondent Relocation Order.

Children

- That children are recognised as clients in their own right and specialised Family Violence Services adequately funded to employ Children's Services Case Workers to work with children who have experienced family violence and homelessness.
- That adequate ongoing psychological and behavioural monitoring of children be available to address long term effects of experiencing family violence in childhood.
- That development of a coordinated and consolidated system response for children who experience family violence and homelessness includes homelessness prevention measures and protection.
- That financial provision be made for Child Care costs for women attending the Magistrates Court for Intervention Order matters.
- That sufficient funding be available to enable children's entertainment, sporting and fitness options to be explored.

Young People

- The extensive homelessness that young people face every day must be addressed with additionally funded crisis accommodation and support services.
- Additional funding for Family Violence Case Workers to work with young people, who are homeless because of family violence, in youth crisis facilities and programs.

Changes to Income Support

- That provision be made for financial assistance for New Zealand citizens and CALD women with no permanent residency or income.
- That a one-off 'Family Violence Financial Hardship' payment be made available via Centrelink to cover the multitude of unexpected costs associated with experiencing or fleeing family violence.

Early Intervention

- That early intervention and prevention programs begin in primary school focusing on gender, power and resource equality and zero tolerance of inter-personal violence.

- That mandatory Parenting after Family Violence Programs be developed for both AFM and Respondent in the context of prevention of generational family violence.

Safety

- That the person experiencing family violence is not expected to apply for their own Intervention Order, but are assisted by Victoria Police whenever a report of family violence is made.
- That all breaches of Intervention Orders are taken seriously by police and that L17's are completed for all reports. If insufficient evidence exists to proceed with a charge of breaching the Respondent, this should be adequately explained to the client to prevent police being misjudged for failing to act.
- That Family Court Legislation prioritises safety of women and children over parental rights of persons using violence. The Respondent's right to spend time with children does not override risk and safety factors or provide him with regular opportunities to continue to harass and intimidate women and children.

Homelessness

- That additional funding is allocated to increase housing stock for crisis, medium/and long term accommodation for women and children experiencing and escaping family violence.
- That government and DHHS Housing provide adequate and increased public housing on to the market.

Animal Abuse

- That animal abuse is recognised in the context of family violence and relationships between animal welfare organisations and human welfare organisations are strengthened.
- That Family Violence specific brokerage goes to animal welfare organisations to support them to provide 'welfare boarding' for pets. This would include funding for health checks and veterinary treatment if needed, and de-sexing and immunisation.
- That there is development of educational programs for children to educate them about the relationship between animal cruelty and violence and teach them to care for animals.
- That there is capacity for emergency and other accommodation options for women and children, where a family pet can accompany them.

Women Experiencing Family Violence

- That all women reporting family violence are referred to a specialist family violence service as a pre-requisite to applying for an Intervention Order.
- That sufficient funding be made available for specialist family violence services to be adequately staffed and resourced to meet demand for services.

- That additional funding is made available for family violence counselling to alleviate long wait times.
- That all parties and stakeholders treat women experiencing family violence in a manner that is equal, fair, honest, respectful, dignified, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate, as is their right.
- That persons experiencing family violence need to be listened to and heard. Whether reporting injuries, incidents, and/or breaches, police officers, court officials and others must be cognizant of the dynamics of power and control in relation to family violence and the importance of listening to often 'what is not said'.
- That additional funding is made available to Community Services, Community Centres and Neighbourhood Houses to enable additional family violence support groups be formed to mitigate the disempowerment of women and social isolation that is a prevailing factor in family violence.
- That there is an understanding that the trauma caused by family violence will not be resolved in the short term but will need a life-long approach to healing and resolution. Funding streams would need to reflect this.
- That a program similar to Big Brother/Big Sister be developed to provide a positive parental and grandparental support service for women and children who have experienced family violence.
- That intergenerational violence is recognized as an additional area for services, funding and research.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

WAYSS warmly welcomes the establishment of this Royal Commission with its clear goals of better understanding and responding to the needs of those experiencing family violence, and seeking ways of improving services and responses with a long term goal of reducing or eliminating Family Violence.

The WAYSS Chief Executive Officer has summed up the current environment within which we practice as becoming increasingly more complex and volatile as indicated in his statement in the 2014 WAYSS Annual Report.

“The ongoing community awareness of the unacceptability of family violence has been highlighted by still more deaths of women and children at the hands of their partners. These murders devastate families and impact heavily on the broader community and this particularly includes our front line staff. There has been a constant increase in both police and self-referrals. Again this year this has placed services under extreme pressure as resources to effectively service this demand have remained static. Many vulnerable women and children as well as young people remain living at a very high level of risk as subsequent governments continue to fail to address this problem. The excellent work done by our services, in particular with children and young people, in the delivery of comprehensive and innovative programs continues under extreme demand.”
(Stowe, K. WAYSS Ltd Annual Report, 2014, p 17.)

For the purposes of this submission WAYSS has focused on gathering experiential feedback from front line staff who are continuously facing the enhanced risk, escalating demand, static or diminishing funding and resources that form the basis of their daily practice when supporting women and children affected by family violence. Within this submission WAYSS have chosen to focus on four of the 21 questions contained within the Issues Paper and these are Questions 4, 7, 8 and 11.

The rationale for this choice is based on WAYSS managing a specialist family violence program encompassing Family Violence Crisis, Family Violence Outreach, Women’s Outreach, Fax-back and Safe at Home programs. These programs are staffed by skilled, experienced workers who have each earned this opportunity to be able to communicate directly with the Royal Commission into Family Violence, based on their years of dedicated service to their clients, teams, programs organisation and the sector generally. We believe we can best represent our client group and the wider community by concentrating on providing factual, current, relevant direct service experience ‘at the coal face’.

It is WAYSS belief that there is an imperative that the whole of government commitment to the elimination of violence against women, and specifically, family violence against women and children, is fulfilled. Whole of Government and society must work together more collaboratively and effectively to ensure consistency in policy development and delivery of services to those women and children who are at risk of family violence and homelessness due to family violence. This includes the newly formed portfolio of the Minister for Women, the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, Department Health & human Services (DHHS), Industry, Justice, Education and Victoria Police.

4.0 WAYSS

4.1 WAYSS Overview

WAYSS Ltd. is a homelessness and family violence agency located at multiple sites across four Local Government Areas. It offers 16 separate programs.

WAYSS employs 133 staff and these employees work in a range of funded services across eight locations in the local government areas of Cities of Greater Dandenong, Casey and Frankston and the Shire of Cardinia.

As a major provider of housing, support and homelessness services in the catchment, WAYSS has a long standing commitment to clear pathways and accessible services for clients.

Staff and Management are extremely experienced providers of Family Violence services with a recognised understanding of the causes of family violence and homelessness and the accompanying need for sound risk management and safety planning in the provision of such services.

Family Violence Crisis Response and Outreach Services operate from six locations, highlighting our commitment to local service response.

The Crisis Service operates 24/7 from a high security facility which also accommodates up to eight women and 20 children in independent on-site units.

WAYSS was the first organisation in Victoria to formally develop, sign-off and implement a Regional Memorandum of Understanding with Victoria Police to accept formal referrals from police via faxed L17 Risk Assessment.

This FaxBack partnership has been in operation since 2005. Currently WAYSS receives 600+ police referrals each month.

WAYSS Case Management of family violence clients is founded on a holistic and detailed assessment of each client that includes a Comprehensive Family Violence Risk Assessment and Safety Planning and best practice standards that have been developed over a long period of service provision to the community.

The case management framework is based on DHHS Standards for Homelessness, Child, Youth and Family, and Disability, with an emphasis on client choice, responsibilities and rights.

Our service practice is dedicated to keeping women and children safe and building a future in which they can live free from violence.

4.2 WAYSS Women's Services

For the purposes of this submission the focus will be on WAYSS Women's Services which consists of the following seven program areas:

- **SOUTHERN WOMEN'S INTEGRATED SUPPORT SERVICE (SWISS)** is the Family Violence Crisis Service. This service operates extended hours seven days a week providing a crisis response and support for women and children escaping family violence.

The program is located at the purpose built SWISS facility (staffed 24/7) and provides case managed support to women and children residing in 8 independent units set in a secure environment.

FAMILY VIOLENCE FAXBACK PROJECT provides services to women and women with children who have had the Victoria Police attend an incident of family violence.

Women will have a formal referral made to the FaxBack worker by the Police when the Police seek an Intervention Order, lay criminal charges related to the family violence incident and/or have concerns for the physical, mental, psychological health and welfare of the family members.

- **FAMILY VIOLENCE OUTREACH SERVICE** provides case managed support to women and women with children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness due to family violence.
- **SAFE AT HOME** works with women escaping family violence who have had Court or Police intervention to keep them in their current accommodation.

The program has access to brokerage funds which provides improved safety and security to enable women to stay in their own home.

- **ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION AND THERAPY (AAET) GROUP**
AAET provides children who are case managed by WAYSS, or who have a parent who is case managed by WAYSS, with practical skills in animal care to strengthen empathy and empowerment through a purposeful activity.

WAYSS are currently running two AAET groups and these programs are run in conjunction with the RSPCA.

- **CHILDREN'S SERVICES** provides case management for children, in conjunction with the primary case manager from WAYSS support services and in consultation with the parent/primary caregiver and the child.
- **WOMEN'S OUTREACH PROGRAM** provides case managed support for single women and women with dependents in transitional housing as well as private rental and other housing tenures.

WAYSS Women's Services has a staff of 40.

- 1 Manager
- 4 Coordinators
- 7 Family Violence Crisis Case workers
- 11 Family Violence Outreach Case Workers
- 5 Women's Outreach Program Case Workers
- 3 Intake and Assessment workers
- 2 Children's Case Workers
- 3 FaxBack Workers
- 2 Safe At Home Workers
- 2 SWISS Facility support Workers

With a collective family violence experience of many decades at WAYSS and service in the sector generally, there exists an amazing depth and scope to the professional practice wisdom within this team.

In addition, WAYSS auspices the **INTEGRATED FAMILY VIOLENCE NETWORK** which facilitates the development of integrated family violence services in the Southern Region.

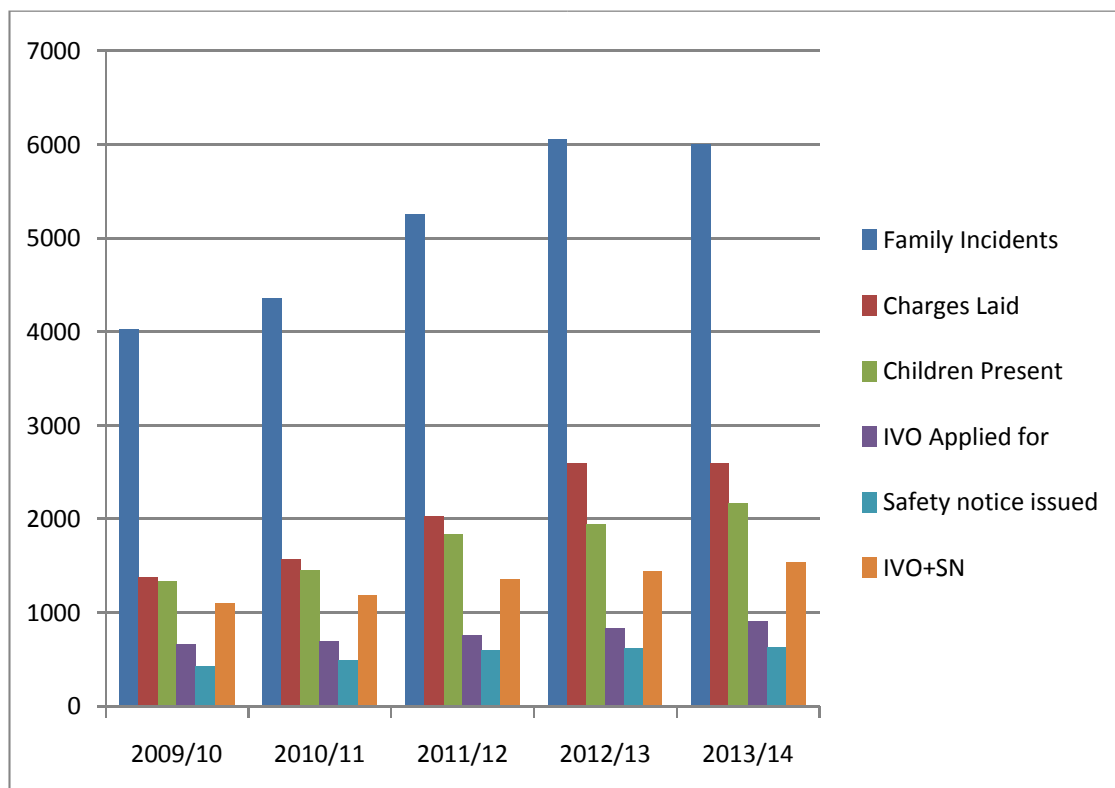
5.0 PREVALENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

To demonstrate prevalence of Family Violence locally for our service we have chosen to use a five year analysis of both Victoria Police statistics derived from LEAP, and WAYSS FaxBack statistics based on L17 referrals received by WAYSS from Victoria Police.

5.1 Victoria Police Statistics 2009-2014

- Family Incident Reports
- Where charges were laid
- Where children were present
- Where Intervention Orders applied for
- Where Safety Notices Issued
- Where Intervention Order and Safety Notice were issued (as these two items recorded separately).

Family Violence Statistics Casey, Cardinia Dandenong & Frankston 2009-2014



(Results produced by Corporate Statistics from data extracted from LEAP 18th July 2014)

Family Incident Reports 2009-2014						
Rate per 100,000 population						
% increase in statistics over 5 year period						
	Family incidents reported	Where Charges Laid	Where Children Present	Intervention Order (IVO) applied For	Safety Notice Issued	IVO + Safety Notice
Cardinia	57	96	52	87	79	67
Casey	49	92	67	68	14	43
Dandenong	38	112	47	18	27	23
Frankston	52	56	82	14	84	35
Across region Total	49	89	62	47	51	42

5.2 WAYSS FaxBack Statistics 2009-2014

This data represents the Local Government Areas of the Cities of Greater Dandenong, Frankston & Casey and the Shire of Cardinia and includes all L7 referrals from Victoria Police to WAYSS 2009-2014.

POLICE L17 FAXBACK REFERRALS TO WAYSS 2009 -2014	
Family Incident Reports	
2009	1496
2010	2005
2011	1885
2012	2500
2013	3212
2014	5134

6.0 PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE

Question 4: If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.

Three ground breaking programs and initiatives that WAYSS has undertaken and pioneered are:

6.1 Faxback

WAYSS and Victoria Police FaxBack Partnership was started in March 2005 with the signing of a formal Memorandum of Understanding. The MOU outlines the practice of formal referrals for Affected Family Members (AFM) from police in 12 police stations across WAYSS catchment.

AFM referrals are received from police when they attend a family violence incident, and upon receipt every woman is then contacted via an SMS text message. This includes an after-hours response from WAYSS Family Violence Crisis service and an arrangement whereby police can place an AFM in a motel and a WAYSS worker follows up the next day.

The shared goal of the FaxBack Partnership with Victoria Police is to ensure victim safety and the development of ways to ensure that abusers are held accountable for their violence. WAYSS has implemented clear aims and practice objectives that underpin the delivery of the FaxBack Program. These include:

- Commitment to a coordinated police and family violence services response and crisis intervention at a time of high risk for women and children.
- Court support for AFMs
- Ensuring that women and children experiencing family violence situations and incidents are offered an informed service and ongoing support.
- Improved safety and security for women and children.
- Enhanced referral pathways into a range of services for women and children.
- Reduced repeat calls to police for family violence incidents.

For WAYSS clients this partnership has been an innovative cornerstone in early intervention work where there is family violence and risk of homelessness. Its development and progress signals a significant advancement in collaborative work between a specialised family violence service and police.

Since its inception in 2005, the number of FaxBack referrals recorded by WAYSS has steadily increased. From 2009-2014, the total of L17 Victoria Police referrals was 16,232.

Currently, Police L17 FaxBack referrals exceed 600 a month.

6.2 WAYSS Animal Assisted Education & Therapy Groups - AAET

When women and children are forced into homelessness because of family violence, they lose more than the immediate roof over their heads. They are often taking the first steps into a poverty trap that may see them spiral into a lengthy period of homelessness, where social and family supports deteriorate and access to safe and secure long term housing is elusive.

For children living with, and then fleeing from family violence, enduring the loss of home, possessions, pets, neighbourhood, school, and other family and friends, has powerful and resounding traumatic effects. This is every child who comes to WAYSS.

WAYSS has a Children's Case Worker based at SWISS and a Children's Case Worker based with an Outreach Service. They facilitate the two separate Animal Assisted Education & Therapy Groups with the contracted practitioner from Education, Empathy & Training.

The following extracts are taken from the Executive Summary from the report of the preliminary evaluation of the WAYSS AAET Group Program. This Report was released and launched in March 2011 by the Honourable Philip Cummins who, as Co-Patron of Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia (CAPRA), attended sessions of the AAET Group, held discussions with the children involved and indicated his enthusiasm for its outcomes.

The Animal Assisted Education and Therapy group (AAET) was implemented by WAYSS in 2005 in response to the needs of children accessing WAYSS services. The AAET group, which is fully funded by WAYSS, was established to offer therapeutic intervention to children residing in transitional housing, and to provide a continuity of care that is often difficult for children accompanying a parent in a homelessness service to access. Barriers to accessible services for children result from Supported Assistance and Accommodation Program (SAAP) services that are not designed to meet the specific needs of children (Kirkman, Keys, Turner & Bodzak, 2009). It is also due to the fact that children accompanying parents in SAAP services are not recognized as clients in their own right (WrightHowie, 2006). WAYSS regards the accompanying child as a client in their own right. The current group model is unique to WAYSS as it has been developed using a child-centred holistic approach in which the child receives ongoing case management support. WAYSS contracts the group sessions to Empathy Education & Training (EE&T), a consultancy that designs and delivers animal assisted therapy programs for children.

From anecdotal evidence, the children who attended the group showed dramatic improvement in many areas of their lives. WAYSS commissioned this pilot evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the model of the group for children and young people affected by homelessness and family violence. WAYSS sought feedback from children and young people who had attended the group, using semi-structured interviews to hear their views of their experiences of the group. The research highlighted the significance of the group.

Mudaly, N. (2011). "It takes me a little longer to get angry now" Animal Assisted Education and Therapy Group. A Preliminary Evaluation. (Appendix 4) Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia. Monash University, Melbourne.

Since the launch of this report, WAYSS has received philanthropic funding to run another weekly group at SWISS. This group is for mothers and their children who are in current family violence crisis and who are homeless. Both groups continue to be very successful.

6.3 Southern Women's Integrated Support Services - SWISS

WAYSS Southern Women's Integrated Support Service, SWISS, represents an exciting development which was many years in the planning and is a unique and valuable service in a region with a high incidence of women and children experiencing family violence. The model is based on the principle of maximising the SWISS facility as a high security supported accommodation service based in the community, while maintaining a 'front door' Intake which is a primary family violence crisis response.

SWISS is staffed 24 hours per day, 7 days per week by the Family Violence Crisis team, which includes a Children's Crisis Support Worker. Two Family Violence Outreach Workers and other co-located services are also on site. These include a Psychologist, a Solicitor from the Casey Cardinia Legal Centre (one day per week) and an Empathy Education & Training Practitioner who runs a weekly Animal Assisted Education & Therapy Group for women and their children. This AAET Group is generously funded by private philanthropists.

There are eight self-contained units that accommodate families, with up to 20 children in residence at any time, for up to 6-8 weeks. Women and children are provided with immediate crisis stabilisation and ongoing intensive case management focused on safety and addressing their support needs, and then assisting them into long-term safe and secure housing.

7.0 CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH REDUCED OCCURRENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

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

To determine an optimum response to this question we have approached it from the perspective of a “miracle question”. If, as direct service family violence workers, woke up tomorrow and observed that we had achieved zero occurrence (or close to) of family violence, the following factors would be present and responsible:

Condition/Circumstance	Reduced Occurrence of Family Violence
1. Gender equality	Presence of equal and respectful relationships between men and women combined with equal distribution of power and resources.
2. Non-violent social norms	Focus on zero tolerance for family violence.
3. Community understanding and acceptance that Family Violence is a crime	Family violence is completely unacceptable and this is fully embraced across our society.
4. Community understanding and acceptance that Family Violence affects everyone.	Family violence is accepted to affect people regardless of factors such as age, culture, religion, socio-economic status, education, or sexual orientation
5. Prevention strategies	<p>Primary prevention initiatives starting at primary school educating children in relation to gender equality, respectful relationships and a zero tolerance to any form of inter-personal violence are well embedded into society.</p> <p>Well developed, consistently accurate and widely distributed media campaigns highlighting gender equality, respectful relationships, consequence, effects and cost to the community of family violence are running continuously.</p>
6. Improved access to support systems and resources	<p>Adequate funding for services to ensure supply of appropriate qualified specialist family violence support teams that are able to effectively meet demand are the norm.</p> <p>Adequate infrastructure is allowed for expanding demand on family violence services.</p> <p>Consolidation is present for family violence support services to one local service only, not spread over various organizations with differing attitudes.</p>
7. Integration of family violence services	A well-integrated service system between agencies such as the police, court, community services, DHHS Child Protection, Centre Against Sexual Assault

	(CASA), Justice Department and others with a shared understanding of family violence, compatible philosophies and collaborative approaches.
8. Focus on intergenerational violence.	Specific training and development of strategies to address intergenerational violence in combination with offender/perpetrator Respondent recidivist programs are available.
9. Perpetrators of violence/ Respondents being held accountable for violence	Appropriate, consistent and timely action in relation to reporting breaches of an Intervention Order and charges being laid is a consistent approach used.
10. Mandatory Men's Behavioural Change Programs (MBCP)	Automatic mandatory MBCP requirement are in place for all Intervention Orders granted.
11. Adequate accessible accommodation options	Safe, affordable, short and long term housing options is available to ensure women and children can live safety and thus reduce family violence.
12. Focus on Respondent Recidivism	Flagging of specific recidivistic persons with concentration on prevention by education, accountability and consequences.
13. Change in Intervention Order Status	<p>Intervention Orders are not <i>time limited</i> but <i>condition limited</i>. Successful completion of MBCP, Parenting Program and lack of reported breaches to order result in Respondent being able to apply to have current order lifted.</p> <p>Onus is now on Respondent proving he has changed instead of Affected Family Member waiting for next bout of violence and reapplying.</p> <p>Successful prosecution for breaching orders result in a permanent ongoing Intervention Order.</p>
14. Adequately funded & accessible Legal Aid & Community Legal Services	Provision of timely, effective, appropriate legal representation to all parties in a manner which prevents one party from disadvantaging another is accepted practice
15. Family Court Legislation that prioritises safety of women and children over parental rights.	Respondent's right to spend time with children does not override risk and safety factors or provide him with regular opportunities to continue to harass and intimidate women and children.

<p>16. Child Protective Services integrated into family violence service system</p>	<p>Collaborative approach between DHHS Child Protection and family violence services resulting in effects of family violence on children being addressed for every child.</p>
<p>17. Effective data sharing systems to facilitate effective information sharing amongst all parties involved in addressing family violence.</p>	<p>A client information data collection system that is accessible to all stakeholders which does not breach privacy legislation but enables all parties to record their services and monitor all other services involved, is in place and working effectively.</p>

8.0 GAPS, DEFICIENCIES AND SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Question 8: Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.

In our survey of direct Women's Service staff we received a plethora of responses to the question of gaps and deficiencies in current responses to family violence.

In a service system that strives for continuous improvement and excellence in client service it is not surprising that WAYSS direct service staff is aware of many ways to improve service and safety for women and children.

Despite much progress in legislation, partial integration of services and improving relationships with all stakeholders, there still exist many areas of the system that could be improved, leading to more positive outcomes for persons experiencing family violence.

We have presented the responses to Question 8 in table format including both gaps/deficiencies and suggestions for improvement.

8.1 Safety

The achievement and maintenance of safety for women and children experiencing family violence is paramount and the primary consideration when addressing family violence. All other measures utilised to address the multiple factors associated with family violence must be based on, and adjusted, with awareness that even minute changes in other factors can have a major flow on impact on safety.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Lack of availability of regular Common Risk Assessment Training (CRAF) for new workers.</p> <p>Limited offering and/or take-up of CRAF training by health and community services.</p>	<p>Continue CRAF training regularly.</p> <p>Expand CRAF training to include all health and community service professionals.</p>
<p>Inability of family violence services to arrange locks change on properties that only have the Respondent's name on the title, even though the woman may have been married for 15 years, lived in and contributed to the property for those years.</p>	<p>Change the law to enable this locks change to be made and safety increased for women and children to remain in the property in the short term while property or tenancy issues are resolved be decided in the long term.</p>

<p>Lack of provision for older sons when families needing to access women's refuge system.</p> <p>This may lead to women choosing a less safe accommodation option due to her unwillingness to separate her already traumatised children and make her older son either homeless or more vulnerable to the person who uses violence.</p>	<p>Provide more "stand alone" independent refuge facilities (units) to enable families to stay together in safety.</p>
<p>Insufficient family violence facilities (refuges and secure accommodation such as SWISS) in Victoria that accommodate women and children generally and especially those with disabilities.</p>	<p>Ensure sufficient crisis accommodation purpose built for persons experiencing family violence who also have a disability.</p>
<p>Insufficient family violence facilities (refuges and secure accommodation such as SWISS) in Victoria that accommodate women and children with accompanying pets.</p> <p>Pets are an important part of a family and in severe cases of family violence are targeted to control the family.</p>	<p>Ensure sufficient crisis accommodation purpose built for persons with accompanying pets.</p> <p>Brokerage available for women to pay for animal boarding or to make a donation to an animal shelter to welfare board and animal if woman and children have to leave the family home.</p>
<p>Lack of communication in keeping the woman informed as to whether the perpetrator has been either released from custody or had convictions & reports against him during the Intervention Order period. This information would alert the woman experiencing violence that the perpetrator has possibly become more unstable or unsafe which would then assist with safety planning.</p> <p>The woman cannot minimise the risk if she is unaware of it.</p>	<p>The example of Luke Batty must show that accumulating reports of violence must be shared between all parties to ensure current and ongoing safety of all parties.</p>
<p>Insufficient or inappropriate handling or reporting of Intervention Orders by police leading to increased family violence incidents and increased injury, stress and trauma for women and children and an overall decrease in confidence in the police and legal system as a measure to decrease family violence.</p>	<p>Strict adherence to intent of Family Violence legislation by no "grey" areas, no consolidation of multiple breaches into one charge, warnings or excuses.</p> <p>This may require additional police staff, a change in culture and attitudes and change in legislation from Civil to Criminal law.</p>

'Recently a client believed her ex-partner was still in remand, and wasn't aware that he had been released. Client continued her normal routine, and as she did not have car she had to transport her son via public transport to school. She was confronted by her ex-partner who tried to grab her young son; fortunately by-standers intervened due to the client yelling. The client explained that if she had known he had been released she wouldn't have kept to her normal routine as she knows this would be putting herself and her son in danger. The client would have updated her safety plan and wouldn't have put herself and her son through the stress of the attempted kidnap. It is situations like this that put the client and anyone involved with the client at risk. This client was grateful that she had the help of bystanders. But the fear that the client and her son experienced could have been prevented if she had been informed of her ex partners release'

8.2 Homelessness

WAYSS takes the view that the cultural and societal **reaction** to women and children made homeless by family violence should be one of repulsion and abject horror. The **response** to women and children made homeless by family violence must be to shift the norm and to insist that it will no longer be condoned.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Too many women and children being forced to leave family home due to lack of safety, property issues etc.	Mandatory removal of the perpetrator of violence from the property. Safety issues first, property issues second.
<p>Insufficient housing options to meet demand.</p> <p>Approximately three quarters of all calls to Women's Services Intake & Assessment are related to the need for alternative housing as a result of family violence.</p> <p>Many clients are surprised to find how little accommodation is available and frequently clients get extremely frustrated with the situation.</p> <p>Comments such as "so you want me to stay here until he kills me" and "I'll just go back home and if I am dead it will be your fault" are often directed at the Intake worker who, despite her best efforts can only offer the options that are available on any given day.</p>	<p>Dramatically improved the number of crisis and short term accommodation available to persons experiencing family violence.</p> <p>Keep housing availability in line with demand and current media campaigns</p> <p>Provide more properties for the Office of Housing public housing program A Place to Call Home.</p> <p>This program allows a successful tenancy in a THM or the similar temporary short term property to be converted to come a permanent public housing tenancy long term) properties so clients and children do not need to uproot themselves once approved for public housing.</p>
Lack of adequate numbers of transitional properties to enable women to be safely and affordably housed whilst waiting for longer term options such as public housing.	Increase funding and housing stock to enable prompt re-housing as required for family violence families

<p>Regularly the only housing option available to workers is the recommendation to look at a Rooming House.</p> <p>Despite Rooming Houses being overpriced, unsafe, unsanitary and totally inappropriate for children, women are being forced to enter them due to lack of any alternative housing.</p> <p>Rooming Houses are the new caravan parks’.</p>	<p>Provision of sufficient crisis housing stock or sufficient funds to enable those needing this type of accommodation to access it.</p> <p>Further provision of women’s only safe Rooming Houses would be another option.</p>
<p>Insufficient access to singles accommodation for single women. Any available two bedroom crisis accommodation is usually prioritized for a woman and children, leaving single and older women to go to Rooming Houses.</p>	<p>Development of singles women’s accommodation not only for family violence but also for other clients (e.g. Women’s Outreach Program) who are struggling to find safe affordable accommodation.</p>
<p>Subsidised rental schemes such as the Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) are not sufficiently funded and subject to funding cuts.</p>	<p>Ensure adequate funding for rental subsidy programs.</p>
<p>A less encumbered relationship with the DHHS Housing including availability of crisis housing with clear time frames for readiness.</p>	<p>Create integrated system where DHHS Housing properties are available for crisis needs.</p>
<p>Inappropriate attitudes of real estate agents who often discriminate against clients who advise them regarding past/present family violence.</p> <p>We have had experiences where women have been verbally approved for properties only to have approval withdrawn when they indicate they will get a Bond Loan or HEF assistance from a homelessness agency.</p>	<p>Ensure Real Estate Agents Code of Conduct covers such behaviour and that breaches of this Code are appropriately dealt with.</p>
<p>Lack of Centrelink benefits to assist with achieving a new tenancy as a result of family violence.</p> <p>While crisis payments and rent assistance are very useful, increased assistance would be beneficial.</p>	<p>Create a one-off tenancy start up payment to assist with rent in advance and bond if required.</p>

<p>Loss of status of public housing property tenancy if a woman has to leave her public housing for safety reasons.</p> <p>Transfer applications are not completed in a timely manner even when safety is a major issue.</p> <p>Mutual swaps are problematic given that a perpetrator is probably stalking the property and most tenants doing a swap do not disclose this.</p>	<p>Ability of Department of Housing to react in a timely manner to genuine safety issues in need of immediate transfer. Evidence of need could be provided such as police statement, new intervention order, support letter from specialist family violence worker etc.</p>
<p>Insufficient financial assistance to remain in family home especially mortgaged properties. The inability of women to sustain the mortgage is a frequent barrier for women leaving abusive relationships and also an often used ploy to exert control of the AFM by the Respondent once separation has occurred.</p>	<p>Suggest a short term increase in rent assistance for persons experiencing family violence who are tenants and mortgage assistance for home owners which can be reimbursed to government once financial property settlement occurs.</p>
<p>The plight of women with no Permanent Residency status who have no income and nowhere to go is a very challenging problem to work with when they are referred for family violence support.</p>	<p>WAYSS has made a commitment to take one or two families into THM and one family in this predicament into SWISS at any given time but it puts a significant strain on current budgets. Sufficient funding provisions for CALD women with no income entitlements or permanent residency.</p>

“A woman had been experiencing family violence for the duration of their 6 year marriage and had one previous family violence Intervention Order. The client went into her local police station where she reported numerous instances of physical and emotionally controlling abuse. The client stated that at one time she had been hospitalised due to injuries sustained from her husband. The client went home after reporting as she stated she felt safe to do so as her husband was not aware she had been into the station to report. The next day a police member rang the husband to attend the station in relation to the allegations. The FaxBack program received an L17 the following day stating that the husband instead of going to the police station went home and physically assaulted the client. She was grabbed by the throat and repeatedly punched to the back of the head, dragged through the house, kicked in the back repeatedly, and all in front of client’s two young children. Client was not able to call police through this attack and instead went into same police station to report incident. As a worker I emailed this case study to a senior police member. The response was an email to say it was being investigated from police end. I never heard any more from this’.

8.3 Accompanying Children

WAYSS statistics reflect that thousands of accompanying children go through WAYSS services (all programs) each year. There are only two Children’s Case Workers funded to work with children.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Absence of dedicated Children's Workers in all specialist Family Violence services.	Increased funding to allow for sufficient dedicated Children's Workers to meet demand.
<p>Insufficient understanding and emphasis on the effects of children being exposed to and living with family violence.</p> <p>Children not recognised as clients in their own right.</p>	Ensure services are funded to provide for the children of all family violence incidents.
Insufficient DHHS CP staff to deal with reporting from police of children in relation to family violence.	Improve staffing ratios by allocation of sufficient targeted funding.
DHHS Child Protection closing a case as soon as a family violence worker involved leads to lack of concentration on children's issues as separate	Improve integration with family violence services so a two pronged approach can exist simultaneously benefiting both the mother and the children.
Poor integration of family violence services and DHHS Child Protection often due to acute caseloads, lack of staff and long hours of Child Protection workers.	Development of an integrated service focused on all aspects of family violence with a shared philosophy, risk assessment, safety planning and co-case management.
Lack of consultation or coordination between DHHS CP and specialist Family	Integrated service as above to enable preliminary discussions with Family Violence
Violence and/or Housing Services prior to DHHS CP making woman and children homeless as a response to family violence.	and/or Housing Services prior to DHHS CP decisions being made in relation to family violence and homelessness.
<p>Lack of choice given to some clients with DHHS CP mandating that they link with Family Violence services or have children removed.</p> <p>WAYSS Women's Services are provided to clients on a voluntary basis.</p> <p>Clients engage with family violence service under duress and this becomes very apparent when options and strategies canvassed with client are rejected or refused by the client because she doesn't want to be with the service.</p>	Training of DHHS CP staff in regard to voluntary nature of family violence services and benefits of empowering client to make voluntary use of support.

Lack of consistency in approach with Family Violence services utilising a comprehensive Risk Assessment to focus on increasing safety to keep the women and children in their home with perpetrator of violence removed, and CP 'ordering' the woman to leave or they will take the children.	Develop integrated service protocols which include shared comprehensive Family Violence Risk Assessment, philosophy and collaborative practice between specialist FV Service supporting the needs of the mother and CP supporting the needs of the child/children to ensure that the family is not forced into homelessness.
Children's needs often cannot be met by mainstream services, when they are accompanying a parent escaping from or dealing with family violence and homelessness issues.	Specialist Family Violence Services must be funded to have dedicated Children's Case Workers.

'Police are not being sensitive to client's needs. When Client Y went to police station to provide statement to SOCIT unit, she was placed in an interview room with 2 male officers. When she asked for a female officer, the male officer asked her to explain why. Client had to explain that she didn't feel comfortable talking to a male about her sexual assault experience. A female officer was finally provided, however she didn't have much time, and the statement had to be completed in two parts. The first interview the client felt was rushed, and then she was not contacted for second interview for several weeks later'.

8.4 Integrated Family Violence Service

An integrated family violence service system has existed in Victoria since 2006 when the Victorian Government sought to achieve a service whereby specialist family violence services and other community and/or statutory service providers (police and courts) work in an integrated manner with a view to improving the safety of persons experiencing violence. This system is based on a prioritisation of safety, a shared understanding of family violence and proactive information sharing.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Lack of communication between police, family violence services and courts in relation to common clients.</p> <p>When there is lack of effective communication the client and/or workers can be put at risk.</p>	<p>Strengthen effective pathways of keeping women and children safe with protocols (both formal and informal) and shared understanding of risk assessment and safety planning, between police and specialist family violence service workers.</p>

<p>High risk referrals from Mental Health services and Mental Health Assessments of hospital presentations, requesting assistance for clients who have been subjected to family violence, but not informing workers of significant mental health issues, such as psychosis and suicidal ideations.</p>	<p>Develop an integrated family violence delivery service where health professionals could share information with family violence services without privacy concerns. This will improve safety.</p>
<p>Lack of communication between police, courts and family violence services as previously discussed in relation to serving Intervention Orders (or not), release from custody and additional crimes.</p>	<p>Stakeholders meetings on a regular basis to discuss specific cases within the guidelines of Privacy Legislation.</p> <p>Need to review Privacy Legislation to allow this.</p>
<p>Unrealistic expectations by workers in other organisations regarding the availability of specialised family violence support and crisis accommodation/housing.</p> <p>This leads to clients with unrealistic expectations experiencing disappointment and loss of hope.</p>	<p>Increased networking and information sessions in relation to capacity and resources for organizations. Increased funding and staffing will also alleviate the problem.</p>
<p>Support from Family Violence Services, Police, and the Courts to ensure that their responses are quicker and more responsive to family's needs regarding orders breaches and safety plans.</p>	<p>Continue to improve integration of services with emphasis on appropriate timely information flow and collaboration.</p>

Client X went to the police to report a breach of her intervention order.

The woman was seen by a female police officer, who according to the woman appeared to not believe the story and would not allow the opportunity to make a formal statement, even when client requested to do so. The woman was forced to discuss her family violence matters in the open over the counter, in front of others. When police officer became aware of information that appeared the client had been aggressive towards the perpetrator's sister, client reports that although this was not true, the police officer accused her of this and dismissed her family violence concerns and did not allow her to report a formal breach. Writer then called the station in question wanting to make a complaint and the male police officer that answered simply said "that would never happen here" and again dismissed clients attempt to make a complaint. This client ended up withdrawing her Intervention Order and returning to the perpetrator, a few months later'.

8.5 Police Issues

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Lack of timely response (or no response) when a woman fearing for her life makes an urgent call.</p> <p>Many women report lengthy waits in response from a 000 call to police leading to increased stress, trauma, injury to women and children and increased possibility of fatalities.</p>	<p>Increase staff levels for Victoria Police so shorter response times.</p> <p>Increased funding and staffing for Victoria Police to have the resources and capability of responding to family violence incidents promptly.</p>
<p>Police misreading situation or believing male, getting it wrong and charging AFM as respondent.</p> <p>Police attending a call to an incident and only hearing the man's version of events, not getting a statement from the woman involved.</p>	<p>Police training must ensure that police are equipped to understand all the dynamics of family violence and how 'crazy making' behaviour works with men who use violence, blame others for the violence and do not take responsibility for the abuse.</p> <p>Disempowered, abused and fearful women are easy prey for manipulation and when police attend and are advised by a man that she is the violent offender, not him, they need the skills and the procedures to establish the truth of the situation.</p>
<p>Lack of understanding of the complexity of family violence by some police officers in relation to the dynamics of power and control and barriers to leaving abusive relationship.</p> <p>Some police are not trained appropriately to recognise if a woman is still in danger as she may minimise the violence and say that she is safe as she is too afraid to say otherwise.</p>	<p>Increased appropriately focused training for all police officers (including the more experienced).</p>
<p>Lack of response from individual officers or stations to family violence reports.</p>	<p>Increased training for police officers resulting in culture changes to reflect consistency across officers and stations.</p>

<p>Lack of quality and appropriateness of response from individual officers. Police response is very, very varied.</p> <p>Some police officers are amazing and some less so. By treating those experiencing family violence and reporting breaches less seriously, brushing them off and advising that women do not have enough evidence for a breach and it will not stand in court when in fact they do, and it would.</p>	<p>Prevent burn out in police officers leading to minimization of family violence seriousness.</p> <p>Increased training in conjunction with family violence services to gain shared understanding of appropriate response and limits to services.</p>
<p>Lack of interest or support from police in regard to assisting women to retrieve personal belongings after they have been forced to leave their homes.</p> <p>This is a highly stressful experience for women and children and they are often not assisted, or they are made to wait for long periods of time due to low priority given to this task.</p>	<p>When an Intervention Order is made and the woman and children have left the family home, Police should have the power to advise the Respondent that he must leave the premises for a period of time to enable the Affected Family Member (AFM) to calmly collect hers and the children's belongings without the scrutiny or intimidation of the perpetrator.</p> <p>This is the 'trigger point' of a woman's descent into the poverty and homelessness cycle, when she and her children leave with nothing and have no choice but to rely on the 'charity' they receive to survive. Their loss of clothes, pets, personal papers and all personal belongings do not seem to matter in the scheme of things.</p> <p>It's accepted by everyone as the 'norm' that when women and children flee their home they end up with (in the words of a 12 year old boy) "jack shit".</p>
<p>Lack of Safety Notices granted or Intervention Orders applied for by police. Police will too often instruct a woman to apply for her own Intervention Order. Women require assistance in completing the Application and its costs.</p> <p>As per LEAP Police statistics there is a noted 89% increase over 5 years in charges laid following family incidents but only 49% rise for same period for Safety Notices and Intervention Orders applied for where police are the Informants.</p>	<p>Comprehensive assessment of need for Safety Notices and Intervention Orders taken out by police, and improved correlation between charges laid and Safety Notices and Intervention Orders.</p>

Lack of female police officers in Victoria Police Family Violence Units.	Increase gender mix in Police Family Violence Units.
Lack of sufficient staff and training for police officers leading to increased occupational stress and burnout leading to greater turnover in police Family Violence Units.	Support police officers dealing with high stress/trauma situations to prevent burnout and minimisation of family violence.
<p>Lack of appropriate seriousness being given to reports of Intervention Order breaches by some police officers and stations. This issue was cited by 80% of direct service staff as an issue requiring improvement. The clients that have taken out Intervention Orders and have reported the breaches advise that sometimes nothing is ever done about the breaches. It makes things worse for them as the Respondent's behaviour becomes worse and there are no consequences for their actions.</p> <p>Police giving Respondent warning for Intervention Order breaches instead of charging them with breach immediately which may help to stop recidivism.</p> <p>The majority of clients believe there are not tough enough charges for Intervention Order breaches. Clients have advised that this deters them from contacting police again regarding future incidences as they find it not useful and just a stressful process that wastes their time. No consequences for Respondents, hence it deters women from getting an Intervention Order again or reporting again.</p>	<p>Strict compliance with the legislation, definitions of Family Violence and conditions of the Intervention Order.</p> <p>Dedicated follow through of all reports of breaches to ensure timely and sufficient prosecution of offenders.</p> <p>No warnings given for breaches of Intervention Orders. Use of family violence worker motto: 'A breach is a breach is a breach!'</p>
Failure to complete L17 reports when family violence incidents reported to police. Some clients have reported up to 3 separate serious incidences reported with no paper trail.	Ensure consistency in relation to completion of L17 or every reported incident of family violence.
<p>Lack of advice or instruction given to women in relation to evidence requirements to enable successful charges to be laid for breaches of Intervention Order.</p> <p>Women are not educated on how to make the Intervention Order work.</p>	Standardised method of advice to women who are Affected Family Members AFM needs to be developed, for police to be able to give to them at time of Safety Notice or Intervention Order application being made (when police are the Informants).

<p>Lack of consistency across officers and stations in relation to action taken in relation to Family Law property issues.</p>	<p>Powers for police to allow women and children to keep (or remove) any items which are clearly personal items and other such items as may be required for the children's wellbeing.</p>
<p>Women commonly describe the experience of police allowing a perpetrator once he has been excluded from the property by the court - to take all items from the house including the children's beds, without interfering as they claim they are not able to take action due to property not belonging to either person due to no property settlement.</p> <p>Common sense should prevail and women and children should not be disadvantaged in this manner.</p>	<p>Police should not be placed into the invidious position of having to 'supervise' this situation. Similar to Family Court property disputes, the excluded party should provide a list of goods that they wish or need to remove and provide this to the Magistrates within the conditions and terms of the Intervention Order.</p> <p>A date can be set, arrangements for the property to be made available to the excluded party can be set, and the women and children can be absent from the property while police escort the party there to retrieve the goods.</p>
<p>Inappropriate Police Prosecutors still responding to victims with comments "just get over it".</p>	<p>Strengthen formal and informal communication avenues between Police Prosecutors and family violence clients' advocates.</p> <p>This could ensure that each brief prepared for a court hearing would contain as much relevant information about the case as possible, especially including the level of risk identified.</p>
<p>Lack of stability of police officers within Family Violence Units</p>	<p>Aim for less rotation of police officers within the Family Violence Unit. If an officer proves to be effective and is happy to continue, encourage continuity.</p>
<p>Required presence of AFM at police initiated Intervention Order hearings in high risk cases.</p>	<p>If a client is identified as high risk and her safety is at risk by attending Intervention Order hearing, (police IVO application) then for her safety she can be given the option to not attend if she is in agreement with the police application. Police can go ahead with application on her behalf.</p>

'Police are not always submitting L17's. One client had police out for family violence several times between 2008 and 2015 without an L17 being done. Client had no safe place to go as he had threatened her and her children. Client had all children removed by child protection to keep them safe and reports made to Child Protection by police. Police need to be constant and not make assumptions about clients. Some Police not responding appropriately to Family Violence, i.e., explaining why they cannot prosecute a breach. Police require evidence of a crime that has been committed not just the word of an AFM. Proof is required for the police to act on the criminal offence. If these points of proof are not met the matter will not be approved for prosecution. So it's not as easy as some people believe. AFM's need to be educated into how to safely obtain the evidence required for a successful prosecution of a breach or subsequent criminal charges. It has been shown that police doing follow up welfare checks at the home after a family violence incident has shown the recidivist behaviour to reduce'.

8.6 Legal and Court Issues

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Lack of safety around court appearances when the perpetrator is aware of women's whereabouts, what time she needs to attend court and when she leaves.</p> <p>While safety inside the Court can be monitored, outside the court and walking to and from it, a woman is at her most vulnerable and highest risk.</p> <p>Often friends and family of the Respondent can engage in harassing and intimidating behaviour also.</p>	<p>Specific close security monitored parking available to all AFMs.</p> <p>Security patrols in the courts external precincts would deter incidents from occurring.</p> <p>Establish safe pick-up and drop zones that are within proximity to the entrances of the court where security staff or police are also stationed.</p>
<p>Safe parking for Family Violence workers supporting victims of family violence at Court would be useful.</p> <p>Once you are identified as being on the AFMs 'side getting to the car afterwards can sometimes be a challenge.</p> <p>It is not unusual for the worker to be targeted by the Respondent and also the solicitors of the Respondent regularly demand information such as name, organisation and role of the worker.</p>	<p>Specific close security monitored parking made available to workers when a high risk client is identified.</p> <p>Establish procedures between Police, Court and Family Violence advocates/workers to create safe passage and access to safe zones within the court if required. This may include extra security staff to escort concerned workers to their vehicles as required.</p>

<p>Long waiting times for women applying for own Intervention Order as application appointments at the courts can be several weeks into the future. This is a very dangerous period of time as the perpetrator of the violence will notice a change in behaviour and attitudes of the woman who is taking the action and may react with physical violence.</p>	<p>Increased funding to enable Courts to provide enough staff to decrease backlog of cases.</p> <p>Amend <i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010</i> to provide for an applicant to fill out an Intervention Order application form and lodge it with a Registrar at a Magistrates Court, with an affidavit that describes the violence and the threats completed with a solicitor. Create two avenues for a woman to seek an Intervention Order on her own behalf - via an appointment with the Registrar, or via a solicitor.</p>
<p>Insufficient court security rooms for clients to wait in if feeling extremely unsafe in general waiting area.</p>	<p>Additional space to be provided to enable multiple clients to access security room simultaneously if required.</p>
<p>A lack of video link facilities to enable women with serious safety issues.</p> <p>An improvement in the court system would be to have video links like they have in prisons.</p>	<p>Fund video link facilities from family violence service offices where an AFM could speak to Magistrates without having to be physically present. This could also decrease the need for additional waiting rooms and other security issues at courts. .</p>
<p>Shared AFM/Respondent waiting rooms at Magistrates Courts (particularly the overcrowded ones) increases stress and trauma for AFM's and children and gives the Respondent's a further opportunity to intimidate and harass their families.</p>	<p>Separate waiting rooms need to be established for AFM and children and Respondents.</p>
<p>AFM having to wait for violence to occur before being granted another Intervention Order. Difficulty with extending existing orders because no further violence has occurred, but no violence has occurred due to active Intervention Order.</p>	<p>In cases with a documented history of the violence reoccurring once the Intervention Order has lapsed, the AFM should be able to extend the Intervention Order indefinitely without waiting to be further assaulted or abused.</p> <p>A mandatory indefinite Intervention Order should be included in any successfully prosecuted breach of Intervention Order.</p>

<p>Overcrowding of lists in Intervention Order list at Magistrates Court. Courts allocated time to hear 25 cases per day but are often hearing in excess of 50 per day.</p> <p>This results in insufficient time being able to be given to each case by the Registrar, Duty Solicitor, and Police Prosecutor. Rushing and overcrowding leads to less than optimum results being reached for all individuals.</p>	<p>Modify existing Court buildings and/or build new Courts that will better facilitate long waiting times.</p> <p>Increase funding into the system for more court personnel.</p> <p>Increase Court infrastructure with specialised Family Violence Courts.</p>
<p>Waiting rooms at some Magistrates Courts too crowded e.g. Dandenong.</p> <p>Due to the overcrowded lists the waiting area is seriously overwhelmed with women</p>	<p>Build additional Court facilities and/or modify existing Court buildings to ease the pressure on existing buildings and persons.</p>
<p>(AFM), children, men (Respondent), lawyers, interpreters, support people and Court personnel trying to co-exist in a tense and traumatic atmosphere.</p> <p>Further abusive behaviour is common as not all parts of the waiting area are visible to the security staff.</p>	
<p>Some Magistrate's attitudes are inappropriate for family violence. When clients apply for Interim Intervention Orders it really depends on the Magistrate as to whether they get an order. Some Magistrates will not hesitate to grant it while others can be very, very hard on the clients. WAYSS has had clients who have low risk family violence happening and apply for an Order before it escalates, and they have been granted Interim Intervention Orders with no problems.</p> <p>Then we have had far more serious family violence clients who are at much greater risk because of their exposure to intensive violence and abuse, and they have struggled to get an Interim Intervention Order. It's hard on the clients and adds additional stress.</p>	<p>Consistency of decision making, attitudes, beliefs and interpretation of the legislation.</p> <p>Interim Orders need to be made. It must be up to the person using violence to prove or provide evidence that such an Order is not to be made.</p> <p>Leniency in sentencing does not reflect the devastating physical and mental health damage family violence has on victims which can be long term and it can lead to an overwhelming demand on financial on the community and governments.</p>
<p>Family Court Orders are not visible to Victoria Police and this has implications for safety and decision making.</p>	<p>Develop shared information system between Commonwealth Courts (Family Court) and State Courts (Magistrates) to allow free flow of relevant information between stake holders, especially police.</p>

<p>Legislation doesn't provide for prohibition of drugs and alcohol on Intervention Orders.</p> <p>If it is accepted by the court that drugs and/or alcohol were factors in the family violence then a prohibition order should be part of the Intervention Order.</p>	<p>Introduce legislation including prohibition of drugs and alcohol in serious family violence cases.</p>
<p>Courts are not seen to be holding the Respondent's accountable for their breaches and some Magistrates have been known to pass sentences that appear to trivialise the family violence situation.</p>	<p>Consistent and appropriate judgments to be made which enable women to have faith that justice will be served.</p>
<p>Intervention Orders are State Orders. If they were Federal, legislation would remove the need for persons fleeing interstate to register their Intervention Order, and make information sharing easier between state police forces.</p>	<p>Enacting new legislation to make addressing family violence a Federal Issue consistently approached by all state police forces.</p>
<p>Intervention Orders need to be Criminal not civil. Everyone knows and talks about Intervention Orders as 'just civil matters' They "don't matter" and won't affect Perpetrators long term prospects – such as having no criminal record, seeking employment, volunteering etc.</p>	<p>Making Intervention Orders criminal may deter some perpetrators of family violence as it would be permanently on their records.</p> <p>If not criminal then successful granting of an Intervention Order could be placed on public record as a deterrent.</p>
<p>Absence of "Furniture Orders" as are common in the New Zealand family violence system, where the woman and children who stay in the house can obtain an Ancillary Furniture Order to prevent him from taking anything from the house, or a Furniture Order which lets the woman take what furniture and goods she needs from the house if she is the one who has to leave.</p>	<p>Include Ancillary Furniture Orders and Furniture Orders in existing Family Violence legislation in Australia.</p>

<p>Not enough Legal Aid services for clients as funding continues to be cut to Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres.</p> <p>Commonly we find the Respondent will deliberately (apparently) attend all local Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid which ensures that AFM cannot access these avenues due to conflict of interest.</p> <p>Some clients will decide to give up as they have enough on their plate to deal with. It is important that legal services and legal assistance is accessible when required and that victims get the right responses when they seek assistance with family violence matters.</p>	<p>Ensure adequate funding for Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres.</p> <p>Develop Guidelines and possible information sharing by Community Legal Centres so Respondent cannot access one if he has already accessed another.</p> <p>Ensure sufficient Legal Aid funding for Family Court to ensure that a women will not have to represent herself against her violent perpetrator in Family Court, where her ability to do and cope with this successfully has serious repercussions for the children.</p>
<p>Duty solicitors have insufficient time to spend with women and thus fail to gain an understanding of the dynamics and intricacies of each individual case.</p> <p>This results in a 'one size fits all' approach and results in less than optimum Intervention Orders being obtained.</p>	<p>Lessen caseloads and throughput at Court to enable sufficient time for holistic assessment of needs by legal representation.</p>
<p>Lack of duty solicitors who understand that family violence is about power and control, and if the perpetrator of the family violence does not agree to the Intervention Order that these factors may be in play. The client did not agree to be beaten up, raped, and isolated, the court process can be a continuation of the violence unseen by solicitors.</p>	<p>Accredited training for solicitors who are working in the family violence arena.</p>
<p>Limited access to Legal Aid. No capacity for representation for Intervention Order hearing and some women are just not up to this gruelling experience without a great deal of support.</p> <p>There is no ability to access legal representation if the woman is a property owner (although she may be “cash poor”).</p>	<p>Sufficient funding for Legal Aid or a legal fee assistance scheme where clients can access legal help and pay later. Being dragged back to court is one of the many ways Respondents continue to financially abuse women.</p>

<p>Better access for women to interpreter services at court. Sometimes due to small pool of available interpreters for a particular language a woman may see the Respondent with the same interpreter she herself had, after her making disclosures in regard to physical and sexual assaults with that interpreter present.</p> <p>Although reassurance is given regarding ethics and confidentiality it is difficult to convince someone who speaks no English that her privacy will be maintained.</p>	<p>More funding for interpreters and monitoring of cross use of interpreters.</p>
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'According to one Magistrate it doesn't matter if the violence is witnessed by the children, as long as it is not directed at them. . It has been proven in numerous researches the effect family violence can have in children that witness the act and/or the after effects. In this case in particular, a 9 year old boy started spending half the time with his father and as a result school disruption, night terrors and bed-wetting started to happen'.

8.7 Funding

Sufficient funding to meet demand in relation to family violence requires a frequently adjusted perspective which in an ideal world would be free of Federal/State or party issues and concentrated instead on the amount of demand, the most efficient and cost effective way to meet the need and channelling of the funding to the organisations most equipped to provide the service.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Insufficient funding for Safe at Home program to provide increased security items such as personal alarms, home security systems, locks change, security doors and solar motion sensor lights.</p>	<p>Increase funding to provide adequate brokerage per individual client.</p>
<p>Insufficient funding of specialist family violence services to meet demand (as per WAYSS demographics ratio between clients offered service and clients funded to receive service). Insufficient funding for training of staff pre and post-employment.</p>	<p>Increase funding to meet demand.</p> <p>Employ sufficient staff to meet demand.</p> <p>Ensure conditions and entitlements of workers are consistent with sustainable long term employment.</p> <p>Ensure adequate funding for integrated family violence training for staff.</p>

<p>Insufficient Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) funding for white goods when family may have no refrigerator and/or washing machine.</p> <p>This funding was previously available and was of great assistance to clients and workers. Due to funding cuts this has been discontinued, to the great disappointment of direct service staff.</p>	<p>Increase PRAP funding to previous levels as this program is highly beneficial to family violence clients.</p>
<p>Insufficient Housing Establishment Funds (HEF) to enable women to initiate new tenancy if safety or circumstances warrant it.</p>	<p>Allocate sufficient HEF funding for family violence clients to relocate if current housing cannot be safely achieved.</p>
<p>Insufficient funding for children witnessing or experiencing family violence. Sufficient funding to enable children to have their requirements met will reduce stress and trauma for both the children and the mother.</p>	<p>Increase funding for children to provide for adequate school books, school uniforms, sports, entertainment and counselling etc.</p>

'Despite this being in a police report and presented to the Family Court, the client was told during the final custody hearing by the Magistrate "If that allegation of family violence occurred, which the gentleman has denied, it is irrelevant to this case because it was just against the mother, therefore the father and mother are to share custody 50-50'.

8.8 Financial

Financial issues have been discussed separately from funding as these pertain to client oriented as opposed to organization/program oriented issues.

Financial abuse in family violence is common, financial control can be complete.

When women and children leave an abusive relationship, financial issues will be one of the major factors that influence choice and decision making.

It is frequently one of the reasons why women stay and also why they knowingly return to an abusive relationship. Sufficient financial support of women is vital to reduce family violence.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Police tell woman to apply for own Intervention Order which may result in increased costs to woman should Respondent contest the granting of an Order.</p> <p>In many cases the Respondent usually has more access to funding for a contested hearing as they are more likely to be employed and the woman may not be employed due to childcare responsibilities. The decision of the police to not apply for the Safety Notice and Intervention Order can thus impact financially on the women and children.</p>	<p>More consistent applying for appropriate notices and orders by Police.</p>
<p>Costs of copies of Police Statements should women require a copy.</p> <p>One of the gaps identified is assistance for New Zealand clients as the majority are not eligible for payments through Centrelink, putting them at risk of becoming homeless or leaving them with no alternative but to return to the abusive relationship.</p>	<p>Liaison with New Zealand government to provide sufficient assistance for their residents who experiencing family violence within Australia before benefits are accessible.</p>
<p>A gap in the system would be supporting clients from New Zealand or other clients who are ineligible for Centrelink payments and unable to work.</p> <p>These clients often cannot access support options thus are forced to remain in potentially violent situations.</p>	<p>An all-encompassing financial assistance system to prevent the need for women and children to remain in violent relationships due to income and benefit issues.</p>

‘Another major gap in the legal system is the current process of clients requesting copies of their statements from Police. A client went to the police station to get a copy of her statement and was referred to the Free of Information Act where she had to pay. This search normally takes 25 days however at present takes 48 days due to the enormity of searches requested. This makes gaining statements very difficult and expensive for clients’.

8.9 Emotional & Psychological

Emotional and psychological issues related to family violence for women and children are complex, long term and serious. Family violence has a huge impact on women's health, including mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Children are at high risk of developing the same problems.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Waiting times for counselling for persons experiencing family violence can be up to 6 months with some organisations.</p>	<p>Funding for more staff to ensure waiting lists are shorter.</p>

Lack of readiness for counselling of persons affected by family violence in the initial stages of trauma.	Different levels of counselling need to be available as initially women will not have the mindset to take on traditional counselling. Direct service crisis workers provide emotional and psychological support but an interim trauma based program would be beneficial.
Lack of available support groups for persons experiencing family violence.	Increase funding to community and neighbourhood houses specifically for the development of support groups for women experiencing family violence.
Lack of consistent education across counsellors and private practitioners.	All counsellors and mental health professional working with family violence need to have a shared understanding and philosophy about family violence. Adequate appropriate training required.
<p>More Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) counsellors for perpetrators of family violence as there is a waiting list of months before perpetrators can get to see a counsellor.</p> <p>The current MBCP is not designed specifically for CALD or Indigenous clients.</p> <p>MBCP course content has not changed to keep pace with clients who are now mandated to attend.</p>	<p>Increased funding for MBCP counsellors.</p> <p>Culture specific MBCP required.</p> <p>Update MBCP course to reflect both mandated and voluntary attendees.</p>
Lack of compulsory counselling for perpetrators.	<p>Provision of one on one mandatory counselling for all Intervention Order recipients.</p> <p>Men behaviour change groups need to be reviewed and made mandatory for all Respondents that are sentenced.</p>

'I also think it's important that services like WAYSS have access to brokerage funding so that children don't miss out. We have funding, which we can use at our discretion to assist with things such as uniforms, school books, excursions, after school activities and occasional recreational activities. Accessing additional funding and being able to purchase tickets to the movies, indoor play centres, the local pool or the zoo for instance can go a long way in helping families to have positive family time together and build some new memories. This is particularly vital during school holidays time when boredom can sink in and kids see their friends out and about and feel like they miss out'.

8.10 Education

With the discussion of gaps and deficiencies in current response it is essential to discuss education. In this context it relates to education of society and community, individuals, workers, clients, children and all other affected parties.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Media campaigns need to be effective as clients worked with over time report that up to half of women affected do not report the family violence they have experienced and a large number are unaware that they are experiencing family violence at all.	Comprehensive media coverage in prime time on family violence related subjects.
Lack/paucity of education programs on the issues surrounding family violence and how to reduce or prevent it.	Continue existing and expand further programs designed to educate, empower and enlighten.
Insufficient community awareness, although improvements are occurring there is much scope for improvement. Large numbers of people still view it as a 'domestic' issue and not a community issue, there is a lack of understanding and still lots of 'victim blaming'.	Continuous funding to allow education via media, health, education and community service providers.

'J has an ex-partner who is the father of her two children. J fled the relationship after 8 years together (very violent perpetrator). J reluctantly took out an Intervention Order (She was too scared initially as she was frightened of the ramifications if she took one out). J eventually felt strong enough to take one out and this did cause her ex-partner to threaten her in court as he was walking past. He continued to call and text her. J reported all breaches to the police who were investigating. J's ex also found out where she was living and often showed up to bang on all the windows and doors until she was so scared she had to let him in. J then couldn't get him out but had to try and pacify him. Every time this occurred it ended up with her ex physically assaulting her in front of the children. J called the police each time and they attended, always getting there after he'd run off. J was too scared to tell the police how serious the assault was and a FaxBack would be sent stating "the AFM is no longer at risk". J's worker spoke to the police and advised how serious the assaults were. The perpetrator has still not been charged with anything and continues to breach the Intervention Order. This perpetrator is not held accountable for anything he has done and he shouldn't even be within 200metres of where she lives, however nothing is getting done about it.

8.11 Data and Privacy

Data and privacy is an important factor in a well-coordinated integrated family violence service system. Unfortunately different data systems and lack of clarity and direction in relation to privacy legislation result in separate information and ineffective collaboration at times.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Lack of information sharing between Police, Courts, DHHS Child Protection, Justice Department and Family Violence services.</p> <p>Each organisation has a separate data and documentation system and no capacity to integrate.</p> <p>Organisations do not share information due to constraints of the Privacy Act.</p> <p>Risk assessment and safety planning would be optimised.</p> <p>Stakeholders would know who was case managing and what goals were being achieved.</p>	<p>Design a system for persons experiencing family violence which includes all information pertaining to AFM, children, Respondent, police, courts, DHHSCP, family violence services and others so that any party can see the comprehensive and complete picture of the family and make appropriate choices and decisions based on knowing the complete story.</p>
<p>With the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) new data base and case management tool Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP) there is no capacity built in to record L17 for FaxBack programs from the police.</p>	<p>Design better data collection tools so adequate recording of family violence data can occur.</p> <p>Ensure that new systems are developed in conjunction with the organisations who will be using them to allow input, feedback and testing of suggested systems prior to roll out.</p>

'A non-English speaking client lived for over 30 years in an abusive relationship with her husband when they moved to Australia. Financial, psychological, verbal and emotional abuse and isolation were present so much so that the client couldn't learn English as part of his control. Client tried to leave the family home and the father made their daughters grab mum by the legs and arms to stop her. she was beaten every time she tried to leave'.

8.12 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse populations which live on comprise WAYSS catchments give rise to a number of issues when combined with family violence.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Difficulty accessing skilled, appropriate and available interpreters. Since DHHS changed the service provider of interpreters the quality and availability has suffered immensely.</p> <p>Interpreters may be on the tram, in the supermarket, having their children in the car or be taking the call in a host of other inappropriate situations where they have to provide intensive exacting interpreting on a range of intimate and traumatic topics.</p>	<p>Appropriately skilled, professional interpreters employed where the cost is not the main feature in their organisations gaining the tender.</p>
<p>Lack of female only interpreters. Male interpreters are more likely to tell the woman in their own language that they should go home and forget about abuse.</p> <p>WAYSS have many scenarios where this happens and clients inform us later.</p>	<p>Funding for female specific and appropriately family violence trained interpreters.</p>
<p>Lack of understanding of family violence in an Australian/Victorian law context by interpreters</p>	<p>All interpreters used for family violence need to have CRAF training.</p>
<p>Lack of specific cultural and religious family violence education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities where family violence is common and may be seen as a male right.</p> <p>Ensure persons entering Australia understands family violence is against the law in Australia, regardless of the customs in their own country.</p>	<p>Develop and deliver culturally specific family violence awareness programs for any CALD groups demonstrating significant family violence statistics.</p>

8.13 Disability

Women and girls with a disability are more likely to experience violence and abuse so require additional awareness and assistance in relation to family violence.

All professionals in contact with women identifying a disability must be aware of the possibility of family violence issues and broach this subject as the woman may not raise it. Carers of not only disabled individuals but chronically physically ill clients have been shown to perpetrate violence against their care recipient.

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Extreme difficulty when police make women leave family home which has been modified to her specifications.</p> <p>It is extremely difficult to gain crisis accommodation, medium term transitional accommodation, rooming house, caravan or a private rental property if the client requires physical modifications.</p>	<p>Removal of the perpetrator from the property generally but especially in cases where modifications are present at the property regardless of whose property it is.</p> <p>WAYSS had a recent case where a Magistrate ordered a woman to leave the house as the Respondent had a disability and the property had been converted for his use.</p>

8.14 Animal and Pet Abuse

GAPS and DEFICIENCIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>Animals and pets are abused as a way for the perpetrator of violence to control women and children, to stop them from talking about the violence or leaving. They are hurt or there are threats to hurt or kill them to show women what could happen to them.</p>	<p>Development of educational programs for children to educate them about the relationship between animal cruelty and violence and teach them to care for animals.</p>
<p>Women often stay because of the threats to hurt or kill a pet if she leaves. This includes the woman being prevented from going to the aid of the pet if it's been hurt, or taking it to a vet, or just preventing her from having any way of getting the animal out of the house.</p>	<p>Capacity for emergency and other accommodation options for women and children where a family pet can accompany them.</p>
<p>Pets are used as weapons of control, and this includes financial control where the animal is starved or neglected because the woman is not allowed to have any money to provide for its proper care.</p>	<p>Family Violence specific brokerage to animal welfare organisations to support them to provide 'welfare boarding' for pets. This would include health checks and veterinary intervention if necessary, desexing and immunisation.</p>

9.0 ONGOING SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Question 11a: What are some of the most promising and successful ways of supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by family violence?

Supporting ongoing wellbeing and safety in persons experiencing family violence requires a continuum ranging from totally safe to completely unsafe.

On a given day the women and children may experience a sudden transition from one position on the continuum to another and often this change is created by external factors that she has limited control over.

Multiple factors affect safety and wellbeing and it is the balance of these factors which will determine how safe or unsafe the women and children are.

Persons experiencing family violence negotiate several phases of service beginning with the reporting of family violence (either due to a recent violent incident or a series of incidents that have accumulated, or which emerge when a client is seeking other types of support), the response (risk assessment, safety planning, intervention order, safe housing and/or other factors) and then enter the longer term ongoing adjustment and recovery phase.

It is within the period of time, from the completion of the initial response to the closure of the case due to all of the clients' support goals being achieved, that this response is directed.

The following factors are considered to be among the most successful and promising ways to support ongoing safety and wellbeing in women and children following the initial response phase.

9.1 Safety

The Family Violence Crisis and Transitional Case Management response provided by WAYSS removes women and children from unsafe and dangerous family violence risk. The service provides them with an opportunity and an environment in which to feel safe and be safe. Case Workers work with clients using a good practice case management framework, which is an intervention and support model that adapts to individual client needs and empowers them. Case Workers adhere to and uphold the client's rights and the principles underpinning case management.

The following promising and successful strategies for safety and wellbeing are provided with general reference to the role of specialist family violence services, and articulate the practice undertaken by WAYSS Family Violence Services.

All other measures utilised to address the multiple factors surrounding family violence must be based on and adjusted with the focus on how any change to the dynamic will affect safety.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>Victoria Police and WAYSS have been in formal partnership since 2005 with the FaxBack Program. When police attend a family violence incident they fax a copy of their L17 Risk Assessment for the Affected Family Member AFM to WAYSS.</p> <p>Every FaxBack referral is contacted via an SMS text message or if this is not possible, a letter is sent.</p> <p>Court support is provided to every client attending court.</p> <p>WAYSS records a very high percentage of client uptake of services via FaxBack referral.</p>	<p>Extreme administration demands placed on the service in processing the volume of paperwork and client referrals.</p> <p>FaxBack as a program is underfunded.</p>
<p>Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management tool. A Comprehensive Risk Assessment is undertaken with every client. Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) provides a common tool and shared philosophy for Risk Assessment for women experiencing family violence and agencies who use the tool.</p>	<p>This tool may be undermined if agencies and services involved in working with the client employ differing methods of risk assessment. .</p>
<p>Education in relation to safety planning and the development of a Safety Plan for women and children by a specialist family violence worker.</p> <p>This Safety Plan is constantly adjusted to cater for changes created externally to the woman and children, and also the choices that the woman makes.</p>	<p>Often safety planning is done by a non-specialist family violence worker using a tool other than CRAF.</p> <p>With limited understanding of the intricacies and dynamics of family violence, a non-trained worker may inadvertently overlook serious risk.</p>
<p>Provision of Safe at Home funding to purchase personal alarms, home security systems, locks change, security doors and solar motion sensor lights to enable women and children to remain in and feel safe within their family home.</p> <p>In view of the value of this brokerage WAYSS has continued to provide client brokerage funds.</p>	<p>Insufficient funding for this type of service has led to strategy failure.</p> <p>Safe at Home funding was made available to WAYSS for 2 years and then ceased.</p>

<p>The ground breaking model of the Southern Women's Integrated Support Service SWISS. This high security crisis facility which is staffed 24/7 provides eight on-site self-contained residential units that can house up to 8 women and 20 children. It has full disabled access in both the facility and the residential units. It caters to clients who would otherwise be unable to stay within their local area, and for those women who for a range of reasons are ineligible for high security refuge. This includes women who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are working • have teenage sons • have pets • have Family Court Orders to continue to provide child contact with a father • have no Permanent Residency status and no income 	<p>This long awaited and purpose built facility cannot always provide a safe option for women for a number of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Risk Assessment indicates that a woman is too high risk to remain in her community • A stay is 6-8 weeks and demand always exceeds turnover of the Units vacancies. • Cultural connections to the local community can prohibit a woman's ability to go out and about day to day as this may impact on her safety, making her effectively a 'prisoner' in the facility.
<p>The ability to refer to high security women's refuges via Safe Steps is a crucial partnership relationship between WAYSS and Safe Steps. This is a vital strategy to combat the extreme threat to life that some women and children are experiencing.</p>	<p>There are regularly no vacancies for women within the refuge system and WAYSS continues to motel these families until a vacancy is available. Insufficient motel funding can become an issue when this occurs.</p>
<p>Provision of overnight crisis accommodation in motels provides an interim measure for safe accommodation for women and children requiring short term crisis housing.</p> <p>WAYSS also provides police with access to this via FaxBack and SWISS referrals.</p>	<p>While crisis motel accommodation is very useful and appreciated by women experiencing family violence, it is difficult to place a woman with multiple children in a small room with limited/no toys or entertainment for them.</p> <p>Motel venues are often adjacent to Pokies venues/hotels which can add to the lack of safety.</p> <p>The same motels are often used for crisis family violence services and mainstream homelessness services which can result in multiple single males at the motel raising risk and the client's anxiety about safety and confidentiality.</p>

<p>The ability to use Cab-charge cards to pay for taxi transport for clients who need to be quickly and effectively moved from place to place to avoid potentially violent situations is a much utilised and appreciated method to ensure ongoing safety.</p>	<p>Care must be taken with particular cultures in relation to the prevalence of that culture working as taxi drivers in our catchment.</p> <p>To transport a woman to high security refuge frequently a taxi is called from the other side of the city to pick up the client and drop them at a police station close to the refuge.</p>
<p>Use of more successful media campaigns makes it more likely that women will report violence.</p>	<p>Media campaigns are useful but only successful in assisting women if appropriately funded services are poised and ready to deal with the additional influx of clients requiring service.</p>

9.2 Homelessness

WAYSS operates as the Front Door into the homelessness service sector and the Family Violence service access arrangements are well publicised throughout the catchment. The WAYSS Mission Statement articulates that it is WAYSS core purpose to assist individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to improve their life circumstances by providing access to stable, affordable and safe accommodations. The manner in which this is achieved informs the practice and delivery of all WAYSS homelessness programs. These programs work together to provide positive outcomes based on the availability of accommodation, funding to access it and the needs of the individual clients.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>The ability to use SWISS as short term accommodation for women awaiting medium term transitional housing leading to longer term public housing.</p>	<p>This model works extremely well when vacancies exist but eight units can only provide limited accommodation options in the landscape of huge demand.</p>
<p>WAYSS Women's Services has 110 Transitional Housing Management (THM) properties which provide women and children with short to medium term housing. While in the tenancy, a client is case managed until safe, affordable long term housing options are achieved.</p>	<p>Clients become 'stuck' in THM due to the length of time that it can take to secure public housing or alternative appropriate affordable and safe long-term housing.</p> <p>Lack of enough public housing means that the wait time can be extensive.</p>
<p>WAYSS has five WAYSS Owned Properties which have been provided by philanthropic funding. These properties are designated for family violence clients who for various reasons are not eligible for public housing. These tenancies are long-term.</p>	

<p>DHHS Housing strategy that tiers public housing applications for family violence clients provides women and children with access to public housing.</p>	<p>Not enough public housing.</p>
<p>The use of Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) funding to enable women to establish a new tenancy. Brokerage funds used and paid directly to the Real Estate agent allow the client to purchase white goods and other household material she would otherwise be unable to afford.</p>	<p>Recent decreases in PRAP funding have decreased the number of women who can be assisted by this extremely useful program.</p>
<p>The use of Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) funding to enable women to establish new tenancies (rent in advance) or save existing tenancies (rental arrears) is a valuable tool to prevent homelessness.</p>	<p>Limited and/or /insufficient funding can cause this option to be unavailable or limited in the amount.</p>
<p>A Place to Call Home (APTCH) properties being offered by DHHS Housing is a positive initiative which allows to family to remain in the short term accommodation property and this tenancy is transferred into an ongoing public housing tenancy.</p> <p>This removes the need for the family to relocate, yet again with no subsequent loss of friends, schools or sporting clubs.</p>	<p>Limited numbers of this type of property are available,</p>

9.3 Specialist Family Violence Services

Specialist family violence services provide initial assessment, risk assessment, safety planning, court support, FaxBack and family violence outreach services to a vast number of women Victoria wide. It is essential that persons experiencing family violence have access to a specialised family violence worker due to the often high risk, multi-faceted and complex nature of family violence and the need for skilled, experienced and insightful staff who can provide the highest level of support and options to their clients.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>Provision of family violence specific case management individualised to meet the presenting and ongoing support needs of the women and children.</p> <p>Although waiting lists for support occur and prioritisation of clients to fill limited support vacancies is a necessity due to funding, case management allows women to receive options, information and support to negotiate the labyrinth of the police, legal, physical, financial and safety aspects of family violence.</p> <p>Women are often afraid/reluctant to apply for an Intervention Order, working through these barriers with the woman is very important as Intervention Orders are the first step in ensuring safety for the client and children. It also sends a clear message to the perpetrator that his behaviour is against the law and will no longer be tolerated.</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge by women that such services exist.</p> <p>Lack of appreciation by some services regarding the need for specialist assessment with family violence.</p> <p>Lack of capacity for family violence services to manage demand due to demand frequently exceeding the capacity of the service to meet all needs.</p>

9.4 Accompanying Children

According to Victoria Police LEAP statistics (Prevalence of Family Violence Section 3.1) the presence of children at family violence incidents increased by 62% in the 2009-2014 period. This figure highlights the continuous need for focus on the effects of family violence on children and on measures to decrease this incidence and to address the impact. Children who experience traumatic events early in life often develop social, emotional, health and behavioural problems as adolescents and adults. This is especially the case when they have experienced complex trauma, involving ongoing incidents across time that may impact significantly on normal developmental progress. Children experiencing homelessness as a result of family violence fall into this category as children have a higher level of developmental delay (Sherman & Redlener, 2003)

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>The use of dedicated Children’s Case Workers to address the trauma and disruption of family violence and homelessness in relation to growth and development and to identify and support children with their immediate needs.</p> <p>WAYSS has two dedicated Children’s Case Workers who provide individualised case management for a comparatively small number of the children whose mother is supported by a WAYSS family violence program.</p>	<p>This strategy does not have the capacity to support a large number of the children experiencing family violence who are linked to WAYSS services.</p>
<p>Provision of access for children to the Animal Assisted Education and Therapy Groups that WAYSS runs weekly. One group caters to children who are case managed in Family Violence Outreach, and the second group caters to mothers and their children who are residing at SWISS.</p> <p>Participation in this program has been shown to help mitigate the effects of trauma caused by family violence and homelessness.</p>	<p>There is more demand for groups than funding allows and many children simply miss out.</p> <p>Currently only two service sites have access to the groups.</p> <p>Currently dependent on WAYSS funding and philanthropic support to maintain these groups.</p>
<p>Accompanying young people may be referred to WAYSS Youth programs such as Emergency Youth Accommodation (EYA), Youth Housing Program which provides some THM accommodation, and Step Ahead which support young people to move into independent living.</p>	<p>Demand exceeds capacity.</p>

9.5 Integrated Family Violence Service

The integration of WAYSS Family Violence Service with other key stakeholders has continued to be strengthened through collaborative and partnership work, with closer relationships now existing between police, courts, family violence services and other organisations. This integration will continue to evolve and the positive outcomes for both clients and the organisations will continue to foster this.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
Increasing collaboration between family violence partnership organisations leading to more positive outcomes for women and children. This has been aided by the Integrated Family Violence Network and Regional Integration Coordinator.	Decreased integration can result with some agencies having a less integrated approach due to perceived competition for funding and resources. Some non-specialised family violence services have not joined this network were unaware of its existence.
<p>Gaining clarity around the roles, limitations and objectives of various organisations and the options and support on offer is assisting to ensure ongoing safety and wellbeing for clients.</p> <p>This can be achieved via training and networking between agencies and the building of respectful relationships.</p>	Decreasing training and networking opportunities due to lack of staff and funding can affect the information sharing and knowledge gained by individual workers.

9.6 Police Issues

The relationship between Victoria Police and WAYSS Family Violence services has developed over many years. Factors assisting this process include the Victoria Police Code of Conduct, the Memorandum of Understanding with WAYSS and the ongoing direct interaction between Women's Services and Victoria Police officers.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
The introduction and expansion of Safety Notices and Intervention Orders due to changes in relevant legislation (Family Violence Protection Act 2008).	When some police officers do not take seriously women's perspective this may result in either no Safety Notice/Intervention Order or the woman being advised to apply for her own Intervention Order.
<p>The collaboration between the Victoria Police Family Violence Units and family violence support services can provide positive outcomes for clients and improved relationships between services.</p> <p>This is an area for continuing development by both parties.</p>	<p>In the past WAYSS Family Violence Crisis Service was co-located after hours at various police stations within the region. (Narre Warren, Endeavour Hills and Cranbourne).</p> <p>While on duty on any given weekend at a police station listening to the police radio,</p>

<p>The collaboration between the Victoria Police Family Violence Units and family violence support services can provide positive outcomes for clients and improved relationships between services.</p> <p>This is an area for continuing development by both parties.</p>	<p>In the past WAYSS Family Violence Crisis Service was co-located after hours at various police stations within the region. (Narre Warren, Endeavour Hills and Cranbourne).</p> <p>While on duty on any given weekend at a police station listening to the police radio, a multitude of calls for family violence would be heard. Workers and police had the opportunity to respond collaboratively, however this was ultimately discontinued due WAYSS concern about risk to staff.</p>
<p>The FaxBack programs provides an effective mechanism for police to supply details of family violence incidents to both men's and women's programs via the L17 form to enable clients to be contacted by services and offered services.</p>	<p>Police can be understaffed and undermanned and the pressure that occurs for them to complete paperwork in a timely manner is high. Police need more internal funding and support to maintain this connective working relationship.</p>
<p>The existence of Family Violence Unit within Police Stations.</p> <p>Having police officers specialised in the area has made a difference for many victims that contact the police to report incidents.</p>	<p>Increased liaison between Family Violence Units and specialist family violence services.</p>

9.7 Legal and Court Issues

Legal and Court issues can be very anxiety provoking for clients. A more integrated service system is addressing issues arising and many improvements have been made such as increased security and better relationships. Many gaps are identified within this area but acknowledgement is needed for the ongoing efforts of court staff and Magistrates to improve safety and wellbeing for women and children.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>Court Network is an established supportive and compassionate service which assists clients when workers cannot be present in court due to workload demand and other conflicting client responsibilities.</p>	<p>Excessive numbers of women seeking Intervention Orders on a given day can overwhelm the capacity of the Court Network staff leading to no support for some people.</p>
<p>Increased Court security is assisting women to feel safer within the confines of the Magistrates Courts.</p>	<p>Despite increased security perpetrators still manage to intimidate women in the Court waiting room in subtle but effective ways. Understanding of the dynamics of this and provision of separate waiting areas would be a great advantage.</p>

<p>The use of the security rooms to enable the client to withdraw from close proximity to the Respondent when individual situations dictate this.</p>	<p>Limited access to security rooms can lead to them not being available when needed and client enduring close proximity to perpetrator and his family/friends.</p>
<p>Changing attitudes of many Magistrates who support family violence initiatives and clearly are aware of family violence dynamics and the subtleties involved.</p>	<p>Some Magistrates display an attitude which is not consistent with supporting women respectfully throughout the Court experience and outcomes depend on individual Magistrate's views and decisions.</p>
<p>Provision of court support by specialist family violence workers can assist the woman significantly to negotiate the Court staff, security, transport to Court, Duty solicitors, Respondent solicitors.</p> <p>In addition they fulfill an important role in explaining to an AFM how to make an Intervention Order 'work' i.e. the need to keep a diary, record and report every breach to police.</p>	<p>Lacking of funding leading to staff shortages can result in some women having to attend Court unaccompanied due to staff not being available. Although a detailed explanation is provided to the client about what to expect and what may happen at Court it is a poor substitute for an experienced advocate being present.</p>

9.8 Funding

Funding is one of the major limiting factors when considering what can be done to assist this client group.

Creative use of existing funding and continued advocacy to increase funding is an ongoing commitment by WAYSS on behalf of their client group.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>Having access to client brokerage funds to provide for client and children needs.</p> <p>WAYSS is a compassionate, ethical employer who channels all available monies to client brokerage instead of marketing, branding and public relations. This is appreciated by the staff.</p>	<p>Decreasing funding has caused a decrease in the availability of brokerage funds overall. i.e. Safe at Home funding and Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP).</p> <p>Competition for funding is spirited and programs offering brokerage are overwhelmed with demand.</p> <p>Inability to access brokerage funding due to lowered limits and closure of programs is impacting on organisations and clients. This is particularly evident in the funding cuts to material aid services, legal services and financial counselling services.</p>

9.9 Financial

Financial issues arising for the family as a result of family violence can range from minor to extremely serious.

Financial abuse is common with some women not knowing how to manage finances due to strict control while other women are seriously disadvantaged by the loss of the second income on rent/mortgage payments, school fees and other costs. Women are often unaware of the families financial state.

Many will access services for the first time and becoming reliant on ‘charity’ is a step that many women cannot take due to pride and/or embarrassment.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
Adequate safe access to Centrelink services via presence of Centrelink Community Liaison worker at a WAYSS office ensures vulnerable women can attend to income and benefit queries without physically going to Centrelink and being seen or approached.	Time available for this service does not always suit client responsibilities or worker capacity to facilitate.

9.10 Emotional and Psychological

Emotional and Psychological issues for persons who have experienced family violence can range from anxiety and depression, to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or suicidal ideation. The traumatic effects of family violence on women and children will depend on the nature, frequency and duration of the violence as well as other factors such as resilience, vulnerability, presence of inter-generational violence and others.

Appropriately trained, family violence specific mental health practitioners are required to provide optimum timely support for our most vulnerable women and children.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
Access to counselling within a short time frame with partner agency South East Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) providing crisis appointments.	A crisis appointment is a ‘one-off’ event which leads to ongoing counselling depending on the waiting list. Waiting lists can be long and short term measures are not available.
Community based programs that work on self-esteem and de-stigmatise family violence in a group setting. Bringing it into the open by helping people identify the signs of abusive and negative relationships.	Programs such as ‘Taking Charge’ are useful but availability is limited and course is not culturally specific.

Access to psychological counselling through GP's Mental Health Case Planning provides women and children with up to 10 sessions and is cost-free.	Women reluctant to use this pathway through fear that it categorises them as having mental health issues.
Psychologist on site at SWISS provides women and children with immediate counselling in a non-threatening and very welcoming, safe and secure environment.	Lack of funding to implement this as a permanent service.

9.11 Education

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
Community education is increasing as a result of media coverage and recent family violence related fatalities.	WAYSS staff are frequently asked to provide training, public speaking, participation in forums and information sharing of their expertise and experience. This is provided as much as is possible but as there is no funding component for this it must be carefully time managed to ensure that it does not take time away from clients work.
White Ribbon Day is a great initiative to draw attention to violence against women and enable men to take responsibility for their attitudes and behaviours.	Consistent yearlong commitment is needed from men to end family violence.

9.12 Data and Privacy

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
Transition to Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP) computer based case management tool has streamlined information storage and retrieval within WAYSS and helps to increase safety and wellbeing by all appropriate programs being able to access details of client in common.	<p>Lack of funding for additional staff has meant that the administrative burden of this system has eroded the face to face contact hours available to workers supporting family violence clients.</p> <p>A significant oversight is that this program was developed with no capacity to record L17 police referrals.</p> <p>Staff regularly raise the issue of the increasing amount of documentation required for professional practice and how this change in priority is impacting on themselves and clients.</p>

9.13 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

CALD clients have specific vulnerabilities which can increase the ramifications of reporting and acting upon family violence incidents. Income, community, religion and immigration all interact to add complexity to an already complex situation.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
Access to appropriate language interpreters as required for assessment, safety planning, court and ongoing case management needs.	<p>Inappropriately trained family violence interpreters can result in the interpreter giving the client a personal view which may not be consistent with the law.</p> <p>Although female interpreters are requested they are not always available and male interpreters can be more inclined to give advice or instruction to the client of a personal or religious nature.</p>
Access to interpreting and translating using an iPad or portable tablet. This has been introduced into WAYSS office locations and provides staff with the ability to take it into an interview when an interpreter cannot be sourced.	Whilst it facilitates communication it is an expensive option which is unfunded.
Ability to access multi-cultural family violence specific services for immigration issues.	Limited resources.

9.14 Disability

Women and girls with disabilities have been cited by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) as being twice as likely as their non-disabled counterparts to experience violence.

Adequate provision needs to be made to enable appropriately modified offices, accommodation and services to ensure this group of vulnerable individuals is assured of safety and wellbeing.

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
The ability to access (when vacant) the disability specific unit at WAYSS SWISS facility.	Insufficient vacancies for disabled clients.
The Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative provides short term funding over a 12 week period for clients who require immediate disability support.	Lack of information and eligibility guidelines and restrictions of this program limit access to it.

<p>Supporting women with physical disabilities when they are looking for private rental accommodation and other suitable housing options is entrenched in good practice case management model with WAYSS. Workers are really informed and strategic when it comes to advocating for clients rights in this area, i.e. smoke detector and alarm needed in a property for a deaf client.</p>	<p>It is almost impossible to find suitable private rental accommodation for women with a physical disability that requires any modifications to her living environment. Particularly if a woman is wheelchair bound, finding a place to live that even has a bathroom she can get into takes days and days getting to view properties. For women who don't have support to do this, like a worker or friend or family support, it really cannot be achieved.</p>
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9.15 Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>ATSI funding component is integrated into client support and case management, and THM program in WAYSS Women's Services. Referrals are made via all referral pathways into those services, including self-referral.</p>	<p>Complex kinship networks may prevent full engagement. Loyalty to family and mistrust of established mainstream services can hold maintaining engagement back.</p>
<p>WAYSS actively works on building and improving networks and relationships with Indigenous Services and agencies and ensures that there is an enduring commitment that our staff provides culturally appropriate support to ATSI clients. This is achieved through training and participation in ATSI activities at local level, e.g. NAIDOC, VACCA Family Days.</p>	<p>Clients who don't want to identify as ATSI and therefore don't want to link into Indigenous services. Client does not want to go to police or get an Intervention Order and this impedes developing a Safety Plan. Engagement may be brief, so client's immediate needs are met but they disengage and contact is lost.</p>
<p>WAYSS practice embraces the Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework. Staff participate as members of Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group and Indigenous Case Management Network.</p>	<p>Direct client support services are not funded for community development and participating in multiple organisational meetings can put staff under strain.</p>

9.16 Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex (GLBTI)

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>WAYSS ensures that our service environment promote equity and access for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex persons. We have GLBTI specific information displayed and available to welcome GLBTI clients.</p>	<p>Despite widespread knowledge in the mainstream community of the family violence services that we provide, some GLBTI community members may be reluctant to engage.</p>

9.17 Animal and Pet Abuse

PROMISING AND SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY AND WELLBEING	HOW STRATEGIES FAIL
<p>SWISS has been specifically designed to provide small back yards that are self-contained and safe for a family pet to accompany women and children to stay.</p>	<p>Some animals are unfortunately damaged by living with violence and have behavior problems that prevent them from staying in a crisis facility.</p>
<p>WAYSS has developed Pet Plans for SWISS and THM's. These include Risk Assessment of an animal's behaviour, evidence of health, desexing and Registration, and provision of appropriate Brokerage assistance is provided if necessary.</p>	<p>Not enough brokerage to cover all vet bills which can sometimes be very expensive.</p>

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Royal Commission into Family Violence Appendices



294/300 Thomas St, Dandenong VIC 3175

Appendix 1

WAYSS History

In response to the need for emergency youth homelessness accommodation in the late 1970's in the Westernport Region, the Westernport Youth Refuge (now Emergency Youth Accommodation) was established to provide emergency accommodation and support.

From the further identification of needs youth housing groups were established in the region with the aim of providing longer term housing options for young people, especially those requiring accommodation after leaving refuge. The region's services planned and developed a regional response to youth accommodation needs and from the early 1980's until 1990, the Westernport Regional Youth Housing Group operated as the voice for youth housing services in the region. The organisation operated with strong ties to the Westernport Regional Housing Council as provider of Crisis and Emergency Housing in the South East Growth Corridor.

During the 1980's there was considerable growth in the development of services and the entire Westernport Region had youth housing services in place by 1990. The Westernport Regional Housing Council continued to develop emergency housing and housing information services with funding from Office of Housing in both the growth corridor and Frankston/Mornington Peninsula sub regions.

This included the provision of domestic violence "safe houses" managed under a unique protocol developed with the Supported Accommodation & Assistance Program (SAAP) Domestic Violence Outreach Services in the region. Following the Victorian Review of the SAAP, youth accommodation services in the Westernport area undertook a comprehensive consultation process to develop a new service that would meet the changing needs of SAAP, retain the strong community base that had been established over the preceding ten years, and provide a quality service to young homeless people.

As a result, Westernport Accommodation & Youth Support Services was developed and incorporated in January 1995. Since then WAYSS has continued to be active in the development and implementation of innovative service models to address the issues of homelessness. In early 1996 the Private Rental Access Program was funded by the Office of Youth Affairs to assist young people access the private rental market.

WAYSS has undergone further transformation with the restructure of Community Housing and the funding of the Transitional Housing Management Program. Transitional housing services are now provided to families, women and children escaping domestic violence and single adults as well as young people and those overcoming a drug dependency. The Regional Housing Council ceased operation and transferred direct service operations to WAYSS in 1997.

The organisation migrated from an incorporated association to a company limited by guarantee in September 1997 and became WAYSS Limited. A corporate governance model was adopted and the organisation is governed by a Board of Directors with day to day management by the Chief Executive Officer.

In July 1998 a voluntary transfer of auspice from Women's Health in the South East (WHISE) of the SAAP funded South East Women's Domestic Violence Outreach Service (SEWDVOS) took place. This service is now well established with accessible offices across the service catchment.

Funding was also received to establish a Children's Services Worker within the outreach service.

Late in 1998 discussions commenced with the YWCA of Dandenong and Westernport in relation to the transfer of the SAAP funded Women's Outreach Program. This received approval and was formally transferred on the 1st of April 1999.

Discussions with Department of Human Services and Department of Justice commenced in 2001 in relation to the establishment of a Drug Court Homelessness Assistance Program. Supporting participants in the newly established Drug Court who as a result of chronic homelessness, would not otherwise be eligible to participate in this innovative program, was the major objective. This program was established with a staff of four supporting up to 30 individuals on drug treatment orders and their accompanying family members.

The decision of a local Women's Refuge to relinquish funding resulted in the establishment of an interim crisis service for women and children escaping family violence. Commencing in December 2002 an interim service was initiated. This service was subsequently developed Southern Women's Integrated Support Service (SWISS).

In March 2003 grants were made from the Community Support Fund for a three year project aimed at providing assistance by way of rental subsidies for women and children escaping family violence. In early 2007 the Private Rental Access Program underwent redevelopment to target women experiencing family violence, young people and clients with mental health issues to assist with access to the private rental market.

As a result of the redevelopment by the State government of Family Violence Services which commenced in 2004 there was considerable reorganisation of the services provided. The strong focus of the organisation on meeting the needs of women and children escaping family violence saw the development of formal protocols with Victoria Police.

The establishment of the first Fax Back program to respond and provide early intervention to victims further enhanced the already formalised Police links to the Family Violence Crisis Service.

Long term housing options for single people had been a major problem in the organisation's catchment. The development of a rooming house program and the acquisition of facilities in Frankston and Dandenong was supported by the Department of Human Services. A successful submission was made by WAYSS Limited for the management of these properties.

The need to secure office accommodation in the Cardinia Shire to meet the demands of the rapidly growing community in the South East Growth Corridor had long been a major issue. In early 2005 a property was purchased opposite the Pakenham police station and has now been redeveloped to house a range of services. A lengthy redevelopment process which required the rezoning of the property was completed mid 2006.

In late 2005 WAYSS was successful in a submission to Department of Human Services - Office of Housing to provide a Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program to tenants of public and community housing. This program commenced implementation in December 2005.

As a response to the further integration of Family Violence Services a partnership was developed in late 2005 with Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services, South East Centre Against Sexual Assault (SECASA) and Windermere Child & Family Services. This partnership was successful in submission for the delivery of increased services to victims of Family Violence.

In August 2006 WAYSS was funded to provide the Common Homelessness Access Point. This program is a change to the sector which has brought together the primary services for homeless people, the services being WAYSS, Peninsula Youth and Family Services, Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Windermere and Hanover. WAYSS and Peninsula Youth and Family Services operate the Common Homelessness Access Points during business hours in Dandenong and Frankston. Hanover operates the out of business hours homelessness response. These access points are now known as Front Doors.

In early 2007 WAYSS was successful in submitting for funding under the Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2. To submit for this funding WAYSS formed partnerships with Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Open Family Australia and Peninsula Youth and Family Services, titled Creating Connections. For WAYSS the funding resulted in specialist youth intake, assessment and referral workers, youth housing placement, and linking young people to the private rental market.

In 2008 WAYSS achieved Registration as a housing provider and Accreditation as a homelessness assistance service.

In 2008 WAYSS received funding for the Step Ahead Program which is an intensive case management program to support young people exiting crisis residential accommodation. In 2010 the Step Ahead Program moved into a refurbished accommodation model in Berwick. Following ongoing issues with the location of the Step Ahead facility WAYSS met with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and a joint decision to move the program to a dispersed model being made in February 2012.

In mid 2009, the Front Door became the Opening Doors Framework. This saw WAYSS provision of Housing Services and Common Homelessness Access Point combine to become Initial Assessment and Planning workers. WAYSS officially renamed the program Homelessness Services.

Capital works began in April 2010 to build a family violence facility in Doveton known as Southern Women's Integrated Support Services (SWISS). The complex includes a support/office/counselling facility and eight individual units for accommodating women and children who are escaping family violence. In 2011 funding was received for establishment and a surety from DHS that recurrent funding would be increased to enable WAYSS

to operate a 24/7 model. WAYSS engaged consultants with the establishment money to produce a report on the functions of SWISS, a service model, linkages and partnership implication and a financial model for its operations.

In 2010 WAYSS received new funding for family violence “Safe at Home” workers that enabled WAYSS to take a more proactive early intervention approach to women and children experiencing family violence. The Safe at Home program operates in close co-operation with Victoria Police and the Justice System.

In April 2010 the submission to provide Accommodation Options for Families was successful. Accommodation options for families (AOF) began as an initiative released from the Rooming House Taskforce. WAYSS was provided funding to appoint two workers to assist families who are at risk of living in sub-standard rooming houses to access private rental.

The Emergency Youth Accommodation facility rebuilding under “Nation Building” was completed in January 2011. The staff moved from their temporary location at Step Ahead to the new facility and the service began taking clients. The new facility provides 10 bed crisis accommodation for young people. The staffing arrangements for the facility have been upgraded to include a Youth Intervention and Assessment worker and Youth Outreach Case Worker. Young people accommodated by the facility have access to brokerage monies for flexible support packages

During 2010/2011 WAYSS undertook a reorganisation of its Management structure. The main reasons for the reorganisation were the growth in WAYSS programs including the new facilities Southern Women’s Integrated Support Service -SWISS & EYA.

In July 2011 the Southern Women’s Integrated Support Services (SWISS) building was completed. In August staff were located to SWISS and commenced working with clients.

During late 2011 and mid 2012 WAYSS undertook considerable office relocation in the outer south. The relocations began with the decision to move WAYSS homelessness programs from Peninsula Youth & Family Services in Frankston to a temporary location in the Integrated Care Centre in Cranbourne. This precipitated the relocation of WAYSS Cranbourne programs to the Cranbourne Information and Support Service a move that have been in planning for some time. A search for a permanent Frankston office began and resulted in the purchase of shop-frontage in Fairway Street. The new facility is large enough to accommodate WAYSS IA&P and SHASP programs as well as on site Management.

In October 2011 WAYSS undertook its second accreditation review. This resulted in successful reaccreditation of the organisation.

The WAYSS office facilities in Narre Warren had been identified as inadequate for some time. Suitable premises were located in Berwick and following refurbishment the WAYSS office in Narre Warren was closed and staff were relocated to Berwick in June 2012.

Over 2012/2013 funding for the Social Housing Advocacy & Support Program was cut by 40%. The SHASP program no longer can provide advocacy, community facilities management and tenant participation services. The program was restructured to provide case managed support for at risk tenancies in public housing.

In May 2013 WAYSS received notification that the Accommodation Options for Families program has been funded for a further 4 years.

In 2013 WAYSS received a sizable donation from the Peter and Lyndy White Foundation. This donation was in the form of funds to purchase five properties in WAYSS catchment. The terms of the donation stipulate that WAYSS will retain the properties for homelessness accommodation for the life of the organisation.

Appendix 2

WAYSS Mission, Vision & Objectives

WAYSS Mission

It is WAYSS core purpose to assist individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to improve their life circumstances by providing access to stable, affordable and safe accommodation. WAYSS exists to serve those in the community who are experiencing difficulties by offering support and advocacy to alleviate homelessness and re-establish connections and links in the community. WAYSS will provide a voice for awareness of homelessness issues and lobby for any structural change required to address homelessness.

WAYSS Vision

WAYSS is committed to the principles of social justice and human rights. WAYSS will provide clients with services that uphold their rights, promotes choice, equality, dignity and respect in a manner that is non-discriminatory, fair and honest.

WAYSS Objectives

WAYSS will measure the success of its work by:

1. Maintaining its focus on clients by monitoring client outcomes and feedback, and aiming to reduce the rate of recidivism.
2. Being an employer of choice demonstrated through WAYSS low staff turnover and meeting staff needs through training, conditions of employment and participation in how our services are delivered.
3. Ongoing working relationships and partnerships with other agencies that view WAYSS as outcome and client focused, reliable, flexible, honest and open.
4. Recognition of WAYSS as an expert and leader in homelessness issues by our opinion being sought by the community and government. WAYSS will be invited to participate in government planning and redevelopment of the sector. WAYSS will be the preferred organisation for new funding and as a result will have successful submission outcomes.
5. Having a reputation for fairness and honesty, clear accountability to the client, the government and the community
6. The ability of WAYSS to present information and data to effect structural and social change at multiple levels within the community and government.
7. Ensuring that complaints are taken seriously and followed up using fair and just processes. WAYSS will use complaints as a learning tool.
8. Continually improving and evaluating ourselves through self-assessment, monitoring and review, to pursue a learning environment where WAYSS strives for the highest quality service delivery.

Appendix 3

WAYSS Homelessness Programs

WAYSS Homelessness Services offers the following programs:

- **ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES** – The program is focused on families with children residing in unsafe and illegal rooming houses. Families are assessed through the Initial, Assessment and Planning staff and referred through to the program. Accommodation options for families' clients are case managed from the rooming house into the private rental market. The program comes with an amount of brokerage to assist the case management focus.
- **DRUG COURT HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (DCHAP)** – provides homelessness support services to clients on a Drug Treatment Order. Case Management is provided on a range of issues contributing to homelessness and is exclusively attached to clients accommodated in transitional Housing.
- **EMERGENCY YOUTH ACCOMMODATION SERVICE (EYA)** - is a ten bed 24 hour crisis accommodation service. The service targets young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years who are homeless with priority given to young people under 21. Generally, young people stay for up to six weeks. EYA has a Youth Intervention and Assessment Worker who provides services to all Youth refuges in the Southern Region to divert young people from entering the homelessness service system. EYA also has a Youth Outreach Case Worker who provides support to young people exiting EYA in all types of accommodation and EYA has access to brokerage for flexible support packages.
- **OUTER SOUTH EAST ROOMING HOUSE PROGRAM** - provides long term rooming house accommodation to single adults in the Frankston and Dandenong areas. Residents must meet the Office of Housing eligibility criteria for public housing and referrals will be prioritized for individuals with strong links to the local area.
- **PRIVATE RENTAL ACCESS PROGRAM** - provides services to three target groups, women who have experienced family violence, young people and people with a mental illness, to access the private rental market.
- **PROPERTY SERVICES** - is based in Dandenong and provides all property and tenancy management functions. Currently this service is staffed by experienced tenancy workers. In excess of 360 transitional properties and two Rooming Houses across the Cardinia, Casey, Mornington Peninsula, Frankston and Dandenong areas are currently managed by WAYSS.
- **SOCIAL HOUSING ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT PROGRAM (SHASP)** - is located in Dandenong and Frankston and provides services to public housing tenants in the Cardinia, Casey, Greater Dandenong, Frankston and Mornington Peninsula service catchment. The program provides case managed support to Office of Housing tenants. Support is also provided to indigenous tenants to resolve factors placing their tenancy at risk.
- **STEP AHEAD PROGRAM** - Case Workers provide support to clients aged 17 to 21 living in Step Ahead accommodation which operates on an extended hours model. Each client is intensively case managed and engaged in a Living and Life Skills program tailored to their needs.
- **YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES** - incorporates youth intake, assessment and referral, youth housing placement and case managed youth support. Services are provided to young people aged 16 to 25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Appendix 4**ACRONYMS LIST**

AAET	Animal Assisted Education Therapy (AAET Group)
AFM	Affected Family Member
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AOF	Accommodation Options for Families
APTCH	A Place To Call Home
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CP	Child Protection
DCHAP	Drug Court Homelessness Assistance Program
DHHS	Department Of Health and Human Services
DHHS Housing	Department Of Health and Human Services Housing
EYA	Emergency Youth Accommodation
FVSN	Family Violence Safety Notice
FVO	Family Violence Outreach Program
GLBTI	Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex
HEF	Housing Establishment Fund
IAP	Initial Assessment and Planning
IVO	Intervention Order
PRAP	Private Rental Access Program
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAH	Safe At Home
SHASP	Social Housing and Advocacy Support Program
SHIP	Specialist Homelessness Information Platform
THM	Transitional Housing Management
VICPOL	Victoria Police
WOP	Women's Outreach Program
YHP	Youth Housing Program

Appendix 5

“It Takes Me A Little Longer To Get Angry Now”

ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION AND THERAPY GROUP



“It takes me a little longer to get angry now”

ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION AND THERAPY GROUP

A Preliminary Evaluation



Acknowledgements

The researcher is grateful to the children and young people who agreed to participate in this evaluation and who shared their views and experiences of the program openly. We are also indebted to the mothers who supported this evaluation. Some of them travelled a long way to bring their children to the research interview venue.

A critical component of the group is the animals. They are the core of the program and this report acknowledges them unequivocally. So too, the work of their owner and carer, Nerys Lewis from Empathy Education & Training (EE&T), who leads and guides the group work, and ensures the welfare, safety, good health, and the good natures of the animals.

This research is a collaboration between WAYSS, EE&T and Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia (CAPRA) Monash University.

WAYSS Board are particularly indebted to Amanda Graham for her persistence and untiring efforts in advocating for the implementation and evaluation of this unique program for children. Without her, her dedicated staff and close collaboration with Nerys Lewis, the program and evaluation would not have occurred.

A Reference Group comprising Amanda Graham and Bernadette Riddle of WAYSS, Nerys Lewis of EE&T, and Neerosh Mudaly of CAPRA oversaw this preliminary evaluation. This group was invaluable in supporting and guiding the evaluation process. The contribution of Deepa Dhital, research assistant, who assisted with the analysis of the data is also acknowledged. A special thank you to Professor Chris Goddard for his advice, support and encouragement throughout the evaluation.

We are grateful to the RSPCA(Vic) for their generosity in allowing the group to be held on one of the grounds of its animal shelters. We especially recognise the role of their staff whose care and work with abused and abandoned animals promote children's ability to interact and connect with the animals and their own healing. We are grateful to the many others who have made significant contributions to the group and the children over the years, especially Angela, Bern, Brielle, Jackie, Jessie, Karen, Leah, Maria, Martine, Monica, Nerys, Paige and Sabina.

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Index of Abbreviations

AAET	Animal Assisted Education & Therapy.
ACF	Australian Childhood Foundation.
CAPRA	Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia.
DHS	Department of Human Services.
EE&T	Empathy Education & Training.
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
WAYSS Ltd	Housing and support agency that provides assistance to women and children experiencing homelessness as a result of violence.
THM	Transitional Housing Management.

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Executive Summary

Children who experience traumatic events early in life, particularly complex trauma involving ongoing incidents of abuse and violence, often develop social, emotional, health and behavioural problems as adolescents and adults. Children experiencing homelessness as a result of family violence fall into this category. Recent studies in neuroscience have noted that such experiences may damage a child's developing brain (Perry, 2009).

Traditional models of therapy appear to be ineffective in helping children recover from such trauma (Perry and Hambrick, 2008). Children experiencing homelessness have additional barriers in accessing and responding to healing interventions because they are often deprived of key elements of therapeutic success – safety, security, and stability.

The Animal Assisted Education and Therapy group (AAET) was implemented by WAYSS in 2005 in response to the needs of children accessing WAYSS services. The AAET group, which is fully funded by WAYSS, was established to offer therapeutic intervention to children residing in transitional housing, and to provide a continuity of care that is often difficult for children accompanying a parent in a homelessness service to access. Barriers to accessible services for children result from Supported Assistance and Accommodation Program (SAAP) services that are not designed to meet the specific needs of children (Kirkman, Keys, Turner & Bodzak, 2009). It is also due to the fact that children accompanying parents in SAAP services are not recognised as clients in their own right (Wright-Howie, 2006). WAYSS regards the accompanying children as clients in their own right. The current group model is unique to WAYSS as it has been developed using a child-centred holistic approach in which the child receives ongoing case management support. WAYSS contracts the group sessions to Empathy Education & Training (EE&T), a consultancy that designs and delivers animal assisted therapy programs for children.

From anecdotal evidence, the children who attended the group showed dramatic improvement in many areas of their lives. WAYSS commissioned this pilot evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the model of the group for children and young people affected by homelessness and family violence. WAYSS sought feedback from children and young people who had attended the group, using semi-structured interviews to hear their views of their experiences of the group.

The research highlighted the significance of the group. Overwhelmingly, the research participants expressed enjoyment of the group. Prior to attending the group, many described themselves as angry, scared or quiet and shy. After the group, they talked about gaining confidence, becoming independent and more sociable. Most significant was the knowledge and insight they had gained about animals and the empathy they experienced in comforting scared, frightened animals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONT'D

Many also demonstrated a capacity to transfer learned empathy into other social and familial relationships, and into more socially acceptable behaviours elsewhere. The group appears to have helped them reconnect with peers and society giving them the opportunity to resume more beneficial development.

As a pilot evaluation, this research endorsed the anecdotal evidence obtained by WAYSS on the value and importance of this innovative therapeutic program for homeless children traumatised by family violence. It points to the need for more rigorous and thorough evaluation using measures to assess changes in these children's trauma symptoms, their ability to regulate their emotions and their behavioural responses to anger and fear. Further research is being planned.

The project has the potential to contribute internationally to innovative therapeutic responses to children who have been affected by abuse, violence and homelessness.

■ ■ ■

Introduction

The Animal Assisted Education and Therapy (AAET) group is run by WAYSS Ltd, who contract the group sessions to Empathy Education & Training (EE&T), the consultancy company that designs and delivers the fundamental structure of the group sessions. The group is aimed at children who are living in Transitional Housing Management (THM) accommodation/safe housing with their mothers after fleeing domestic violence. The first condition of recovery from violence and abuse is safety (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). While living in this accommodation, the parent of the child receives case management support from a WAYSS caseworker, who has a primary role to assist the family into long-term, safe and secure housing. For the duration of this support period, the child is case managed by the WAYSS Children's Caseworker who is an active and integral practitioner in the AAET group model.

CAPRA was asked to evaluate the AAET group. CAPRA commenced this evaluation by consulting with the children and young people who had attended the group for various periods of time since the group began. This was a preliminary evaluation in order to develop a full scale evaluation. Particular attention was given to ensuring, as far as possible, that no harm was done to the children during the course of the evaluation.

Theoretical Background

Children who experience traumatic events early in life often develop social, emotional, health and behavioural problems as adolescents and adults. This is especially the case when they have experienced complex trauma, involving ongoing incidents across time, that may impact significantly on normal developmental progress. Children experiencing homelessness as a result of family violence fall into this category, as homeless children have a higher level of developmental delay (Sherman & Redlener, 2003). These children may become traumatised (Fuller, McGraw & Goodyear 2000). Developments in the neurobiology of trauma are now informing therapeutic interventions in trauma recovery for children. This knowledge suggests that therapeutic change comes from targeting those areas of the brain where trauma may be stored. Traditional cognitive-behavioural approaches are found to be less effective (Perry, 2006).

Family Violence

Family violence includes violent, threatening or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. This encompasses not only physical injury that may result in death, but also direct and indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, property damage, social isolation and behaviour such as stalking, which causes a person to live in fear (Bedi & Goddard, 2007; McGee, 2000). Child abuse and family violence often co-exist, with violence sometimes being directed at children (Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Stanley & Goddard, 2002).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND CONT'D

It is also a form of psychological abuse if a child hears or witnesses violence directed towards another, even if the child is not a primary victim (Bedi & Goddard, 2007; Victoria Police, 2005).

Homelessness

A homeless person is without a conventional home and lacks most of the economic and social supports that a home normally affords. They are often disconnected from the support of relatives and friends, have few independent resources and frequently no immediate means of self support. They are in danger of falling below the poverty line, at least from time to time. A person is homeless if she or he has inadequate access to safe and secure housing (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Act, 1994).

In most cases, by the time the mother and child/children become clients of WAYSS, they have already experienced several periods of homelessness. This may include nights spent in motels, in women's refuges, temporary stay with friends or relatives, sleeping in a car, or constantly moving from place to place, including interstate. It then takes time for children to settle into this secure environment. Children often put mattresses together in one room so that they don't have to sleep alone. Sometimes they make cubbies and 'hidey holes' with blankets, doonas, pillows, toys and even food. Mothers explain that this is how they lived at home, hiding or staying in their hidey holes for hours at a time to keep safe.

Children's Experiences of Family Violence and Homelessness

Every year, thousands of children in the company of their mother become homeless and seek housing and support from homelessness and family violence agencies and services. Children in homeless families are the largest single group who seek support from the homelessness service system in Australia (Homelessness Australia Factsheet 'Homelessness and Children').

Barriers to accessible services for children result from SAAP services that are not designed to meet the specific needs of children (Kirkman, Keys, Turner & Bodzak, 2009). It is also due to the fact that children accompanying parents in SAAP services are not recognised as clients in their own right (Wright-Howie, 2006).

When women and children are forced into homelessness because of family violence, they lose more than the immediate roof over their heads. They are often taking the first steps into a poverty trap that may see them spiral into a lengthy period of homelessness, where family and social supports deteriorate and access to secure and safe long term housing is elusive. For children living with, and then fleeing from, family violence, enduring the loss of home, possessions, pets, neighbourhood, school, and friends, has powerful and resounding traumatic effects.

WAYSS Ltd

WAYSS is a registered not-for-profit community based company, providing homelessness support services; family violence support services and transitional housing for women and children, and other specialist services. WAYSS is funded to provide many of these services under the Supported Accommodation & Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP is a major part of Australia's overall response to homelessness and represents a broader social safety net designed to help people in crisis in the community. SAAP supports a diverse range of people, including parents with children accompanying them. An accompanying child is a person under 18 years who accompanies a client to a SAAP agency during a support period. (Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05: summary findings). WAYSS strives to regard an accompanying child as a client in their own right.

The Case Management support for the child's mother is a collaborative approach (between client and caseworker) aimed at empowering and working effectively with her. It aims to ensure that the needs of the family are met no matter how much those needs change while the family is engaged with the service. This strengthens the mother's capacity to be actively involved in her child's case management and subsequent participation in the AAET group.

Transitional Home Management is medium term accommodation. Through its Transitional Housing Management (THM) program and Family Violence Crisis and Outreach Programs, WAYSS accommodates hundreds of these children accompanying a parent every year. Transitional housing is bridging accommodation, aimed to be short-term, where a woman and her children can stay while she works with the caseworker to attain long-term secure and safe housing. While children know it is temporary or short-term, they adapt quickly to a real sense of safety that is provided through risk management and safety planning that is put into place as part of their mother's case management. This is a window of opportunity in terms of therapeutic intervention, as the secure accommodation and attached support allow the family to stabilise, and the child is given case management support and care.

It is from this target group that children participating in the AAET group are selected.

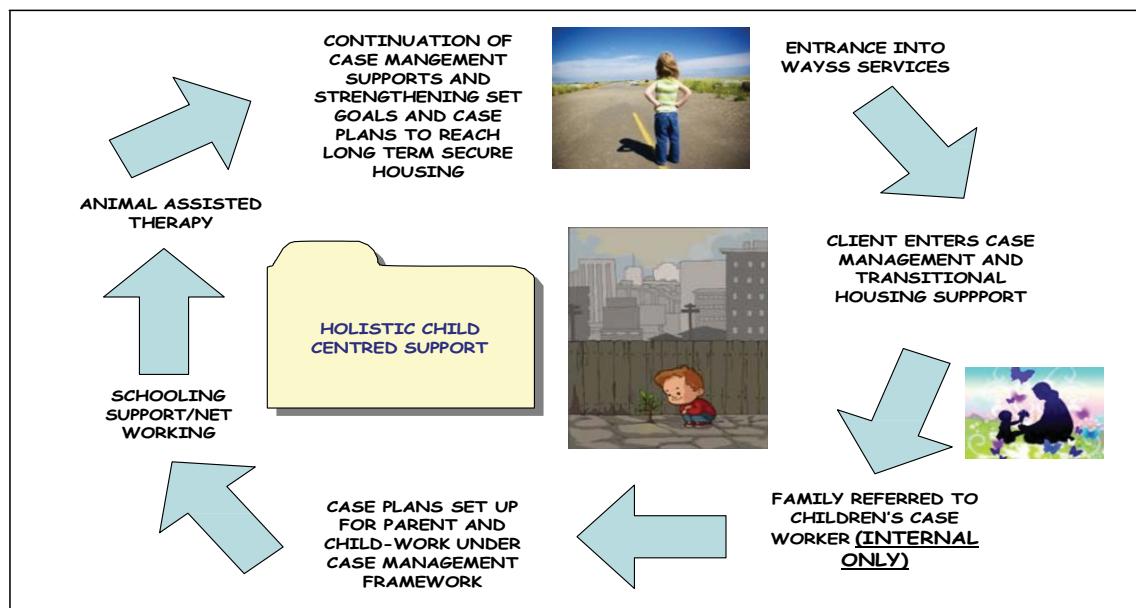
WAYSS Children's Services Case Management Model

WAYSS case workers work with clients using a case management framework, a process that is modified to suit individual client needs and the model of service delivery. Case Workers adhere to and uphold the client's rights and the basic principles underpinning case management.

The parents and the child/children are placed in Transitional Housing Management (THM short term supported) accommodation. Children are assessed as clients in their own right, within the context of the family which includes one on one direct support of children. A comprehensive collaborative case management plan is developed with the parent and the parent's caseworker. WAYSS liaises with and advocates for children with schools. Placement in the AAET Group is implemented.

WAYSS LTD CONT'D

The ongoing case management of the child by the children's caseworker is an integral assessment and planning process that identifies and considers the educational, health, cultural, social and emotional needs of each individual child.

WAYSS Children's Services Case Management Model

Empathy Education & Training

Empathy Education & Training (EE&T) is a privately run consultancy that specializes in the design and delivery of animal assisted programs for children experiencing trauma related to violence and abuse, neglect and homelessness.

Programs are designed to mitigate the effects of complex trauma on children. It uses the human animal bond to assist children to begin their participation in their healing from trauma. Interaction with calm, happy animals suggests safety in the first instance. The presence and conduct of adult leaders further strengthens the sense of safety that must be present before the children are able to move from the state of fear that has become familiar to them. The program design provides a framework of repeated activities that engage the children while offering them repeated experiences of calm and safety.

The animals are cared for by the staff who run and present the programs. The bond between program presenters and the animals is clearly demonstrated in the knowledge they have of each individual animal, and in the response of the animals to their handlers. Each animal is referred to by its name, and the participating children are invited to develop their own relationships with the animals during the course of the program.

The welfare of the animals is a priority. EE&T believe that the desired healing interaction between the children and the animals can only occur when the animals

EMPATHY EDUCATION & TRAINING CONT'D

are healthy and relaxed in the therapeutic environment. Significant effort is spent in caring for and preparing the animals for their role. This includes socializing them, familiarizing them with being transported, exposing them to the sounds of children, as well as regular health checks and proper husbandry.

The safety of the animals is paramount especially as the animals in this work are small. Children are closely supervised when handling the animals. There is a graduated process in the group program before children are allowed to interact with and handle the animals. The animals are covered by the legal and welfare requirements for inclusion in this work (see Ethical compliance).

The AAET group was designed to provide an accessible therapeutic intervention for the selected children from WAYSS. Staff from EE&T work closely with WAYSS case management staff to maximize the benefits for children selected for the program.

Animal Assisted Education and Therapy Group

WAYSS and EE&T began the partnership arrangement that is now AAET in 2005, establishing an innovative model of therapeutic intervention to address the effects of violence and trauma on homeless children. Evidence that homeless children may suffer from behavioural and psychological problems is persuasive (Sherman & Redlener, 2003).

Using small animals in a group setting, the model delivers animal assisted therapy aimed at promoting change in traumatised children. The presence of healthy, relaxed animals in the programs elicits a positive response from children, seeming to convey a sense of safety and trust that has been missing from their lives. Feeling safe is a prerequisite for moving on from trauma.

Physical contact by children with animals has been shown to have physiological impact on heart rate and blood pressure, functions that are controlled by lower brain levels, where the effects of trauma are stored. (Friedmann & Tsai, 2006).



Returning a sense of power to children is another aspect of healing for children in this situation. The small size of the animals chosen for the programs emphasizes that the children have control of all interactions.

Empowering children is one of the deliberate aims of the program, and the choice of work with the small animals is a key difference between this program and other animal assisted interventions.

Education about animal health, diet, husbandry and welfare accompany the highly valued opportunity for contact, making the package of program activities as safe and beneficial as possible to people and animals alike.

A key feature of the group is children's bonding with the animals. Through this bond, they learn to develop empathy for smaller, vulnerable beings. It also helps

ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION AND THERAPY GROUP CONT'D

them reconnect with their caring and affectionate qualities. Many children develop a strong attachment to the animals. The group is structured to promote this attachment and also prepare them for managing separation when they finish with the program.

From anecdotal evidence, the children who attended the group have shown dramatic improvement in many areas of their lives. This pilot evaluation sought to assess the effectiveness of such an animal assisted therapeutic group for children and young people affected by homelessness and family violence.

Selection of Children for AAET

Selection of the children into the AAET Group is coordinated by the children's case worker, who assesses the children in the context of their case management. This does not involve the use of a clinical framework. It is based on the scope and level of support required by the child, with high priority given to children who:

- are currently residing in WAYSS Transitional Housing Management accommodation.
- are school refusers or who have had large gaps in school attendance.
- have been unable to access or have refused any therapeutic intervention.
- have experienced violence against animals.
- have experienced displacement due to copious school and accommodation moves.

Children's presentation at entry to AAET group

When a child enters the AAET Group they display a range of trauma-based behaviours. These may include being frightened. Many children present as terrified and do not engage with adult helpers nor with their peers. Many blame themselves for the violence and loss of their home, and struggle with the loss of their possessions and pets. They have problems in school and often refuse to attend school. They are afraid of being located by their violent father or mother's partner and the possibility that their mother may be hurt, killed or not there when they get home. Many display a range of physical problems such as nervous twitching, jiggling, constant fiddling with clothes and hands, panic attacks and breathing problems. Some engage in self harming behaviours, running away, comfort eating, overeating, hoarding food or refusing to eat. Some children stop talking or cry all the time. Children often experience night fears and are unable to sleep in a bed by themselves. Many children bedwet or soil at home and/or at school. A common behaviour is aggression and anger, physically violent. These children are very difficult to engage in therapeutic relationships and services.

Description of the Group

Group sessions are run during school terms. Children are assessed and prepared for entry into the group by the WAYSS Children's Caseworker who participates in each session. The group is held on the grounds of one of Victoria's RSPCA animal

ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION AND THERAPY GROUP CONT'D

shelters, a venue that adds great depth to the program. The parallels between animals and children, two powerless groups in society, are strong. The children are transported to and from the group in a bus operated by WAYSS.

The group sessions are run by EE&T who provide the regularly participating animals and ensure that their health and welfare is given priority at all times. The animals chosen for the program are small and include guinea pigs, rabbits, rats, and sometimes, cats.



Eight to ten children attend weekly group sessions of 1.5 hours. Children engage in high levels of contact with small animals, allowing for repeated experiences of gentle, calming touch in an environment of safety. The group is intended to instill this sense of safety in the children. It also provides opportunities for the creation of positive associations with adults and animals to counter the likely damage from experiences of violence, displacement and uncertainty (Ascione, 2005).

Activities include animal handling (grooming, comforting); animal care (feeding and observation) and art and photography that complement the animal activities. The adult practitioners provide supervision, knowledge, and companionship for children and young people during the group sessions.

Aims of the Project

The pilot evaluation aimed to obtain feedback from children and young people who had attended the group on their experiences of the animal assisted therapy group sessions.

Evaluation is a critical element for sustaining child abuse prevention programs. It is also essential for ongoing quality assurance efforts (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Program evaluations are undertaken to create greater understanding and improvement, and for accountability purposes (Taylor-Powell, Steele & Douglass, 1996). Richard Gelles (2000) is scathing in his criticism of the lack of 'sound studies of the effectiveness of efforts to prevent and treat child maltreatment' (p.13). This study was part of the commitment from WAYSS to improve its responses to children attending their service and to incorporate direct feedback from them in service delivery. Feedback from service users is critical to effective service provision. What children have to say about services set up for them is essential for improving service delivery (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Kirkman, Keys, Turner & Bodzak, 2009; McGee, 2000) as they have their own perspective on what happens to them (Mullender, Hague, Imam, Kelly, Malos and Regan, 2002). Using semi-structured interviews, children's views of the impact of the intervention was sought, and matched against the objectives of WAYSS and EE&T.

AIMS OF THE PROJECT CONT'D

The chief aim of the project was to establish whether the animal assisted therapy group was effective in promoting children's recovery from the effects of living with violence and their consequent homelessness. The key questions were: how do children experience the group, what benefits do they identify from the group; had the group experience increased their sense of safety in the environments in which they functioned (home, school, extended family, friends, peer activities); what was their perception of the importance of the animals in the group; and whether their interactions with and views of animals changed since their participation in the group.

The project was intended as a preliminary investigation into the potential effectiveness of this type of intervention. An effective trauma recovery program should allow participants to achieve a more developmentally appropriate level of functioning, resume pathways to meeting developmental milestones, and to function more effectively in their daily lives.

There is little rigorous data about animal assisted interventions, though many anecdotal accounts hint at the potential importance of well designed programs. This preliminary study was intended to pave the way to linking best practice to current theory to enable the delivery of the best possible interventions and long term outcomes for the children and young people involved.

Methodology

Qualitative Method

A qualitative methodology was chosen for the evaluation. This approach allows people to tell their own stories in their own voices, promotes new realities to be discovered by interactive dialogue between researchers and participants, and prevents the need to find simple answers to complex life issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Berg, 1998). It allows for the realities of vulnerable populations whose voices have been silenced to be reflected and it examines how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others (Berg, 1998; Hudson & Nurius, 1994). Qualitative research rarely includes tables and numbers. The data is presented in the form of descriptions. The researcher interprets the data, giving them meaning by finding out how the people being studied define their situation or what it means for them (Neuman, 1997).

This approach allowed children and young people who attended the AAET group to talk about their experiences of the group in their own way. Children and young people were interviewed using the indepth interview, which is described by Minichiello et al (1990) as a conversation between the researcher and research participant with the focus on the participant's perception of self, life and experience expressed in his or her

own words. Research participants therefore had some measure of control over the research interview by way of choosing code names for themselves, deciding which topics he/she wished to talk or not talk about, when to end the interview, as well as choosing to return for follow up interviews if she/he so decided. Research

METHODOLOGY CONT'D

participants were also offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews if they wished. None of the participants chose to do this.

Ethical Compliance

CAPRA in partnership with WAYSS and EE&T obtained ethics approval to conduct a pilot evaluation through Monash University's Standing Committee on Ethics in Research involving Humans. The Ethics application identified and listed potential ethical issues and strategies to address these if they arose during the evaluation.

Criteria were set to minimize risks to children and young people who consented to participate (Alderson & Morrow, 2004; Mudaly & Goddard, 2009; 2006; Mudaly, 2002). These included that children and young people were not in any known risk or unsafe situations; that they were in the care of or had access to a supportive, protective adult, and that they would be supported by their WAYSS children's worker. Access to a psychologist/counselor was also arranged to further support the research participants if needed.

The project used a continuing consent and dissent process to protect children's rights to participation (McGee, 2000). This meant that research participants could withdraw from the research at any time during the research process. Policies related to limited confidentiality around children's current safety and protection and access/contact with child protection services if the need arose were also emphasized to the non-offending parent/s and children at several stages of the research.

WAYSS has a strong commitment to client rights, so when involving participants in this evaluation, it was important to acknowledge that an unequal relationship can exist between adults and children, and between clients and WAYSS as a service provider. WAYSS acknowledges this disparity in its general service delivery and takes every measure to address this through governance, policy and best practice.

WAYSS provides services that are confidential, voluntary and free of cost. Upon entry into a WAYSS service, every client is advised of their rights and responsibilities, their privacy, confidentiality and informed consent. They are asked to participate in the collection of de-identified data, and if they decline, they are still provided with a service.

While it is recognised that most WAYSS clients are vulnerable in some way because of their homelessness, WAYSS is committed to the principles of social justice, non-violence, empowerment and anti-discrimination. WAYSS works within the framework of a code of ethics and conduct (WAYSS Policy: Code of Ethics and Conduct, 1996)

For those clients who agree to participate in feedback, evaluation or research, this commitment to their rights does not alter in any way.

The women and children approached to participate in this evaluation were all advised that if they declined, or chose to withdraw from participation once the project had started, it would have no influence or bearing on their right to access any WAYSS services.

The need to promote respect for the rights of clients of WAYSS services arises from the nature of the relationship with the organisation. WAYSS clients have significant

METHODOLOGY CONT'D

and complex needs and the nature of this relationship imposes obligations on the organisation that require services to be responsive to the changing needs of each individual. WAYSS programs engage individual clients in determining the services that are provided to them within funding parameters. This is crucial to creating an environment in which clients can be confident in exercising their rights and responsibilities (WAYSS Policy: Client Rights, 2005)

EE&T comply with existing legal and welfare requirements for the inclusion of animals in this work. It has intentional educational outcomes. The Animal Ethics Committee of the RSPCA oversees animal involvement within programs and their care outside of them. This involves compliance with Part 3 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, and the companion compulsory codes: the Australian Code of Practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (v 7), and the Code of Practice for the housing and care of laboratory mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits.

The Research Sample

The contact details of children who attended the program were obtained from client files held by WAYSS according to the WAYSS Client Rights and Client Privacy Policies.

Only those clients who had indicated that they were interested in being contacted after leaving WAYSS support services were short-listed to be contacted. Criteria for inclusion in the research included:

- That the child/young person had attended the AAET group.
- That the child/young person was over 6 years of age.
- That the child/young person was in safe care with no known current concerns for his/her safety and protection.
- That the child/young person had a supportive adult who approved of the research and child's/young person's participation.
- That the child/young person had consented to participate in the evaluation.

Thirty two children from twenty families were identified. Of these, twenty three children from sixteen families were contactable. Although twenty children agreed to participate, eleven children from seven families eventually participated in the evaluation. The size of the sample however was irrelevant as the focus of the research was on capturing the detailed descriptions about the AAET program in the words and terms of the children and young people who had attended the program (Berg, 1998).

There are a number of reasons that only eleven of the possible thirty two children eventually participated in the research. These include:

- **Difficulty locating families.** Many families who flee violence and become homeless tend to become transient. This occurs primarily because they tend to move frequently to keep safe and in hiding from the violent family member. Several families could not be located. Some who had initially been located moved and contact was lost.

METHODOLOGY CONT'D

- **Changes in family situations/circumstances.** In a few cases, work, health and/or terminal illness of the mother prevented the children from participating in the research.
- **Mothers' issues.** In some cases, the mother's issues prevented the children's participation in the research. This was due to her being in a new relationship, or moving to a new house or region, or going overseas to visit family.
- **Safety/protection issues.** In some instances, after WAYSS had made contact with the family, there were concerns about the children's protection. In one instance the mother had returned to the violent partner, In another, the mother was in a new relationship that was also violent. In these cases, notifications to child protection were made.

Child-Centred Research Approach

To communicate and work effectively with children, it is important to appreciate how the world looks from a child's perspective (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, 2002). If not, 'we will adopt approaches and procedures which will be insensitive, ineffective and even counter-productive' (Bray & Pugh, 1997, p. 143). As this research relied on feedback from the children and young people, engaging them in the research process was critical.

A number of strategies were incorporated into the research design in keeping with a child-centred approach. These included:

- **The research environment.** The children were interviewed at a WAYSS Women's Services office in an inner suburb of Melbourne. The interviews took place in a children's services room that had been especially fitted out with comfortable seating, and child friendly and child safe equipment (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006, 2002; Geldard & Geldard, 1997). The room was accessed via an entry door from the staff car-park, so the children did not have to walk into or through the main office. All of the children had attended this office previously and were familiar with it. They therefore felt safe and comfortable in this environment (Doyle, 1997). None of them had been into the identified research interview room and were therefore not influenced by it.
- **Engaging the children/young people.** Conversing with research participants rather than interviewing them using a questioning format facilitates communication and rapport building (Atwool, 2000; Thurgood, 1990). Activities and games were used to promote the interaction between the researcher and research participants as it is the 'child's preferred and natural medium of expression' (Schaefer & Cangelosi, 1993, p.4). The research participants were offered a snack (fruit, biscuits) and a drink which are also important considerations in engaging and communicating with children (Mudaly, 2002; James, 1989; Thurgood, 1990). After the research interview, research participants were offered a voucher to attend a further three sessions of the group program, and a soft toy as a token of appreciation for their participation.
- **The research participant's family.** For any contact with children to be effective, parents need to be involved either in tandem or jointly with the child (Mudaly, 2002; Geldard & Geldard, 1997; Webb, 1996; Jones, 1990; Leach, 1990; James, 1989). All non-offending parents of the research participants were

METHODOLOGY CONT'D

warmly welcomed by WAYSS staff and offered morning or afternoon tea. A space was made available where they could wait for their child, and transport was offered to facilitate their travel to and from the research interview venue.

Data Collection And Analysis

The research interviews were audio-taped. Children and young people were engaged in this process and were allowed to control the tape recorder by switching it on and off (Mudaly, 2002). All interviews were transcribed.

The data collected was coded and analysed using NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software package.

Limitations of and Problems Encountered in the Research

There were a number of limitations to this research.

1. **Minimisation of harm.** It was critical for this pilot evaluation that the research participants were protected from any possible harm from involvement in the research (Butler, Scanlan, Robinson & Murch, 2003; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Mudaly, 2002; Runyan, 2000). For this reason, the research did not explore children's experiences of homelessness, the violence they experienced, nor their views on their violent parent and the impact on them. This data is essential in future research to assess what supports and services may be developed to help children living with violence.
2. **Children's non-verbal language.** Non-verbal ways of communication are an important aspect of children's language (Mudaly, 2002) and therefore another important issue that was not recorded in this evaluation. This is critical information in assessing how children change over time in response to their interactions with the animals in the group. Future research should also be video-taped as it is a non-literate source of information for less verbal groups such as young children (Mudaly, 2002; Minichiello et al, 1995; Kellehear, 1993).*METHODOLOGY CONT'D*
3. **Consent issues.** Whilst this research actively sought children's consent to participate in the research, consent from parents or gate-keeping by parents (see Thomas & O'Kane, 1998) remained a limiting factor. Twenty children who were contacted initially consented to participate but through parental issues and gate-keeping, only eleven children finally participated. Overcoming parental gate-keeping and promoting children's rights to participate in research is an issue that requires ongoing attention in future research (see Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).
4. **Timing of the research.** Involving children from this population (homeless families fleeing violence) is fraught with difficulties. Their lives are often characterised by daily crises, changes, transience and problems. Several mothers who were initially contacted and who conveyed eager and strong support for the research could not be located subsequently, or they changed their minds after a few days. This meant that the prospective participant list kept changing. Keeping to the ethical and research requirements such as providing prospective families and children with full details of the research and

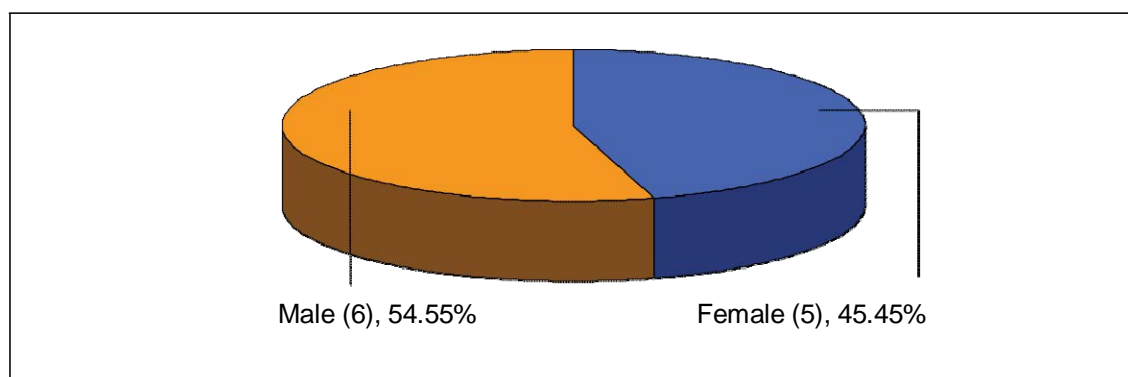
METHODOLOGY CONT'D

obtaining consent meant that we lost many families along the way. By the time of the research interview, the participant list had changed dramatically. In one instance, a mother who was extremely keen for her children to participate was subsequently never located. Follow up home-visits, phone calls and letters met with no response. So when a family was located and expressed interest, arrangements had to be made to undertake the research interviews as soon as possible so as not to lose them.

5. **Making contact with families.** Making contact with these families for research purposes after some time had elapsed is a sensitive and delicate issue. Many of these families live in fear and are hypersensitive to any out of the ordinary contact. For some families, this would mean re-opening old wounds for them and their children. In most cases, how the initial contact was made had to be carefully decided. Letters were sent out in most cases and followed up with home-visits and/or phone calls. This meant travelling long distances to various places that families had relocated to. The timing of phone calls also had to take into account the current situations and circumstances of families. In one instance, at the time of making contact, a mother had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and was on intensive treatment. In another, a mother was in the middle of legal proceedings after being assaulted by her ex-partner.
6. **Other difficulties** included technical problems such as rain or air-conditioning which interfered with the audio-recording of the research interview.

Demographic Details

Gender of Research Participants



Research Participant Details

Code Name	Gender	Age at Res interview	Age at AAET	No. of Groups attended
1. Sarah	F	7	6	24
2. Batman 1	M	8	7	56
3. Bloodhaze	M	9	7/8	14
4. Batman	F	12	9	17

Code Name	Gender	Age at Res interview	Age at AAET	No. of Groups attended
5. Ginger	F	13	10	17
6. Barry	M	14	12	33
7. Quagmire	M	14	11	48
8. Rukia	F	14	12	8
9. Squish Ninja	F	14	12	8
10. Fred	M	14	11	16
11. Franga	M	15	12	16

NB: Code names chosen by the children and young people for anonymity

Details of Offenders of Violence

In eight cases, the biological father was the violent offender.

In three cases, the mother's partner had been the violent offender. In two of these cases, the older siblings had also been violent.

Details of Violence and Homelessness Experienced

The violence and homelessness experienced by these mothers and children has been extensive. Often children had been deliberately drawn into the violent behaviour towards their mother. Children were often taunted, threatened or abused in the presence of their mother, resulting in assault or abuse of her when she intervened to protect them.

The following are some of the abuses that the children experienced.

- Direct physical and/or sexual abuse
- Threats to kill or hurt their mothers
- Destroying children's things—smashing rooms and possessions, tearing schoolwork up, smashing games, toys, television and computer, throwing possessions out or burning them.
- Direct threats to the child to burn the house down.
- Cruelty and abuse of pets—threats to kill and actual killing of pets, terrorising pets with yelling, hitting and kicking them, tying, caging or chaining pets up and children not allowed to protect them.
- Sleep deprivation—deliberate waking of the child during the night, or child unable to sleep because of the sounds of violence.
- Road rage—driving dangerously with the child in the car, threatening to crash, driving into a wall, another car or off a bridge, hitting and punching the child's mother while driving.
- Holding mother and children hostage.

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS CONT'D

- Name calling and swearing. Children told they were stupid, useless, pathetic, dumb, a piece of shit, hopeless, a mistake, a failure, smelly, ugly, a waste of space, a crybaby.
- Pushing and throwing children out of the way if they try to intervene when their mothers are being assaulted.
- Making children obey orders with threats to hurt their mother if they fail to comply.
- Abducting mother and children from a women's refuge.

All of the children had left their known family home and none of them had ever returned to live in the same property. Children had stayed in temporary situations with family and friends, often sleeping in the one room in the same bed or on shared mattresses, resulting in sleeping patterns that became difficult to change. Some children had stayed in more than one women's refuges and safe houses, and all had spent nights in a motel at some point in their homelessness experience.

Details on Mothers

- Eight were single parents after separating from the husband/or partner.
- Two mothers were living with partners.
- One mother had had three violent relationships one of which was with the father of her child.
- Three mothers had been in one relationship with the father of their child/ren. One of these mothers had lived with her husband for 20 years.
- Two mothers had had two relationships with violent partners.
- One mother had a violent ex-partner and older children living in the home.

Behaviours of Children at Entry to AAET

Eight participants were described as displaying aggressive behaviours which included being physically violent with siblings and at school, fighting, bullying, angry all the time and argumentative.

Three participants were described as displaying withdrawn behaviours which included high levels of anxiety, distress, acute sensitivity, running away, hiding, not talking (one child became mute until she attended the AAET group) or over-talking, being bullied, tantrums, very unsettled and constant attention-seeking.

Results of the evaluation: What children and young people said about the group

This section presents the outcomes from the research interviews with the children and young people. The quotes and extracts have been taken directly from the research interviews where children and young people chose to speak on these topics. Therefore they do not represent the experiences of all the children who participated in the research. The quotes are also presented using the code names that were chosen by the participants.

... Views about themselves

Many participants described what they were like before attending the group. Several talked about being angry:

I used to be like an angry little boy sometimes ... because I used to get angry a lot. ... I just let it out, like full on let it out. Scream and all that I've got heaps of memories. Too much. — Fred, 14 year old male

I was an angry person around like Prep and Grade 1, I was very sensitive and I tried to hide that by pretending to be tough and stuff like that, putting on an act. I was really cocky and think I could fight and take down anyone, and I would take on people way bigger than me, and I'd win sometimes and other times I would get beaten the crap out of me. Yes like just fighting wasn't the answer. —Quagmire, 14 year old male

Yeah, it may have been because I was a little bit angry in those days, I wanted to kill myself sometimes. —Franga, 15 year old male

Others described themselves as quiet, shy and not able to connect with the other kids:

When I was in the group I was really quiet and didn't talk to anyone that much ... —Franga, 15 year old male

Ah well, I, when I was a little baby and I got out of my Mum's tummy, well I wasn't like screaming and stuff. And I'm a quiet person. —Batman 1, 8 year old male

I think I was a bit shy. —Ginger, 13 year old female

I just didn't get along with them (other kids). I didn't know what to say ... I was fairly sensitive. —Quagmire, 14 year old male

Like having trouble meeting people, like making friends. —Rukia, 12 year old female

VIEWS ABOUT THEMSELVES CONT'D

Some talked about being scared or stressed:

Yeah like when I was younger I used to basically not talk to anyone because I was scared of pretty much anyone and everything. So I'd just huddle in my little corner, or in my bedroom and just ... yep talk to myself. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

Well I was pretty much scared of people before I went back in there (the group), and I was scared of guinea pigs, they squealed and hurt your ears. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Yeah, a little bit ... well before the group I was stressed out more. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

... Views about how they had changed

Research participants also described how they had changed as a result of attending the group. Many described gaining in confidence:

How it changed me? I used to be like more of a shy person, type thing. And when I started going there, started talking to everyone and ... probably gave me more confidence about myself. Because I'm not used to having a lot of people around me, so everybody's talking to me at once, I'm just like, oh zoom, zoom. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

I got a bit more confidence. —*Batman, 12 year old female*

I'm more confident and more safer around the animals. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

Some talked about becoming independent

... and now? I'm independent. Yeah, but now I talk to everyone, I hang around with everyone. Yeah, and now I'm popular and everyone likes me and I talk to everyone ... I think it's because of the group, because I learnt how to talk to everyone there and make friends. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

Independence. I think if you go through rough times then it readies you for the world. Yeah. If you are always incruperated into tiny, tiny, little things, being overprotected then you can't learn anything. If you are, ... er ... if you work on the things you do then you know what to do, yes like people who have been overprotected they get to 18 and they haven't even, like there's this person that I know that only learned what sex was or something like that when they were 16 and that's not that good because, yes they are like under-prepared and stuff. You just can't have a perfect little life, always daydreaming or something like

VIEWS ABOUT HOW THEY HAD CHANGED CONT'D

that because you are going to turn 18 and you are going to move out of home. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*



Several felt that some of the skills they learnt in the group helped them become more sociable:

...and then after the group I was more positive on life and everything. Yeah, they (kids in the group) said I was friendly. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

It really got me into photography and stuff like that. Getting all the camera angles were really fun. ...and everyone was like nice to me then. They were like 'oh so that's what it is.' They loved it. It explained a few things and yes. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

It takes me a little bit longer to get angry now. I am a friendly person, but it's this sort of thing. Like muck around, we muck around and that. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

I am just a friendly person now. Soft as well. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

This young person however felt that he could not assess whether he had changed because he had changed schools at the time:

Yeah, no, yeah it didn't. Not really at school, to be honest ... because, I can't really say much about that, because when I came here, I changed school, so... —*Barry, 14 year old male*

For this child, he felt helped by the things the group gave him:

Nah, not really (changed me). It was fun. I made some friends, but I hardly ever see them. ... (they) gave me a pencil case and let me keep my book ... and got me a house. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

VIEWS ABOUT HOW THEY HAD CHANGED CONT'D

Many identified the fun aspect of the group and their interactions with the animals as promoting many changes in them:

Because I learnt more things about animals, and I could get a good report at school. And just learn how to be like cleaner, always wash your hands like before you eat, and like just have - try to have fun all the time. And be careful with animals, and things. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

Yeah. It was, yeah well really, really fun. It was like something to look forward to. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

... it was fun. I was just being myself. I like being myself. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

Yeah, I realised I was quite an animal person... and then in the group it was so good and then I just felt like, it was something that I should live for, like I could actually go and work with them. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

A few talked about growing up and feeling more prepared for the challenges in their lives:

I already plan my next moves if something happens yeah. I don't really have to try to think about things. I just do it ... Yes. Like if I am playing chess I will go 5 moves ahead than what I am already on. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

I feel grown up. I feel like I'm grown up. I don't need my big one (teddy bear) anymore. —*Batman 1, 8 year old male*

Sometimes I go with the flow, because sometimes you can only go with the flow like4 getting a house. I couldn't control that ... That wasn't in my hands, so I just went with the flow... —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Yeah I want to be a animal person and a fashion girl ... because I like, umm, being in fashion. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*



... Views about the group

Many research participants said they loved the many aspects of the group and that it was fun:

It was fun for kids, for all kids. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

Yeah it was pretty fun. The animals, everyone was pretty friendly and yeah. And I was like oh yes I can't wait until Wednesday. —*Batman, 12 year old female*

Yeah, the kids all love it, any kid, 15, 12 ...Yes I love that group. I love it. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

It was fun. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

I think it's because of the group, because I learnt how to talk to everyone there and make friends. Yeah, and now I'm a person who will get in there. I want to go back to the group but I think I'm too old to go back to the group. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

You get like - just like you have fun before school, and you can have fun at school as well. And just seeing animals. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

I remember going and meeting all the animals and stuff. I remember the people that took us there, the ladies. Yeah. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

The group was pretty fun. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Because to get them (the kids) away from troubles and meet new and interesting people. Get interactive with families. Learn some new stuff. —*Rukia, 14 year old female*

It really helped me. It was very good for me and I said goodbye and I really wanted to go again. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

... it was friendly and stuff. —*Squish Ninja 14 year old female*

... go on the truck. (they) gave me a pencil case, let me keep the books and got me a house. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

Yeah it's been one of the best groups ever. And it's really good how it will help with kids and help them grow up ... like animals won't hurt them and humans will help them and then they will help us. Like animals, like a dog, they can help you if you're upset, they can make you happy. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

Ahhh I love photography. We did a lot of that. It really got me into photography and stuff like that. Getting all the camera angles were really fun. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

VIEWS ABOUT THE GROUP CONT'D

... and probably the animals and we got to do our own scrap book.
—*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*



Others talked about the animals:

Yeah, like when young kids first came in they had no idea what to do. But after a week or so they were holding the guinea pigs, whatever animals. They were really enjoying it. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

It was exciting the first time when we went and playing with all the animals, they were so cute. There was like this room that we were in and they had also this place where we used to cut up fruit and stuff and put them down and they (the animals) used to go everywhere to find them. —*Batman, 12 year old female*

We got to take the guinea pigs outside into the barn. And bring their baskets ... and we brang them back inside again.
—*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

I remember it was a small group and there was four other people in the group and we were looking after guinea pigs, rabbits, we looked at some dogs and cats and goats. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

Me and B (brother) go before school. And we go see animals, basically guinea pigs and rabbits, and yeah. (and) patting new creatures and stuff. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

They were helping the kids and the animals. And they taught me how to use animals properly. I really liked the animals.
—*Sarah, 7 year old female*

On how to get along with pets as well. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

Some talked about the other kids in the group:

It was good to have other kids there. Some kids were ummm very nice.
—*Sarah, 7 year old female*

VIEWS ABOUT THE GROUP CONT'D

Mum said it would be pretty cool. She said there would be animals and stuff like that. I got on the bus and started talking to this guy S. He was like my first friend there, and yes I was always friends with the boys, I didn't really socialise with the girls that much, but I had to, the second time I went there, because there was no boys the second time. — Quagmire, 14 year old male

It was the people around me. I made some friends, but I hardly ever see them. —Bloodhaze, 9 year old male

Well I was pretty spooked by everyone, actually. From the start, I don't know, just because they were new, there was a lot of them. —Barry, 14 year old male

It was so friendly and we all had the best food there. —Franga, 15 year old male

Some kids enjoyed missing school to get to the group:

Yeah and the best bit about it, I missed half my school, half the day of school. Yeah, that's another thing, you go there and miss half a day of school and then when you get to school it's finished. So the kids all like that too. —Franga, 15 year old male

Ohh I got out of school. —Bloodhaze, 9 year old male

Food and refreshments, an important part of the group process, was acknowledged:

We got lunch and afternoon tea, a lot of food actually, cupcakes, biscuits, real big biscuits and we got drinks, heaps of drinks. We got some chip. —Franga, 15 year old male

... Views about the animals

Research participants enjoyed the different animals that are part of the group:

I liked the group, mainly the animals. The animals were cats. Yeah it was all cats and sometimes rabbits. Yeah, they were my favourite part ... I've always liked cats. I had a cat basically when I was born, so. —Barry, 14 year old male

Guinea pigs, oh yeah and they had the rat. I'm not sure about rabbits, I don't think I remember and we used to sometimes see the kittens. —Batman 1, 8 year old male

VIEWS ABOUT THE ANIMALS CONT'D

They had a lot of guinea pigs, they had two rats, they had, I think, it was a goat or something. Yeah there was cats as well. And they had, they brought one dog in once. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

Well I did get that cat while I was at group and I went past the cats every day at group and said 'oh you are kind of cute.' One thing I wanted to do the most was, because I really, really like birds, I wanted to go in the bird aviary, but we never got permission while I was there. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

No, we didn't get any cats and I remember the mouse because I took a picture of it. —*Rukia, 12 year old female*

Yeah, I think his name was Rex – a little rat. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

Many described what aspects of the animals they connected with:

Like half the cats were edgy and scared of everyone, but soon as I walked by they'd be getting up, saying hello, and purring and ... —*Barry, 14 year old male*

Dogs just like everybody. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

Probably seeing all the animals, patting them and feeling them so soft. —*Batman 1, 8 year old male*

I tell people Flameblaze's name. He had really spiky like fur. Yeah it was cool. Like when I like brushed his hair yeah. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

Yes and I always wanted to like pat Squirt, like other than poking your little finger in the cage And scratching his belly. He was a very, very tame bird. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Some participants talked about their favourite animals:

I always liked dogs. I hated cats until I got my cat now I absolutely love my cat. I didn't really like small animals but now I do. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

My favourite animals in the whole world is dogs, kittens, and all the animals. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

This one was my favourite, Flameblaze. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*



Many children talked about what they learnt about animals:

(I learnt) How to care for them to help them feel relaxed and stuff like that. And how you treat them. And sometimes like when you're scared they're scared too. (You can tell from) their actions, their eyes and just sometimes they don't eat when they're scared. Yeah like to comfort them and just help them be more relaxed and know that you're not going to hurt them. —*Batman, 12 year old male*

... first we talked about the animals that we have at home and how they're going and if like they're not doing really well and stuff. And people got to express their feelings and stuff. And also when we're holding the animals, makes you feel more calmer and stuff. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

We used to feed them, so I know how to feed them. After that group I wanted to become a vet. But if the dog's upset you've got to make it happy by giving it a hug and feeding it. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

Ah they teach me a lot ... you have to like, give them like food so, so ... and like go next to their family and they get used to you. And they won't like keep going out and running away. —*Batman 1, 8 year old male*

Probably learning what the animals like, their favourite food, what they like, the way you hold them. Like if they like brushing on the head or underneath them or ... the more you play with them and stuff, like you work it out. Like my sister ... she used to rub Peggy (guinea pig) like near the leg and he used to lay down all the time, really cute. ... they're safe ... you know they're happy. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

We helped out feeding the animals, talking about stuff that goes on in our lives and then we just helped out with the RSPCA and we got to see what happens and everything. Well I've never had a guinea pig before so I could experience what it would be like. Yeah. I really wanted a guinea pig. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

VIEWS ABOUT THE ANIMALS CONT'D



Many participants developed much insight and knowledge about animal behaviour:

I can tell if a dogs happy, if its tail's wagging (when he's scared) you can feel he's vibrating. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

They all had their own unique features really like ...Little Fish was just like ... a climbing frame or something. Flash would run so fast. Mowie was like the tough guy. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Yeah they don't really, really judge you or anything. They're always wanting a lot of attention. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

Some get frightened easy, and some are good. (They) try to run away (when they are scared) Yeah. They're like - Yeah you hear them squeak, or squeal...you feed them and pat them, comfort them. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

You can sit very still or stand still. Because if you don't stand very still and you just want to catch them ... errr ... they won't come to you. Yeah, I give him a pat like that, and I just umm they fall asleep and I talk quietly. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

Little Fish is, How cute she looks in that picture. It was like, she's looking down at the ground and curled up so I think she was pretty scared and that, and her eyes are popping out. See Shazza in that (picture) he is all happy and nice and ... Yes, he's got his eyes pretty closed. He's about to go to sleep and he's actually staring at the camera. But Prince, he's scared shitless, like his eyes are coming out. You can see the white in his eyes and he's not moving. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

When something's really noisy, they were very scared so they get in, they get in, get all squashed. Umm, I have to go to them and say "it's okay" and we get, my favourite guinea pig Prince, and I hug him. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

VIEWS ABOUT THE ANIMALS CONT'D



Yeah, it (the dog) wasn't really human tempered because the person we got him from, they never held it and stuff or played with it and it was scared of people. Pat them nice and slow so their heart doesn't ... because if you pat them fast their heart will start racing. Like you could, like they're probably getting scared because you're patting them too fast. If you pat them too fast you probably speed up their heart. When it starts eating stuff it's calm and happy. —*Rukia, 14 year old female*

Well (when they are scared) usually their eyes go really big and sometimes their ears go back, and sometimes they'll freeze up. (When they are happy) ... they'll come to you, they'll purr, they'll rub up against you. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

When they are really relaxed they close their eyes, but if they are scared then they open their eyes with the eyes popping out really far, because then they have got their eyes as far as they can go. They can see from every side if a predator is coming. And they squeak very loud all the time. Yes like Little Fish used to squeal like, oh ear-busting. He would just go 'eeh, eeh, eeh' crazy yes. ...And there was a few times where I had to hold every single guinea pig Yes to calm them ... —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Yeah, (when they are scared) probably cuddle up with us. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

But some cats like to drool all over you. There was one cat, it was a really big black cat, and it was scared of everyone. And I was allowed in its cage, gave it a pat, and it drooled all over the floor, it was just like ewwww. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

... well and say, this is a guinea pig ... you have got to put a blanket on. Yes so put a blanket there and make a cave for it, a safe haven for it to go to. It will hide in that cave for a little while. Yes and just let them hide in between your arms if they are scared you just hold them like that, give them a nice den, a nice area. Yes. It feels really warm and safe. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

VIEWS ABOUT THE ANIMALS CONT'D



Several talked about what it felt like to respond to animal's need for comfort and safety:

And guess what? I used to, umm, keep them asleep. I used to pat them very nicely and I fell them asleep. It made me feel good. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

A dog is a man's best friend and a cat is a girl's best friend. I think that's true. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

And also when we're holding the animals, makes you feel more calmer and stuff. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

I sit down like this and they came to me, they all came to me and then this little one, umm, just sit down on me, and then all the little kitties went away. I think he wanted to live with me because I was so nice to him. Hmm. You have to be gently with them. I really liked it. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

Yes. It feels really warm and safe. It makes you feel good as well. You can tell that they are feeling safe and ... It's like painting a room and saying 'oh God I just did that, that felt so good. It's like taking a kid to college and watching them graduate'. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

... Views about the kids in the group

Several research participants commented on their interaction and contact with the other children and young people in the group. One boy felt that the interaction with the animals helped children settle into the group and enjoy it:

Yeah, like when young kids first came in they had no idea what to do. But after a week or so they were holding the guinea pigs, whatever, animals. They were really enjoying it. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

VIEWS ABOUT THE KIDS IN THE GROUP CONT'D

Many developed friendships and some of them maintained these friendships:

... all the kids we met there. I had so many friends there and I used to go stay at their houses and all that. It was really fun. There's a guy named L who went there and I'm still friends with him now. I went there about three or four years ago. I still talk to him. I'm probably going to see him today. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

There were probably - I know P... that's the only one, because I went to his house sometimes to hang out. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

Others talked about how the group facilitated their social development:

Yeah, most of them I talked to, pretty much all of them actually. We talked, laughed, had a good time. I remember all of them really, I just don't remember names really, I'm not good with names. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

I got to meet like all the people in our group. —*Batman, 12 year old male*



The comments from several participants indicated that the presence of other children and young people in the group was an important part:

Yeah the people there were really friendly as well and you got to meet other people from the other schools. There were these two girls, I'm not sure if they were, they went to two different schools, but I think they were sisters. They were nice and there was also this other girl, she was tall and slim, she had blonde hair and she played with the guinea pigs a lot. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

It was fun for kids, for all kids. It was good to have the other kids. Some kids ummm were very nice. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

Yeah I still have the booklet. It has everything and it's got all signatures, all the people who were saying like positive stuff about us and everything. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*

... Views about family

In order to minimise any possible harm from remembering or talking about their experiences of violence, none of the participants were asked specific questions about their families. However, some of them chose to talk about their families:

S... (older sister) and me are quiet. All the others are loud. Probably J... and L... (older brothers) (are loudest). Some ... sometimes dad is. Sometimes mum is. (Sometimes) they're angry and like fight and stuff.
—*Batman 1, 8 year old male*

It's better than living with my dad, my annoying dad. Errr because I made him have a bloody nose once. I was six. He made me angry. I was only playing, because I only jumped on him. I don't know, but he made me really angry, so I hit him across the nose, and it became bloody. —
Bloodhaze, 9 year old male

Before we did fight a lot before yeah, but we did. Yes. We still have arguments but they don't get as heated as before. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

I don't have a, I do have a Dad but he lives far, far away. Because when I was a baby only, I didn't like see him because my eyes were closed. —
Batman 1, 8 year old male

... Views about workers

Several participants talked about the workers who ran the group and the WAYSS children's worker who introduced them to and also participated in the group. Their comments indicate the positive role workers had:

You could talk to anybody there, like N (EE&T) and stuff. About anything, any problems or anything. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

Everyone was really nice. —*Rukia, 14 year old female*

Well, they're pretty nice and stuff. And yeah. —*Batman 1, 8 year old male*

They were friendly ... they were pretty happy. —*Batman, 12 year old male*

Yeah the people there were really friendly as well and you got to meet other people from the other schools. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

VIEWS ABOUT WORKERS CONT'D

This boy describes how he learnt about the group:

I came into the kitchen. B... (WAYSS children's worker) was here, and she's like, hey, how would you like to come to our animal group. I just asked what it's about. She tells me, and it sounded pretty good, so I decided to come at least once and see how it was. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

Some participants demonstrated insight into the workers' skills:

They taught me how to use animals properly. They were helping the kids and the animals. —*Sarah, 7 year old female*

Yeah, I think so. She's one of the best, all of them, P..., and N... (EE&T). —*Franga, 15 year old male*

Tufty (guinea pig) was K...'s favourite. N... liked Prince and P... liked Shazza and she liked all the originals really because they spent all the time with her. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

... Views about feelings

Some participants talked about how they reacted to fear:

Ah what kids do when they get scared ... Well kids, we like chuck, some kids like, like get 'em back, the other kids. Yeah. —*Batman 1, 8 year old male*

Err ... (long pause) ... I practically don't move. Yes. I just stay still like. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

Yeah like when I was younger I used to basically not talk to anyone because I was scared of pretty much anyone and everything. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

I wouldn't attack someone unless they attacked me but yes... Knowing that there is somebody safe there. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

A few of them described what they did when they were worried and the following quotes demonstrate the different ways children and young people cope with anxiety:

VIEWS ABOUT FEELINGS CONT'D

I just think about it more. Like I'll give you an example, like if I'm worried about Ginger (cat) I just think of ways that if he could still be alive and okay. Sometimes I want to think of the bad things, because stuff always happens when we least expect it, so I want to like expect all the bad things, so the good things come. Yeah. It kind of puts your mind off things. —*Batman, 12 year old female*

(I) just laugh. I just watch Funniest Home Videos. And my favourite video game. —*Bloodhaze, 9 year old male*

... Views about how the group could be improved

Some participants talked about the animals:

I reckon to make it a little bit better probably see more animals more of the time. Everybody loves animals. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

It could have been, but it's all right Err You could just like probably like - (long pause) I don't know really. Probably like maybe like go for a walk with the animals, or something. —*Fred, 14 year old male*

I'm not sure, maybe use other animals, but I'm not sure. —*Ginger, 13 year old female*

Others commented on the kids who attended the group:

Well I was pretty spooked by everyone, actually. From the start ... there was a lot of them. Because I'm not used to having a lot of people around me, so everybody's talking to me at once, I'm just like, oh zoom, zoom ... Probably, yeah (better to have) one at a time maybe. And just a couple afterwards. —*Barry, 14 year old male*

On the other hand, this young person found the interaction with other kids on the bus most helpful:

Yeah. I think it's better that you get all the kids there, then go (on the bus). Because if they all just go in their own cars, not only is it wasting a lot of petrol, but they all arrive there and they have to make friends and see the animals. So they could be friends on the bus and then they could focus on the animals, and see if they sit together like that. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

VIEWS ABOUT HOW THE GROUP COULD BE IMPROVED CONT'D

He also went on to suggest that more funding would help to improve the group:

Ahh. If they got more grants, like if they were able, if they had more freedom. ... by not getting (a grant), they are not allowed to do some things like go in the cages of the birds. I wanted to do that so much and another thing, if they had more money they could probably get more kids in there, because there's not much middle-aged kids. There's the bigger kids, there's the smaller kids and there's no kids in between really. Then you have got the smaller, smaller kids. Yes and they could get more people ... so they could get another helper. —*Quagmire, 14 year old male*

But several participants felt the group was good:

Not really it was pretty good. —*Batman, 12 year old male*

No. I think it was really fun how it was. And I don't think it's changed that much. They've got new animals, I know that. —*Franga, 15 year old male*

No. I reckon it was really awesome. —*Squish Ninja, 14 year old female*



Summary

The Animal Assisted Education and Therapy (AAET) group was developed and run by WAYSS for children and young people affected by homelessness and violence. The model of the group had been developed and implemented in 2005 in partnership with EE&T and has been running consistently, with different children, for the past five years. In order to expand and continue with the group WAYSS sought an independent evaluation of the group to assess its effectiveness as a therapeutic response to children and young people affected by homelessness and family violence. Evaluation of programs is critical for sustaining child abuse prevention programs and for quality assurance. This study was part of the commitment from WAYSS to improve its responses to children attending their service and to incorporate direct feedback from them in service delivery. Feedback from service users is critical to effective service provision. What children have to say about services set up for them is essential for improving service delivery

Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia (CAPRA) was asked to undertake this evaluation of the group. The chief aim was to hear directly from children and young people who had attended the group about their experiences of the group.

The evaluation was intended as a preliminary investigation into the potential effectiveness of this type of therapeutic intervention in promoting children's recovery from the effects of living with violence and their consequent homelessness. Anecdotal evidence had demonstrated that there had been a dramatic improvement in many areas of their lives.

The results of the evaluation which presented direct quotes from the research participants demonstrated that:

- Nearly all participants had enjoyed the group immensely and experienced it as fun and friendly, and something they had looked forward to every week. Many talked about feeling sad when they had completed the group. All participants expressed delight at being given a voucher to attend a further three sessions of the group as a token of appreciation for their participation in the evaluation.
- The animals in the group were identified as the major appeal. Participants engaged with and became personally connected with the animals, knew the names of the animals and their histories.
- Many of them recognised that they had changed since attending the group. Many talked about gaining confidence, changing from being quiet and shy to being friendly and positive. Others described being angry initially and one child said 'it takes me a bit longer to get angry now'. Others were able to acknowledge their sensitivity and softness as positive qualities.
- Through animal care activities, they learnt how to read when animals were afraid, anxious or feeling unsafe. They also learnt how animals could be comforted and made safe.
- Many participants demonstrated a growth in empathy. Several described the warm feelings they experienced in nurturing, comforting and caring for these vulnerable animals and especially in reducing the animals' fear and making them safe.

SUMMARY CONT'D

Many demonstrated a capacity to transfer learned empathy into other social and familial relationships, and into more socially acceptable behaviours elsewhere. For most of them, the group provided an opportunity to develop friendships and interact socially with other participants. For some of them, it helped them overcome feelings of isolation and aloneness.

Overall, the AAET group appears to have helped all the children and young people who participated in the pilot evaluation reconnect with peers and society giving them the opportunity to resume more beneficial development.

Recommendations

The pilot evaluation yielded very positive results on the effectiveness of the Animal Assisted Education and Therapy (AAET) group. However, as one of the fundamental aims of the group is to break the cycle of violence and reduce the use of violence by traumatised children in the future, further rigorous, long term research is required. This will provide concrete evidence of changes in these children's trauma symptoms, their ability to regulate their emotions and their behavioural responses to anger and fear.

It is recommended that future research:

- Includes an evaluation pre-group and post-group. Children should be engaged in the evaluation before, during and after attendance at the group, and also followed up a year after attendance.
- Develops specific psychometric tests to measure changes in their trauma symptoms, empathy, emotional regulation, self esteem, depression, social skills, and attachment capacity. Non-verbal changes in the children's physical response to the group (i.e. changes in body language from initial entry to group to exit) would add a further dimension to the evaluation.
- Includes a comparison with a control group of participants who do not attend the group (i.e. those who are on the Waiting List).
- Obtain feedback from primary carers of the research subjects and the professionals involved with them as a further important component of future evaluation.



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