

May 2015

Latitude: Directions for Young People

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence



We acknowledged and thank the Royal Commission into Family Violence for the opportunity to put forward our knowledge and experience of the issue of Family Violence in the Youth Homelessness Context.

Please note that the following are broad statements based on the experience of Latitude

Latitude: Directions for Young People is a DHHS funded, youth specific, Specialist Homelessness Service: target group young people 16-25yrs who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Service delivery area: DHHS Western Division, Local Government Areas of Hobsons Bay & Moonee Valley.

It is Latitude's experience that almost all young people presenting have had an experience of family violence, as victim or as perpetrator. This has been an impacting factor of their experience of homelessness.

It must be noted however that a very low number of the 200+ young people receiving Latitude support services, identify the experience of family violence as an impacting factor. In **Latitude's** opinion **the experience of family violence (as victim or perpetrator) is often 'the norm' a standard form of communication, with little or no insight to the many forms that violence may take.**

Latitude has a high proportion of young men engaged in service (approx 70%), of these, nearly all have perpetrated violence at some time, and most have experienced FV as well, often being a learnt behaviour.

Within a homelessness setting it can be challenging to create opportunities for behaviour change. In relation to Family Violence, many young people presenting at Latitude have a current or previous **history of receiving IVO's as a perpetrator** (often instigated by Victoria Police rather than victim), none have insight as to the reason why. Some have been court **ordered to attend men's behaviour change programs, without change occurring.**

In **Latitude's** experience, young people accessing our service have not had opportunity to develop positive communication skills, therefore in their eyes, acts of violence, particularly towards women are not violent, rather (the violence) is their understanding of what a relationship is.

Acknowledgement of the experience of generational family violence will allow accountability to be effective. Little work is done to provide a learning opportunity for perpetrators of violence, particularly young people. There needs to be acknowledgement that young people

require a specific response that is tailored to their learning abilities & acknowledges their own experience of being a victim of family violence.

What we do know is that if young men experiencing homelessness are provided with opportunity, there is a demonstrated willingness to change behaviours.

The opportunities that currently exist to gain insight into Family Violence and behaviour change are short term and are usually attended under duress (result of Court Order) thus reducing positive buy in from participants.

Latitude have integrated program opportunities into their case management practice of which are funded by a range of small one off grants (Local Council Community Grants, Rotaries, Lions etc).

Reclink Australia Football League: WynBay Bulldogs

Footy Team – underpinned by a supportive nurturing environment with positive male role models as active participants – its level playing field aids understanding of behaviours of which the key strength is peer support and accountability.

Delivered in partnership with Victoria Police, Western Bulldogs and Youth Services from both Hobsons Bay & Wyndham.

Coach – Victoria Police Youth Resource Officer.

On field Mentors: Latitude, Hobsons Bay Youth Services, and Wyndham Youth Services.

Community Volunteers.

Many of the players have at one time or another had an intervention taken out on them, a couple have been incarcerated due to breach of an intervention order. In the Writers opinion there is little if any insight into ownership of the behaviours that have resulted in the order. One way the program addresses this is to have a zero tolerance of violence in all forms. Clear communication & behavioural boundaries are set, training throughout the seasons include sessions discussing respectful relationships and consequential thinking. These discussions are set in the football context and translated to off field behaviours.

Most of the players are from low socio economic backgrounds where violent behaviours are a form of communication, not identified as violence. Players will often have their partners at games (often when there is an order in place); off field workers can intervene and provide support and access to external services in a safe non threatening environment.

Program development underpinned by clear boundaries, agreed behaviours & expectations as well as provision of positive role models can begin the complex process of positive behaviour change. This must be done in a non threatening/non blame environment, only then can insight be gained.

In the context of the WynBay Bulldogs football team, now in its eighth season, we are starting to witness positive behaviour change, self regulation and insight. Eight seasons in.

Young Men's Mentored Group

This program has been developed again in recognition of the lack of opportunity for young men to understand their behaviours and communication skills. The assumption is often that young men 'know', however if the experience of homelessness is present it can be assumed that such an opportunity has not been present or has been present at a minimum.

This group is small in number (averaging 8 participants) with a higher number of mentors. Latitude targets volunteer mentors successfully from Victoria Police, Rotaries & Lions Clubs.

The 10 week program includes a Homelessness 101 training session for mentors, a range of activities and culminates in a celebration. The young people participate in sessions that are supported by a Latitude worker but are young men exclusive, and during these sessions a range of themes are considered.

All 'closed' sessions are based around identifying and challenging behaviours that have been barriers to successful relationships; the context is broad, although the focus is respectful relationships and positive participation in the community.

The mentors provide positive male role modelling as this is something that most of our young men have not previously experienced.

Latitude acknowledges that 'naming' family violence is important; however in the context of youth homelessness, providing learning opportunities are far more effective when the approach is subtle & repetitive.

The Young Men's Group needs to be completed at least twice and integrated into case management support plans for lasting impact.

As previously stated, these programs are funded by accessing small pools of grant money; they are not a funded compulsory activity. Latitude has a commitment to changing behaviours particularly in relation to Family Violence. These initiatives can & do work. To support the delivery of these programs, Latitude employees are required to complete DVRCV Training, specifically: Intro to Family Violence and CRAF.

An awareness and understanding of the impacts of Family Violence underpin all of the support offered to young people accessing Latitude services, be they male, female, victim, perpetrator. This is not dissimilar to many services responding to homelessness.

Latitude is a signatory to submissions made to the Royal Commission by Council to Homeless Persons & Western Homelessness Local Area Service Network.