

A healthy and inclusive community

29 May 2015



Dear Commissioners

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this extremely important Royal Commission into Family Violence. Inner South Community Health is a values-driven organisation, committed to improving the health and wellbeing of our community. Inner South has a long history and expertise working to prevent and reduce the harms of family violence for over 20 years. This submission draws on our experience as a service provider, with a particular focus on our expertise in engaging and working with perpetrators.

About Inner South Community Health

Inner South Community Health (Inner South) is a multi-sited community health agency that provides a comprehensive range of health and welfare services within the Inner Southern region of Melbourne. Inner South is dedicated to delivering programs that reflect its adherence to principles of equity and justice, and reflect its comprehensive view of health and health care, including the underlying causes of health and illness. Inner South provides a range of services which emphasise prevention, rehabilitation, and education in addition to direct care, and that meet the needs of local communities. Programs are targeted towards those individuals and groups of people in 'high need', encompassing physical, social, emotional, psychological and financial need.

Inner South's services span the continuum of social and health services, including: primary health; family and children's services; family violence; sex industry health resourcing and education; alcohol and other drug services; mental health services; housing and homelessness; employment services; and health promotion and community development initiatives. In 2013-14 Inner South had a budget in excess of \$22 million, employed over 270 staff and provided services from 10 sites across the Inner South (including four dedicated Inner South centres). We saw 13,209 clients and delivered 121,029 episodes of care.

INNER SOUTH Family Violence Programs

Inner South has a long history providing services in response to family violence. We provide services that include: Men's Behaviour Change Program Groups – voluntary, court mandated and corrections referral; Pilot Court Directed Counselling Orders Program;

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Men's Counselling; partner contact worker for the former and current partners of perpetrators; and women and children's counselling.

In 2002, Inner South undertook a three-year partnership project with Connections Uniting Care to develop and deliver a holistic service addressing family violence and targeting women, children and men through group work. This included the development and implementation of a Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) (which has since run continuously). In 2014 we commenced a pilot Court Directed Counselling Orders Program (a second MBCP) with the Moorabbin Justice Centre, which will now receive ongoing funding.

Since 2009, Inner South, in partnership with the Salvation Army, has provided a Family Violence Men's Case Management service whereby a mix of intensive case management with higher levels of direct face-to-face support for men with a range of complex issues, along with less intensive support for men with lower support needs is provided to men using family violence. This work extends from early intervention and prevention for young men and first time offenders to support for recidivist offenders. This response is located in a broader context of social justice, prevention of women's homelessness, safety of women, protection of children and making male users of violence accountable for their violence.

Inner South has also taken a leadership role in sector coordination and integration in the Southern Metro Region. Between 2008 and 2013 Inner South auspiced the inaugural Inner Middle Southern Metropolitan Region Family Violence Regional Integration Coordinator. A senior Inner South Manager has also been a member of the Inner Middle Family Violence Partnership since its inception and chaired the committee in 2012 and 2013.

Inner South has extensive experience and expertise in the adolescent violence arena and has published the 'It all starts at Home' report in 2007, and a resource booklet for those working in this field which is used across Victoria and South Australia and has been translated into several languages. Our work with adolescents has also focused on a group program called 'Who's the Boss' for parents of adolescents using violence, which has been running since 2008.

Inner South's approach and practice in responding to family violence is consistent with the No to Violence Minimum Standards. Inner South is a member of No To Violence, and our Family Violence Program staff members were closely involved in the development of the Standards in both 1995 and 2006.

The attached response outlines Inner South's comments on specific questions raised in the Royal Commission's Issues Paper. If you require further information please don't hesitate to contact my office, on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Damian Ferrie
Chief Executive Officer

Responses to Royal Commission Issues Paper Questions

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

On White Ribbon Day 2009, the Inner Middle Family Violence Partnership agencies organised a 'Walk Against Family Violence', to promote public knowledge of the effects of family violence. The Walk also raised awareness of the support services available to women and children experiencing Family Violence. Since then it has become an annual event, with over 2000 people participating in 2014. The Walk is a great example of the integration between partnering agencies, including the NOT1MORE and White Ribbon campaigns.

Following the 2014 Walk, an evaluation was undertaken by the organising committee, which found that the format for the event worked well, including marques with information, entertainment, and guest speakers. Coordination with the Not1More organisation lunch, high profile parliamentarians, community and business leaders, unions, schools and sporting figures demonstrated the broad range of community that advocates for elimination of family violence.

Recommendations

As this is a major event with broad coverage in Melbourne, Inner South recommends further resourcing for appropriate event management for the Walk Against Family Violence and other White Ribbon Day events. This could be achieved through the mandating of family violence prevention initiatives in local government health promotion plans.

In delivering prevention initiatives, Inner South recommends that consideration be given to ensuring campaigns do not demonise men and create barriers to self-identification and self-referral. Language used in these campaigns and by anybody speaking publically about family violence and perpetrators is important. If family violence perpetrators are demonised, men who are violent will not associate with the message or make any attempt to change, as in most cases they will not see themselves as demons, even if privately they acknowledge a need to change.

Question eight: Tell us about any gaps of 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.

Inner South has identified the following gaps in the current response to family violence .

- **Increased focus on prevention**, with a particular focus on strong mother–child attachment from conception to age two years. The psychological, emotional and social adjustments in pregnancy can represent opportunity but also challenges for women. Maternal stress such as family violence can impact the quality of the experience with potential negative outcomes for mother and child. The flow on effects can lead to serious mental health outcomes for the mother, attachment issues in baby and long term physical and mental health problems for the infant, the mother and the family unit. Prevention can be achieved through programs and supports including GPs who recognise post-natal depression and signs of violence in the home, child and maternal health services, through to programs such as the Kids Matter Program and promotion of respectful relationships from an early age, beginning in the extended family, kindergartens and primary schools. Inner South also supports greater resourcing for VicHealth’s Family Violence Strategy.
- **Education and training:** There is an urgent need for increased and ongoing resourcing for family violence education and training for: health professionals (including GPs); teachers; magistrates; and police. Given that staff turnover can be high and knowledge and procedures are often person-specific rather than systematic at the moment, there is a need for a systems wide solution to ongoing education and training in how to prevent, identify early and respond appropriately to family violence. Responsibility for sector education needs to be clearly identified and resourced. As an example, Magistrates need to better understand court-directed Men’s Behavioural Change Programs and their role in directing men to attend programs.
- **Police and Court responses to breaches of intervention orders:** The current system does not adequately respond to breaches of intervention orders. For example, Inner South routinely hears of perpetrators receiving several warnings for breaching intervention orders before any further action is taken. Breaches of intervention orders are also not given adequate weight in the Family Court (as highlighted in the Case Example below).
- **Easier transfer and communication of information:** Better systems for information sharing are required so that risk is established early and information is available to agencies in a timely manner. This is particularly important between women’s and men’s services in the family violence sector. A willingness to share and trust the management of confidential client information is required, placing the focus on risk management and the non-perpetrators (and extended families) right to know, rather than on the perpetrators right to confidentiality.
- **Review of the safety notice system:** While asking the perpetrator leave the family for 72 hours is acknowledged as enhancing the safety of women and children and allowing continuity of the family’s local supports and access to school and friends etc., the current

system lack adequate support for the perpetrator, increasing the risk for families and the police/courts. When safety notices are issued perpetrators may also need access to support and services for example, alternative accommodation.

- **Greater support for children impacted by family violence:** There is a need for greater resourcing for programs which focus on rebuilding the mother child bond after exiting family violence in response to mounting evidence that family violence adversely affects this relationship and can lead to long term psychopathology across the life span for children. There is also a need for more early intervention programs for children who have witnessed incidents as a means of interrupting the intergenerational transmission of family violence.
- **Access to suitable and affordable housing options:** Dedicated public housing for family violence perpetrators and victims which ensures people have secure housing for the period required for counselling, behaviour change programs and other life changes they need to make, particularly for children's schooling. Suitable, safe housing options following a stay in a refuge are necessary so that women do not feel that they have no other choice but to return to family violence situations. Suitable housing options for men released from prison are also required as they may seek to return to the family home if they feel that they have no other housing options.

Case Example: The need to increase the family violence focus of the Family Court

The process of family court can be challenging for all accessing this system, particularly for women who have experienced family violence. Children who witness sexual abuse or severe physical abuse of their parent (mother) are also very vulnerable. At present the family court system is unable to accommodate the complexity of cases where family violence has occurred.

S and her three primary school aged children were supported by a women's domestic violence worker during the time family court was in process. Due to allegations of family violence (there was an intervention order in place, including the children as protected persons, and outstanding criminal charges against the father), the case was exempt from mediation. However, during the court process, S would often debrief with the support worker that her own or her children's safety were being considered. S had a long history of experiencing family violence from her husband, including serious physical abuse, threats to kill, and emotional abuse. The children also reported that the father had been verbally abusive towards them and were worried about staying with him. The eldest child was receiving specialist psychological support as a result of their experience of family violence.

An Independent Children's Lawyer was appointed to this case; however S was disappointed to learn that this role did not include any contact or conversation directly with the children about their needs. S also reported that she found the process intimidating and stressful, feeling she was put in a position of needing to defend herself and be the person to raise and hold the context of family violence. S and the children felt their experience and ongoing safety concerns were not taken seriously, which was further reinforced by the outcome that the father was granted equal shared parenting responsibility and shared living arrangements despite the many years of limited parenting, no financial support to the children (refused to pay school fees and child support payments), and a history of abusive behaviours.

Question twelve: If you, your partner or a relative have participated in a behaviour change program, tell us about the program and whether you found it effective. What aspects of the program worked best? Do you have criticisms of the program and ideas about how it should be improved?

In a recent survey of men who have completed our Men's Behaviour Change Program, it was found that the exercises and lessons that resonated the most were the power and control wheel, timeout, thinking more before speaking and effective listening. The most useful topics covered have been: empathy (seeing violence from my partner's point of view); impact of violence on women; and maintaining values-based behaviour.

Useful strategies learned in the group which enabled new behaviours included: grounding techniques, assessing situations more clearly, breathing exercises, time out, removing oneself from the situation and having empathy for partner.

In terms of usefulness and impact on motivation to change, 100 per cent of participants rated the group as useful or very useful. In regards to whether the topics covered were useful in relationships, whether they increased the motivation to change, and whether they increased the ability to change, the response has been positive.

In regards to improving the Men's Behaviour Change Program, the men said that large group sizes made it difficult to engage and learn, and that monthly intakes (men joining the group at the beginning of every month) disrupts learning and impacts negatively on group cohesion. Although monthly intake to groups appeared efficient in increasing access, Inner South strongly recommends a close group model to ensure the development of a safe space to encourage openness and honesty.

Case example: The need for additional support in Men's Behaviour Change Programs

J is a [REDACTED] father of two children under five years of age and has been married for [REDACTED]. J entered into the behaviour change group as part of a court issued corrections order, as well as drug and alcohol counselling. While alcohol affected, he was originally charged with assaulting his wife in the presence of his children. When J first engaged, he presented as a reluctant participant, and claimed his treatment in the legal system was unjust, that the incident was a 'one off' and that he did not need to enter into a MBCP.

Individual counselling was indicated and conducted before J started the group. The preparation involved reviewing the barriers that were distracting him from addressing his behaviour, as well as allowing J to identify which areas he was motivated to address in regards to his behaviour toward his family. It also included preparing him for the nature and content of the group and managing the discomfort and emotions that may arise. Once ready, J entered into a 16 week closed group with approximately 15 other men. The group invited J to consider the impact of his behaviour on his wife and children, and he was encouraged to participate in exercises that focused on empathy and self-awareness.

J was able to notice how behaviours he thought were normal were actually controlling in a family setting. Strategies J said he learnt were: deescalating volatile situations by using time out, learning how to use nonviolent communicate in a respectful way, and self-regulating emotions. J is now better able to compile a strategy to maintain his changed behaviour and write an accountability plan to ensure safety should he lapse into violent behaviour.

Question fourteen: To what extent do current processes encourage and support people to be accountable and change their behaviour? To what extent do they fail to do so? How do we ensure that behaviour change is lasting and substantial?

Currently personal accountability is low and influenced by personal issues (not ready to acknowledge problematic behavioural and resistant to change), minimal consequences via the court system for breaching orders, no follow-up from Magistrates, and a lack of coordination between MBCPs, magistrates and police.

Whilst mandated programs within the criminal justice system are thought by researchers to be the way forward, we advocate multiple pathways for men to access behaviour change programs and believe the voluntary model and options for individual counselling as well as case management need to be retained alongside the development of integrated criminal justice responses. The Mirabel Project (men's behaviour change programs/interventions) from the UK has been subjected to research and evaluation and has been found to be successful in breaking the cycle of violence for perpetrators both from their and their partners/ex partners' perspectives.

Question fifteen: If you or your organisation has offered a behaviour change program, tell us about the program, including any evaluation of its effectiveness which has been conducted.

Inner South has a strong history in providing services in response to family violence. We provide services that include individual and group work for men, and individual work for women and children who have experienced violence. In 2002, Inner South undertook a three-year partnership project with Connections Uniting Care to develop and deliver a holistic service addressing family violence targeting women, children and men through group work. This included the development and implementation of Inner South's Men's Responsibility Program and a Men's Behaviour Change Group (a group that was first piloted in 2001 and has since run continuously).

The Men's Behaviour Change Program operates from the Inner South St Kilda site. The service operates Monday – Friday with after hours and outreach support available as appropriate. The groups run on Tuesday evenings (7pm to 9pm) during school terms. After hours interview times are available as required. The group has undergone several formations and currently operates as a closed group of 16 weeks duration with two facilitators and four individual sessions.

If necessary, men's attendance after program completion is tailored to meet the needs of individual men and their families. Partner contact interviews occur individually by telephone and face-to-face. Face-to-face appointments are available for women at all Inner South sites (St Kilda, Prahran and South Melbourne) with sites other than St Kilda being routinely offered for safety reasons. Transport assistance is provided for women as needed. Drug and alcohol, mental health and family, generalist and gambling counselling services are also available within Inner South. All counsellors are skilled in working with women affected by family violence and we offer a range of groups for women that further target the effects of family violence.

In 2009, Inner South undertook a detailed client survey with 750 clients across all services. 30 per cent of the clients surveyed had experienced family violence in their past. Broken down further, this equated to 22 per cent men and 38 per cent women. While we do not have family violence data for adult female victims specifically for our local catchment, police data since 1999 has consistently shown that the Southern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne has statistically significant higher rates of reports than other regions in Victoria.¹

Inner South practices according to the No to Violence Minimum Standards. Our service guiding principles are:

Services for men who use violence need to be part of an integrated system, coordinating with services responding to family violence at the local level

A coordinated and consistent approach supports the building of a community held responsibility for addressing family violence, helps hold men responsible for using violence and makes it harder to keep the issue hidden behind closed doors. Men using violence in families will experience consequences for their behaviour, while being offered help to change it. Those subject to violence are supported in seeking help, their safety will be enhanced and the number of instances of family violence reduced.

Inner South uses its considerable experience in networking to continue integration. We maintain involvement in regional and local meetings and convene a program reference group. The emphasis is on information sharing, particularly with the Moorabbin Court referrers for new clients.

The safety of women and children is paramount when working with men who use violence

The risk a man poses and the safety level of partners needs to be continually considered with men who use violence. A risk assessment approach, one that also takes into account women's stories and experience of violence, is needed in Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Safety is one of the first items canvassed with the women partners when they are contacted by the partner service.

A gendered analysis of violence is necessary

A gendered understanding of violence views family violence as male use of power and control over women and children. With our patriarchal history men continue to have more power than women in our society. Many men use violence and abuse to exert this power in family settings. Culturally embedded male entitlement and a socialisation process that supports male privilege underpin the continued use of violence.

A gendered understanding and practices are fundamental to the service we provide and are supported by the minimum standards for this work². Inner South has run Men's Behaviour Change Programs based on the role of gender in family violence for many years. An understanding of power and control informs the way our programs are delivered and what is presented to both men and women in their programs.

¹ Department of Justice 2011, Measuring Family Violence in Victoria, Victorian Family Violence Database, Vol. 5., Eleven Year Trend Analysis 1999- 2010, Department of Justice, Melbourne, Victoria.

²: "Men's Behaviour Change Group Work Minimum Standards and Quality Practice", No To Violence, 2006, page 32.

Violence is not to be seen as only physical

The use of violence to exert power and control over others can clearly be achieved by means other than physical violence. The various types of violence and abuse are defined and named by our services in group and individual work with both men and women. This is done in the knowledge that there is a common misconception in the community to think of violence as only physical.

Women & children have a right to stay in their homes when there has been violence

It is the men who have used violence who should have the consequence of moving from their place of residence, not the women and children subjected to it. Women and children should be able to stay safely where established patterns of community, school and family already exist. Inner South assists men with an exclusion intervention order against them in accessing emergency housing options.

Partner contact is essential in MBCPs

The partners and ex-partners of men attending men's behaviour change programs are offered contact in all cases. Partner Contact is necessary in order to hear and validate the woman's story, canvas safety and safety plans, inform about the men's program and support her decision making processes about her relationship. It is done in the interests of the woman and not to just check up on the man, although it also provides group facilitators a reality check about the violence as the men commonly minimise it. The wishes of women who do not want contact are respected.

Child safety has to be addressed in all work with both men and women in men's behaviour change programs, in terms of witnessing family violence as well as direct abuse. The safety and wellbeing of children is paramount, particularly where they live in situations where there is family violence. This is addressed directly via risk assessment with the men and in partner contact with the women, and is presented educationally as part of the men's group curriculum. Notifications to Child Protection are made when it is appropriate to do so, and assistance is offered for children when there are any concerns about the direct or witnessing effects of violence on them.

Access to men's services should be available to a diversity of people

Access should be available whatever a client's gender, indigenous status, cultural and linguistic background, sexual preference, life experience or financial viability. We support the development of men's behaviour change programs in indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and offer an exchange of knowledge and resources to assist this.

Adherence to the No To Violence Minimum Standards for MBCPs

These government approved standards of practice for men's behaviour change programs have been developed for and by practitioners. They are essential for work with men who have used violence, and their partners, because they give clear guidelines for safe and constructive practices in a complex and often difficult area of work. Inner South is a member

of No To Violence, a condition of which is agreement to adhere to the standards. Inner South Family Violence program staff members were closely involved in the development of standards in both the 1995 and 2006 versions.

Appropriate approaches need to be used for behaviour change work with men who use violence

Working with men to change their behaviour at Inner South is based on exploring motivation to change, educational approaches, challenge and support to change. The Men's Behaviour Change Program:

- has an entry assessment and ongoing risk assessment;
- always presents violence as a choice;
- invites men to take responsibility for their behaviour without blaming them;
- defines violence and its use as power and control;
- challenges the excusing, justifying, minimising or denying of violence;
- looks, with the men, at the effects of violence for those that they have hurt, as well as for the men themselves;
- explores alternative behaviours and constructive approaches to situations of conflict, including effective ways to communicate;
- is led by, and responds to, the experiences and needs of women and children; and
- actively seeks feedback from men, women, and where appropriate children, to support program development

Inner South's behaviour change program is educational, with therapeutic elements informing the origins of attitudinal issues and interpersonal skill deficits rather than rationalizing violent behaviour. Attention is also paid to group dynamics, varied learning styles and cognitive abilities.

Men's behaviour change programs work for safe separation as well as behaviour change

It is not unusual for relationship separation to occur during the time that a man is attending a men's behaviour change program. Often this is because the man is not changing or it is too late to repair things for the woman. In these situations, the work with the man needs to focus on safe separation and respecting his partner's choice, as well as on behaviour change.

Men's behaviour change programs need to be responsive and accountable to the experiences of women and children

These programs ask men to remove family violence from behind closed doors and be accountable to the experience of women subjected to violence. Programs mirror this by making their work transparent and accountable to women's services. We need to construct the response to family violence as a joint and mutually trusting exercise by men's and women's services.

Program Structure

Since its inception in 2001, Inner South has trialled several models, from closed groups (not open to new participants once the group has commenced) to rolling intake (men can enter the group at any time). Our analysis of client commitment to the groups and facilitator and client feedback has ultimately resulted in the current model.

The current Men's Behaviour Change Program at Inner South is a closed 16-week group program that runs twice a year. Men are expected to attend a minimum of 14 sessions before they are considered to have completed the program. Upon completion, facilitators are able to write letters for court purposes should the clients require them. However, these letters will only state the number of sessions which were attended and will not breach their privacy as to their participation or progress (as per the No To Violence Minimum Standards). The letters will also be given at the end of each semester. If the men require letters before the completion of program, the letters will also clearly state that they have not completed the program.

Each semester is divided into two nine-week blocks with a short break during the semester, and a break in between the two semesters. There are two intakes each year. Men can only enter the group program during the first two weeks of the semester. The group is closed thereafter and men will be put on wait list for the next intake.

Men may be placed on a maximum of a 20-week waitlist. These clients are supported by the family violence counsellors during this period of waiting. Counsellors work individually with men at least once a month during this period.

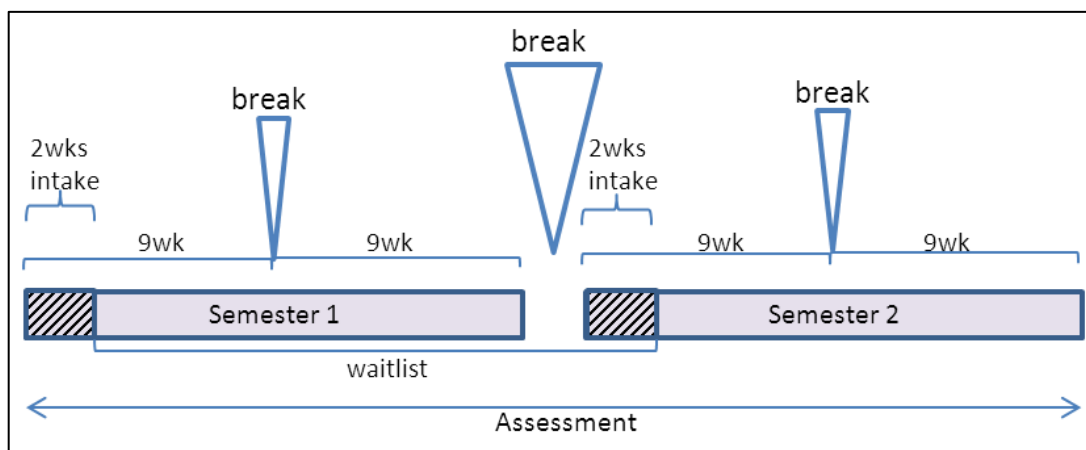


Fig. 1 Structure of the MBCP at Inner South / 42-week year

The rationale for the 16-week program is that:

- Counsellors have a reasonable timeframe to work with men and consolidate learning after laying foundations. This means that there are more opportunities for short to medium term therapeutic work.
- A longer program means that there is increased time to build trust with the men.
- There is a start point and an end point of group work in this 16-week program.

- This structure allows men to miss up to 2 sessions as compared to a 14-week programme where men cannot afford to miss any sessions.

Inner South has a detailed Men's Behaviour Change Program Client Service Model document that we can provide on request.

Voluntary and Mandatory MBCPs

Whilst mandated programs within the criminal justice system are thought by researchers to be the way forward, we advocate multiple pathways for men to access behaviour change programs and believe the voluntary model needs to be retained alongside the development of integrated criminal justice responses.

Inner South's experience has also shown that there can be benefits from integrating voluntary with mandatory programs, where appropriate. Where mandated men see that men choose to change voluntarily it has often had a positive impact in reducing resistance to change.

Recommended Improvements to MBCPs

Uptake of men identified by Victoria Police on a family violence call-out into men's behaviour change programs is less than 10 per cent in our area. The men are referred through the completion by police of a form known as an 'L17' to change programs. The process needs review and resourcing, as it could be an effective way to engage men earlier. Based on 15 years' experience in developing and delivering men's behaviour change programs, Inner South recommends the following model to improve the effectiveness of men's programs.

Inner South recommends funding should be based on a three-stage graduated group program (introduction/taking responsibility, followed by therapeutic work, and then advanced/broader work, such as alcohol and drug, mental health support and parenting skills) up to 24 weeks long, with maintenance contact afterwards. At the end of the introductory stage, men would be requested to commit to the program or return to the court. Currently, program funding is generally based on rolling intake and a 12 week program. A graduated program would better fit the progression of men through the change process from education/responsibility to therapeutic work, to broader change for example parenting skills.

Inner South also strongly recommends increasing the resourcing for counselling and case management services in addition, or alternative to group programs, as a group approach does not suit all. Further, even where a group program is beneficial, additional counselling or case management may be required to get an individual ready for a group setting or work on other broader issues.

There is also an urgent need for greater resourcing for partner contact and support. Currently, Inner South experiences positive response to offers for partner contact interventions; however we have insufficient resources to meet the demand adequately.

Finally, there is a need for better integration and coordination across the justice system and community support sector. Inner South recommends that the expertise of program providers is better utilised in the Court Counselling Order Assessment process, and that Court Counselling Orders are open to specifying alternatives to group-based behaviour change

programs where appropriate (for example one-on-one counselling or case-management). There is also a need for greater accountability to Magistrates for non-attendance, as currently there is very limited follow-up.

Funding uncertainty and short term contracts (1-2 year) with late advice of ongoing funding has severely reduced the capacity to programs to be efficient and effective. These funding patterns contribute to difficulties in recruiting from the small pool of appropriately trained and qualified staff. A commitment to recurrent funding will support agencies to build a strong resilient workforce who have employment certainty and commitment to the work.

Similarly, there is an urgent need for increased resourcing for training programs to resource men's behaviour change programs which are facing a workforce shortage. Resourcing for the Graduate Certificate in facilitation of Men's behaviour Change programs is urgently required.

Evaluations

At the end of each men's behaviour change program a client evaluation form is collected from participants. In recent years these evaluations have shown that the most useful discussion topics identified by the men are:

- empathy (seeing violence from my partners point of view);
- looking at the impact of violence on women; and
- maintaining values based behaviour.

Useful strategies learned in the group which enabled new behaviours included: grounding techniques, assessing situations more clearly, breathing exercises, time out, removing oneself from the situation and having empathy for partner.

In terms of usefulness and impact on motivation to change, 100 per cent of participants rated the group as useful or very useful.

In 2008 Inner South undertook a comprehensive evaluation of our men's behaviour change program from the perspective of partners, *Listening to What Matters: A Report on the Partner Contact Component of a Men's Behaviour Change Program*.³ We received funding from the Australian Government's Office for Women's Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Initiative, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to undertake research to explore the needs of women receiving support via the partner contact component of the program.

Listening To What Matters was initiated for several reasons. Firstly, we wanted to ascertain how the program, which had been delivered for over six years, contributed to enhancing the safety of women and children. We wanted to explore with the women what the contact with the program meant to them and whether this contact was helpful and met their needs. Secondly, while the Inner South partner contact worker speaks regularly with current and ex-partners of the men attending the program, there was interest in utilising the women's feedback to further develop the Inner South partner contact response and program broadly.

³ Howard, J, Wright, M and Borderlands Cooperative 2008, *Listening to What Matters: A Report on the Partner Contact Component of a Men's Behaviour Change Program*, Inner South Community Health, http://InnerSouths.org.au/content123/uploads/2012/08/Listening_to_what_matters1.pdf

Finally, Inner South was keen to share the learnings from the partners with other agencies and to positively influence the development of other men's behaviour change programs through these learnings.

The research was informed by a number of sources, including:

- 21 women whose partners attended the men's behaviour change program;
- a Women's (or Client) Reference Group comprised of three women who had previously received support from the partner contact worker at Inner South prior to the research period; and
- a Workers' Reference Group comprised of six representatives of service provider organisations, including No To Violence; Family Life and the Salvation Army Crisis Service.

The major findings of the evaluation found:

- **Validation:** The single most important and common finding was the importance of being contacted by a professional who, because of their knowledge of domestic violence, identified the problem as violence, understood women's experiences and was in a position to validate those feelings and experiences. Program staff helped women implement safety strategies and articulated that the violence the women had experienced was wrong and unacceptable.
- **Women's sense of safety:** Women did not unequivocally say that the contact made them feel any physically safer, although they said they felt supported and comforted by knowing that someone cared and could offer them practical advice and support. However they clearly indicated that if the men had not been in the program, they would not have had access to support services.
- **Enhanced sense of wellbeing:** Many women said the partner contact provided an important and helpful perspective on the relationship, the place of the violence and abuse in it, and the nature of love. It also helped them to deal with their feelings of unworthiness and to tell their stories, if they wished.
- **Enhanced understanding of domestic violence:** Many women spoke of how their contact with the partner contact worker helped them to understand more about domestic violence. This included realising that it is a common occurrence, that it impacts on women from diverse backgrounds and that it is about power and control. Being able to discuss why domestic violence occurs, its effects on women and children and how myths about domestic violence keep women and children trapped was liberating for women.

Recommendation

Current resourcing for MBCPs does not include funding for evaluations, making it difficult for service providers to evaluate the longer-term success of their programs. Inner South strongly recommends that funding for men's behaviour change programs include dedicated funding for evaluation studies to establish longer-term effectiveness and assist in improving program design.

Question sixteen: If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing approaches to behaviour change, tell us about any Australian or international research that may assist the Royal Commission. In particular, what does research indicate about the relative effectiveness of early intervention in producing positive outcomes?

As recently highlighted by the Centre for Innovative Justice, while research on the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs has been somewhat controversial, 'the elusive nature of 'proof' that men's behaviour change programs work should not detract from the many studies which indicate that these programs do have significant positive impact'.⁴ The Centre for Innovative Justice quoted the following studies supporting the benefits of these programs:

- A long term Australian study has indicated that men do experience participation in a behaviour change program as a significant and meaningful consequence.⁵
- A substantial project in the UK entitled Project Mirabel has recently released findings that a considerable number of men do reduce or cease their use of violence and coercion as a result of participation in these programs.⁶
- Equally, it is vital to recognise the considerable experience of many practitioners, who report the significant difference that perpetrator programs can make.⁷

With respect to the difficulty in proving the value of men's behaviour change programs quantitatively, the UK Early Intervention Foundation has observed, the debate about the value of standard batterer/men's behaviour change programs '*is a very good example of the tensions between the requirements of evaluation on the one hand and the locally variable and self-generated approaches of much local practice on the other*'.⁸

Research has been undertaken in the UK through the RESPECT organisation to determine what counts as success in family violence services. The Mirabel Project has considered the men's behaviour change program from the perspectives of victims, perpetrators, children, agencies and funders. They conclude that success can be measured by:

- an improved relationship between men in these programs and their partners/ex-partners;
- empowerment for partners/ex-partners through restoring their voice and capacity to make choices, as well as improved general well-being;
- improved safety and freedom from abuse for women and children;

⁴ Centre for Innovative Justice 2015, *Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view*, RMIT, <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/r3qx75qh2913.pdf>

⁵ Smith, J, *Consequences for men who use violence? Perspectives of men attending men's behaviour change programs and women from partner/ex-partner contact programs*, PhD research, <http://ntv.org.au/conference/wpcontent/uploads/2012-ntv-conference-workshop-1j.pdf>.

⁶ Kelly, L & Westmarland, N 2015, *Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs: Steps Towards Change*, Project Mirabal Final Report, London and Durham, London Metropolitan University and Durham University, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/criva/projectmirabal>.

⁷ 'Perpetrator programs do work' At <http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-growing-problem-of-family-violence-in-victoria>. This was reiterated in consultations with practitioners in MBCPs around in NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and the ACT.

⁸ J Guy with L Feinstein & A Griffiths, *Early Intervention in Domestic Violence and Abuse*, Full Report, Early Intervention Foundation, UK, 13 March 2014, p 81. <http://www.eif.org.uk/publications/early-intervention-in-domestic-violence-and-abuse-full-report/>.

- safe, positive and shared parenting;
- enhanced self-awareness and understanding by men of the impact of family violence on their families; and
- safer, healthier childhoods for children.⁹

Importantly, Men's behaviour change programs also offer wider benefits to women, which may not be captured in evaluations narrowly focused on behaviour change in men. As highlighted above, an extensive evaluation undertaken by Inner South in 2008 found that the program was highly valued by women partners.¹⁰ Similarly in the UK, Project Mirabel has recently released research which indicates that perpetrator programs have value to women in a variety of ways. In particular, Project Mirabel encourages a wider conceptualisation of program 'success' beyond the cessation of physical violence or attitudinal change, noting that women seek 'expanded space for action' – a sense that they are sufficiently autonomous and able to resume control of their own lives and decisions.

Question eighteen: What barriers prevent people in groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefiting from family violence services? How can the family violence system be improved to reflect the diversity of people's experiences?

Generally, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, people with disabilities and severe medical conditions, mental health or alcohol or other drug issues, people who are experiencing homelessness or other barriers to mainstream services are less likely to participate in men's behaviour change groups and face barriers to accessing other family violence services.

Also, Inner South believes that the needs and experiences of children are not adequately considered in the current response system. Inner South argues that programs and services seek and/or be based on feedback from children affected by family violence as to their unique needs and how these are best addressed. This is a specialised field of practice requiring highly skilled and motivated staffing.

We also see a strong need for women with varying visa arrangements living in Australia to have greater access to family violence services. There is a growing need for systems to support women on particular visas e.g. spousal visas.

Inner South's indigenous Access program has representatives on the Family Violence Indigenous Regional Action Group. We understand that in some circumstances mainstream family violence groups do not appeal or suit Indigenous community members. Kinship groups have family responsibilities and obligations to intervene in family matters, particularly older family members, but young men may be asked by an elder to intervene. The system must take into account the particular needs of Indigenous Communities and cultures in responding to family violence. In light of inherent mistrust of mainstream services within the Indigenous community, we support dedicated culturally specific services which include family violence issues within a more general service.

⁹ Westmarland, N., Kelly, L and Chalder-Mills, J. 2010 *What Counts as Success?*, London: Respect.

¹⁰ Howard, J, Wright, M and Borderlands Cooperative 2008, Listening to What Matters: A Report on the Partner Contact Component of a Men's Behaviour Change Program, Inner South Community Health, http://InnerSouths.org.au/content123/uploads/2012/08/Listening_to_what_matters1.pdf