



Nick Staikos MP

State Member for Bentleigh

The Electorate of Bentleigh

The electoral district of Bentleigh is a lower-house seat of the Victorian Parliament, located in Melbourne's south-east. In addition to the suburb of Bentleigh, from which it derives its name, the district also covers the entirety of McKinnon, Hampton East, and Moorabbin; as well as sections of Bentleigh East, Brighton East, and Ormond. It sits within the Southern Metropolitan Region of the upper house, and incorporates sections of the cities of Glen Eira, Kingston, and Bayside.

The district is home to a community of some 57,000 people: families, seniors, and young Victorians, with a collective heritage spanning the globe. Almost 30% of Bentleigh residents speak a language other than English, with Greek, Russian, Mandarin, Italian, and Hebrew topping the list. 26% of residents identify as Catholic, 11% Anglican, 9% Eastern Orthodox, 9% Jewish, and 24% non-religious. Median household income sits just slightly above the state average at \$1435 per week, with residents working in a wide variety of industries including education, hospitality, healthcare, administration, trades, and sales. 26% of residents are aged below 20 years, 24% between 20 and 39, 30% between 39 and 59, and 21% 60 years and over. The median age is 40, 3 years greater than the Victorian average.

The electorate of Bentleigh is not immune to police call-outs to family violence incidents. This by this table demonstrates graphically the marked increase in safety notices issued from 2008-2013.



Source: Bayside Medicare Local



Nick Staikos MP State Member for Bentleigh

Taskforce Alexis

Taskforce Alexis is an innovative initiative aimed at breaking the cycles of repeated incidents of family violence. It is a three year pilot although it is only funded for twelve months.

Taskforce Alexis has been operational for almost six months, commencing on 1 December 2014. It comprises twenty- four staff led by a Senior Sergeant under the active support of the Superintendent of Police, Commander of the Southern Metro Region Division 2. Twenty one of these staff are sworn officers. The Police Ambulance and Clinical Early Response (PACER) unit forms part of Taskforce Alexis. In addition, the taskforce comprises one Salvation Army family violence practitioner, a mental health clinician and an unsworn police staff member.

Taskforce Alexis is based at Moorabbin Police Complex. It covers three Local Government Areas in my electorate of Bentleigh: Kingston, Glen Eira and Bayside.

Taskforce Alexis is the first of its kind for both Victorian Police and also for Family Violence and other mental health services in Victoria.

Its primary focus is on breaking the family violence cycle through the use of an holistic approach which provides an integrated response to family violence, mental health, crime prevention and youth related crime.

Taskforce Alexis officers work primarily with recidivist offenders. They also attend serious incidents and are available on request from triaging units who may be the first at the scene of an incident.

Considerable care was invested in the planning of the structure and operation of the taskforce. Both the traditional police command and control culture and more typical family violence service responses were challenged and worked through in the development of Taskforce Alexis. This investment in what the taskforce might look like, how it would work, the reporting lines and the processes required has meant that a clear model has been articulated. This has enabled all stakeholders, and there are many, to understand their role, the importance of their contribution and also responsibilities and accountabilities. Victoria Police were involved in the selection of the Salvation Army Family Violence practitioner; the first time this has occurred in Victoria.

Both Victoria Police and the Salvation Army acknowledge that the setting up of Taskforce Alexis has presented challenges to organisational culture.



Nick Staikos MP State Member for Bentleigh

Victoria Police were mindful of a gap between Victoria Police and the services that support families. One of the intended goals was to develop a closer and more effective relationship with local services.

The Salvation Army has funded the family violence practitioner from a serendipitous staffing allocation surplus which occurred in the last calendar year. The cost of the Salvation Army Family violence practitioner is \$93,000.

This funding is no longer available.

The Salvation Army have also funded an independent evaluation which will run the length of the project and is to be undertaken by RMIT University at a cost of \$56,000.

Both the mental health clinician and the family violence practitioner are integral parts of the Taskforce Alexis team. They attend team meetings, are involved in planning; all of those activities that comprise a functioning team. In addition, the family violence practitioner attends team meetings and receives clinical supervision from her Salvation Army team.

In terms of operation of Taskforce Alexis the Salvation Army family violence practitioner and a police officer meet each day and discuss the incidents that have been reported over the last 24 hours. They then make decisions about the most effective intervention they can make. It is not unusual for the family violence practitioner and a police officer to visit the home of the perpetrator and/or victim/survivor together. This provides tangible evidence to the family that Victoria Police and family violence support services are working together.

The Salvation Army family violence practitioner may counsel the family; the perpetrator or victim/survivor although much of her role is connecting family members with the appropriate support services and where necessary advocating on their behalf. Each case is offered a unique response based on particular circumstances.

This provides a contrast to the previous strategy for reporting and support. It entailed the completion of a Form L17, Victoria Police Risk Assessment and Risk Management Report, by the police which would then be referred to a family violence service. The service would then attempt to contact the victim/survivor of the violence and provide them with supports. The Salvation Army have advised that they attempt to make contact four times and if this is unsuccessful, the case is closed. Taskforce Alexis provides a more effective way of dealing with family violence.

At the same time that support is offered for the whole family, Taskforce Alexis has a zero tolerance approach to breaches of intervention orders. The effect of this is that the perpetrators of violence know there will be consequences for the breach. In fact they will be remanded.



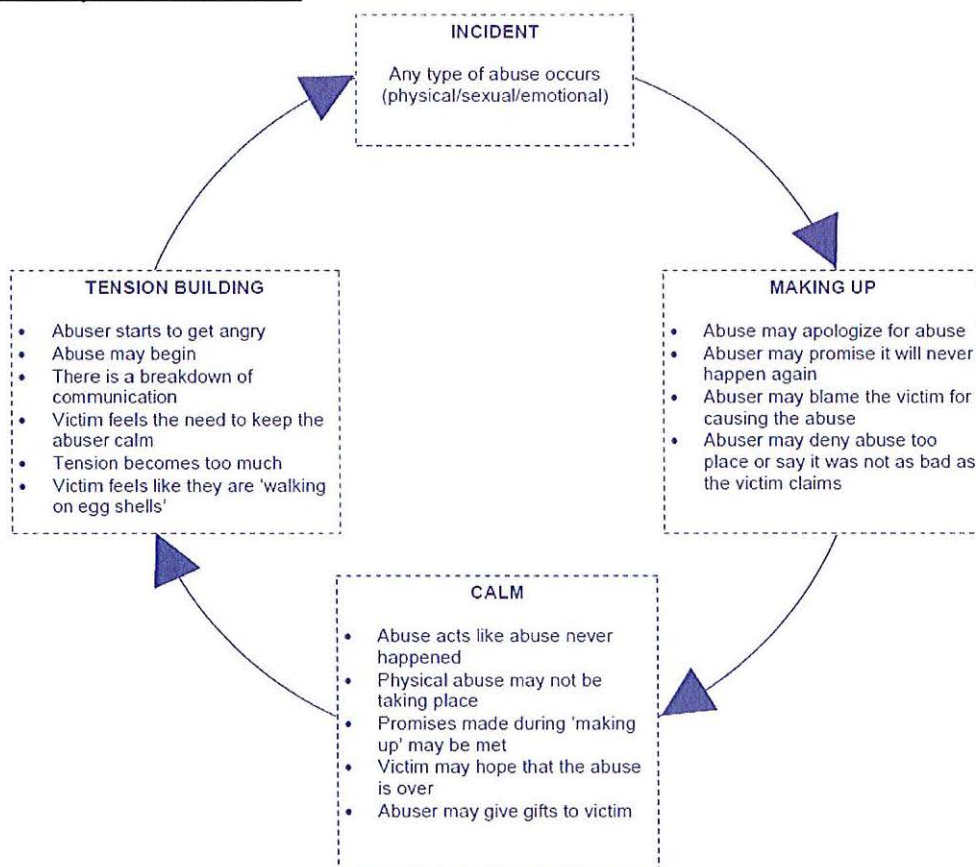
Nick Staikos MP

State Member for Bentleigh

Taskforce Alexis provides an integrated approach which is immediate. Interventions and support are available at the most appropriate time and police officers will act to remand if a breach occurs.

One of the great advantages of the approach Taskforce Alexis takes is that interventions occur at the crucial stage in the cycle of violence; after the 'Incident' occurs but before the 'Making up' stage. Better outcomes are more likely to be achieved if services are involved at this stage.

The Cycle of Violence



Source: Building Futures for Women and Children

Victoria Police report a shift in police mentality, particularly with regard to breaching of Intervention Orders.



Nick Staikos MP

State Member for Bentleigh

Each month the key stakeholders meet for a case management roundtable. This includes Taskforce Alexis officers, the Salvation Army family violence practitioner, the mental health clinician, Child Protection, Corrections, DHHS, Housing, Safe steps, Family First, Family Life, Courts, Moira, Victorian Legal Aid and others.

At this meeting the six most serious cases are discussed. Everybody at the table has some input and as a result holds a level of accountability.

Preliminary results include:

- A reduction in repeat calls relating to most serious recidivist offenders. By way of example, the family that had been number 1 on the list of recidivists have now dropped three quarters of the way down the list.
- Closer professional relationships with services leading to a more integrated approach to working with families.
- A more effective response to families through the monthly case management round table comprising Victoria Police, family violence and children's services, mental health organisations, housing organisations and government departments.
- Zero tolerance of breaches combined with appropriate and immediate supports, particularly the Salvation Army Family Violence Worker has led to a noticeable decrease in recidivism.

Recommendations

1. The State Government should fund Taskforce Alexis for an additional two years, the intended interim end date of the Taskforce.
2. The Government, provided the independent evaluation by RMIT University is favourable, should fund Taskforce Alexis in an ongoing capacity.
3. The Government in conjunction with Victoria Police, should roll-out Taskforce Alexis across Victoria.