



Child & Family Services Ballarat Inc (CAFS) Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence

Introduction

Child & Family Services (CAFS) Ballarat is a large community based welfare organisation providing services and programs across the Grampians region. With a staff of over 180 and an annual operating budget of \$16 million dollars, CAFS vision is to ensure wellbeing, respect and safety for all children and families. CAFS works to ensure all family members have access to high quality responsive and coordinated programs.

Our programs are delivered through three management streams;

- Family Violence, Family Relationships & Housing
- Family Services
- Out of Home Care

Family Violence Work at CAFS

CAFS is established as a leading family violence service in the State of Victoria. We offer a comprehensive range of family violence service responses to families with a specific focus on programs that engage and work with men who perpetrate family violence. CAFS also provides support services for women and children impacted by family violence as well as working closely with women's family violence services.

CAFS commenced delivery of Men's Behaviour Change Programs in the early 1990's, funded in part by CAFS, and now with funding from the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), The Magistrates Court of Victoria and Corrections Victoria. CAFS is one of only two organisations delivering the specialist family violence services to the family violence divisions in the Magistrates Courts.

In addition to Men's Behaviour Change family violence work, CAFS provides intensive case management services to men who are homeless as a result of their violence and abuse and an intensive Intake and Assessment program that receives in excess of 800 referrals a year, a large proportion of these coming from Victoria Police through an L17. Which is the document used by police to record their preliminary assessment to determine risk and safety for a victim



by considering a range of victim and perpetrator characteristics that affect the likelihood and severity of future violence.

CAFS delivers one of only three Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) programs in Victoria, having been instrumental in the development of this program in partnership with DHHS and Peninsula Health Services. CAFS was successful in accessing philanthropic funding through a grant from the Ian Potter Foundation to pilot an adolescent program in 2012 that has since received additional funding from DHHS.

CAFS works closely with workplaces, schools and the community to raise awareness and address the issues associated with family violence.

CAFS staff are active members of the family violence sector, participating in regional and state wide networks, forums and committees. Some of these committees include the Grampians Integrated Family Violence Committee, The Central Highlands Crime Prevention Committee, City of Ballarat Community Safety Committee and the Ballarat White Ribbon Day Committee.

As an organisation striving to end violence against women, CAFS was one of the first eight organisations in Australia to achieve White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation and is active in now supporting other organisations to achieve this accreditation.

To support the family violence work delivered by CAFS, we have a range of family services and out of home care services that work alongside the family violence services to achieve positive outcomes for family members.

CAFS also has an extensive housing program that provides services to women and children who are experiencing family violence. These services include crisis housing, short term transitional housing, private rental support services and indigenous support services. These programs work closely with all family violence services to ensure the safety of women and children is paramount in the decisions being made.



Submission Response

CAFS would like to provide the following thoughts, ideas and recommendations to:

- Assist in the ongoing development and improvement of a family violence system to prevent family violence
- To ensure women and children are safe
- To hold men accountable for their violence and abuse and to provide services to men to address their violence
- To address the community attitudes and beliefs that still support men to hold and maintain positions of power and control.

While CAFS acknowledges that violence and abuse can be perpetrated by both males and females, family violence is perpetrated predominantly by males towards their partners and children to maintain a position of power and control. In this context programs delivered by CAFS accept that:

- Family Violence is about power and control
- Men choose to be violent and abusive to maintain their position of power and control
- Men must take responsibility for their behaviour
- Men should be held accountable for their behaviour
- Men can change their behaviour.

CAFS believes that while much of the focus of its programs is on addressing and holding men accountable for their violence and abuse, and ensuring the safety of women and children, work is required in the community to discuss and address the issues of gender inequality, power and control that women experience on a daily basis.

CAFS is in a unique situation of providing family violence services to all family members. This includes:

MEN

Who are

- Voluntary clients
- Men who receive Counselling Orders through the Magistrates Court of Victoria specialist family violence division.
- Men who are referred on community based orders from Corrections Victoria.
- Men who are referred by other government departments eg, child protection.
- Men who are referred by community based organisations.



ADOLESCENTS

- CAFS delivers an Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) program aimed at working with adolescents both males and females who perpetrate family violence on their parents, carers and siblings.

WOMEN & CHILDREN

- CAFS provides services to women and children through the Men's Behaviour Change Program partner contact program as well as referring women & children to the relevant family violence women's services. CAFS also has the capacity to provide group work programs to women and children as the need arises.

The Family Violence Service System

The service system has grown and changed since CAFS commenced delivering Men's Behaviour Change Programs in the early 1990's. Initial funding came through the Department of Human Services and was primarily targeted at men who were voluntarily seeking a service.

The concept of "Behind Closed Doors" remained a strong theme and those speaking up about family violence were in many ways seen as trouble makers. Those advocating for men's programs were seen to be taking money away from women's services.

In the early days there were minimal structures and responses to male family violence work and it was not until No To Violence (NTV) guidelines for the delivery of Men's Behaviour Change groups was released in January 2006 that programs developed solid structures and became more credible and accepted. In the early days of Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) program development, mandated clients in the programs were a minority rather than, as we see today, the majority.

Changes to police protocols and the reporting of family violence incidents have seen a significant change in responses to addressing family violence. These changes include referrals for perpetrators and victims from police.

The establishment of the specialist family violence division in the Magistrate's Court saw the court system become more active in the family violence area with family violence trained Magistrates and court staff. The implementation of counselling orders directing men to attend Men's Behaviour Change programs supported a mandated response to addressing family violence.

This court intervention has played a significant role in holding men accountable for their violence and abuse as well as providing opportunities for men to change their behaviour. This court



overlay is crucial in increasing the safety of women and children and holding men accountable for their violence.

Corrections Victoria are now engaging more than ever in the community based MBC programs, referring clients on community based orders. A recent tender through Corrections Victoria will continue to see this work increasing.

With the ever increasing demands on the MBC services being made by departments that include the Magistrates Court of Victoria, DHHS and Corrections Victoria (CV) from a systems response it now feels like there are at least three bodies (DHHS, Magistrates Court & CV) fighting for their space in the service system. While there maybe discussions occurring at senior levels, at a service system response level there appears to have been little or no obvious communication occurring.

Compliance and the reporting of non-compliance has become an important and crucial component of the work, however it has not been a common component of Men's Behaviour Change work in the past. Non-compliance work is time-consuming, resource intensive and demanding on programs and services which have not been resourced properly to do this work. Each department is asking for what they need from the service system without what seems to be a considered coordinated response. With multiple departments involved, addressing family violence has become more difficult. As a result of this the service system is:

- Managing competing demands
- Trying to deal with multiple departments with varying demands and requirements
- Delivering varying models based on tenders, contracts & requests
- Managing client groups that are appearing in more than one stream eg, client in the family violence court system may also be in the Corrections Victoria system and the DHHS system
- Working in an un-coordinated manner
- Trying to manage compliance requirements with little or no training or support

CAFS understands these complexities, however we believe a more coordinated response is required.

The Grampians Region has for the past 10 years had a Regional Integration Coordinator (RIC) to assist the Grampians Integrated Family Violence Committee (GIFVC) to support the integration of the family violence service system to better meet the needs of clients. This position has also supported the integration of non-specialist family violence services into the family violence system to ensure a more integrated and seamless service is available to clients. This position has been integral in supporting the committee to drive change in our region. The position has offered support for regions to develop process and procedure unique to its situations. The committee (which oversees the position) has recently been independently reviewed and is in the process of



moving to an even stronger and strategic role in the area. CAFS believes this position should be used to support the reform agenda.

Much has been said recently that the family violence system is non-existent, in a shambles, broken, failing women children, not holding men accountable. CAFS believes that in the Central Highlands location of the Grampians Region that this is not the case and is concerned that many of the comments made are ill informed and inaccurate.

This region has an active Integrated Family Violence Committee (GIFVC) strongly supported by all family violence services working closely together to address family violence. Strong referral pathways exist between the police and women's and men's services, strong relationships exist between men's and women's services, innovative programs including the adolescent family violence program, client high risk recidivist meetings, the roll out of the RAMP (Risk Assessment Management Panel) and strong links with the court and justice systems are well supported.

The committee is active in the prevention sector with committee members involved in community activities, speaking engagements and important programs delivered locally. Act@work is an example of a locally developed primary prevention workplace program aimed at addressing violence against women. CAFS believes that regions that function well should be supported to grow and expand and, where appropriate, be used as models of good practice. CAFS is willing and able to play a leadership role in this.

The capacity of programs to work together to address family violence is inhibited due to poor data collection programs and data bases. Over time family violence programs have been "added" to existing data bases. Organisations use different data bases depending on contract requirements and no data bases have been designed specifically for family violence services.

Until the time when consistency in data collection and analysis can be achieved, the system will continue to have gaps, limiting knowledge transference and placing women and children at risk.

Recommendations

CAFS believes the following recommendations will assist in improving the current service system response to family violence.

- An overarching government body be established to provide whole-of-government advice and direction to all government departments to ensure government coordination. This should be made up of government employees, peak bodies and specialist family violence workers.
- The Royal Commission looks closely at service systems that are working well that can be better resourced to continue to improve and where possible replicated at other sites.



- Geography and location be considered in service system responses. A one model fits all will work at the top and should drive what occurs below, however flexibility needs to be built in to support the challenges experienced in regional and remote areas
- The specialist family violence divisions in the Magistrates Court be rolled out across state and resourced appropriately to
 - Hold men accountable
 - Increase the safety of women and children
 - Use counselling orders as a referral pathway into MBCP's to hold men accountable for their behaviours and to increase the potential of change occurring.
- Counselling orders implemented through specialist family violence divisions in the Magistrates Court be seen as a crucial component of the service system response in the court jurisdictions.
- A review of the specialist family violence court sentencing options for breaches of counselling orders occur with intent to increasing these sentences.
- Increase the specialist family violence court powers that see a man return to court once he has completed the MBC program as an additional accountability mechanism.
- Ensure specialist family violence court responses to recidivist clients and breaches of counselling orders is dealt with in a timely manner.
- A coordinated response to addressing family violence takes into account the Family Court of Australia and its role in working with families.
- A database be established that ensures the tracking of clients irrespective of their pathway into the service system and that this data base is accessible to the key family violence response services.
- A shared common language be agreed upon that markets the concepts of power and control in a way that can be better understood by all community members.
- Consider the possible merit of one agency per region being responsible for providing coordination, management, leadership and strategy for service delivery in that region



Men's Behaviour Change Programs

Men's work and Men's Behaviour Change programs are a crucial component of the service system in addressing family violence. Men are the major offenders in perpetrating family violence and unless our service system supports and funds this work appropriately there will not be an end to family violence. Guided by the No To Violence standards, Men's Behaviour Change programs play an important role in increasing the safety of women and children, holding men accountable for their violence and abuse and working with men to change their behaviour.

To be successful in the change process men must be engaged into the work. We must move away from the belief that men who just 'turn up' and attend a program to meet attendance requirements will change. While the exposure to the work that occurs in a group is an important aspect of the work, the capacity to safely challenge men as to why they believe they have a right to behave the way they do is crucial in the change process. CAFS believes the MBC programs require evidence based responses to drive change and appropriate support should be available to these programs to achieve this.

As a leading provider of Men's Behaviour Change Programs across Victoria CAFS has developed and delivered many programs and models to men who have perpetrated family violence, whether they be voluntary clients, court directed clients on counselling orders or Corrections Victoria clients completing community based order requirements. Our goal has been and will continue to be increasing the safety of women and children by working with men to challenge their values and belief about power and control leading to behaviour change.

CAFS, since its commencement in MBC work, has trialed, developed and implemented a variety of different approaches to the work. This has included the delivery of 12 session programs, 22 session programs, 14 session programs, closed groups, open groups and support groups for men. CAFS has also delivered support groups for women who are victims of family violence and children's groups.

CAFS continues to strive to find the elusive model that evidence is saying is the most appropriate one to deliver. CAFS has been in the unique position through the different funded programs to deliver different models. CAFS believes that evidence should strongly inform program development and implementation and that consistency across the MBC program sector is required. Current minimum standards for the delivery of MBC programs require an immediate review, in line with new and emerging evidence.

The Magistrates Court of Victoria funded programs provides an opportunity to deliver an Intensive Response Programs (IRP) for men who are resistance to address their behaviours and resistant to complete group work. This is a one-on-one counselling model delivered over three sessions. This program has a significant impact on engaging men into the work and has contributed successfully in addressing resistance to the work. CAFS believes that this work should be a core component of all Men's Behaviour Change programs.



CAFS provides individual programs to men who are deemed as not suitable for group work. Those men who may be excluded from group will potentially have:

- Learning disabilities that restrict their capacity to learn in group
- Mental health issues that limit their capacity
- Men who are highly resistant to group work and if placed in group would
 - Be difficult to manage
 - Have negative impacts on other men
- Men with significant drug and alcohol issues that impact on their capacity
- Men who are just not going to change

CAFS believes that this work increases the safety of women and children by keeping men engaged in a service response. Current MBC models are not resourced to complete this work and many of these clients risk falling out of the service system. CAFS believes that MBC programs should be funded to provide alternative models of delivery other than group work to increase the safety of women and children and to keep perpetrators of family violence in the system.

CAFS programs are strong supporters of counselling orders through the Specialist Family Violence Court with internal data showing that attendance and completion of the MBC program is significantly higher with this cohort of men compared to referrals through Corrections Victoria and other referral pathways. CAFS believes that counselling orders are a crucial component of the court responses to holding men accountable.

Much of the commentary in relation to ending violence against women and children has focussed on men being mandated to attend MBC programs and if non-compliant receiving appropriate sentences. This is of utmost importance however it needs to be noted that this is a very small cohort of men in our society. These are the men that have been caught.

If we work on the premise that their needs to societal change to end violence against women then programs such as MBC require the resources to do this. MBC are currently inundated with mandatory clients and compliance work reducing their capacity to target all men in the community. MBC programs now have limited capacity to work in the community to address the broader social issues of gender inequality, patriarchy and power and control.

The service system is so overloaded with Police L17 referrals, an increase in court mandated clients that they lack the capacity to offer interventions earlier in the cycle.

If we continue to wait until men have been “caught” before we address the reasons for the violence abuse in our community then we are not working on ending the violence.



The family violence court counselling program delivered through the Specialist Family Violence Court where men are placed on counselling orders to attend Men's Behaviour Change programs is one program attempting to break the cycle at an earlier point. Although men have been "caught" it is hoped that an intervention at this point will increase the safety of women and children and support men to address their violence and abuse. This in turn will reduce the chances of family members progressing further into the court systems.

Funding MBC programs to implement early intervention programs to all men is crucial in the societal change model.

Recommendations

CAFS believes the following recommendations will assist in improving the current responses that Men's Behaviour Change Programs can make

- The Counselling orders model referring men to MBC programs through the family violence divisions in the Magistrates Court be adopted as common practice in all magistrates courts.
- The component of Intensive Response Programs (IRP's) currently funded through the Magistrates Court of Victoria program be considered a core component of all Men's Behaviour Change programs and funded appropriately to address resistance with men.
- Men's Behaviour Change programs are funded to provide early intervention services to all men in our community to break the cycle of violence at an earlier stage.
- Men's behaviour Change programs be funded to do primary prevention work with students and young people (particularly to males but not excluding females) to stop the violence and abuse before it commences.
- NTV (No To Violence) be resource appropriately to
 - Provide leadership in MBC work to government and non-government on best practice models for MBC work.
 - MBC guidelines are regularly updated in line with new evidence and best practice.
 - External audits all men's programs occur on a regular basis to ensure best practice.
- Men's Behaviour Change organisations are funded appropriately to deliver evidence base programs that can measure change and safety. Programs should be similar and consistent in length, size and content.



- All MBC programs should be delivered within a consistent framework addressing elements of the work that includes the length of the group, the numbers of participants and the content delivered.
- Consider the possible merit of one agency per region being responsible for providing coordination, management, leadership and strategy for service delivery in that region

The Community

It is now well established and understood that to address the issues of violence against women it must be seen as a community issue that requires a community response. Addressing the issue only with men who attend Men's Behaviour Change programs means that the majority of men in our community are not exposed to the conversations of gender inequality power and control. In some ways CAFS believes all men would benefit from a Men's Behaviour Change programs.

The sector and the community continue to struggle with the language we use to discuss family violence. Much of the commentary is about the behaviour (physical, sexual, verbal etc) rather than the causes driven by gender inequality, power and control. The community generally believes family violence is the behaviour. We interweave words like domestic violence, family violence, family abuse, victims, survivors, perpetrators, users of violence and, to add to the conversation, we talk in welfare language, legal language, and police language. When we do introduce the language of gender inequality, power and control the community struggles to understand what it all means.

We need to find common consistent language that everyone understands.

Prevention programs should target schools, universities, workplaces and organisations where men are. Programs being offered by White Ribbon and Ourwatch need to be funded at a local level so that regional and rural communities can deliver them. Locally developed and evaluated programs are owned by the community and accepted as mechanisms for change. CAFS is active in delivering many family violence prevention programs in the settings mentioned and believes that drivers for long term change in our communities sit within these environments.

Currently very little funding flows from the peak prevention organisations mentioned in to local communities and networks. As an example, Ballarat is a strong supporter of the white ribbon initiatives, however relies on the good will of organisations to free workers up to run the white ribbon activities. Communities are asking for these programs however the lack of resources and coordination means that ad hoc responses occur.



Recommendations

CAFS believes the following recommendations will assist in improving the community responses to addressing family violence.

- Primary prevention work is considered a “given” and funded accordingly.
- White Ribbon prevention activities should be funded in local regions as part of an Australian wide prevention strategy.
- Regionally developed programs be supported
- The challenges of working in smaller regional and remote areas in primary prevention work be acknowledged and funded accordingly.
- Gender inequality and power and control are central to the language being developed to explain violence against women.
- A common language statement be developed that the community can connect with
- Consider the possible merit of one agency per region being responsible for providing coordination, management, leadership and strategy for service delivery in that region

Adolescents

CAFS has, for the past three years, rolled out an Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) program targeted at both males and females who perpetrate violence against parents, carers and siblings. This is newly funded work in Victoria and while its early stages some initial findings of the Ballarat Program have identified:

- 80% of our abusive teens have experienced violence in the home predominately perpetrated by dad or stepdad.
- The majority of adolescent clients in the program are victims of family violence
- Based on the above figure, concerns around intergenerational violence is a reality
- A significant proportion of mums in the program (52% and 18% unknown) have mental health issues: depression, anxiety and often limited social networks. This highlights a connection between what we know about violence and the negative outcome for women.