



QUANTUM SUPPORT SERVICES INC.

RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES PAPER

For further contact:

Alan Wilson
Chief Executive Officer
Quantum Support Services Incorporated
227 Princes Drive
Morwell, VIC 3840

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Quantum Support Services Incorporated (Quantum) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Issues Paper released by the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

We are an independent not-for-profit organisation whose proud history demonstrates over 30 years of providing accessible, high quality advocacy and support services to meet the needs of the Gippsland community.

Quantum delivers an extensive range of family violence programs including outreach services, after hours service response, private rental brokerage, a statewide high-security women's refuge, specialist children's support worker, Safe at Home Program, A Place to Call Home Program, case management and intensive case management that includes specialist service provision to Aboriginal women, CALD women and women with disabilities.

Quantum's response to this Issues Paper draws on this experience and practice knowledge.

Quantum advocates that there are a number of unique delivery issues in a regional setting which add to the complexity and cost of providing family violence services, and a number of other existing service delivery issues that are exacerbated by a regional context. Quantum strongly advocates for systemic reform in the allocation and distribution of funding to family violence services to reflect these compounding issues to allow location based sector responses and to ensure equity, access and a better service response to women, men, children and families in regional settings.

Quantum has responded to 7 of the 21 questions.

ABOUT QUANTUM SUPPORT SERVICES INC.

Quantum's program delivery focuses on achieving the best outcomes for individuals and families in the Gippsland community upholding their human rights, including the right to be safe and free from violence.

Our programs are delivered from four service centres located in Warragul, Morwell, Sale and Bairnsdale as well as from two refuges. Quantum provides an outreach program and an after-hours service to ensure accessibility to all members of the Gippsland community.

These programs included include;

- family violence
- family support
- homelessness crisis and transitional support for families and single adults
- homelessness prevention
- youth homelessness
- youth refuge
- court integrated support
- home based care
- leaving care
- other youth focussed programs including youth justice

Quantum has demonstrated its expertise in the delivery of services to disadvantaged families and individuals and has built a solid reputation for quality service provision to its client groups.

The philosophy and approach of Quantum is demonstrated in all its practice in the community and is consistent with the governments' strategic view of prevention and early intervention to ensure sustained change and better outcomes for families. Quantum also subscribes to the need for an integrated approach to service delivery as demonstrated by its wide range of delivery partnerships and representation at all levels on the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Sector.

Quantum recognises the need for a whole community approach as demonstrated by its work with schools, education and training organisations and as a White Ribbon Organisation to educate community members about violence before it occurs.

Our vision is of an equitable and inclusive community that values and supports social, economic and cultural wellbeing. Driven by fundamental values of respect, integrity and empowerment, the organisation strives to support the rights of the community and the best interests of all our clients.

Quantum's extensive local knowledge and experience is focused on adapting best practice from across sectors and regions to build the capacity and strength of Gippsland families and prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty, violence and disadvantage.

RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPER

QUESTION TWO – The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered.

Police

Quantum strongly supports recent reforms in responses to family violence, particularly the implementation of the *Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (2014)* and the development of specialised family violence units (comprising Victoria Police & Child Protection) at several regional police stations.

In Gippsland we have three of these specialised family violence police units, in Morwell, Sale and Bairnsdale and Quantum work with all three units to varying degrees. We have experienced significant improvement at all levels of policing in these units and have found members provide a consistent, informed and appropriate response. Further, we believe these specialised units demonstrate a clear commitment to address family violence at higher levels of policing by engaging with community at events and local forums and undertaking specialised family violence training (CRAF).

Quantum strongly supports the focus of the specialised family violence units on recidivist offenders and has found they are more responsive to issuing multiple charges, acting on order breaches and work to educate other members across the region from non-specialised family violence units. Further, this consistent approach from the specialised family violence units builds confidence in the women to report, knowing that police will respond appropriately.

As a family violence service provider, we have found local police are sufficiently involved in the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Sector and we have a largely positive and productive working relationship with them when collaborating on individual cases (through our after hours, outreach or case management services).

However, our women's experience of the police response in our region varies greatly, perhaps because it includes areas of significant family violence activity without a specialised police presence (Baw Baw and Bass Coast Shires). Some women have reported feeling re-traumatised by having to repeat their lived experience with family violence in their interactions with different police personnel. Some have also advised of an inconsistent response across police personnel and a lack of understanding of the complexities of family violence. Some have described their concern with a lack of focus on offender accountability despite repeated interactions with the police, leaving the family far from feeling safer, but further disempowered and victimised by the system itself, with one woman's 9 year old commenting the "police work for dad"¹.

We believe there is further work to be done by the police to embed a consistent family violence informed response by having all police undertaking frontline duties undergo compulsory training in family violence and to explore improved methods of recording and internally sharing the history of a family to minimise the impact of repeated testimonies of victims.

Justice

Quantum strongly supports the reforms undertaken in this area such as the *Family Violence Protection Act* (2008) but advocates for greater reform in a number of areas within the courts system.

As a family violence service provider, we have limited regular contact with court representatives and believe their presence within the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Sector should be expanded.

We have also had many negative experiences within the court system when working with our individual women, including from sitting magistrates who have demonstrated a lack of respect for the women and a lack of understanding of the complexities of family violence, particularly in dismissing her assessment of her safety. Quantum advocates for all frontline court staff undertaking specialised family violence training.

We have had many women state that they feel victimised by the system as it fails to prioritise both their safety and the accountability of the perpetrator.

In some regional areas, including Gippsland family violence matters are heard in older court buildings with little capacity to accommodate the safety or confidentiality requirements of the women. They are commonly required to wait in the same area of the building as the perpetrator and his family or supporters and are sometimes subjected to further intimidation and threats.

Ideally, purpose built family violence courts could be constructed with separate entrances, waiting areas and interview rooms to manage these risks. In the meantime, there is a need to increase the security at the existing venues with additional visible security staff, screening of visitors and providing escorts for women who require it.

Further, in the absence of purpose built facilities, we would advocate for the immediate development of specialised family violence hearings based on the 'Koorie Court' model where all individuals and services are present (including for the men) at a round table discussion with a magistrate rather than in a court setting. This model would also strengthen the accountability of the offender, as an opportunity to hear and understand the impacts their violence has had on the women and children and acknowledge the harm they have caused.

¹ Interviews with family violence clients, May 2015

This model could be easily integrated into our existing court processes and structures to assist women to feel safe and empowered when taking legal action.

We believe alternative justice models must be explored to deliver immediate, punitive responses to male violence, which research demonstrates encourages behavioural change.

Quantum would also advocate for a greater integration of the civil and criminal aspects of family violence. We have had difficult situations arise regarding bail conditions when working with some families, with the man being bailed on a criminal proceeding to an address where they have been excluded by an Intervention Order taken out by the woman for family violence. It seems there is a disconnect between these parts of the system and we believe there needs to be improved communication and monitoring of this interplay to maintain the safety of women and the accountability of the perpetrators.

General comments

Quantum recognises that the Office of Housing has undergone significant improvements in relation to its consideration of family violence within its management of the applications process and to property damage issues. However, we have had incidences where our client's safety has been compromised by the actions of the Office of Housing sending out letters (to perpetrator) which disclose location and/or that the woman had engaged our services despite the fact that Quantum had nominated to receive all mail for safety reasons.

We believe the applications process could be improved by adding questions about safety, by educating staff about family violence and in particular of working with secure locations (refuge) and by developing a document management system that flags some applicants as high risk.

Quantum would also advocate for further consideration of family violence in the Residential Tenancies Act in order to minimise the impact on women's future housing options. All too often we see women saddled with significant rental arrears and property damage costs after having to flee the home into secure refuge. These women are at the mercy of the real estate agents (who arguably work for the homeowners) to act promptly to dissolve the tenancy and secure the property to minimise arrears and possible damages. An otherwise impeccable rental history can be ruined by a blacklisting from such a situation which excludes these women from the private rental market into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide training in family violence to all police
- Police maintain and share internally more detailed records on incidences within a family
- Greater involvement by court staff in the Integrated Family Violence Sector
- Family violence training to all court staff with frontline duties
- Immediate introduction of family violence courts modelled on 'Koorie Court' practices
- Civil and criminal aspects of family violence need increased channels of communication
- Office of Housing staff undertake family violence training
- Office of Housing add safety questions to applications made on the basis of family violence and improve their internal systems to adhere to these
- Reform of the Residential Tenancies Act to consider family violence

QUESTION SIX – What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?

The average Latrobe Valley family has a standard of living that is lower than the Victorian average², a rate of high to very high level of psychological distress, higher than both the Gippsland and Victorian averages, and reports lower levels of social connectedness than their regional counterparts³. These are all recognised contributory factors to violence in the home⁴

These generational vulnerabilities have resulted in record levels of family breakdown and violence with the highest number of reported family violence incidences in Victoria, two and a half times the state average⁵. In addition it has the highest proportion of young people admitted to out-of-home care and the highest ratio of child protection reports in the state, including the highest re-report rate of any region⁶.

This multiple and generational disadvantage results in a greater isolation of family members with fewer outside influences upon which to model alternative behaviour and learn other life and living skills, such as;

- understanding healthy relationships
- understanding feelings and self-talk
- understanding violence and power
- assertive communication and problem solving skills
- budgeting and household management
- personal care and hygiene
- legal rights and responsibilities
- accountability and responsibility

An absence of these skills and limited opportunities to learn them ensures the transmission of problematic behaviours and the continuation of the cycle of violence through generations. Quantum has recognised an increase in referrals for women experiencing violence from people other than their current or former intimate partner, the majority of who are for parent/child violence, with the majority of perpetrators under eighteen years of age and the majority of the women as single parent households.

Our community has a very high number of single parent households, with the population concentrated in the 10-19 and 40-64 year age groups⁷. These female lead single parent households are impacted by the gendered pattern of both adolescent violence and family violence by adult men and it reflects the intergenerational transmission of violence, boys modeling their abusive father's behaviour towards women.

² Department of State Development Business and Innovation, 2012

³ Department of Health, Victoria's Population Health Survey, 2012

⁴ Cottrell & Monk, 2004

⁵ Victoria Police, 2012

⁶ Department of Human Services, 2012

⁷ ABS Data

QUESTION SEVEN – What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?

Quantum advocates that capacity building programs which provide an opportunity to acquire or increase life and living skills are the most successful way to reduce the occurrence of family violence in our community.

These programs, when delivered in a group setting, provide a new skill set and model of behaviour which participants may not have experienced previously within their familial home, and a supportive environment to build their confidence in achieving behavioural goals related to nonviolence and respect, with progress reported each week in group, fostering accountability for behaviour and keeping the focus on using skills learned.

While the department funds the Men's Behaviour Change Program across Victoria to increase skills and insight in adult male perpetrators, Quantum advocates the need to provide capacity building programs to both women and children to reduce the occurrence of family violence, with some children (and adolescents) being considered both victims and perpetrators of family violence.

Quantum currently delivers a number of programs, some of which do not attract government funding, to build the capacity of families in Gippsland in order to reduce the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and violence. These include;

Inspiring Women

It runs for a school term and aims to;

1. Increase their understanding of interpersonal relationships including parent/child
2. Increase safety
3. Understand the gendered nature of family violence
4. Strengthens self-image and self esteem
5. Strengthens parenting skills and helps parents identify healthy and safe choices for themselves and their families
6. Develops improved strategies to respond to behaviour
7. Practical assistance such as legal support
8. Facilitates connections to community links and other supports

Living Skills

This is a flexible and client centred program of skills development to enable successful independent living for young people. It includes communication skills and relationship strengthening, budgeting, household management, legal rights and responsibilities, shopping, laundry, hygiene, being organised, personal care, household cleaning and living with others.

Facilitated by trained practitioners, key themes include;

1. Social Media
2. Bullying
3. Money
4. Drugs & alcohol

5. Cleaning
6. Cooking
7. Employment
8. Sexual Health
9. Healthy Relationships

Rock and Water

Quantum has delivered components of this program in primary and secondary schools across Gippsland to young clients identified by the school as exhibiting 'at risk' behaviour that may result in future involvement with the justice system. Principals report a consistent improvement in communication skills and behaviour including the use of self-management techniques resulted in a sustained change. Requests from schools for this program continue to grow and as a result Quantum has invested in training over 30 of its staff as Rock and Water Practitioners.

Rock and Water is about developing positive communication skills and raising awareness of feelings and emotions, and of challenges and personal qualities. Rock and Water is characterised by the development of the unique psycho-social approach, the triangle of action (experiential learning), thinking (self-reflection) and verbalizing (feelings and emotions).

Quantum strongly advocates that an early intervention approach to build the capacity of both young people and women to increase their understanding of healthy relationships and to support young people to take responsibility for and reduce their problematic behaviour reduces the intergenerational transmission⁸ of violence in our region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Funding of early intervention approaches to address adolescent violence
- Funding of life and living skills to build the capacity of young people
- Funding of group work to women to build their capacity around responding to violent behaviour in men and in their children
- Funding of therapeutic groups for children who have experienced family violence to build children's resilience, self-esteem and to affect change in the generational cycle of violence

⁸ VicHealth, *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*

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

Failure by funding bodies to respond to consequences of police reforms

One of the significant consequences of the police reforms has been the dramatic increase in numbers of L17's received by support agencies such as Quantum who hold a service agreement with the Department of Human Services (the department) to provide a service response to women and children.

For several years state government funding did not keep up with the sustained increase in the number of L17's, indeed the initial screening and processing of these reports was not funded at all, instead the management of these reports was 'absorbed' as a component of case management funding. More recently, the department has sought to address this by funding intake, however in our area an .8EFT position is funded which is insufficient given the volume of reports.

This issue is further compounded by the fact that such family violence programs are funded on the basis of the populations in various regions rather than the actual number of incidences of family violence reports (L17s) or of additional self-referrals.

For example, the Latrobe Valley has a population of 125,000 and based on that, the department funds a total of 223 targets for outreach and 8.6 targets for intensive case management per year (this covers Latrobe, Baw Baw & Wellington Shires).

However, the Latrobe Valley area has the highest number of reported family violence incidences in Victoria, two and a half times the state average⁹. In addition it has the highest proportion of young people admitted to out-of-home care and the highest ratio of child protection reports in the state, including the highest re-report rate of any region¹⁰.

For the six month period of the 2014/2015 financial year, Quantum received 1,731 L17 reports, this figure does not include the number of women who self-refer which is often equal to the number of police referrals¹¹. The funding received to respond to these 3,000 women and children is based not on the frequency and severity of the incidences, but on the number of people, even though evidently this group generates many more times the number of incident reports than pure population figures would suggest.

It is not uncommon for our annually funded targets to be met in the first or second quarter of the year, and every year up to 400% above the agreed target number in the service agreement with the department.

Consequently, a triage approach to referrals has evolved in response to the sheer volume of reports. As an organisation which prides itself on the quality of its services and in being proactive in addressing the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage and violence in our community, this situation has forced us to make difficult choices about prioritising resources to the most at risk, at the cost of some other important family violence activities such as community development.

⁹ Victoria Police, 2012

¹⁰ Department of Human Services, 2012

¹¹ Quantum Support Services data 2014/2015

It has had a detrimental impact on our family violence team, with workers feeling over stretched to deliver what is a challenging role to begin with, and feeling the pressure of delivering less than an optimal service response to families in need, including the cumulative trauma of the 'lost opportunity' to intervene effectively bringing all possible resources to bear. It has become a human resource management issue for us to ensure the safety and well-being of our staff under these conditions.

A triage approach has a number of very undesirable consequences including;

- cases are prioritised and only the most serious are addressed
- staff turnover and burnout
- difficulty in finding suitably qualified or experienced staff in a rural setting
- quality and length of case management is reduced
- complexities of cases not addressed
- choices and opportunities for women compromised
- community development activities not prioritised
- our community does not have a highly visible family violence support presence

This approach of funding on a population basis is even more problematic in remote locations with smaller populations across our region. It often means, the department chooses to fund a nearby agency to deliver a service over a very wide geographic area to address a number of towns and outposts. The funding itself, reflecting the small population, can be as little as .5EFT to provide a service response. The agency does not necessarily possess the specialised skills and knowledge required to provide a family violence service, however the small amount of funding provides little ability or incentive to organisationally integrate into the wider family violence service sector to support and develop that specialised skill base or contribute to strategic planning for the region.

The service delivery by these agencies invariably concentrates within the larger towns which are closer to the agency to minimise the expense and time needed to travel, meaning the more remote areas receive no service. Unfortunately, sometimes these part time positions are absorbed by the organisation with no real family violence service being provided, or with such variability in how and where they are delivered that the programs are unrecognisable from area to area. Further, it is impossible for that one part time individual worker to sufficiently integrate into the family violence sector by attending practitioner meetings, limiting the peer support and professional development available and isolating the service further.

In such circumstances, the effectiveness of the service provision is entirely dependent upon the individual's skills, knowledge and networks which is unfair to the community and unsustainable as a model.

In addition to the inadequacy of the funding model to address the volume of police reports, the model also fails to recognise the added expense of delivering the programs over a wide geographical area and the complexity of preserving the safety of women and children in a regional setting.

A number of common risk factors for women are more evident in regional settings and often require the transporting of these women and children out of area to address them. This adds to the complexity and cost in ensuring the safety of these families.

Examples include;

- geographic isolation
- greater social isolation
- no public transport available
- perpetrator may have relationship with local police through community activities such as sport
- woman may have relationship with local police
- no crisis accommodation locally
- difficulty in locating motel accommodation across a wide area particularly in peak tourism periods
- greater access to firearms in a rural setting
- family break up has implications in the division of the family farm (livelihood, income & asset)
- no interpreters available
- no medical facilities available
- some specialised services do not outreach to Gippsland, requiring staff to drive client to and from Melbourne to access (such as support on immigration issues)
- services not available within region such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation

In addition to the volume of referrals issue, this 'one size fits all' approach to funding service delivery results in a struggle to address individual complexities in cases and subsequently a significant shortfall in quality provision which is commonly left to regional service providers such as Quantum to manage.

General comments

One of the family violence services that Quantum provides is a statewide high-security women's refuge. This refuge was established many years ago in an isolated area far from any town, facilities or transport which compounds the feeling of isolation for many women. It is also a communal living facility which is not suitable for a number of families who require a high security refuge service.

The age and location of the building in a high fire risk area has also meant that Quantum has had to evacuate the refuge on occasion, further disrupting families in residence.

Quantum is aware that the department's more recently commissioned facilities such as Orana Gunyah in Morwell (a family violence refuge for Aboriginal women and children) address all these concerns in their location, design and construction.

Quantum strongly advocates for a statewide review of current refuge accommodation and a program of replacement of older facilities is undertaken to provide a more optimal refuge service to all women and children requiring high security accommodation.

Quantum advocates for the increase in availability of a specialised family violence therapeutic response to women and children such as counselling, particularly in regional settings. Currently few of our women are able to access this kind of support at the critical time in their journey with family violence when they feel they are ready. Instead, they are placed on a waiting list for months on end, and often when it becomes available their circumstances or acceptance of the need for counselling has changed. It is a missed opportunity to break the cycle of violence.

Further, in regional settings there is only one specialised service provider per area who is funded by the department to provide counselling, with very often only one practitioner within that agency providing the service because the funded targets are so low.

Quantum advocates for an increase in this funding to provide women and children with the opportunity for choice in preferred practitioner and for greater flexibility around the length and intensity of service provided.

Quantum strongly supports the ongoing reforms which emphasise the exclusion of the offender from the familial home as the preferred option where deemed safe by the women. However, Quantum advocates for the increased provision of crisis and longer term accommodation and individualised support including case management for the excluded offenders in order to ensure the viability of this practice, and to further preserve the safety of women.

Quantum has concerns about the lack of options for men, with Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP) being effectively the only service response currently and advocate for this to be expanded to include counselling, capacity building programs and case management. It is problematic to fund only group work as a service response to men, as some men may never be ready or willing to undertake a group based program. This is potentially compounded by the increasing number of men who are court ordered to attend.

Quantum advocates for an evaluation of the effectiveness of MBCP in achieving sustained behaviour change before expanding its delivery further. This program currently operates largely in isolation from the women (and children) concerned and recommend a robust evaluation consider both the number and severity of violent incidences reducing (as reported by the women) and the sustained safety of the women and children effected as indicators of its effectiveness.

Quantum advocates the funding for therapeutic responses to family violence be expanded to include capacity building group work for women and for young people.

These living skill programs, when delivered in a group setting, provide a new skill set and model of behaviour which participants may not have experienced previously in their familial home, and a supportive environment to build their confidence in achieving behavioural goals with progress reported each week in group, fostering accountability for behaviour and keeping the focus on using skills learned.

We believe that developing positive communication and relationship skills and raising awareness of feelings and emotions provide both therapeutic outcomes and as an early intervention approach is the most successful way to reduce intergenerational transmission of family violence in our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reform the model of funding of family violence responses to reflect actual number of incidences rather than population
- Funding to reflect the additional complexities and expense of preserving safety in a regional setting
- Statewide review of refuge accommodation and replacement of older facilities
- Increase funding to provide a therapeutic response to women and children, particularly in a regional setting
- Provide funding for case management and accommodation services for men
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of Men's Behaviour Change Program
- Provide funding for capacity building programs (group work) for women and children to reduce the transmission of family violence

QUESTION TEN – *What practical changes might improve integration and co-ordination? What barriers to intergration and co-ordination exist?*

General comments

- The implementation of privacy legislation has resulted in some organisations and government departments not appropriately sharing information and coordinating with others in the sector through fear of breaching their obligations. Education on the relevant nuances of the legislation in the context of family violence should be made available to reduce these blanket responses by some organisations
- It can be problematic when assisting a client across region or state boundaries as there are no protocols or guidelines for family violence services to facilitate this. Anecdotally, perpetrators also move across regions and states and as they move on from victim to victim. It would assist organisations to coordinate if national protocols could be developed for information sharing and managing referrals for women and a national database of perpetrators
- It can be difficult for an agency to maintain an ongoing dialogue with police over a particular case sometimes, given the nature of the police shift work. Consideration needs to be given to improve methods of communication internally so that multiple members can input into a case, given that shiftwork rarely coincides with the office hours that agencies are available
- In regional settings, family violence matters are heard by magistrates on a circuit which often means they lack local knowledge and there can be great variance in how these matters are dealt with creating uncertainty for women and their supports. Consideration needs to be given to dedicated family violence magistrates in regional settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide education on the application of privacy legislation in a family violence context to clarify organisation's obligations and facilitate greater coordination
- Develop national protocols for information sharing and referrals
- Improve internal record keeping/information sharing of police
- Specialised family violence magistrates on circuit

QUESTION EIGHTEEN – What barriers prevent people in particular 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?

Quantum advocates for additional resources to engage with women without permanent residency status. These women are arguably the most isolated and the most vulnerable to family violence often without access to other family or friends, language, transport, money, identification documents or knowledge of their rights in this country or the services available to assist.

All too often these clients access our services by chance. A neighbour sees something or hears something and suspects family violence, so they talk to the woman and facilitate contact with a cultural centre who then contacts a family violence service who arranges an intervention¹².

Even once the safety of the woman is secured in alternate accommodation, the woman is entirely reliant on support services for income, food, information, referrals and any other support. The process of achieving permanent residence can be derailed by the actions of her partner interfering with documents or refusing to cooperate with compliance requirements, so often the woman requires specialised support to assist with immigration issues. The only service providing such specialised advocacy is located in Melbourne, so our workers are required to transport the woman to and from appointments in Melbourne from Gippsland, taking up the entire day.

It is a very time consuming and expensive support that this particular cohort requires, often for very long periods of time while they await an outcome on their residency status application.

Quantum advocates for a more comprehensive approach to engage with these vulnerable women utilising the intelligence of governmental immigration services to identify this cohort and additional resources to provide the support they require.

Alternative models need to be considered to provide these resources. A \$10,000 bond or guarantee could be paid by the husband to governmental immigration services prior to the woman’s arrival which could then be accessed via application by support services if the woman requires a family violence support service to fund accommodation and income support.

This model would act as both a punitive measure for the perpetrator and a safety net for the woman to ensure support was available for her should the need arise, reinforcing both the accountability of the perpetrator and the safety of the woman.

It would also mean that support services would no longer carry the burden of these labour and resource intense cases.

General comments

As a consequence of inappropriate levels of funding to meet demand and a triage approach to managing the volume, our community development activities have not been prioritised. This has a greater effect on isolated groups, such as the growing Sudanese community in our region. For a number of cultural reasons, our Sudanese women are not approaching our crisis service when there is a need for a service response (as indicated by L17s).

¹² Interviews with family violence clients, May 2015

Quantum need the time and resources to build trusting relationships with female community members and leaders to ensure they are comfortable to access services, to run group programs with Sudanese women only to build their capacity or to develop other suitable service responses in consultation with community leaders. However, under our current funding conditions we are unable to do so and Quantum advocates that this disproportionately excludes certain groups from engaging with services (particularly CALD).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A proactive engagement strategy be developed for newly arrived women or those without permanent residency
- Additional resources made available for their support
- A bond model be explored to fund the support of these women
- Community development activities be funded to reach CALD groups

QUESTION TWENTY – Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to improve policies, programs and services which currently seek to carry out the goals set out above?

Quantum advocates for reform in the funding of family violence services to reflect both the volume of instances and the added complexity of preserving safety in a regional setting, to truly enable a quality location based response. Quantum believes that a Melbourne centric and ‘one size fits all’ approach to funding disadvantages regional providers to best respond to their local communities.

Quantum strongly advocates for a reformed funding model enabling flexibility for locally based organisations to leverage their local expertise, their program experience and their existing region wide integration to deliver innovative approaches to vulnerable families.

As the local crisis response provider, we are aware that it is common practice for services across the state to place women and their children in motel accommodation until a refuge is available or a support service is available. However, we have concerns of the appropriateness of this service response and the impact it has on the women returning to their violent partners.

Our women report;

- instances where every motel room in the complex is taken up by women (and their children) in similar circumstances fleeing family violence
- in a regional setting this is problematic in terms of the partners locating them while in the motel
- these stays in motels (with children) can be up to 3 weeks at a time
- they are unsupported in motels by services other than by occasional phone calls
- they struggle to manage their children in a motel setting and question their parenting ability
- they spoke to other women in the motel about the frequent placements in motels by family violence service providers and the disruption this cycle brought to their children

- women left alone in this environment began to question their choice to leave as a result of all the uncertainty they are facing
- fear about their future
- without immediate support women begin to doubt their ability to forge ahead and make decisions and some of the internalised verbal abuse begins to weigh heavily “everything he said about me is true”
- the isolation of the motel makes it easier to return to their relationship
- this is a key moment the women decide to return to what they know if the fear and certainty overwhelms them¹³

Quantum advocates that this initial service response in ‘motelling’ families is a missed opportunity to break the cycle of violence. We believe that it is a critical moment when a woman contacts in crisis for assistance and all resources should be brought to bear in this moment, of greatest risk, to facilitate the leaving and preserving her safety in not returning.

Quantum strongly advocates for the funding model reforms to enable services to develop location based accommodation and support services to provide an alternative to unsupported motel stays.

In the Latrobe Valley we believe a stand-alone regional family violence based service that provided crisis accommodation and acted as a ‘hub’ for a range of services to wrap around the woman and her children at this critical time would meet this need.

Advantages of this model would include;

- provide safe crisis accommodation
- highly specialised family violence staff
- enable the woman to have face to face support when needed while in crisis
- immediate material needs could be met
- access to thorough assessment including medical, mental health, drugs and alcohol
- specialised assessment of children’s needs
- specialised children’s services
- comprehensive treatment planning could start immediately
- site would act as a centralised delivery point for services including therapeutic care
- case management could be provided on site
- comprehensive safety planning provided if returning to the home

This model could also act as a hub for dispersed transitional or private rental accommodation provided in the community to enable a supported exit point from crisis accommodation.

It could provide a service to support the safety planning of the family if there is a commitment to change and stay together.

¹³ Interviews with family violence clients, May 2015

This model would allow for a more comprehensive and flexible response to family violence requirements in our community, enabling the services to wrap around the whole family both in the short and medium term rather than the client having to navigate a complex service sector unsupported, risking a return to an unsafe and uncertain future.

General comments

Previously, there was significant investment by government in the development of a Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework and Practice Guides 1,2,3 (2012) also known as CRAF.

Training in this framework was systematically rolled out across the state and delivered to a wide range of service providers including specialist family violence and those services who may be at risk points in identifying family violence such as schools or GP's.

However, this important program of training appears to have ceased.

Quantum strongly advocates for government investment into the ongoing delivery of this family violence training across the state (in particular in regional areas) to an expanded group of service providers (hospitals, emergency relief workers, Police) including all frontline government personnel, as a demonstration of a whole-of-government commitment to addressing family violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Funding reform to provide for development of flexible location based response such as stand-alone regional family violence centres where appropriate
- Invest in an ongoing program of training in CRAF in regions
- A whole of government approach to training frontline staff in family violence in a number of risk points such as maternal child health, social housing, medical centres, hospitals