

bethany

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

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1. Introduction

Bethany Community Support (Bethany) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Royal Commission's terms of reference, specifically around the area of perpetrator accountability.

Bethany was founded in Geelong in 1868 and provides services to men, women and children across the Barwon and Western Districts Areas in Victoria. Bethany's vision is for a society where there is opportunity for all. In order to achieve this vision, we value people and work together to strengthen lives and effect positive change. We do this through the provision of a wide range of support services and activities that aim to:

- ensure the safety, wellbeing and participation of vulnerable children
- strengthen vulnerable families and support those in a caring role
- reduce the impact of homelessness and increase access to housing
- lessen the impact of family violence and change perpetrator behaviour
- reduce problem gambling and its effects
- build better relationships and stronger communities.

Bethany is funded to deliver specialist family violence services and programs to women, children and men and is the only community support organisation based in Geelong that is specifically funded to work with men who use family violence. Ensuring the safety of women and children is the core focus of all family violence services and programs delivered by Bethany, including those programs specifically targeting men.

The key messages that underpin Bethany's family violence services include:

- the safety and well being of women and children are our first priority
- all forms of violence are unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- perpetrators of family violence must be held accountable for their behaviour
- ending gender-based inequalities is integral to preventing male family violence
- working together with others ensures the best outcomes for the women, children and men that we work with.

2. Bethany's services and programs specifically targeting men who use family violence

In Victoria, program responses for men who use family violence are largely limited to Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs). Two exceptions to this at present are the Enhanced Intake Service funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Men's Case Management (MCM) program funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

2.1 Men's Behaviour Change Program

In the Barwon Area, Bethany is responsible for delivering the voluntary MBCP in Geelong. This program is funded by DHHS and is a key initiative under Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children.¹

MBCP components

Key components under Bethany's MBCP include:

- **Eligibility assessment:** men are assessed in terms of their suitability to participate in the MBCP. This process involves a comprehensive assessment of a man and an assessment of risk for his ex/partner.
- **Group work program:** experienced and qualified facilitators deliver this program over 24 sessions covering eight modules. The group work content facilitates a process where men are held fully accountable for their use of violence, in an environment that is non-violent, non-judgmental and respectful of women and children. This is available for men aged 20 years and over who are deemed eligible to participate and is delivered to up to 16 men at any one time.
- **Partner contact services:** this component aims to extend information, support and advocacy to women and children (where appropriate) who have experienced family violence perpetrated by men participating in the group work program. Partner contact is available for any woman with whom the man has – or recently had – an intimate relationship.

¹ Victorian Government (2012) *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children, 2012-2015*, accessed 4 May 2015, available at: http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/736056/preventing_violence_against_women_and_children_action_plan_102012.pdf

Theoretical underpinning

Bethany's approach to the MBCP is underpinned by the Duluth Model, which provides for a system that considers men's use of violence through a gendered lens and places accountability and responsibility on the man using the violence.² The Duluth Model operates with an integrated service system response to ensure the safety of women and children and hold men accountable for their behaviour. It offers a psycho-educational offender program for men, which focuses on weakening the power that men have over their victims, exploring the intent and source of their violence and the possibilities of change through a different kind of relationship with women.³

The key guiding principles of the Duluth Model include:

- removing the blame from the victim of family violence and placing the accountability on perpetrators of family violence
- shared policies and procedures for holding perpetrators accountable and keeping victims safe across all agencies
- prioritising the voices and experiences of women and children who experience violence in the creation of policies and procedures
- believing that violence is a pattern of actions used to intentionally control or dominate and intimate partner and actively works to change societal conditions that support men's use of tactics of power and control over women
- ongoing discussions between criminal and civil justice agencies, community members and victims to close gaps and improve family violence responses.⁴

Program referral

There are several pathways in which men who use violence can access Bethany's MBCP. A high proportion of men choose to enter the program voluntarily (self referral) or may be referred to the program by their partners, family members, and employers. Men may also be referred by other Bethany services, including the Enhanced Intake service, the Men's Case Management (MCM) program, the Geelong Strengthening Risk Management Program (GSRMP) and the Risk Assessment and Management Panel (RAMP). Agencies such as Victoria Police, Child Protection, Corrections Victoria and community agencies may also facilitate their referral.

In 2013/14, Geelong's MBCP received 127 referrals. 44 men were assessed for group and 28 men commenced the group work component.

2.2 Men's Enhanced Intake (MEI) service

The Men's Enhanced Intake (MEI) service operates within an integrated family violence service system in the Barwon Area and aims to provide timely accountability responses to men who use family violence. The Enhanced Intake worker is the first point of contact within Bethany for all men who have been referred by Victoria Police. This service provides clear referral pathways for men who use violence, with men either being referred to the MBCP or to other services deemed appropriate.

Bethany received a total of 1,142 men's referrals from Victoria Police in the 2014 calendar year, and 340 men's referrals between January and April 2015. The percentage of men who responded to contact from the MEI and in turn, were able to be referred to men's family violence services remained relatively small.

2.3 Men's Case Management (MCM) program

The Men's Case Management (MCM) program provides timely case management to men who use family violence against women and children, and in particular, those men who require housing assistance due to removal from the family home. The MCM program aims to:

- facilitate opportunities for men to engage with family violence services, in collaboration with Victoria Police and Corrections Victoria
- provide case management responses to men who choose to engage with family violence services, with a focus on facilitating accountability and risk management strategies
- assist men to establish alternative housing, as a result of their removal from the family home due to family violence
- where possible, work closely with women's and children's services to monitor safety risks, and to facilitate timely accountability and risk management responses as informed by women's and children's voices.

² E Pence & M Paymar (1993) *Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model*, Springer Publishing, New York.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *What is the Duluth Model*, accessed 13 April 2015, available at: <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/about/index.html>

In 2013, Bethany entered into an arrangement with Victoria Police, which involves the Men's Case Manager working one day a week at the Geelong Police Station to allow for immediate engagement with men.

In 2013/14, the MCM worker provided services to 84 men. MCM is funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

3. Services and programs that support men who use violence to be accountable for their behaviour

3.1 Geelong Strengthening Risk Management Program (GSRMP)

The Geelong Strengthening Risk Management Program (GSRMP) aims to strengthen risk management responses to women and children identified at high risk of serious injury and/or lethality due to family violence. The program provides intensive case management to women and therapeutic case management for children experiencing family violence, as well as men's case management for men using violence. The program collectively aims to support and enhance the safety and well being of women and children and facilitate a risk management and accountability response for men using family violence.

In 2013/14, the Women's Case Management and Children's Therapeutic Case Management workers provided services to 31 women and 30 children. In all cases, the risk of family violence had reduced from 'imminent' risk at time of referral to a reduced level of risk that was manageable for the affected women at case closure.

The GSRMP is also responsible for the coordination of the Risk Assessment and Risk Management Panel (RAMP). RAMP is chaired by Bethany and involves senior representatives from Victoria Police, Child Protection, Corrections Victoria, specialist women's family violence services, legal, housing, family and health services convening monthly to plan and coordinate integrated risk management responses to families identified at high risk of family violence.

44 women and 84 children presented at RAMP in 2013/14, while 42 women and 81 children have presented between July 2014 and April 2015.

DHHS provides funding for the GSRMP. Specific funding for the case management for women, children and men is due to cease on 30 June 2015. Funding to support the coordination of the RAMP will continue.

3.2 Specialist Family Violence (SFV) service

The Specialist Family Violence (SFV) service provides therapeutic counselling and support services, including outreach and case management to women experiencing family violence and where appropriate, their children. The service aims to enhance the safety and well being of women and children, and to increase women's sense of empowerment and agency.

In 2013/14, the SFV service provided assistance to 119 women experiencing family violence. The SFV facilitated clients' safety planning, educated clients about the nature and dynamics of family violence, provided therapeutic responses to clients' psychological distress and trauma, and linked clients to appropriate housing, legal and other relevant support.

The SFV service is funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS).

3.3 Family Violence After Hours Program

The Family Violence After Hours (FVAH) Program provides risk assessment, safety planning, support and referral to women and their children experiencing family violence outside of normal business hours. The program operates between 7pm and 6:30am Mondays to Thursdays and 7pm Fridays to 6:30am on Monday mornings. All referrals come through the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

In 2014, the program experienced a steady increase in demand and provided emergency accommodation and after hours support to 50 women and children.

The program is funded by the Victorian DHHS.

3.4 Children's Contact Service

Bethany's Children's Contact Service provides assisted changeover of children between separated parents and supervised contact visits of children with non-residential parents. The service aims to ensure all contact between children and their parents is conducted in the children's best interests and provides a safe, positive experience for children who attend the service.

Anecdotally, Bethany estimates that approximately 70 to 80 per cent of families involved with this service present with family violence issues.

The service is funded by the DSS.

3.5 Child Family Information, Referral and Support Teams (FIRST)

Bethany is the lead agency of the Barwon Child FIRST partnership. Child FIRST provides a single entry point for families and professionals to access a range of community-based family services and support. The primary function of Child FIRST is to undertake intake assessments of the needs of vulnerable children and families and then target the appropriate family services to meet those needs.

Bethany has witnessed an increasing number of Child FIRST referrals presenting with family violence issues. For example, 40 per cent of all Child FIRST referrals in 2012/13 recorded family violence issues⁵, while in 2013/14, this figure rose to 46 per cent.

This service is funded by the Victorian DHHS.

3.6 Integrated Family Services Program

Bethany provides an Integrated Family Services Program, which incorporates Family Services Casework, New Parent Infant Network (NEWPIN) Early Years Program and SafeKids. All of these services receive their referrals from Barwon Child FIRST. These services provide child focused and family centred interventions, including casework, assertive outreach, case management, volunteer support and group work interventions.

The aim of this program is to enhance children's and adolescent's safety, stability and development by focusing on building the capacity of parents, carers and families to meet their needs. Services include family counselling, support and advice with parenting and managing children's behaviour, group work, mediation and case management for families with high needs.

These programs are funded by the Victorian DHHS.

3.7 Parent education programs

Bethany offers a number of parenting programs specifically focused on building emotional intelligence in parents and awareness that equips parents to remain focused and responsive to their children's needs/emotions and feelings. These programs, which are funded by the DSS, include:

- **Bringing Up Great Kids:** a six week parenting program aimed at building respectful, caring and loving parent-child relationships. The program provides insights to children's emotional development and the importance of connecting in a loving way with children; supportive strategies for being a reflective (not reactive) parent; strategies for respectful and positive parent/child interactions; and a focus on communication to support children's positive self identity.
- **Great Dads, Great Kids:** an eight week parenting program targeting dads with children up to the ages of 12 years, who want to build supportive, respectful and loving relationships with their children. The program focuses on the changing role of fathers and different styles of parenting; child development and basic child care; being a responsive dad; guidance and discipline; building healthy self esteem, family relationships; connecting through play; looking after yourself.
- **Navigating the Rough Swells:** a six week post-separation parenting group that aims to explore the effects of separation on parents and their children; assist parents to develop skills for relating to children's issues and concerns around separation; provide communication tools to enhance connection with children, family and ex-partner; assist with implementing strategies to manage the changing family circumstances, shared care, re-partnering, step parents and siblings and difficult behaviour.
- **Building Connections:** a three-hour seminar run in partnership with Geelong Family Relationship Centre targeting separated parents. The seminar is focused on assisting parents to have healthy and strong relationships with their children and explores the impact of separation and conflict on children; ways of communicating with the other parent; setting goals for future parenting; and available support services.

⁵ Family violence can be recorded as a presenting issue under the following categories: current economic abuse; current emotional or psychological abuse; current physical abuse; current youth family violence; history of family violence; and verbal abuse.

4. Snapshot of men who use violence in the Barwon Area

Bethany collects data on men who use family violence (as well as women and children experiencing family violence) through its services and programs.

Data collected from Victoria Police Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Reports (L17 forms) men's referrals in 2014 shows the following trends:

- Victoria Police made 1,142 men's referrals to Bethany.
- 34 per cent of all men were between 20 and 29 years of age (17% each for the 20-24 and 25-29 age categories).⁶
- 52 per cent of men were either in a defacto relationship or separated from their partner at the time of the family violence incident.
- Verbal abuse was the most commonly reported abuse for men (31%), followed by physical assault of both a summary and indictable nature (26%) and emotional abuse (14%) in 2014. Breaches of Intervention Orders were reported in 9 per cent of all referrals.
- 42 per cent of men were reported as being at immediate or elevated risk.
- 37 per cent of men had previously had a L17 referral.⁷
- More than half (53%) of all men were identified as using or possibly using drugs and/or alcohol.

Data collected by Bethany's FVAH Program also demonstrates a high proportion of drug use amongst men who are using family violence. For example, between July 2014 and March 2015, 47 per cent of women who accessed the service reported the use of the drug Ice by either the man or both the man and women. Of these women, 85 per cent indicated that the man was using Ice on a regular basis.

RAMP data collected in 2013/14 and between July 2014 and March 2015 also highlights the high use of drugs and/or alcohol by men who use family violence, as well as the presence of mental health issues:

- 77 per cent of women presenting at RAMP identified men as using drugs and alcohol. Between July 2014 and April 2015, ice was the most commonly reported drug used by this group (69%), followed by alcohol (28%) and cannabis use (3%).
- In 2013/14, 36 per cent of men⁸ presenting at RAMP were involved with mental health services. There was a slight decrease (24%) in this number between the July 2014 and April 2015 period.

RAMP data also highlights a significant proportion of men presenting at RAMP as having some type of involvement with Corrections Victoria (45% in 2013/14 and 43% between July 2014 and April 2015).

5. Gaps and challenges in current program responses for men who use violence and opportunities for improvement

In Victoria, program responses for men who use family violence are largely limited to Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs). Bethany has identified a number of gaps and challenges that it faces in delivering programs to men who use violence.

5.1 Program funding levels

Bethany receives funding (\$105,000 per annum) to deliver the MBCP to men who use family violence. This funding provides for 0.9 equivalent full time (EFT) position to work with approximately 60 men per year. Current funding allows for a MBCP worker, casual group facilitators and a partner contact worker. At present, Bethany has a waiting list of 85 men for the MBCP, which equates to a waiting period of between three and six months. To deal with the increasing program demand within the current program resources, Bethany is obligated to prioritise high-risk men for this program.

There is considerable demand in Geelong for interventions that work with men who use family violence. In 2014 alone, Bethany received 1,142 men's referrals from Victoria Police. While Bethany acknowledges that not every man referred by police will be eligible for, or want to attend, a MBCP, the level of funding for interventions to work with men is significantly underrepresented in terms of demand for services. This poses a number of risks, including:

⁶ Referral data for January to April 2015 demonstrates a slight decline in the proportion of men in the 25-29 year category (13%), with a slightly higher proportion of men presenting in the 20-24 (19%) and 30-34 (17%) age categories.

⁷ Data for the January to April 2015 period shows an increase in the proportion of referrals with previous L17 (47%), with 20 per cent of these men presenting within the 20 to 24 year old age group.

⁸ This figure assumes that there was one man presenting for every woman.

- Bethany not having the capacity to engage with and support ex/partners of men on MBCP waiting lists and therefore promote women's and children's safety
- Missing an opportunity to engage with men – research suggests that men who enter programs within two to three weeks after first contact with police are more likely to engage with and complete MBCPs.⁹
- Minimising the accountability of men – research suggests that delay in entering programs can vindicate a perpetrator's belief that his behaviour is not unlawful or inappropriate.¹⁰

This raises implications for Bethany and other program providers in Victoria, who are unable to engage and work with men quickly due to program funding being misaligned to the demand for services and ultimately the extent of the family violence problem.

Limited program funding has also had implications for Bethany in terms of attracting, retaining and supporting staff. Attracting and recruiting men into our workforce has been a particular struggle for our organisation, with men representing less than ten per cent of our workforce. This has implications for our ability to provide gender balance in our programs and for men to experience the modeling of non-violent ways by male workers. Bethany is of the view that the level of program funding is a significant consideration in this issue.

Working with men who use violence is also a very challenging and demand role. This has resulted in:

- a high turnover of MBCP facilitators
- staff burnout
- staff being more predisposed to suffer from vicarious trauma as a result of working with men who use violence.

The level of program funding does not acknowledge the highly specialist work that is required to work with men who use violence and the need for staff to be equipped, trained and highly supported to do this work.

Recommendations

1. That funding for programs that target men who use family violence be reviewed and appropriately resourced to:
 - maximise the accountability for men and promote the safety of women and children
 - acknowledge the specialist skills required to work with men who use violence and the significant support and training required for staff.
2. That funding for programs that target men who use family violence be regularly reviewed and adjusted to reflect the current demand for services.
3. That the Royal Commission investigate the reasons why men are not attracted to working with men who use violence and identify strategies to address any barriers.

5.2 Partner contact work

Bethany is firmly of the view that partner contact is an essential component of programs working with men who use family violence. Partner contact is critical for holding men accountable for their behaviour as well as providing value to women and children in a number of ways:

- Most women who receive support through MBCPs are not engaged in any other family violence service and as such, it is often the only contact that women have with a specialised family violence service.
- Research by Day et al (2010) on the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response found that women who were engaged as a result of the referral to the men's intervention program appeared to facilitate a more comprehensive monitoring of risk than might otherwise have been possible.¹¹
- An evaluation of the Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs operating in the UK, which provide a support worker for women whose partners are attending programs, found that the program assisted in improving women's space for action – a sense that they are sufficiently autonomous and able to resume control of their own lives and decisions.¹²

Some of the challenges that Bethany faces in providing partner contact work include:

⁹ J Edleson, *Promising practices with men who batter: report to King Country Domestic Violence Council*, January 2008.

¹⁰ E Gondolf (2012) *The Future of Batterer Programs: Reassessing Evidence-Based Practice*, Northeastern University Press.

¹¹ A Day, D Chung, P O'Leary, D Justo, S Moore, E Carson & A Gerace (2010) 'Integrated responses to domestic violence: legally mandated intervention programs for male perpetrators', *Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 404, December, p7.

¹² L Kelly & N Westmarland (2015) *Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes: Steps Towards Change – Project Mirabel Final Report*, Durham University and London Metropolitan University.; Centre of Innovative Justice (2015) *Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view*, RMIT University: Melbourne.

- The term 'partner contact' is not necessarily reflective of the work that is done with women. The work requires building rapport and trust with the women, providing emotional support and linking them in with other specialist services, which is far broader than just making 'contact' with women. In the UK, partner contact work is referred to as an Integrated Support Service.
- Limited capacity to support women as soon as possible through the MBCP. Ideally, the partner contact worker engages with women when men are referred to the program to provide a safety mechanism, however the worker does not have the capacity to support women until men start the group work.
- It is Bethany's experience that there can be up to three women for every man attending the program who requires contact work. Current program resourcing does not allow for this level of contact and support for women.

Bethany acknowledges that partner contact work is identified in the NTV Minimum Standards for running MBCPs, however we also note that there are no parameters set by the program funding body in terms of how partner contact work is to be delivered. This presents a risk in terms of MBCP providers approaching partner contact in different ways across Victoria. Bethany is of the view that the program funding body should expect women and children to be equally supported when supporting men, and explicitly note that partner contact work is a core component of the MBCP.

Recommendation

4. That the MBCP funding body:

- provides greater recognition of the importance of partner contact work in working with men who use violence
- acknowledges that it is a core component of MBCPs and as such, requires minimum standards to ensure some consistency in service delivery
- consider changing the term 'partner contact' to a more accurate reflection of what the work involves
- allocates adequate funding specifically to deliver support for women and children under the MBCP.

5.3 Program accessibility

Bethany notes that MBCP accessibility for men who use violence is limited in terms of the:

- number of programs available to service men across the Barwon Area
- ability of programs to fully engage with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities.

Program locations

Bethany is responsible for providing the only MBCP in the Barwon Area. Therefore, in order for men to attend programs, those living some distance from Geelong must be willing and prepared to travel to the program venue otherwise they are not deemed suitable for the MBCP. Resources available do not allow for outreach work in the MBCP.

Responding to CALD and ATSI communities

Bethany's MBCP does not allow for a culturally specific response for men who use violence. It is limited in its capacity to work with men presenting from CALD communities, particularly those who do not have a basic comprehension of English. Bethany is aware of some culturally responsive programs operating across Melbourne for men who use family violence. These include a Vietnamese MBCP in Melbourne's North Western region¹³ and a program targeting South Asian men in Melbourne's North Eastern region.¹⁴

Bethany is also limited in providing a culturally appropriate MBCP for ATSI men. Bethany notes that these men are likely to be connected to an ATSI-specific organisation, such as the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative based in Geelong, however these organisations do not always offer family violence specific interventions. Bethany notes that there are Aboriginal specific family violence services for men operating around Victoria, such as Men's Healing Circles managed by the Boordawan William Aboriginal Community Service in the Eastern Metropolitan region of Victoria.¹⁵

Recommendation

5. That the Royal Commission explores culturally appropriate interventions for men who use family violence for men more broadly.

¹³ <http://www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au/assets/PDFs/Evaluation/FV-evaluation-report-2011.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/7-30/NC1505H075S00>

¹⁵ <http://www.bwahs.org.au/#!/mens-healing-circles/ctgz>

5.4 Engaging men

There are several pathways in which men who use violence can engage with programs managed by Bethany. Due to the voluntary nature of Bethany's programs, Bethany can be approached by men who may self refer to the MBCP after seeing information about the program or being referred by a third party. Bethany also accepts men who have been mandated or directed to attend the program by the Courts or Corrections Victoria.

While Bethany receives a high number of men's referrals from Victoria Police, the reality is that a significant proportion of these men do not engage with Bethany's services. Bethany makes every attempt to make contact with these men, however this is not always possible as men have not provided contact numbers, or change or provide false details to Victoria Police at the time of the family violence incident.

Bethany has an arrangement in place with Victoria Police where our Men's Case Manager works from the Geelong Police Station one day a week in order to enhance our engagement with men. This arrangement allows the Case Manager to follow-up with men immediately whilst they are in police custody. Bethany considers this to be highly valuable as men are particularly vulnerable at this time and many will talk to the Manager and be willing engage further with Bethany.

Case study

████ is █████ years old and a Victoria Police Multi-Agency Information Sharing Meeting (MAISM) client (deemed to be a recidivist family violence offender). His ex-partner is █████ and they have a █████ year old daughter, █████. The Victoria Police Family Violence Unit based in Geelong contacted Bethany's Men's Case Manager to arrange a meeting for █████ at the Geelong Police Station. At the meeting, the MCM advised █████ of the services available and he accepted an appointment for an assessment.

Interventions

During █████'s assessment by Bethany's MCM, the following information was disclosed:

- █████ is subject of a current Family Violence Intervention Order from his ex-partner, whereby he has to be invited to the house to see his daughter █████. █████ is not currently seeing his daughter as he believes that █████ will oppose him seeing █████. The Bethany MCM recommended that █████ seek advice from a Victoria Legal Aid solicitor and was referred to Bethany's Children's Contact Services.
- █████ claims that when █████ is taking the drug, Ice, she is unpredictable and becomes violent. █████ says that he only retaliates to protect himself and has only ever pushed █████ away. The Bethany MCM discussed retaliation and what that may mean with █████ and proposed other alternatives to using violence.
- █████ is a heavy alcohol drinker (consuming equivalent to one bottle of wine a day). He is not interested in changing this at the moment but is open to stopping at some stage.
- █████ is effectively homeless, living in a friend's work warehouse. The Bethany MCM will link █████ in with the SalvoConnect Entry Point to address his housing needs.

Outcomes

During the course of █████'s engagement with the Bethany MCM, █████ has:

- Secured accommodation in Bethany's Family Violence Transitional Housing Management properties (short term accommodation available between a three and 12 month period)
- Linked with Barwon Health Drug and Alcohol Services
- Linked with DHHS and has supervised access with his daughter █████
- The Family Violence Intervention Order has expired and not renewed
- Removed from the MAISM list (following MCM intervention and no further incidents).

████ will also participate in Bethany's MBCP later in 2015.

In terms of improving engagement with men who use violence, Bethany suggests that there may be opportunities to think more broadly and innovatively about the ways in which we do this. For example, a social marketing campaign was run in the UK in 2009 and again in 2010 as a means of engaging with men and stimulating take up of a new family violence program for men who use violence. To inform the development of the campaign, formative research was conducted with men in the general population of the City of Hull; a city characterised by high socio-economic deprivation, unemployment and low educational attainment; to explore their perceptions of help seeking in relation to men's violence against women. The campaign located its targeted audience at the centre of the campaign's design, content and delivery and was particularly effective in generating high demand for a local family violence service who men who use violence.¹⁶

¹⁶ G Thomson, N Stanley, & P Miller. 'Give me 'strength to change': insights into a social marketing campaign in the North of England', *Primary Health Care Research and Development*, October 2012, pp 1-10.

Recommendation

6. That the Royal Commission considers:

- strategies for enhancing men's programs to allow for greater and more timely engagement with men, ideally within two to three weeks after contact with police
- more innovative ways in which programs engage with men, such as the social marketing campaign in the UK.

5.5 Assessing men's risk

Bethany's assessment of a man's risk is informed by the Victorian Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (otherwise known as the CRAF). The CRAF has been designed to assist a range of professionals, including family violence service providers, Victoria Police, the courts, and professionals in mainstream services who encounter and work with women and their children who experience family violence. The CRAF was developed to better understand and identify risk factors associated with family violence and respond consistently and appropriately.¹⁷

Corrections Victoria, on the other hand, has adopted the Risk-Need-Responsivity model in its assessment of offenders, including men who use family violence. The Risk-Need-Responsivity model, developed by Bonta and Andrews (2007) is one of the most influential models for assessing and treating offenders and is based on three core principles:

- **Risk:** this suggests that criminal behaviour can be reliably predicted and that the level of treatment should match the offender's risk to reoffend. The level of risk is determined by an assessment of static (unchangeable) risk factors and dynamic (changeable) risk factors.
- **Need:** this highlights the importance of assessing criminogenic needs and targeting these in the delivery of treatment. Other non-criminogenic needs such as unemployment, accommodation issues, poor social supports and mental health issues may also need to be addressed in order to increase the perpetrator's capability to change.
- **Responsivity:** this suggests that programs should be delivered in a style and mode that perpetrators will respond to and engage in. Responsivity can be divided into internal, such as motivation, learning style, age, culture, and external, such as the environmental interaction between perpetrators and program staff.¹⁸

While the Risk-Need-Responsivity model is primarily focused on reducing recidivism, as opposed to promoting the safety of women and children, Bethany is of the view that there may be opportunities incorporate the Risk-Need-Responsivity principles in its assessment of men who use violence. This would allow for a consistent risk assessment approach to be adopted across Victoria for men who use violence, regardless of whether a man is participating in a voluntary or mandated Corrections program, as well as allowing for program interventions to be more tailored to the men's specific needs.

Recommendation

7. That the Royal Commission gives strong consideration to introducing a consistent and evidence-based risk assessment tool for men who use violence across Victoria.

5.6 Program length and interventions

In Victoria, MBCP providers are required to provide men with access to a minimum of 24 contact hours of group work, spread over a minimum of 12 sessions in order to comply with the minimum standards.¹⁹ These standards, which were developed a decade ago, were consistent with industry opinion at that time. However, there has been a shift in this thinking, with international policy and practitioner opinions suggesting that the length of programs for men who use violence needs to be longer.²⁰

Minimum standards or examples of current program length include:

- At least 60 contact hours for group-based programs, or a minimum of 24 hours for one-on-one interventions, and over a six-month period under the UK Respect minimum standards.²¹
- Batterer Intervention Programs in the United States vary in length, most between 26 to 52 weeks.²²

¹⁷ Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, *CRAF*, accessed 10 May 2015, available at: <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/training/family-violence-risk-assessment-craf>

¹⁸ J Bonta & D A Andrews (2007) *Risk-Need-Responsivity Model for Offender Assessment and Rehabilitation*, Canada; Corrections Victoria (2010) *Offender Management Framework – Achieving the Balance*, Department of Justice: Victoria.

¹⁹ NTV (2005) *Men's Behaviour Change Group Work: Minimum Standards and Quality Practice*.

²⁰ R Vlasis (2014) *Ten Challenges and Opportunities for Domestic Violence Perpetrator Program Work*, Not To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association.

²¹ No To Violence (2015) *Strong evidence of accredited domestic violence perpetrator program effectiveness*, accessed on 14 April 2015, available at: <http://ntv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/150210-project-mirabal-aus.pdf>

²² S Elinoff Acker, 'Batterer Intervention Programs: Getting to the Root of Domestic Violence', *UTNE Reader*, October 2013, accessed 13 April 2015, available at: <http://www.utne.com/community/batterer-intervention-programs-ze0z1310zpit.aspx>

- On average, 20 sessions for European domestic violence perpetrator programs.²³
- Group and individual work undertaken with men over a two year period under Scotland's Caledonian System.²⁴

Bethany's MBCP consists of 24 group work sessions (2 hours per session), covering eight different modules consistent with the Duluth Model's Power and Control wheel.²⁵

Bethany suggests that there are a number of factors that need to be considered when thinking about program length. Research on the Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs (DVPPs) in the UK suggests that the length and depth of DVPPs makes it possible to go beyond simple behaviour disruption to deeper changes, which make a difference in the lives of women and children. Short untested programs run a number of risks, including playing into the instrumental orientation that many men have at the outset and therefore are unlikely to address the deeper issues, such as the safety of women and children.²⁶

Vlais (2014) also highlights the importance of longer programs, indicating that they enable partner contact and support, risk assessment and risk management and engagement of men during potentially higher risk times over a longer period. Gondolf's multi-site longitudinal research study in the US indicated that the first 15 months after intake into a DVPP appears to be the key risk period in which reoffending might occur, suggesting the need for interventions to keep contact with men for at least this period.²⁷

Bethany is of the view that there is merit in reviewing the current NTV standards around the minimum length of MBCPs. In Bethany's experience, it can take some months to engage with men and women and often by the time this engagement happens, the program is coming to a close. Extending the program length will also give women more time to decide what they need to do. Anecdotally, women feel a sense of relief when men are attending the MBCP because they know they are being monitored. As soon as the program ends and the monitoring reduces, the women no longer feel safe.

Bethany also sees merit in reviewing the types of interventions available for men who use violence under the MBCP. Not only do we find it challenging to work with men on their issues and behaviour within a limited period of time, but we are also faced with a situation where men are presenting with multiple and complex issues, such as drug and alcohol use, cognitive impairment, mental health issues and housing/homelessness issues.

Bethany acknowledges the advantages of conducting group with men who choose to use violence in terms of changing attitudes and behaviours, however the format of the group work makes it difficult to address the individual needs of men. Also, there is no capacity within the existing MBCP structure for Bethany to undertake individualised work with men. Research suggests that there is a growing need for group work to be complemented with individualised interventions to address other issues that a man may be presenting with, which is likely to have positive effects on program completion. This could include adopting a more comprehensive case planning approach involving individual sessions and other interventions with men to help tailor the group work program to each man's risk, criminogenic needs and responsivity issues. Individualised approaches may also increase the likelihood that comorbid conditions will be identified and addressed.²⁸

Bethany suggests there may be opportunities to introduce other interventions under the MBCP, such as:

- pre-group work for men (either one-on-one or in a group setting)
- support groups for women whose partners are on the MBCP waiting list
- a maintenance program post group-work
- a post-MBCP parenting program.

An evaluation of Victoria's LifeWorks' interventions with men who use family violence suggested that it might be feasible to introduce another individual component at the end of the program where each man could discuss their progress, their future needs, and additional services they might require with a facilitator.²⁹

Bethany also notes that there may be opportunities to look at the way programs are delivered. For example, it might be more effective requiring men to successfully complete a set number of modules rather than hours or weeks. Men's readiness to accept accountability, together with their stage of change will depend on whether they move to the next module.

²³ T D Akoensi, J A Koehler, F Losel & D K Humphreys (2013), cited in R Vlais (2014) Op Cit.

²⁴ Scottish Government, *The Caledonian System*, accessed on 7 April 2015, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Equality/violence-women/CaledonianSystem>

²⁵ <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/pdf/PowerandControl.pdf>

²⁶ L Kelly & N Westmarland (2015) Op Cit, p46.

²⁷ Edleson (2012), cited in R Vlais (2014) Op Cit.

²⁸ K McMaster (2013) 'The changing nature of family violence interventions,' *Te Awatea Review: The Journal of Te Awatea Violence Research Centre*, 10 (1&2), pp8-11, cited in R Vlais (2014) Op Cit; J Edleson (2012) *Groupwork with Men who Batter: What the Research Literature Indicates (February 2012)*, National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, accessed 13 April 2015, available at: http://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/docs/AR_GroupworkMenWhoBatter.pdf

²⁹ T Brown & R Hampson (2009) *An evaluation of interventions with domestic violence perpetrators*, Monash University: Caulfield, p48.

Recommendation

8. In light of the international trends around the length of programs for men who use violence and what interventions are most effective in terms of holding men accountable and promoting women's and children's safety, the Royal Commission considers extending the length of the MBCP and the addition of other program interventions.

5.7 Standards and accreditation for program providers

In Victoria, MBCPs must meet minimum standards set by the peak body, No To Violence (NTV), the Male Family Violence Prevention Association in order to receive state government funding. These standards, which were developed ten years ago, have been superseded by international standards.

Bethany is of the view that there is a lack of standardisation for MBCPs operating across Victoria. While NTV provides minimum standards, which are within the context of a gendered analysis of men's violence, they are only guidelines for program providers and do not ensure consistency across programs. In addition, Bethany notes that there is a lack of monitoring of program providers' compliance with these minimum standards. This poses a number of risks in terms of men being held accountable at differing levels across the State as well as differences in the prioritisation of women's and children's safety.

Bethany acknowledges that work is being done at the national level to develop national outcome standards for men who use violence, including establishing and monitoring national minimum standards for programs to ensure adherence to evidence-based best practice.³⁰ However, we feel that more could be done to enhance current standards and that there may be merit in considering an accreditation process similar to the UK to ensure program integrity.

Respect, the peak body for community-based Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programs in the UK runs a two-staged accreditation process, including:

1. Safe Minimum Practice assessment, whereby agencies must demonstrate that they are running safe programs in terms of their ability to assess and respond to risk (as specified in their Safe Minimum Practice Standard).
2. Full accreditation, which has a greater focus on the quality of delivery and outcome measurement, building on the risk and safeguarding functions assessed in stage one. It requires six months of recorded evidence, including video footage for groups/organisations and audio for individual work.³¹

Recommendations

9. That the Victorian minimum standards for MBCPs be immediately revised to reflect current best practice and that these standards be reviewed regularly to ensure that they respond to a developing evidence base and changes to the external environment.
10. That the Victorian Government, as the funding body, actively and regularly monitor program providers' compliance with minimum standards.
11. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to introducing an accreditation process for providers delivering programs for men who use family violence to ensure that services are of a high quality and maintain program integrity regardless of where the program is being delivered.

6. Gaps and challenges at the system level for holding men accountable and opportunities for improvement

6.1 Shared understanding of what it means to hold men accountable

The family violence system in Victoria has matured over the past 10-15 years through the introduction of the integrated response to family violence. Women and children experiencing family violence and men who use violence are now receiving more coordinated and integrated responses, with the ultimate goal of promoting the safety of women and children and holding men accountable. Bethany suggests that its MBCP is itself becoming more integrated in the service system with referrals coming from a range of agencies as well as being involved in multi-agency information sharing forums about men who choose to use violence. There also appears to be shared understanding across the system that family violence is unacceptable.

While Victoria is heading in the right direction, Bethany maintains that more needs to occur in order to develop a shared understanding of what it means to hold men accountable. At present, there is a general view that MBCPs are the way in

³⁰ <http://www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au/files/D108102423.pdf>

³¹ R Vlasis (2014) *Domestic violence perpetrator programs in the UK: A Q&A with Neil Blacklock*, No To Violence.

which we hold men accountable. Bethany acknowledges that these programs are a valuable response, however they should not be seen as **the response** for engaging with, and holding men accountable. As a system, we need to be thinking more broadly and strategically about our interactions with men and how we all have a role to play in holding them accountable.

Vlais (2014) highlights the need for other agencies, such as child protection, family services, alcohol and other drug (AOD) and other interventions to more effectively engage with perpetrators. While this would provide some form of engagement with those men who may not be able to participate in programs immediately due to waiting lists, it would allow for some assessment and management of the perpetrator's risk to women and children and provide an additional avenue for monitoring perpetrators activities.³²

Bethany also suggests that as a system, we need to be adopting more sophisticated ways for holding men accountable. Data shows that a significant proportion of men presenting to Bethany are recidivist offenders and this trend is not going to change unless we get smarter in terms of how we hold men accountable. Other strategies may include: introducing men's supervision programs post MBCP³³; a greater use of GPS technology to monitor men who use family violence³⁴; and introducing a family violence disclosure scheme similar to the UK Home Office's pilot, Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme.³⁵

One of the challenges that the family violence system faces in terms of developing a shared understanding of holding men accountable is that different agencies are operating under a range of different frameworks, which influences the way they intervene with and respond to those experiencing family violence. These frameworks may not necessarily be consistent with looking at men's use of violence within a gendered perspective and therefore, there is a risk that the system as a whole is holding men accountable at differing levels. There may also be instances where agencies may be inadvertently colluding with men or minimising their use of violence because they just do not see it.

Bethany believes that as a system, we also need to be looking for ways to remove the onus from women for holding men accountable and placing this back on the system and the community. At present, women are playing a significant role in holding men accountable (for example, reporting breaches of Intervention Orders) as well as being responsible for protecting their children, seeking support services, disrupting employment opportunities, relocating and attending appointments, etc.

In order to develop a shared understanding of what it means to hold men accountable across the system, we require:

- Major cultural and attitudinal changes, which are driven by strong leadership
- A discussion about how hold men accountable for their violence, but also a broader debate around how we hold men accountable in terms of sexist attitudes and behaviours that promote power and control.

Until we as a society truly understand what is leading to this problem of violence against women, we will not be able to respond effectively and truly address this issue.

Recommendation

12. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to:

- identifying ways in which the system as a whole holds men who use violence accountable
- developing strategies to promote a shared understanding of men's accountability
- broadening the accountability discussion to also include how we hold men accountable in terms of sexist attitudes and behaviours that promote power and control.

6.2 Information sharing between agencies

In its work with men who use violence, Bethany understands that the system is not truly working in an integrated manner and the lack of information sharing across agencies is a key barrier to holding men accountable. Bethany considers the risks associated with not working in an integrated way to be high, particularly in terms of women's and children's safety, the safety of its workers, as well as the broader safety of the community.

Bethany highlights RAMP and Multi Agency Information Sharing Meetings (MAISM) as being two strong examples of where information sharing is working well and producing good outcomes in terms of holding men who choose to use violence

³² R Vlais (2014) Op Cit.

³³ The Scottish Government, Op Cit.

³⁴ T Orchiston (2012) 'GPS tracking and domestic violence offenders: promise and pitfalls', *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse newsletter*, no. 48; The Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland (2015) *Not Now, not Ever: Putting and End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland – Final Report*.

³⁵ Metropolitan Police, *Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – Clare's Law*, accessed 13 April 2015, available at: <http://content.met.police.uk/Article/Domestic-Violence-Disclosure-Scheme---Clares-Law/1400022792812/1400022792812>

accountable. RAMP involves multiple agencies coming together to communicate and share critical information about men's whereabouts and circumstances, which is providing increased opportunities for Victoria Police and other agencies to develop a risk mitigation plan and associated actions to hold men accountable.³⁶

Case study

■ year old ■ was referred to RAMP after she made disclosures to her Family Violence worker around behaviours exhibited by her ex partner ■. These included serial stalking, interference in her social media accounts, waiting for her at her university, constant attempts to make contact via phone (on some occasions up to 100 times per day), email and social media, and specific threats to harm her dog and her family members if she did not reconcile with him. He attempted to force entry into her home on three occasions and on each occasion, left a threatening message. On one occasion, he also left a knife.

Interventions

At the RAMP meeting, panel members were able to openly discuss the family violence offending history of ■. He had been subject to ■ previous Family Violence Intervention Orders due to stalking behaviours. He was also subject to a Community Corrections Order (CCO) that was the result of his previous Family Violence offending. Specific actions that occurred as a result of the RAMP included: Immediate steps to breach of ■'s current CCO, Police successfully making application for a Full Family Violence Intervention Order, a referral for ■ to clinical mental health services and specialist Family Violence services for men, security mechanisms installed in ■'s property and referral to specialist victim support services.

Outcomes

As a direct result of the timely referral to RAMP, ■ experienced an:

- immediate reduction in Family Violence perpetrated against ■ and therefore a decrease in risk for ■
- immediate increase in safety for ■
- immediate increase in accountability attributed to ■'s family violence offending
- increase in the sharing of risk between statutory services including Victoria Police and Corrections Victoria in regards to ■'s behaviour.

MAISM, which is led by Victoria Police, provides for a range of agencies to come together and share information on a weekly basis in relation to recidivist family violence offenders. Bethany attends these meeting where information is shared about men and actions are identified to hold men accountable and promote women's and children's safety. Bethany has also referred men to Victoria Police for consideration at the MAISM meetings.

One of the key barriers that Bethany sees in relation to information sharing is a general lack of understanding about what information can or cannot be shared. There is a sense that people working across agencies may be afraid of crossing boundaries when it comes to the sharing of information. There is a need for all those working across the family violence system to have clear guidelines around when, how and why information should be shared and the importance of confidentiality and privacy. Legislation can be a useful and effective tool in terms of fostering information sharing across multiple agencies, as witnessed with the introduction of the *Human Services (Complex Needs) Act 2009*. This could be one option for removing some of the barriers around information sharing and privacy across the family violence system.

The lack of integrated client data systems is also viewed as a key barrier to information sharing. For example, Bethany currently uses two different client data management systems (IRIS and SHIP) in its work with men, women and children experiencing family violence. These systems do not link with other data management systems in use by other agencies, such as Victoria Police's LEAP database or the Courtlink case management system used by Victorian courts. Without linkages or communication between these systems, we rely solely on the expressed communication between systems and is highly subject to human error.

The lack of information sharing between specialist men's and women's family violence services is also a key barrier to the promotion of women's and children's safety and holding men accountable for their behaviour. In order to fully protect women and children from violence, it is critical that specialist women's services recognise and understand the work that is being done with women through men's services and how the safety of women and children is the first priority of those agencies working with men who use violence. Models such as the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response and Scotland's New Caledonian System demonstrate the benefits of men's and women's services working together to respond to family violence. The Gold Coast model, in particular, allows for the co-location of men's and women's services, which has been beneficial for information sharing and consultation between the services. Bethany suggests that there is a need for greater emphasis on specialist men's and women's services working together.

³⁶ Thomson Goodall Associates Pty Ltd (2013) *Evaluation of the family violence Strengthening Risk Management Demonstration Projects in Victoria*, Department of Human Services: Victoria.

Bethany believes that further work is needed around developing Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) between agencies outlining clear expectations of working together and information sharing. Feedback mechanisms would also assist us in our their work with men, women and children. Often we find ourselves in a situation where we are providing information to other agencies, but we do not receive any information back from these agencies. Information sharing needs to be a two-way process.

Recommendation

13. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to:

- the need for MOUs between all agencies within the family violence system, which set out strong expectations for working together and clear guidelines for information sharing
- introducing legislative changes to remove current barriers to information sharing between agencies
- a state-wide family violence client database accessible by all agencies working with women and children affected by family violence and men who use violence. The database could have differing levels of access for agencies (to maintain privacy and confidentiality) depending on their type of work with clients
- the need for men's and women's services to work together more collaboratively and share information to promote the safety of women and children and hold men accountable.

6.3 Workforce capability

Developing capability of both the specialist family violence and generalist workforces to identify, respond and intervene appropriately was a key requirement identified in Victoria's Integrated Response to Family Violence. Family violence training has been delivered across Victoria to those working in these workforces, however Bethany maintain that more could be done to build on people's knowledge and skills in terms of assessing risk.

Despite the delivery of CRAF training across Victoria, Bethany is of the view that not all agencies and their staff are recognising or understanding the risk factors associated with family violence. One of the likely reasons for this is that agencies and staff not working in specialist family violence services are working within different frameworks and they do not consider family violence to be part of their focus or feel confident in undertaking family violence risk assessments. As such, families presenting with family violence issues are not likely to be identified, which leads to a significant underreporting of family violence.

Bethany recognises that more training could be directed towards professionals and organisations working with family violence clients (outside of the specialist responses) in terms of their understanding of the nature and dynamics of family violence. It is not uncommon for Bethany to hear professionals saying, "*why did the woman go back?*", or "*she's not protecting the children by staying*". This lack of understanding is undermining the specialist family violence system and diminishes men's accountability. Bethany is also aware of a number of professionals, such as private psychologists and counsellors and organisations that may not have had access to any family violence training. This could lead to situations where these professionals and organisations are inadvertently colluding with men who use violence or not considering their behaviour within a gendered framework.

Recommendation

14. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to developing a workforce capability strategy that seeks to:

- broaden training around the nature and dynamics of family violence for professionals and organisations not operating within a gendered analysis framework, including those within the family violence system as well as those engaging with men who use violence
- enhance existing family violence risk assessment training for non-specialist family violence services.

6.4 Program and system evaluations

Bethany is of the view that there is a significant gap in terms of tested evidence about how effective programs and the family violence system are in holding men who use violence accountable in the Victorian context.

A literature review on Domestic Violence Perpetrators undertaken by Urbis identified that there was mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of programs for men who use violence, however this evidence was largely based on the North American context. Evidence on program effectiveness has also been heavily focused on the extent to which men who have

gone through these programs have reduced rates of recidivism.³⁷ As we know in Victoria, this is a very narrow way of looking at how we hold men accountable for their behaviour.

In Victoria, MBCPs are a key component of Victoria's integrated family violence system, which seeks to:

- Improve the safety of women and children, particularly those at greatest risk of experiencing family violence
- Ensure that men who use violent and controlling behaviour are held accountable for their actions
- Prevent family violence from occurring.³⁸

As such, there is a need to evaluate these programs to assess how effective they are in achieving the identified outcomes above.

Bethany further acknowledges that we need to be evaluating the family violence system more broadly in terms of how the system holds men accountable. Again this reflects our view that MBCPs are only one response in terms of how the family violence system holds men accountable.

Recommendation

15. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to developing a thorough research and evaluation strategy to assess how effective programs and the broader family violence system are in holding men who use violence accountable.

6.5 Specialist Family Violence Support Services for Children

In Victoria, there are very few specialist family violence services available for children affected by family violence despite the significant number of children affected by family violence. Data shows that children's exposure to family violence is significant. Between January 2014 and April 2015, men's referral data from Victoria Police shows that children were present in 35 per cent of all family violence incidents. Children are also being presented to RAMP, along with their mothers at approximately double the number of women.

Under the GSRMP, Bethany has been able to provide children affected by family violence with case management and therapeutic interventions. Evaluation findings show that this work was valuable in terms of:

- increasing children's safety through the development of a safety plan and making referrals to Child Protection
- assisting some women to develop insights into the effect of trauma on children, which led to a greater resolve to protect children from family violence
- improved educational stability for some children
- improved health and well-being of some children.³⁹

³⁷ Urbis, *Literature Review on Domestic Violence Perpetrators*, Department of Social Services, accessed 13 April 2013, available at: https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2013/literature_review_on_domestic_violence_perpetrators.pdf

³⁸ Department of Human Services (2009) *Enhancing access to men's behaviour change programs*, Victorian Government: Melbourne.

³⁹ Thomson Goodall Associates Pty Ltd (2013) Op Cit.

Case study

■■■■-year-old ■■■■ was referred to Bethany's Children's Therapeutic Case Manager by her student welfare officer following irregular attendance at school and several disclosures of family violence within the home. ■■■■ the man perpetrating the violence was the father of ■■■■'s ■■■■ younger siblings (aged ■■■■). ■■■■'s mother ■■■■ who was not an Australian citizen, was financially dependent on ■■■■ to support herself and her children.

Interventions

The Children's Therapeutic Case Manager worked with ■■■■ through one-on-one sessions and engaged ■■■■ in narrative work around her experiences of family violence. The Case Manager also engaged in safety planning with ■■■■ and worked with ■■■■ to complete activities around healthy relationships, building self esteem, self worth and the processing of her experience of trauma. ■■■■ was also referred by the Case Manager to Music Art Play (MAP), a therapeutic group work program.

Through ■■■■ engagement with the Children's Therapeutic Case Manager, ■■■■ mother ■■■■ was linked in with the Women's Case Manager at Bethany and received support for herself and ■■■■'s ■■■■ younger siblings. The case was also referred to RAMP as there were concerns raised by ■■■■ about lethality.

■■■■ continued to use violence despite being on a Family Violence Intervention Order and a ■■■■-month Community Corrections Order. Through the RAMP, Victoria Police shared information, which demonstrated that he was a recidivist offender (21 police callouts in the past 12 months).

Outcomes

As a result of ■■■■'s referral to Bethany's Children's Therapeutic Case Manager, ■■■■ experienced:

- increased confidence and feelings of self worth
- greater ability to talk about her concerns where in the past she felt that she couldn't
- improved sleeping patterns
- regular attendance at schools.

■■■■'s involvement with the Case Manager also led to the following outcomes for her family:

- decreased level of risk as a result of the referral to RAMP
- improvements in ■■■■'s sibling's wellbeing and linkages to kindergarten and other therapeutic programs
- greater awareness by ■■■■ of the effects of trauma on her children and herself
- ■■■■-month custodial sentence with no parole period for ■■■■ for threats to kill, criminal damage and ■■■■ breaches of a Family Violence Intervention Order, and a ■■■■-month Family Violence Intervention Order to protect ■■■■ and her ■■■■ children.

While the children's therapeutic case management work under the GSRMP has been valuable in supporting and working with children affected by family violence, the children engaged in the program have also provided useful information in terms of holding men accountable for their behaviour, particularly in situations where mothers have been too scared to disclose any information for fear of retribution. As such, without these specialist programs, not only is there is a service gap in terms of providing specialist support for children who have been exposed to family violence, but there is a gap in terms of information that promotes women's safety and holds men who use violence accountable.

Recommendation

16. That the Royal Commission gives strong consideration to the provision of specialist family violence program interventions for children affected by family violence, which work closely with women's and men's family violence services.

6.6 Early intervention and prevention

In thinking about the continuum of family violence responses, Bethany identifies opportunities for greater focus on early intervention and prevention. The importance of early intervention and prevention in family violence is well documented⁴⁰ and Bethany supports the work that is undertaken at the national level to develop a framework for the prevention of violence against women and children.⁴¹

While Bethany works only with adult men who use violence, we are aware of the increasing trend in adolescents using family violence against their parents. In Geelong, the Adolescent Family Violence Service exists for 12 to 18 year olds and their families where the young person is using violence against a parent or carer. This service is operated by Time for Youth and is a good example of a family violence early intervention program.

⁴⁰ Centre of Innovative Justice (2015), Op Cit.

⁴¹ [http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-\(1\)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do-(1)/National-Primary-Prevention-Framework)

There are other examples of early intervention and prevention programs operating in Geelong. While responses are not specific to family violence, they are important in terms of preventing the cycle of violence from occurring:

- *Boys Rock* early intervention group work program is an eight-week school based program for Grades 5-6 boys facilitated by Bethany Family Services. The program seeks to assist boys to enhance their emotional intelligence, literacy, resilience and social skills. It provides an interactive group setting that encourages boys to explore and discuss appropriate and positive strategies to handle their emotions, difficult situations and relating to others. The program aims to provide the boys with a safe and nurturing environment to share their experiences and feelings as well as practical strategies to manage their behaviour in a context that builds connections with others. This program has been running for over six years and was identified in the Department of Human Service's (DHS) Child, Youth and Families Good Practice publication in 2013.⁴²
- The *Great Dads, Great Kids* program is an eight-week psycho-educational parenting program specifically for dads with children up to the ages of 12 years, facilitated by Bethany. The program is targeted to fathers who want to build supportive, respectful and loving relationships with their children. It focuses on the changing role of fathers and different styles of parenting; child development and basic child care; being a responsive dad; guidance and discipline; building healthy self esteem, family relationships; connecting through play; looking after yourself.

The above programs are good examples of how we can intervene earlier and seek to prevent men's use of violence, however these responses often occur in isolation or are happening on a small-scale rather than being available across Victoria.

In thinking about other ways for earlier intervention, Bethany is of the view that there may be opportunities for earlier intervention by services. For example, the threshold for involvement of the Child Protection system often limits their ability to become involved with families that are displaying high risk factors of family violence. As we know from the research that there is an increased likelihood that family violence and child abuse will co-exist, Bethany will often report high risk families to the Child Protection system, however these reports are often not actioned as they do not meet the threshold level for their involvement. After some time has passed, Bethany receives referrals for these same families, who now have a pattern of history in terms of contact with the Child Protection system. As such, opportunities to intervene earlier are missed as can be demonstrated in the case study below.

Case study

■■■■-year-old ■■■■ had been receiving a specialist family violence response from Bethany's GSRMP for a twelve-month period. Victoria Police had referred ■■■■ and her ■■■■ children to Bethany due to persistent and serious levels of physical violence perpetrated by her ex partner ■■■■. ■■■■ was the father of ■■■■'s ■■■■ youngest children and had been imprisoned for a ■■■■-month period due to his use of violence against ■■■■.

Upon release from prison, ■■■■ recommenced an intimate relationship with ■■■■ and they commenced using the drug Ice. This fact was reported to the GSRMP by ■■■■'s oldest child, who further expressed feeling fearful of ■■■■. This contact was immediately reported to Child Protection via a notification. Further incidents occurred and these were also referred to Child Protection.

After four notifications were made specifically around both ■■■■'s and ■■■■'s use of Ice and increasing incidents of violence (over a period of seven months), Child Protection sought an Interim Accommodation Order and removed all ■■■■ children from ■■■■'s care in a very distressing circumstance.

Recommendation

17. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to introducing early intervention and prevention initiatives across Victoria, including (but not limited to) those that:

- address adolescent violence
- assist people to build healthy and respectful relationships
- promote positive strategies for children in terms of their behaviour, responding to difficult situations and relating to others.

6.7 Consideration of family violence issues in family law matters

Bethany maintains that more needs to be done to support women going through the Family Law Court who are experiencing family violence. Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) guidelines restricting funding for legal representation in family law hearings can have significant implications for women experiencing violence. Bethany is aware of situations where women are

⁴² Department of Human Services (2013) *Good practice: a statewide snapshot 2013*, accessed 12 May 2015, available at: http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/842779/Good-practice-a-statewide-snapshot-2013.pdf

unrepresented in Family Law Court proceedings while their previous partners have private legal representation. This can result in these women feeling pressured to settle or withdraw their matters. Bethany views this as a legally sanctioned manner in which men are perpetrating family violence against their (ex) partners. Where possible, Bethany will try and assist women going through the Family Law Court who are also experiencing family violence (see case study below), however the circumstances in which this can occur are very limited.

Case study

■■■■ had been referred to RAMP after reports were made that serious levels of violence had been perpetrated by her ex partner ■■■■. These incidents had been regular and increasing in frequency and severity. They were also mostly perpetrated in front of their ■■■■ children. Upon serving the Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO), ■■■■ was excluded from the family home and was instructed that any contact with his children must be ordered by the Family Law Court.

■■■■ was in possession of significant financial resources and engaged the services of legal representation. ■■■■ had access to very limited resources and was unable to access legal aid due to her reliance of this service in earlier representations for the FVIO.

Interventions

Given ■■■■'s history with the RAMP, her Bethany case manager was able to speak with the RAMP Chair and explain the current circumstances. The RAMP Chair authorised the use of RAMP brokerage funding to engage legal representation for ■■■■ in the Family Law Court. The legal representative was also provided with all information collected and discussed at RAMP. In addition, a letter from the RAMP Chair was furnished to the Family Law Court that carefully outlined all risks involved in this case and the collective concern that the RAMP panel members shared.

Outcomes

As a direct result of these interventions:

- ■■■■ was provided with legal representation at the Family Law Court
- the Family Law Court ordered a thorough psychological assessment of ■■■■
- an Independent Children's Lawyer recommended supervised contact only and any change to that be at the Order of the Family Law Court.

Recommendation

18. That the Royal Commission gives consideration to reviewing the Family Law system in the context of those also experiencing or at risk of family violence, including strategies and responses for providing greater support to women experiencing or at risk of family violence and minimising men's capacity to use the Family Law system as a way of further perpetrating family violence against women.