

Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence Warrnambool and District Network of Schools

Network Environmental Context

The Warrnambool Network comprises nineteen government schools located in the Moyne Shire and the Warrnambool City local government areas. The Network is located in south-west Victoria and is part of the Great South Coast, two hundred and sixty kilometres from Melbourne.

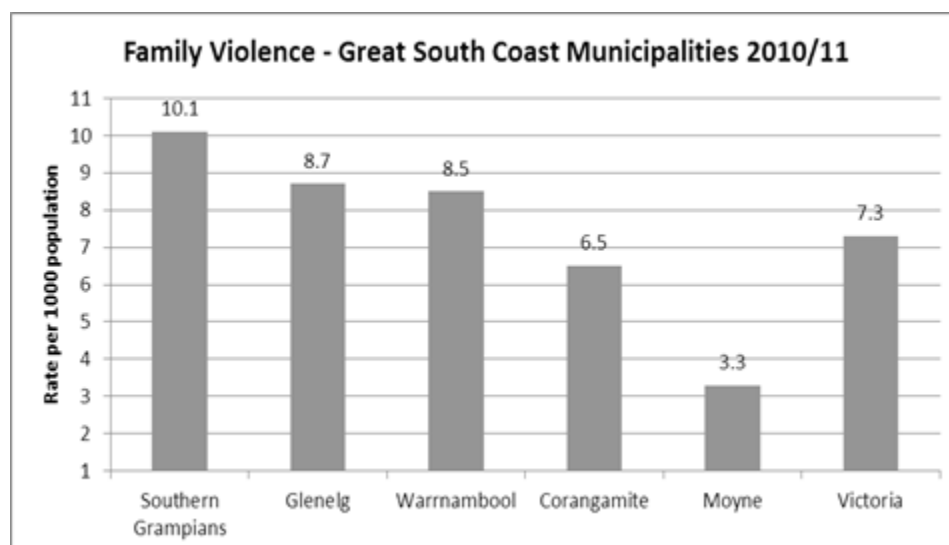
The community is relatively mono-cultural, with small percentages of European migration (Italian, Greek & Dutch), recent migration of New Zealanders (dairy farming) and refugees from Somalia and Sudan. The refugee program has been sponsored by the local governments and has seen only small numbers relocating from major capital cities. The indigenous community is small but significant and has had a continuous involvement with their traditional land. One of Victoria's major Aboriginal Mission sites was at Framlingham, 26km from Warrnambool, and has been owned and administered by the Framlingham Aboriginal Trust since the land was returned to the traditional owners in 1970.

Nine schools reside within the Warrnambool boundaries: two large secondary schools, six primary schools and one special development school. The schools within the Moyne Shire boundaries are largely primary schools with two prep-12 schools. The majority of primary schools in Moyne have an enrolment of less than 100, with two schools having less than 30 students. Contrasting this, the two secondary schools located in Warrnambool are large, with a combined enrolment of nearly 2,000 students.

The City of Warrnambool is continuing to grow with its predicted population to be 50 000 in 2036 (currently approximately 34 000). Moyne Shire is not predicting overall growth, though several small towns are experiencing substantial increase in population. This is due to expansion of residential subdivisions within commuting distance from Warrnambool or due to new industrial projects, most critical the expansion of energy generation with gas powered plants at Mortlake and Orford (near Port Fairy). The current population of the Moyne Shire is 16 000.

Family Violence Data for Great South Coast

Recent data compiled by Victoria Police and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development clearly indicates high levels of violence against women and their children across the region with three of the five Great South Coast municipalities experiencing rates significantly higher than the state average (2010/11).



Source: Victoria Police Crime

statistics

The recently released report "Measuring Family Violence in Victoria – Vol. 5" indicates an increasing rate of family violence reporting over the past eleven years across the region with Warrnambool showing the greatest

rise at 183%. This compares with the state average increase of 82%. The table below also highlights the number of hospital emergency department attendances as a result of family violence.

	Corangamite	Glenelg	Moyne	Sth. Grampians	Warrnambool
1999 - 2000	44	105	31	65	89
2009 - 2010	76	125	57	121	252
% increase	73	19	84	86	183
Hospital ED Attendances 2009-10	7	0	6	16	51

This picture is mirrored with data showing rates of child abuse across the region. There is a growing understanding that family violence and child abuse often occur in tandem. Recent data from the ChildFirst / Integrated Family Services providers from the South West Alliance indicate that > 30% of cases involved family violence.

Sources:

- Victoria Police Crime Statistics link: http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=781
- "Measuring Family Violence in Victoria: Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5 (11 year analysis from 1999 – 2010)

The Family Violence Forum and Think Tank

Family Violence Forum – June 2014

The Warrnambool and District Network of Principals identified Family Violence as the focus of the annual School Agency Forum in 2014. The resulting a Family Violence Forum was held in June 2014 in order for school staff and local agencies to share information, build relationships and develop capacity to work together to support and assist students and their families who were living with Family Violence (FV). A panel discussion by Family Violence agency workers occurred, providing information on how the different agencies would respond to a student scenario and provided practical strategies that schools could use. The forum finished with a presentation on early intervention and primary prevention programs, delivered by Women's Health and Well-being South West.

The panellists for the case discussions were:

Program	Agency
Child Protection	Dept. Human Services
Child First	Brophy Family & Youth Services
Integrated Family Services	Brophy, Warrnambool City Council, Mpower, Bethany, Gunditjmarra, Wind-Mara.
Family Violence Unit	Victoria Police
Emma House	Emma House Domestic Violence Services Inc.
Take Two	Berry Street.
Drug and Alcohol support	Western Region Alcohol and other Drug service
Supporting Koori families achieve safety outcomes.	Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service Victoria
Sexual Assault	South West Centre Against Sexual Assault
Family Violence After Hours Service	Bethany

The feedback from the FV Forum was extremely positive with 81% of school staff reporting they had an improved understanding of local services that can provide support around FV and 78% indicated they now knew what response to provide if a student disclosed (FV).

Family Violence Think Tank – 20 October 2014

Following the success of the FV Forum it was decided to hold a follow-up event, a FV Think Tank in October 2014 in order to facilitate further conversations between schools and agencies around FV. The aim was to develop a more detailed understanding of what information and support schools require around responding to and supporting families that are experiencing family violence. A representative from each school and key FV agencies were invited to attend. The Think Tank was attended by twenty two school and key family violence agency staff.

A wide ranging discussion about family violence took place, with challenges for schools noted, and where possible, solutions identified. Please refer to the table in Appendix 1 for a summary of the challenges identified. These are complex and have been categorised into Schools, Services, Early Intervention and Prevention. Due to lack of human resources in schools to implement the changes required the Think Tank participants identified four priorities for 2015 that could be implemented in schools with the assistance of Student Support Services Social Work and the School Focused Youth Service Coordinator. These were:

1. Newsletter inserts on family violence provided to network schools
2. Pamphlets on Family Violence Support Agencies provided to schools
3. Child FIRST – information to schools
4. Casual Primary Welfare Officer bank (Social Work locums)

Identified Solutions and Resources Required

Overall, schools want to provide an appropriate response to children and families living with family violence. Teachers and school staff are at the coal face, managing the day to day impact of this on children including their capacity to engage with learning, their social skills, their coping mechanisms, self-worth and view of the world. They also deal with women who are disempowered, frightened and are attempting to protect their children.

The ideal solution to assist with the complexity of family violence issues within schools, the linkage with agencies, early intervention and prevention is to have qualified Social Workers embedded in individual schools.

Schools are often neglected as a service provision point for children. However, Principals, teachers and wellbeing staff in schools are already dealing with the impact of family violence on a daily basis. Therefore, addressing the complex issue of Family Violence appropriately in the school environment would be an ideal approach to provide:

- Children with direct support
- Children with Therapeutic intervention or linkage to appropriate services
- Women with information and access to services
- A safe environment
- Planned input of schools in regard to Case Planning, Case Closure and ongoing support
- Social and Emotional Learning programs including respectful and healthy relationships

Qualified Social Workers have knowledge, skills and training to:

- Engage with, assess and appropriately assist children in Family Violence situations
- Assist schools in providing a safe environment which fosters behaviour which is non-violent and is not aggressive
- Facilitate and source best practice early intervention and prevention programs
- Facilitate Social and Emotional learning programs
- Engage with local agencies to build and maintain smooth referral pathways
- Attend agency meetings to advocate for student needs and the parameters of school support
- Feed information that is helpful or relevant from agencies to appropriate school staff in order to support individual students or families
- Develop a whole of school approach to Family Violence
- Participate in evidence based practice

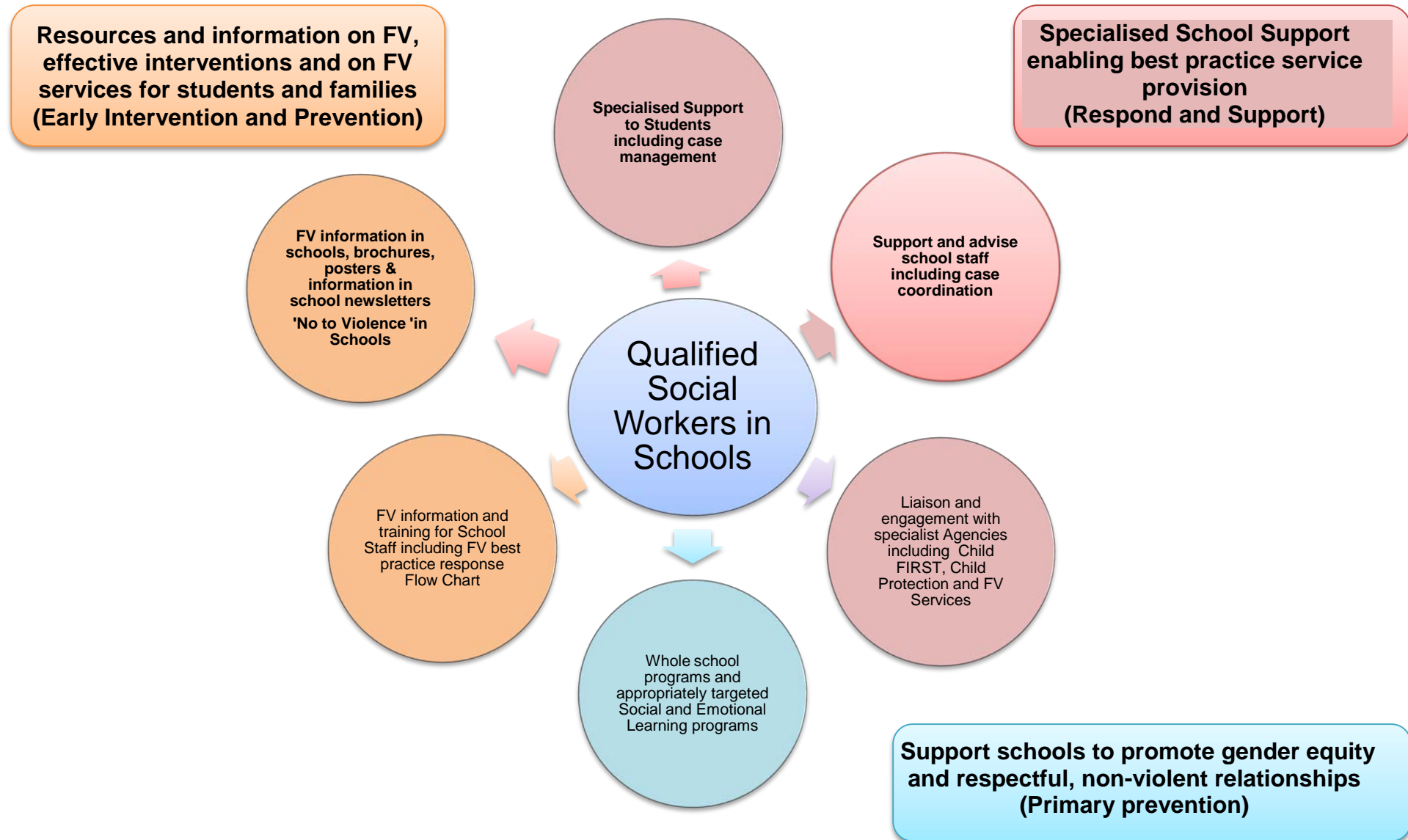
Some schools already receive funding for Primary Welfare Officers. However, the level of funding is too low to attract qualified Social Workers to these positions, with Integration Aides sometimes being the only option.

Proposal

It is our proposal that schools need to be funded for support services at a level that would result in qualified Social Workers being employed. With small rural schools, a Social Worker could be shared between 2 to 3 schools. This is a cost effective and appropriate solution which would result in best practice system change in order to appropriately manage the complexity of family violence in schools.

The Warrnambool Network of Schools would be prepared to act as a Pilot site. The diagram on page 5 illustrates a framework that could be utilised to ensure a holistic approach which would provide immediate targeted assistance to students in FV situations as well as long -term cultural change.

**Framework for Systemic and Cultural Change
using Schools**



Appendix 1

Family Violence Think Tank Outcomes Challenges and Solutions

Challenges	Solutions
Schools	
Clear Pathways for FV reports – do all staff know them?	Develop a family violence reporting flowchart (completed)
Regional schools – unsure of processes	Develop a reporting flowchart (completed) and a flyer for school staff
Processes rely on Welfare Staff being available in a school to advise/assist with the process and support students/staff	Capacity for teachers to deal with student issues while another staff member manages the class. Additional CRT funding required for this or Qualified Social Workers in schools to deal with student issues
School has concerns about Family Violence in the home	Police to do welfare checks if reported
Staff understanding of what causes inappropriate behaviour, and indicators of Family Violence with parents and students	Trauma training – FV training
“Not my role” attitude	Qualified Social Workers in schools
Absenteeism	Absenteeism being a legitimate concern for Child FIRST and Child Protection. If Family Violence services are engaged with Mother, then the school is aware and the school can contact this service to discuss barriers to school attendance with the mother. Qualified Social Workers in schools who have the training and skills to have discussions with parents and put appropriate plans in place.
Absenteeism	A bus and staff who go and collect students who are consistently not attending
Absenteeism	Outreach processes for attendance such as letter first, then Home Visits by Child FIRST / Child protection. Vice Principals and Welfare staff are doing these home visits in a school, but there are safety issues with this, however, the process is effective.
Smaller (rural) Primary Schools do not have Welfare Staff	Qualified Social Workers in schools or one employed across two to three schools. Alternatively, a pool of Social Workers available for smaller schools.
Small towns – Denial – safety – Don’t want to get involved- condoning attitudes	Early intervention and prevention programs in schools. Community education re Family Violence. Teaching and modelling respectful relationships at schools and through sporting/community groups.
Repercussions of ‘doing something’	Qualified Social Workers in schools who can reinforce to school staff the

	positive effects of 'doing something'
How to support children without making it worse	Qualified Social Workers in schools . They can provide ongoing support and training in schools and manage complex student situations
Pathway for dealing with threatening situations	Staff protocols to ring Police Zero tolerance to violence
How to do it better without breaching confidentiality.	Qualified Social Workers in schools. They can provide ongoing support and training in schools and develop appropriate school policies and procedures in line with Departmental Guidelines.
Need for all teachers to observe children. They don't feel confident.	Qualified Social Workers in schools . They can provide ongoing support and training in schools and assist teachers in complex student situations
How to support teachers in responding – back up.	Qualified Social Workers in schools
Relocating (transient) families – high absenteeism	Qualified Social Workers in schools. They have knowledge of the service system and the understanding and skills in regard to tracking the history of transient families.
Secondary school students have multiple teachers each year vs Primary Schools where students have one teacher per year.	Qualified Social Workers in schools who have the skills and knowledge to be able to assist each school in developing a Wellbeing system which ensures effective student support , which may include individual Student Support Plans
How to best support child?	Details regarding any existing connections that a family has with community or health agencies are provided to the school on enrolment. The appropriate management and best practice use of this information requires qualified Social Workers in schools.
Sibling violence	Reporting to SOCIT (Vic Police). Support for family/students via Qualified Social Workers in schools
IVO – real or threatened. Condition of orders is important.	Schools to be provided with copy of IVO by parent. Schools seek advice from Legal Department to assist in understanding conditions of the order and how to implement them in the school.
Child to parent violence –	Police talks in schools and community Who's In Charge? parent/ carer 8 week program available locally Youth justice conferences. Alternative dispute resolution. Qualified Social Workers in Schools.
Smaller schools – Don't have PWO'	PWO 'bank' - locum work?
Children living with Family Violence	Report to Child FIRST or Child Protection. Provision of strategies for living with Family Violence – safety plan. This process can be assisted/facilitated by having qualified Social Workers in Schools.

	Reports can also be made to the Police. This creates a history. Police can contact South West Healthcare Emergency Department to determine if any presentations, and assist with gathering evidence.
Aggressive and violent parents	Zero tolerance to violence in schools including signs in schools stating this. Policies and procedures re aggression and violence Protocols established when meeting with families Schools to call police if parents become aggressive or threatening. Care and support for staff.
Services	
What services are available to support children in schools in Family Violence situations? Difficult for schools to engage services to work with children.	Child FIRST can work with children in Family Violence situations (referral needs to be accepted as high enough risk and parent required to consent to service) Family Services can work just with children (referral is filtered through Child FIRST and service tends to be family/risk focused as opposed to providing direct support to children) Emma House Domestic Violence Service will work with children if mother engaged with their service (however, no pathway for schools to know if mother is engaged) Qualified Social Workers in schools could work therapeutically with children who are in, or have been in, Family Violence situations.
Lack of information provided to schools regarding student circumstances/needs, by services who are engaged with families.	Consent to share information signed by parents when Domestic Violence Refuges are facilitating enrolment of students in schools. Family Violence Services, Family Services and Child Protection to have case planning and case closure meetings with schools. Written plans including safety plans provided to schools Qualified Social Workers in schools can facilitate these processes, establish communication pathways with services and ensure appropriate information distribution and adherence to plans by schools.
Sibling Violence. Insufficient services.	Case Conferencing prior to being charged by Police Involve Police SOCIT unit Who's In Charge? parent/ carer 8 week program available locally Qualified Social Workers in schools
Communication/case planning between schools and agencies	Monthly meetings would be ideal. Need Social Workers in schools to facilitate this, and inform/assist schools to implement components for students.
GP's have different levels of understanding	Family Violence Education for GPs

Is verbal parent consent OK for services to children?	Emma House Domestic Violence Services. Verbal consent is sufficient for communication but not service delivery. Qualified Social Workers in schools would allow the provision of therapeutic support to children in Family Violence situations.
Agencies accepting referrals. Schools refer when they are unable to manage the situation internally, and have tried everything, or they are extremely concerned about risk issues.	Qualified Social Workers in schools who can assist in facilitating referrals, or assist with the school managing the situation.
Agency case closure – discharge planning. This rarely happens.	Agency contact school to discuss. Development of hand-over protocols, and relevant information provided to school. Attendance of schools at case closure meetings. Qualified Social Workers in schools
Concern after case closure	Agency to consult with schools and ensure that school is informed of relevant information, and is able to support the children and have a pathway to re-referral if required. Qualified Social Workers in schools
How to not put women at further risk	Qualified Social Workers in schools
Early intervention	
	Standing Tall – Mentor programs
	Police talks at schools on Family Violence
	Posters/information stating that a school does not tolerate violence or aggression
	Consistently delivering the message in schools that every child has a right to feel safe
	Schools have pamphlets/posters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emma House ➤ Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service
	Inserts for school newsletters provided by the Network
	Rip-off numbers for Family Violence services on bottom of A4 sheet in school public areas
Information re Child FIRST as preventative service. Concern that in reality Child FIRST is too consumed with managing risk.	Circulate information about Child FIRST Qualified Social Workers in schools can act from an early intervention, prevention perspective

Prevention/	
Preventative Work → Universal respectful relationships information/training ➤ Fear of this approach Difficult for Principals to deliver 'safety' (non-violence) message	Police can talk to schools/groups Qualified Social Workers in schools can provide social and emotional learning programs which focus on respectful and healthy relationships, conflict resolution and gender equality
Primary prevention – schools need to be guided on how to do it. Do schools have the capacity and will to do this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pamphlets for schools – local Family Violence Services information • Insert for school newsletters provided by Network • Agency information packs for Wellbeing staff • Rip-off numbers for Family Violence services on bottom of A4 sheet in school public areas
Respectful relationships education	Qualified Social Workers in Schools to source and deliver appropriate programs in schools or assist teachers to deliver to their classes.
You the Man play @ Mortlake P12. Need clear messages for school and agency staff.	Follow up discussion/learning frameworks for students and teachers to assist with exploring messages of plays/films which raise social issues.
	FV Champions in schools – may or may not be the Principal.