



# From Risk to Resilience

## A Safe Future for All



**Submission to the Victorian Royal Commission  
on Family Violence**

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## Introduction

### The invisible scars

Violence is a 'wicked' issue that has resulted in rapidly escalating mortality and long-term harm to the health and wellbeing of countless millions of children, young people and adults globally. We have long been told that family violence is a crime most often perpetrated by a man against a woman. In the adult world this is undoubtedly the case as is evidenced by global statistics that have resulted in the United Nations announcing a worldwide epidemic. This can never be challenged or minimised. What is missed in this message however is that most of those experiencing control, abuse and violence are children and young people. The physical scars from this trauma may fade but often the emotional scars remain, invisible but forever present. When a baby is born into this world few would argue that they should be loved, nurtured and protected. Sadly many face a life filled with fear, hurt and sadness. As adults these boys and girls often continue to hold the secret and the sense of shame. Family violence is the best-kept secret of many families. As a community we allow innocent children to experience controlling, abusive and violent behaviour. Hidden behind the shameful secrets we all know as family violence and child abuse, young boys and girls are robbed of their innocence, denied the opportunity to reach their future potential and to have a happy and safe future. Currently over one million children in Australia are reported to live in homes where control, abuse and violence exist. In reality these statistics only identify those where the 'secret' has been discovered. The shocking truth is there are so many more that we, as a community, are unaware of. All children deserve to have a world full of hopes and possibilities, where innocence is preserved and no dream is too big. We must build a community where it is everyone's responsibility to ensure this happens. As a community we must protect and support those who care for our children. We must also commit to make accountable those who put them at risk of harm and to support them to change their behaviour.

### Why didn't she just leave

We have heard so often "**Why didn't she just leave?**" This question reflects the communities thinking that family violence is a danger to women and children that can be easily seen and avoided. In reality family violence often has a slow, chronic onset where it is difficult to establish where the violence begins. Small changes in a relationship such as on-going criticism and questioning of ability turn into behaviours that create isolation and dependence. Add threats of harm and the use of physical violence resulting in women and children living in constant fear for their lives, robbed of

self-confidence and social supports and you see the picture of a family struggling to escape the cycle of violence. The community often has stereotypical beliefs of the families that live with family violence. Strong women, working women, educated women, women from all socio economic and cultural and diverse backgrounds fall victim to family violence. Importantly, we must recognise that women and their children that each of us know and respect have fallen victim to the cycle. The question of “**Why didn’t she just leave?**” turns into “**It’s a miracle they survived**”. The community then needs to ask “**Why do we not challenge and stop those who use control, abuse and violence?**”

## Uniting for a Safe Future

All at the Safe Futures Foundation are bound by their passion to create a safe future for generations to come. We understand that at the heart of change and making a real difference is recognising all are born equal and are worthy of respect and empathy. The community must be united in its commitment to give survivors confidence they will be protected and given every opportunity for recovery.

The Safe Futures Foundation believes all children, young people, and adults have the right to live safely in their homes and community. We understand violence in the home to include control, abuse and physical assault. Engaging and partnering with those that can influence and create change, the Foundation is committed to building understanding on the long term impact and cycle of violence, creating solutions to protect those at risk or experiencing control, abuse and violence, and to have a community united in their commitment to ensure a safe future for all. We believe that a response ensuring those first to know are also those first to act is central to a solution that provides safety and support at the earliest possible time. We are committed to providing every child, young person and adult with choices and opportunities to holistically heal the mind, body and soul and to reach their potential after the trauma of control, abuse and violence. We invite those who have gained strength and resilience to walk with others and inspire them to become empowered and self-determining.

Janine Mahoney

CEO

## Chapter 1.

### Who we are

Safe Futures Foundation is a nationally awarded innovator providing specialist family violence responses whilst also advocating for safety, wellbeing and justice to all who experience control, abuse and violence.

Safe Futures formed in 2013 from the merger of Brenda House and Maroondah Halfway House. Since formation it has continued to grow with two subsequent acquisitions resulting in more staff and resources to become one of the largest family violence organisations in Victoria. The organisation has won national and state awards for innovation, quality of its services and workplace arrangements for employees:

- Being recognised in 2010 as the recipient of the Victorian Fair and Flexible Employer Award
- Being recognised in 2011 as the recipient of the National Homelessness Services Achievement Award for Excellence and Innovation in addressing homelessness by an organisation, Safe Futures was commended for developing Victoria's first state-wide integrated domestic and family violence, homelessness and disability response that focuses on addressing each woman and child's practical and emotional needs and issues arising from the violence – while attempting to find accommodation that is most appropriate to the woman's individual circumstances.
- Being recognised in 2012 as the recipient of the Excellence in Accessible Communities Award as part of the National Disability Awards, Safe Futures was applauded for the work they undertook in raising awareness of the extra risks faced by women with disability in domestic violence situations. SFF is recognised within the sector for its client work, particularly for the outcomes it achieves with individuals who have complex and specialist needs due to diversity in culture, language, age or physical ability.
- Being awarded the 2015 inaugural Optus Peoples Choice Award for the establishment of the first ever satellite school to support children escaping violence. The school's aim is to break the cycle of violence for young people and keep them connected with education. The response ensures that students are able to continue with education despite being affected by homelessness as a result of family violence in their home.

Safe Futures is growing and developing rapidly to serve contemporary community, government and legislative needs in the face of a problem that the United Nations regard as so catastrophic as requiring a global commitment to the elimination of its root cause, violence in the home. It delivers strategic solutions for community sector challenges within a reform environment. Recognising the urgent need to abolish service 'silos' and achieve better outcomes for users with a system-wide, 'joined-up' approach (Professor Shergold AC, 2013), Safe Futures focuses on ensuring those first to know are also those first to act which is central to a solution that provides safety and support at the earliest possible time. The response is premised on a triage approach with comprehensive assessment of risk, safety and support requirements, and direct accesses to responses and resources ranging from safety strategies and immediate necessities through to therapeutic, educational and wellbeing programs. Increased safety, security and support are provided for those able to remain in their own homes and communities. For those where no intervention will provide the safety they require, support is provided to relocate and create a safe and stable life in a new community. Respect for the clients connection to their community, culture and spirituality is of paramount importance. Accessing specialist support for those with a disability, physical or mental health diagnosis, substance addiction or no permanent residency is a priority. The Safe Futures services are based on a more strategic approach than existing community service models in this area. Its work focuses on instigating social change through prevention and early intervention work, alongside its crisis responses for family violence.

Safe Futures collaborates closely with partners across emergency services, justice, education, health, housing and financial aid to deliver holistic client support through its Circles of Support C.A.R.E™ model (client advocacy, resilience and education). Communication is critical to this model, which integrates services across a client-centred continuum of care, achieving successful outcomes.

Communication is also essential in Safe Futures broader education and policy leadership agenda, and strategic engagement with partners, including government agencies, corporate sponsors and researchers.

Safe Futures expertise was recognised globally in 2014 with an international contract awarded to conduct research in Timor Leste. The research is concerned with both community perceptions of family violence and current responses to the issue. The impetus for this research is fundamentally based on the needs of family violence victims. By providing a deeper understanding of how communities perceive and

choose to address family violence, this research will inform future planning and decisions of implementing partners, local service providers, international donors and state actors regarding how to best direct funds in the design, plan, implementation and delivery of efforts to prevent and reduce family and community violence in Timor Leste. A number of other governments from the Asia Pacific region have approached Safe Futures to work collaboratively to inform the development of family violence responses.

## Chapter 2.

### Context

#### A Global Health Epidemic

Family violence harms individuals, families and communities and presents immense social and economic challenges for governments across the world. In 2013 the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced findings from an extensive global study, indicating some 35% of all women will experience either intimate partner violence or non-partner violence. The study found that intimate partner violence is the most common type of violence against women, affecting 30% of women worldwide. The United Nations has determined that violence against women and children has now reached epidemic proportions and continues to be one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world. It severely impacts survivors and comes at tremendous emotional, social and economic costs for families, local communities and the wider society.

In Australia Domestic violence is the leading cause of death and injury in women under 45, with more than one woman murdered by her current or former partner every week. Currently one murder per week in Australia is attributable to family violence.

*“These findings send a powerful message that violence against women is a global health problem of epidemic proportions,”*

Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General (World Health Organisation, 2013b).

#### Increasing Demand

Crime statistics show family violence offences are spiralling out of control and place immense demands on the community and health sectors, emergency services, the justice system and corrections. In the past ten years, cases of family violence related crime against the person have increased by nearly 400% in Victoria. In financial year 2012-2013, family violence offences increased by 21.6% and police attended almost 61,000 family violence incidents, about 49,000 of these resulted in a person being charged (Bucci, 2013). In Australia a woman is killed by an intimate partner every 72 hours.

*“The interesting thing for me is understanding that a woman or child is more likely to get assaulted in their home than they are on the street,”*

Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Ken Lay (Le Grand, 2011)



### Root cause of individual, community and societal dysfunction

Numerous international research studies have recently identified that the experience of control, abuse and violence as a child significantly increases the likelihood of long term impacts on mental and physical health, social, sexual and interpersonal experiences and functioning. It also significantly increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity and incarceration. Alarming the following statistics are some of the many that identify the long term cost to the individual and the community of childhood experiences of control, abuse and violence:

- A National study by the Crime Victims Institute at Sam Houston State University in the USA based on a national sample over a twenty year period identified:
  - 3 of 4 children who experienced control, abuse or violence as a child ended up victims as adults
  - 4 of 5 children who experienced control, abuse or violence as a child ended up becoming perpetrators as adults
- In a further study the Crime Victims Institute at Sam Houston State University also identified that 33% of male and 40% of female gang members experienced or witnessed control, abuse or violence as a child.
- The University of Alaska identified that 80% of those incarcerated in prisons experienced childhood control, abuse or violence. These statistics are duplicated in numerous studies of those incarcerated in the USA.

### Economic Cost

Beyond family violence's terrible physical, psychological, emotional and social impact on individuals, the economic costs are huge – estimated at more than \$3.4 billion per annum in this State alone (Victorian Government, 2012). In 2008-2009 the estimated economic cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was approximately \$13.6 billion of which approximately \$3.4 billion was the cost to Victoria. In 2013 the cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy reached \$14.7 billion. KPMG has calculated these costs to include pain and suffering, health costs, medical treatment, police and judicial services, housing, child protection and a range of other services. It also includes the productivity cost, including absenteeism, lost productivity related to use of sick leave, underperformance, poor

workplace relationships, and access to employment support services, replacing staff, and lost unpaid work.

Without appropriate action to address violence against women and their children, it is estimated the national figure will rise to around \$15.6 billion, by 2021–222, with Victoria's share of that cost around \$3.9 billion (Office of Women's Policy 2009). The cost to the Australian economy is expected to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2021.

### Advocacy & Media Agenda

Some recent tragedies have received extensive media coverage, including the deaths of 11 year old Luke Batty, 3 year old Savannah and 4 year old Indiana Mihayo, and mother of four Fiona Warzywoda. Advocacy and awareness campaigns in the media led by public figures such as the former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Ken Lay and Premier Daniel Andrews have significantly increased the profile of family violence in the public eye.

### Sector Reform

*“Service integration has been a major plank of policy directions in all Australian jurisdictions. Both service users and providers want it...Integration needs to be based upon a range of public service agencies working in partnership with both generalist and specialist providers...To date, six multi-disciplinary centres have been funded in areas of high need. Initial evaluation suggests positive outcomes,”* (Professor Shergold AC, 2013).

Government is reforming the way it delivers human services in response to spiralling demand and recent high-profile examples of systemic failures. This reform is driven by a number of national and state reform strategies, many of which target or intersect with family violence issues. The Shergold Report (*Service Sector Reform: A roadmap for community and human services reform*) has guided reform in Victoria alongside other existing plans including *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children* and *Victorian Vulnerable Children's Strategy*.

*“Our plan involves a more co-ordinated and integrated approach by government and other agencies to helping these women and children. It recognises that research, education and early intervention are vital to ensure long lasting change across the community,”* (Victorian Government, 2012).

### Information Communication Technology

State and Federal Governments are committed to implementing information communication technology (ICT) and becoming better at sharing data within and between departments and the public, to digitalise and streamline systems in health, aged care and human services. The Victorian Government *ICT Strategy 2013-2014*, *DataVic Access Policy* and the *Australian Public Service Information and Communications Technology Strategy 2012-2015* set the immediate priorities for this work (Australian Government, 2012; Department of Treasury & Finance, 2012; Victorian ICT Advisory Committee, 2013).

## Chapter 3.

### Current Challenges

The United Nations has determined that violence against women and children has now reached epidemic proportions and continues to be one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world. It severely impacts survivors and comes at tremendous emotional, social and economic costs for families, communities and governments. This distressing and intractable social problem, has been made worse by avoidable failures in the very systems set up to protect those at risk of harm. **The current family violence and child protection systems across the country - despite the hard work and good intentions of many, and significant financial investment - are not ensuring the safety, stability, wellbeing and best interests of the vulnerable and at risk as well as they should or could.** As a result the capacity of individuals and communities to be resilient and self-determining continues to deteriorate. The existing family violence system has developed historically as a 'one size fits all' service system and is primarily focused on a crisis response that requires women and children experiencing family violence to fit into specific time limited responses. The current family violence response in Victoria is somewhat piecemeal and uncoordinated, it is characterised by numerous disconnected service providers. There is duplication across many of the responses with multiple service providers seeking to address the same need with multiple entry points, other areas of identified need are significantly under resourced thus allowing many to fall through the gaps. There is no formalised communication or referral system, no consistent model of response and no agreed emergency response plan. Inconsistent responses across the service system at a state and national level have led to many women experiencing barriers, limited outcomes, escalated risk and homelessness. Too many women and children have paid the ultimate price and lost their lives due to systemic weaknesses and failure to protect. The system requires the woman to identify her experiences as family violence although the broad definition of violence remains mostly misunderstood within the community. Few in the community, including the majority of professionals, fail to understand that control and abuse, are equally as part of the cycle of violence as physical assault. This has resulted in many women, and the communities they are connected with, not recognising their experiences as family violence and thus not accessing family violence responses for support. Most clients of the existing family violence service system have reached the point of crisis and imminent risk before the system responds. The existing service system also frequently impedes women and children remaining within their own home and community, and accessing the existing

supports available. This inevitably leads to women's economic disempowerment and results with children commonly disengaged from education with academic outcomes well below those of their peers.

Eight critical challenges need to be addressed to decrease the incidence of violence in the home and the subsequent community issues i.e. community / street violence; workplace violence / bullying; sexual assault; elder abuse; human trafficking; drug and alcohol abuse; mental health issues; homelessness; and crime. The eight challenges are to:

- Meet rapidly rising demand efficiently and effectively within an environment of resource constraints;
- Implement cross sector internal, external and emergency communication strategies to ensure risk and duty of care are addressed at the earliest time with the most appropriate response to provide optimum individual and community safety;
- Improve emergency communication and response times;
- To increase the level of education, engagement, capacity and resourcing of the cross sector workforce to increase successful safety, wellbeing and justice outcomes for women and children experiencing control, abuse and violence;
- Increase engagement, educational outcomes and opportunities for all children who have experienced control, abuse and violence to reach their potential;
- To provide men with responses that address and support their personal challenges, build father child relationships, teach them about respectful relationships and stop their use of violence;
- To meet growing community expectations;
- To improve financial performance, public value and viability of cross sector responses utilising technology and cloud based digitalisation.

## Chapter 4.

### Proposed model of response

Although subsequent Victorian governments have attempted to develop integrated responses, a successful model that can operate across government and the community sector has yet to be achieved. Historically integration models have been reflective of connecting organisational responses. As reflected in the ever-increasing numbers of individuals experiencing control, abuse and violence, this has not achieved the desired outcomes. Reflecting on the challenges and barriers the current system has posed to those at risk of harm, Safe Futures proposes a model that is centred on the individual and the connections to the safety and support they and their family require. The model of response will not only serve the individual at risk of harm but contemporary community and government.

Considerate of legislative requirements and the challenges facing first responders and frontline workers, Safe Futures has designed, successfully implemented, and enhanced an alternative service model. The client-centric, family focused and integrated approach features a range of specialist responses to ensure all are provided with a response tailored to their specific circumstance. The model is derived from Safe Futures commitment to improving outcomes for individual clients and systemic outcomes for government by breaking the broader family violence cycle.

The model refers to the systems and process required to enable the delivery of coordinated, integrated and interoperable responses to individuals and families experiencing control, abuse and violence in Victoria.

Safe Futures is proposing a model that will:

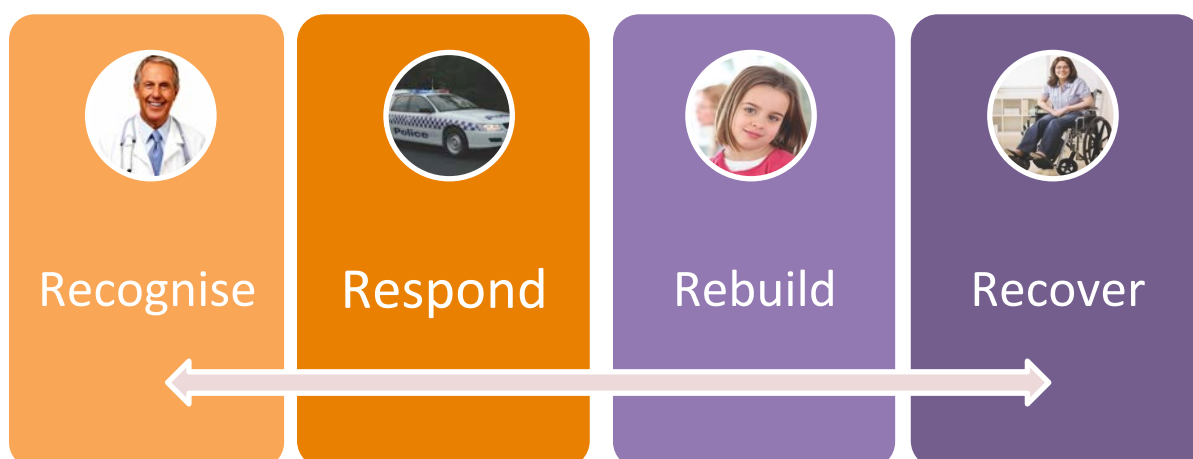
- Create a shared understanding of the indicators of family violence (control, abuse and violence).
- Identify those at risk of harm at the earliest possible time.
- Improve the safety, stability, health, wellbeing, recovery and long-term outcomes for survivors.
- Deter and make accountable those that use control, abuse and violence with increased capacity to progress criminal justice responses.

- Deliver programs focused on strengths based support to address the abusive, controlling and violent behaviour of those putting others at risk of harm and enable them to change their story and the cycle of abuse within their family.
- Measures and monitor qualitative outcomes to in addition to collecting quantitative data.
- Apply resources to create the best possible individual and public value.

This document will provide a high level outline of the sector reform required, including the key features and benefits of a new response model.

Four critical elements comprise the client centred family violence response model:

- **RECOGNISE** - The 'First to Know is the First to Act'
- **RESPOND** - A comprehensive assessment identifies risk, triggers a safety response and establishes a 'duty of care' plan to ensure safety.
- **REBUILD** - A comprehensive assessment identifies immediate support needs, and initiates case management and referrals to ensure stability.
- **RECOVER** – Outcomes focused, strength-based support provides pathways to health, wellbeing and opportunities to reach potential.



## Chapter 5.

### Recognise.

Every day thousands of Victorian women and children silently scream for help. The community does not hear nor understand their fear; it does not stop the violence or address the trauma to which they are subjected. They are also hidden amongst the statistics that continue to increase for the already over utilised emergency, health, mental health and justice service systems. Education services continue to struggle with the ever-increasing challenge of working with traumatised children. These women and children often don't recognise their experiences as family violence; they have not yet reached the point of crisis and they do not realise that support is available; they have not reached the stage where they must leave their homes to survive. The distress they feel when they think of leaving home because of the violence, all too often now becomes a reality when they become homeless.

Across the State countless children, young people and adults are experiencing what experts know as family violence. It is very difficult to measure the true extent of violence as most incidents go unreported. In 2012/13, Victoria Police attended 61,000 reported incidents family violence (Victorian Government, 2012). However, the ABS Personal Safety Survey (2006) has previously estimated that 'only 36 percent of female victims of physical assault and 19 percent of female victims of sexual assault in Australia reported the incident to police' (Parliament of Australia, 2006). On this basis a rough calculation shows that the true number of potentially reportable family violence incidents in Victoria in 2012/13 could have been as high as 282,637 or an additional 221,637 cases. Notably, these calculations do not include the full range of controlling or abusive behaviours that may be the precursors to physical or sexual violence.

Why then are the majority of those living with family violence not seeking support and why are we as a community most often waiting until the point of crisis to respond? If we wish to reverse the rapidly escalating statistics we must understand why these questions have remained unanswered for countless generations.

A number of factors must inherently influence family violence reform strategies:

- How do we ensure all in the community understand what family violence is?
- Whose responsibility it is to ensure safety and support to those at risk of harm?
- How do we ensure they respond appropriately at the earliest possible time?



- How do we ensure those who should be responsible for others safety are accountable for their actions?

### A. Language - Informing our understanding of family violence

**Family Violence:** What is family violence? There are numerous understandings and definitions held by the community, service sectors, and government. Critical to this difficulty is that many who experience family violence lack an understanding of what family violence is. Simply, many understand family violence to be physical violence and are unaware that controlling and abusive behaviours also form part of the cycle of violence. This was evidenced when Safe Futures partnered with Centrelink to support women identified by social workers as experiencing family violence. Centrelink Social workers were identifying indicators of financial abuse, in particular women who were otherwise ineligible for benefits were seeking help to purchase such basics as food. Further, when Safe Futures advocates built trust with the woman additional controlling and abusive behaviours were uncovered. The majority were not experiencing physical assault and were unaware they were living with 'family violence'. Although many traumatically had experienced threats of harm and death, they were unaware their lived experience was family violence. Significantly the majority would never have sought assistance from a family violence service as they were unaware their experience deemed them eligible for support. Equally concerning is the significant number of professionals who are often the first to identify indicators of control and abuse who are also unaware these behaviours constitute family violence.

Safe Futures now substitute the terms **Control, Abuse and Violence (CAV)** in place of family violence (except when referring to specific statistical measures). We believe that this term covers the full range of behaviours that can cause harm and more accurately reflects the experience of violence in the home.

The tables below provide insight into the behaviours that identify control, abuse and violence.

<b>CONTROL</b>		
<b>Social</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Spiritual/Cultural</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jealousy and possessiveness</li> <li>• Constant checks on whereabouts</li> <li>• Controlling time, activities and contact with family or friends</li> <li>• Systematic isolation from social circle/support network</li> <li>• Physically restricting the person from going out and meeting people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling access to family resources including time, transportation, food, clothing, shelter and insurance</li> <li>• Providing an inadequate 'allowance'</li> <li>• Complete control of all monies</li> <li>• Forbidding access to bank accounts</li> <li>• Taking wages earned by the person</li> <li>• Preventing the person seeking or holding employment</li> <li>• Not paying child support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denigration of cultural or religious background</li> <li>• Preventing religious observance</li> <li>• Denying access to ceremonies, land or ethno-cultural community</li> <li>• Misuse of religious beliefs to force partners into subordinate roles</li> <li>• Forcing people to do things contrary to their beliefs</li> <li>• Misuse of spiritual or cultural traditions to justify any form of CAV</li> </ul>

<b>ABUSE</b>		
<b>Verbal</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Psychological</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeated verbal attacks on the person's worth as a parent, family member, friend, employee, professional or community member</li> <li>• Continual 'put downs' focusing on intelligence, sexuality or body image</li> <li>• Swearing or humiliation in private or public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaming a partner for all of the problems in the relationship</li> <li>• Undermining the person's self-worth through comparison with others</li> <li>• Withdrawing interest and engagement (i.e. sulking or remaining silent for days)</li> <li>• Emotional blackmail including threats to commit suicide</li> <li>• Using access to children to threaten or force compliance (e.g. threatening to kidnap or prolong custody fights)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Mind games' or other tactics to undermine the person's sense of reality</li> <li>• Asserting the justice system will not believe or support the person</li> <li>• Threats against pets or property and other acts of intimidation</li> </ul>

VIOLENCE	
Sexual	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticising or using degrading insults</li> <li>• Any form of pressured/unwanted sex or sexual degradation including making a partner perform sexual acts unwillingly</li> <li>• Coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases</li> <li>• Causing pain during sex including assaulting genitals</li> <li>• Sexual assault accompanied by violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locking the victim out of the house</li> <li>• Sleep and food deprivation</li> <li>• Driving dangerously and other violent behaviours</li> <li>• Abuse of pets in front of family members</li> <li>• Assault of children</li> <li>• Any physical assault including spitting, scratching, biting, grabbing, shaking, shoving, pushing, restraining, throwing, twisting, slapping, punching, choking or burning</li> <li>• Use of weapons to threaten or inflict harm</li> </ul>

**Victim:** For generations our community has labelled those who have experienced control, abuse, and violence ‘**victims**’. While this reflects the truth of their experience, it contributes to a feeling of powerlessness for those who carry this label with them for life. The language implies weakness and creates a sense of shame, encouraging children to continue to keep their experience a secret as they move into adulthood. When a child, young person or adult lives with this trauma the simple act of surviving, of making it through each day, takes immense strength. To be able to say ‘**I am a survivor**’ provides a sense of strength, courage and the possibility of a safe new beginning. Safe Futures now advocates that a child, young person or adult who has lived with control, abuse and violence is referred to as a **survivor**.

A term commonly used to describe a mother who has left a controlling, abusive and violent partner is **single mother**. Although this term aptly describes the woman’s situation it too informs the communities perception of her and often leads to discrimination. Accessing housing, finance and employment can be adversely affected. The term **independent mother** more appropriately reflects the strength required to leave a CAV relationship and her capacity to move forward towards the life she envisages for her family.

## **B. Who are the 'First to Know'? – Those with a responsibility to ensure safety and support to those at risk of harm**

There is a broad range of professionals who may become aware of the indicators of control abuse and violence who might support a child, young person or adult in recognising the need to take action before the situation reaches a violent stage. The following sectors in particular are most likely to be the 'First to Know'

**Finance** – Financial control is one of the indicators of control, abuse and violence in a relationship often overlooked. Those people who are involved with the financial affairs of families may be the first to notice that one partner is seeking to exercise financial control over another. These professionals includes

- Centrelink staff
- Accountants
- Bank staff
- Financial advisors

**Health** – Health workers are frequently in a position to observe the physical, emotional and psychological indicators of CAV. These professionals include:

- General practitioners
- Paediatricians
- Midwives
- Maternal and child health nurses
- Hospital emergency department staff
- Community health workers
- School nurses
- Psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health practitioners
- Alcohol and other drug counsellors
- Dentists
- Allied health practitioners – Speech therapists, Occupational therapists, podiatrists etc
- Paramedics

**Community Sector** – Due to the trauma and personal challenges associated with CAV, many seek assistance from professionals in the community sector such as homelessness and family services agencies, Child Protection, relationship and mediation centres. These include:

- Social workers
- Community development workers
- Counsellors
- Women and children family violence advocates
- Housing workers

**Education** – Educators are most likely to identify indicators of CAV within a family through working with children and young people. Children and young people display many and varied signs of experiencing or witnessing CAV. These professionals include:

- Childcare workers
- Kindergarten teachers
- Primary and Secondary school teachers
- TAFE and University lecturers and tutors
- English language teachers

**Legal and Justice Services** – Many engaging with the legal and justice systems are either experiencing or perpetrating CAV. These professionals include:

- Solicitors / Barristers
- Registrars
- Magistrates / Judges
- Family court report writers
- Community Legal Centres

**Police and Corrections** – Victoria Police report that they have a call every four minutes relating to CAV. This clearly identifies that police and corrections are working with significant numbers either experiencing or perpetrating CAV.

**Sporting organisations** – Sporting organisations engage individuals and families across generations and from all socio-economic, cultural, spiritual and geographical communities. Coaches and administrators are aware of family dynamics often before other professionals yet are unlikely to identify indicators of CAV.

**Organisations and professionals supporting Specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples report that they experience domestic and family violence more frequently than non-indigenous Australians (VicHealth, 2010).

**Cultural organisations** – People from diverse cultural communities are often particularly vulnerable as they may not be aware of the supports available and might also have English as their second language.

**Spiritual communities** – For many experiencing CAV the only people they trust to share their story with are those from faith-based organisations and those ordained. This applies to both those living with CAV and the perpetrator of the CAV.

**Organisations and professionals supporting those with a disability** – Research has identified that people with a disability are twice as likely to experience CAV. It is critical that those in disability organisations identify indicators of CAV and don't inadvertently increase risk by co-ordinating support via a family member who is a perpetrator.

**Organisations and professionals supporting older persons** - Research has identified that the number of older people experiencing CAV are rising rapidly. It is critical that those organisations responding to older people identify indicators of CAV and don't inadvertently increase risk by co-ordinating support via a family member who is a perpetrator. The National Ageing Institute advise that 92.3% of elder abuse is perpetrated by a person related to the older person, of these 66.8% is perpetrated by a child of the older person.

**Animal welfare agencies** – Pet abuse has for some time been recognised as an indicator of CAV. Professionals working in this field are trained to identify the abuse of animals but often do not recognise the likelihood of CAV in the home.

**Corporate organisations and small businesses** – Research has identified that for those experiencing CAV, the people they are often likely to confide in are a work or business colleague. It is also noted that of those most likely to identify a perpetrator of CAV, many are also a work or business colleague.



### C. How do we ensure that those who are the 'First to Know' are also the 'First to Act'?

Education and responsibility are the two key elements that will ensure those that are 'First to Know' are the 'First to Act'. With inconsistent knowledge to recognise and no obligation to respond it is no surprise that the majority of CAV reaches the point of crisis before the community responds. All relevant organisations, government agencies, unions and industry associations must unite to provide their workforce with the consistent education to recognise the indicators of CAV, referral pathways to relevant specialist safety and support responses, and accountability for adherence to agreed best practice.

**Professional Education / Development**– International studies have shown that first responders and frontline professionals generally have a low knowledge and understanding of CAV, relevant legislative requirements, and how to respond appropriately to maximise safety and support. Although in a unique position to identify CAV at the earliest possible time, professionals untrained to recognise the indicators miss opportunities to immediately improve safety and support to those at risk of further harm. Furthermore inadequately trained professionals may inadvertently cause increased risk through improper reactions or responses. Without appropriate recognition and referral they may also unintentionally create additional barriers to those at risk accessing safety and support. This may result in them remaining in unsafe and violent environments, sometimes paying the ultimate price of losing their life, with no record of their engagement with the professionals being made available to the appropriate agencies.

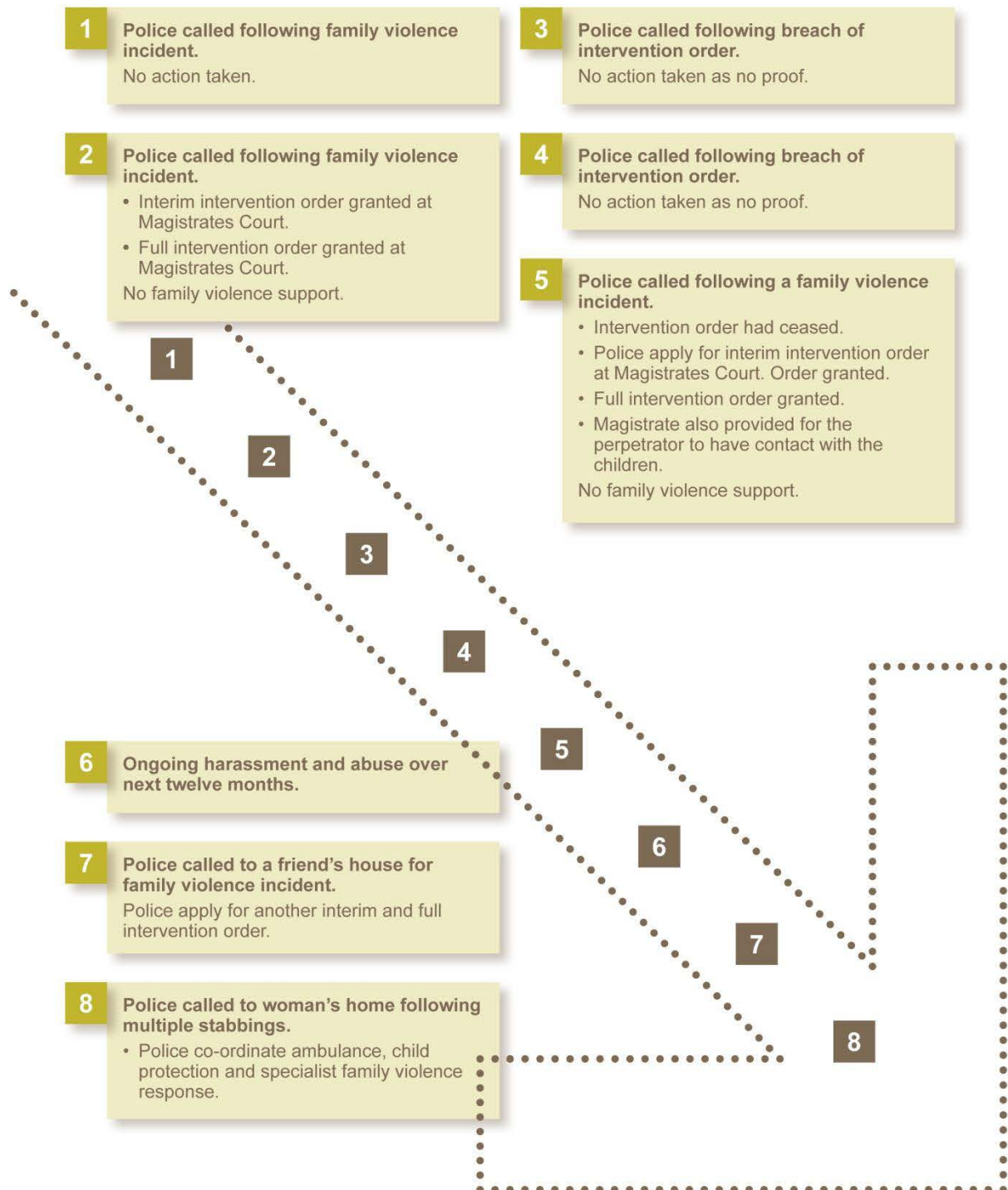
**Case study** - *The case study below is presented to highlight the significant physical, psychological, economic and social cost to both the woman and her children as a result of control, abuse and violence. It also highlights the significant costs to the community that could have been averted if the indicators of family violence had been identified much earlier and a referral made to a family violence early intervention response such as Safe Futures - Safe in the Community.* ■■■■■ is a ■■■■■ year old woman. After immigrating to Australia with her husband and pre-school year old child, the family was thrown into turmoil when her husband suddenly passed away just weeks after their arrival. ■■■■■ was determined to make a new life for her and her child in Australia and enrolled in English classes with the goal of employment, financial independence and stable housing. ■■■■■ developed a friendship and then relationship with a man who lived in her neighbourhood. When ■■■■■ discovered that she was

pregnant she wanted to marry her partner. When he refused to marry her she ended the relationship. Throughout the pregnancy he stalked, psychologically and physically abused her and her daughter and sexually assaulted her numerous times. During the relationship he had continually created financial hardship for the family as he gambled heavily leaving no money for food, living costs or bills. During and post her pregnancy, although not directly disclosing the family violence ██████ sought assistance from the community on many occasions exhibiting indicators of CAV (family violence). None of the agencies involved formally identified the violence, nor did they progress a referral for a specialist family violence response. The ongoing family violence culminated with her former partner attempting to kill her, stabbing her multiple times after breaking into her home. Her ██████ year old daughter, witnessing the attempted murder of her mother, grabbed a knife and attempted to stab the perpetrator. He turned on her and stabbed her as well. Neighbours hearing the assault called Police who in turn called Ambulance Victoria for the three family members to be transported to hospital. Child Protection was called resulting in the children being placed in out of home care. Child Protection determined that ██████ had failed to protect her children. After a number of Children's Court hearings and strong advocacy from Safe Futures and the Police, the children were eventually returned to their mother a number of weeks after she was released from hospital. The perpetrator was found guilty of attempted murder and is now serving a lengthy jail term. ██████ and her eldest daughter continue to live in fear as he has threatened to kill them upon his release. He had previously spent ██████ years in an interstate prison for murdering his former wife. He also has had a history of assault and imprisonment in Victoria. Please follow ██████'s pathway through each of the sectors she connected with through the diagrams on the following pages and also her suggestions for a better outcome.

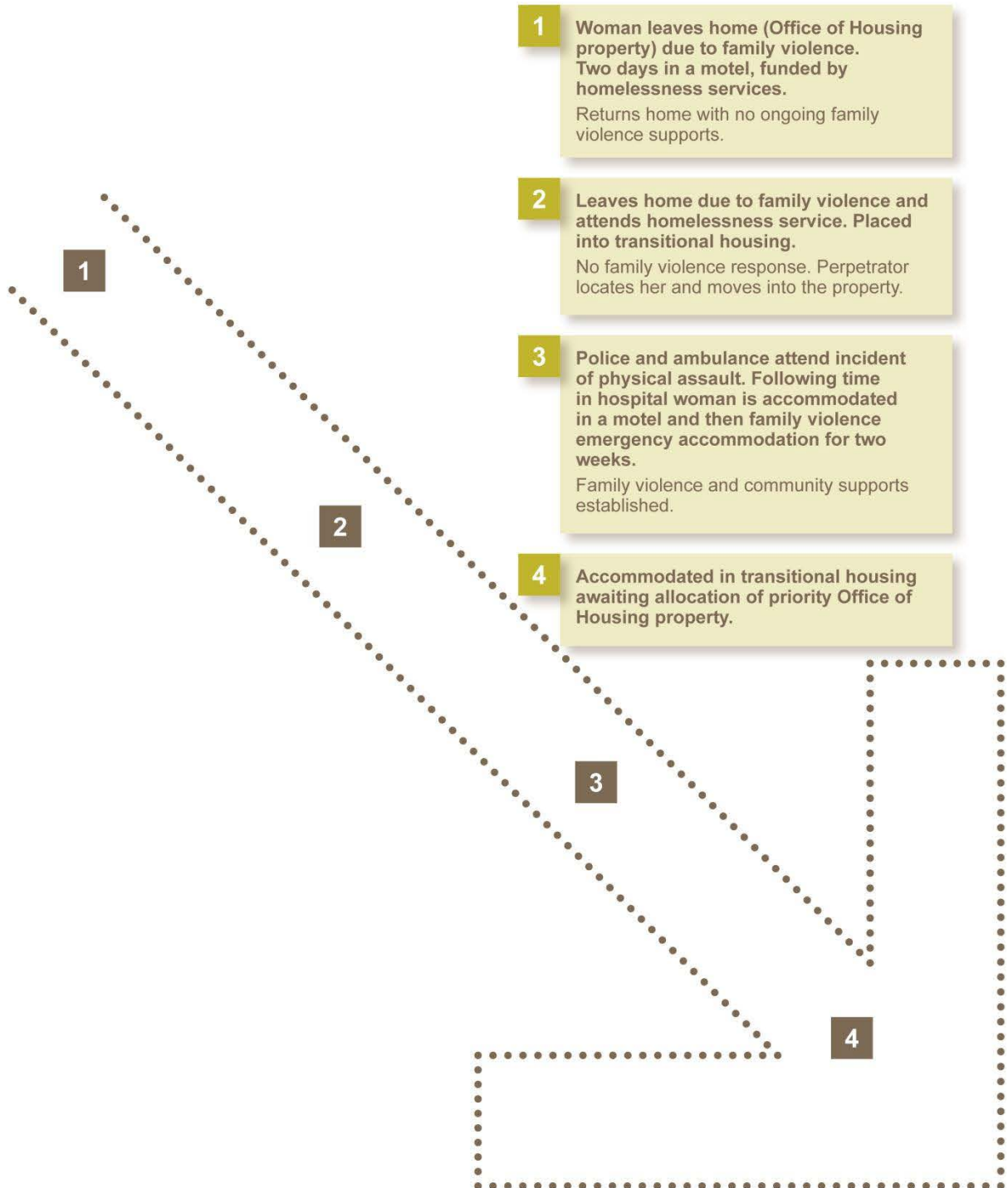
██████'s story is factual, she has given permission for her story to be told in this submission in the hope it might help others. She has no family in Australia, spoke little English and was too fearful to ask for help. She hopes that in the future the community will step up and help when they see indicators of violence. She believes that her later experience of a women's advocate walking with her, advocating when her voice wasn't heard and stepping back to mentor and support when she became stronger has helped her to believe in her future. With the ongoing support of her Safe Futures women's advocate she has since continued her education, gained employment and secure stable housing. She wants her girls to be happy and feel safe; she hopes they will have every opportunity to reach their potential free from control, abuse and violence.



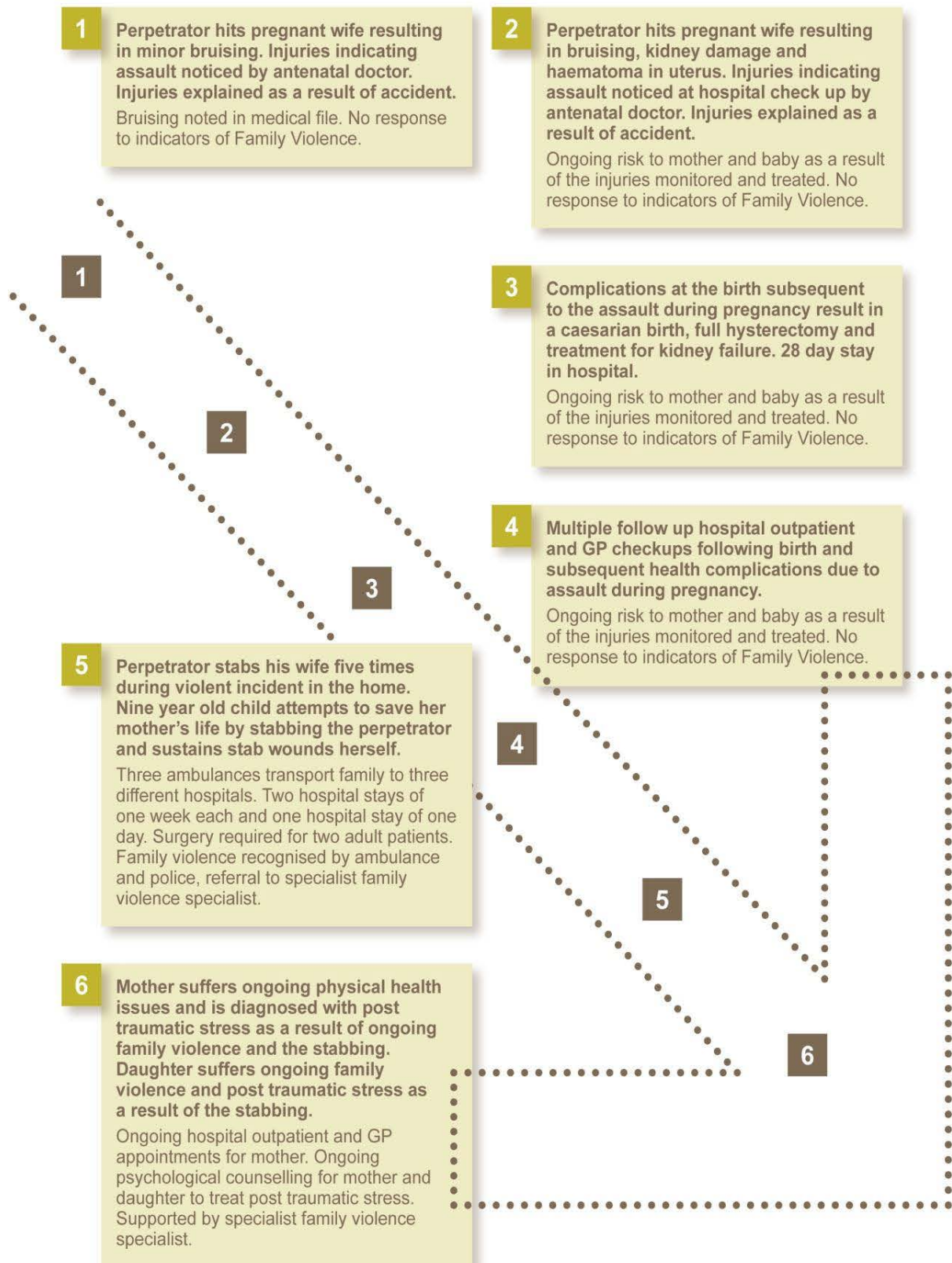
## Police



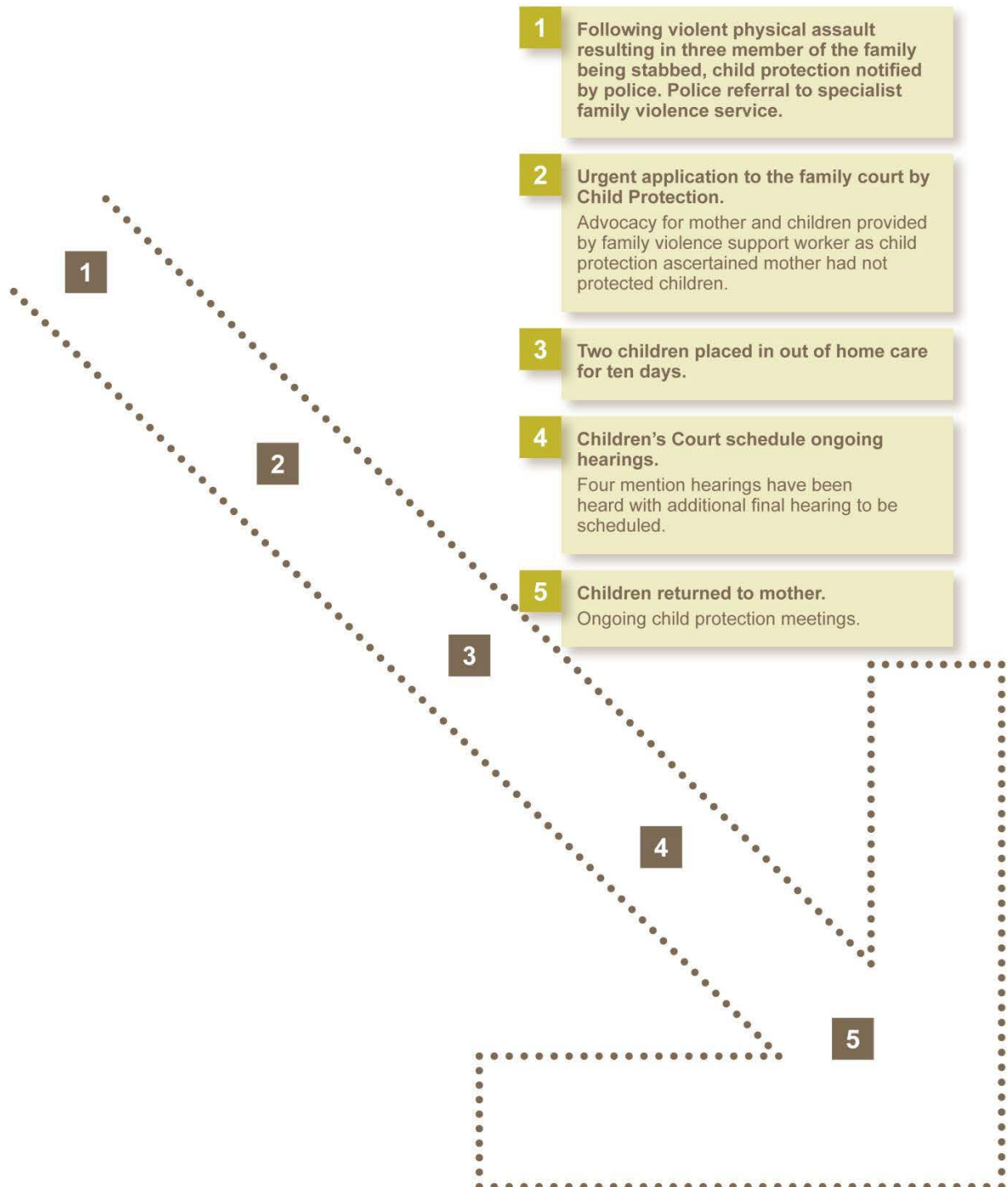
## Accommodation



## Health



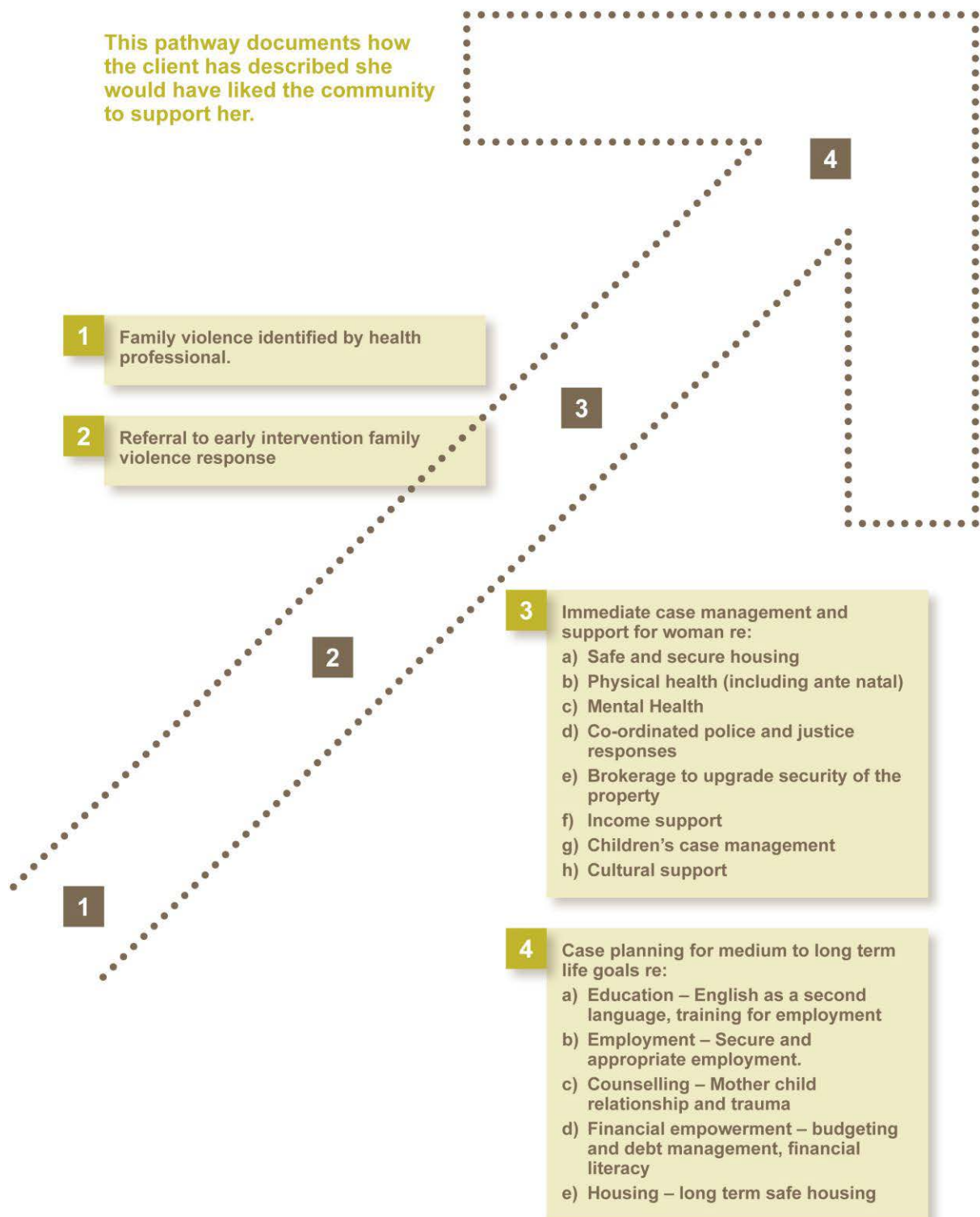
## Child Protection





## Early intervention pathway (NEW)

This pathway documents how the client has described she would have liked the community to support her.



A formal education programme should provide first responder and frontline professionals with knowledge, skills and tools to accurately recognise and refer as well as perform support tasks, such as evidence gathering and documentation.

Programmes should include CAV education that includes:

- The definition of CAV
- The root causes
- The myths
- The early indicators
- The impact on safety, stability, health, wellbeing and opportunities to reach potential
- Factors that can escalate risk, for example the use of drugs and alcohol, mental health, access to weapons etc.
- OH&S factors including vicarious trauma and physical safety
- Referral pathways
- Best practice

Education should take place initially in a pre-employment context. Graduate courses should contain compulsory units of study. An initial comprehensive and consistent base unit that is common across all professional qualifications should be followed by a unit tailored to the diversity of the professions and focuses on the specialist requirements. For example those in the health sector would undertake study on identifying the indicators, treating and documenting of ill health and injuries. In the context of professional development, education programmes should also be made available to currently employed professionals and allow for continuous refreshing and updating of content. This could be offered as face-to-face or virtual on-line training. It is strongly recommended that eligibility for promotion is reliant on completion of the study. For example for a police officer to be considered eligible for Detective training or promotion they must have first completed the comprehensive CAV training. Not only does this ensure that professionals have the required understanding, but that there is an incentive for undertaking the training.

A number of Victorian universities have expressed interest in developing units of study including Monash, Deakin and Swinburne. It is strongly recommended that units of study are common across all TAFE's and universities and that a working party be established to ensure this occurs.

A number of professions have also identified the value of pre employment education and professional development. Ambulance Victoria has partnered with Safe Futures for a number of years with the intent of establishing units of study, strengthening responses, and improved data collection. The Australian Medical Association and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have expressed their commitment to establishing units of study.

**Community Education – ‘Change your Story’ campaign.** Safe Futures have been working together with Phil Huzzard the founder and director of Accelerator Communication, an internationally recognised advertising company, to develop a national advertising campaign. Paul Gardner, the former CEO of international company Greys Advertising has also generously contributed his expertise.

The often-quoted cycle of violence rarely informs how the community tackles the epidemic of family violence. When we look to the statistics, over eighty percent of those that perpetrate control, abuse and violence are they themselves childhood survivors of family violence and child abuse. Without consideration of the childhood trauma that has informed their lives, we have focused on perpetrators accountability for the crimes they commit as adults. Whilst family violence must always be understood to be a serious crime and addressed with strong policing and justice responses, as a community we must also understand that ‘power and control’ and many of the compounding factors associated with family violence, are most often symptoms of childhood trauma.

**‘Change your Story’** focuses on building an understanding that men have the capacity to build on their own strengths as survivors to become their children’s superhero. Portraying men as potential superhero’s removes the stereotypical beliefs of men who use control, abuse and violence. Offering men the opportunity to choose the path of good over evil provides a sense of hope that they can change the story of their life. Opting to seek help to break the cycle of violence provides the chance to both give their family a life free from violence and change their children’s story.

Those contributing to the development of this campaign have spent considerable time researching overseas campaigns and have identified what has not worked. We firmly believe that focusing on positive solutions rather than statistics and blame will provide government with an opportunity to make a real difference in Australia and lead global change by example.

**Communication** – Due to escalating demand and growth in the number of agencies and government departments responding to the challenge of CAV, communication processes and tools no longer serve the community adequately, nor prepare it for the possibility of further expansion in the future. Currently many simple and fragmented communication platforms, processes and tools to communicate internally and externally exist (including a combination of paper and digital methods that do not provide strong evidentiary support). In addition there is no integrated emergency response communication strategy.

State and Federal Governments in Australia and other countries are looking for solutions that will curb the problem and ease the immense systemic burden CAV places on health, education, community, emergency services, justice and corrections. Communication is the critical connecting factor for Governments to achieve their objectives. Streamlined, scalable and contemporary communication arrangements partnered with innovative service design would improve governments and the community's capacity to deliver client outcomes in line with government directions in ICT development.

The systemic reform must include ICT and communication solutions that forge stronger relationships across all relevant agencies, progress multi-agency responses, and strengthen government, non-government and corporate partnerships. Whilst recognizing protocols governing privacy and information sharing it must create opportunities for shared capacity building and training of all relevant service systems nationally.

To achieve safety, best client outcomes and public value, an exchange and referral platform and ICT software solution have been developed by Telstra Health to deliver multi- agency interoperability and coordination whilst supporting the capability for agencies to operate autonomously. Telstra Health has worked with the Safe Futures Foundation and joint venture partner Knowledge Community, to oversee the development and implementation of a client centered, family focused referral and case management 'cloud' solution that is maximum security, low cost, efficient, scalable, integrated and interoperable. The system captures and makes accessible client data and risk profiling, this is currently not available. This world-leading solution:

- Has the capacity to be globally scaled whilst remaining locally relevant to the needs of diverse communities.



- Fosters a collective culture across sectors whilst enabling high potential for individual agencies to operate autonomously.
- Hosts a referral platform that incorporates comprehensive child, survivor, perpetrator, property, cyber, cultural and disability risk assessments combined with a streamlined triage and referral system that identifies the level of risk, assesses potential lethality of perpetrators, and identifies those most at risk of serious physical assault and homicide. As risk escalates, those responsible for safety and 'duty of care' are alerted. In addition when a situation of risk is reported, a risk profile is generated to brief emergency services attending the incident.
- Determines the most appropriate safety and support response through a process of triage for better identification of the child, young person or adults level of risk, this is supported by clearly identified targeted referral pathways. Under this model, many families that historically would have escalated to the point where a crisis and emergency services responses would have been required will be referred quickly to the services they need at the earliest possible point, without ever needing to come to the attention of the statutory system.
- The Telstra Health response model compliments and supports emergency services assessments and responses. The model has capacity to triage and better align low and medium risk cases to early intervention safety and support responses so that police and paramedics are available to concentrate on high and extreme risk clients requiring an immediate 000 emergency response (the most costly response).
- The software solution promotes a cross sector culture of excellence and high performance. Programing is supported by world leading ISO quality improvement systems able to be informed by government legislation and agency policies that are enduring yet agile and open to revitalisation.
- Safe Futures individualized 'Circles of Support' C.A.R.E. (client advocacy, resilience and education) plans offer a pathway to a comprehensive suite of responses supporting access to immediate options for safety, stability, health and wellbeing, recovery and opportunities to reach potential. A range of management plans can be integrated to provide a single plan for the individual child, young person and adult:

- A single CARE plan guides a lead professional to ensure safety and support needs are identified and responses developed to deliver appropriate and timely outcomes. All professionals and agencies involved with the client with a duty of care responsibility are able to access and further add to the client record assisting in identification of escalating risk and flag the need for increased safety and support requirements at the earliest possible time. The CARE plan can incorporate:
  - A safety and security plan
  - A comprehensive support and needs assessment
  - A health management plan including a personal health record
  - An educational / employment support plan including information on a child, young person or adults educational / employment goals and plans
  - Cultural support plan for every child, young person or adult who identifies as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or a particular cultural or linguistic group. In the case of a child or young person it can include information about the child's clan, language, ethnic, cultural, Island and/or community group. It can also include the parents' and siblings' clan, language, ethnic, cultural, island and/or community group.
  - Disability support plan.
- Promotes education, engagement, collaboration and communication within and across diverse professions to equip first responders and front line professionals that are 'first to know' with the knowledge, resources and referral pathways to offer earliest possible 'first to act' responses.
- Child safety, wellbeing and connectedness is embedded in the solution as a collective and shared responsibility of all individuals, families and communities. The response provides pathways and immediate access to a suite of options that promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children and support families in fulfilling their responsibility for the care, upbringing, development and education of children.

- The capacity for place based and virtual responses will position the responsibility for safety, stability, healing and support at the centre of every community, including regional and remote communities. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems is alarming. Improving access to universal and secondary services including health, housing, family violence prevention, and other social services is central. Isolated and remote communities will have the ability to access expert and specialist virtual responses that previously were unable to be accessed.
- Families cannot be supported, nor children protected, unless workforce specialists have the necessary skills, ability, knowledge and aptitude for the task. A highly skilled and committed workforce is essential for guiding clients along pathways to safety, stability, health and wellbeing, healing, resilience and self-determination. Telstra Health, with the expert support of Safe Futures, has incorporated in the solution design a virtual training and performance management strategy to an employer of choice standard. This framework of practice has the capacity to guide cross-sector training to all working in the context of family violence and other areas of community responsibility. The flexible solution has the capacity to ensure the highest regard for workplace safety, consistent response, time efficiencies and accountability. The solution also provides government and non-government agencies with the capacity to cope with increasing regulatory and administrative demands whilst improving the ability to deliver high-quality services to all parts of the state.
- Comprehensive data collection, flexible and responsive reporting, quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms complete a robust and visionary solution. Such mechanisms have the additional benefit of ensuring:
  - Reports required for child protection, policing and justice responses meet legislative and regulatory requirements and are comprehensive and consistent in presentation when required for the preparation of briefs of evidence.
  - Program evaluations of funded agencies which identify outcomes for individuals and families and achieve objectives cost-effectively.
  - Historic data analysis assists demand projection and planning

The ICT strategy supports and compliments the proposed Ambulance Victoria's revised operating model and multidisciplinary referral call centre. One of the most fundamental changes proposed by the revised operating model, and which is central to achieving an effective overall system, is to improve current triage arrangements. This could potentially be done through the introduction of a new triage tool (detailed above) and process. The multidisciplinary call centre has been established by Ambulance Victoria but would equally support improved responses for Victoria Police. This model has the potential to triage and better align safety and support options so that police and paramedics are available to concentrate on high-risk clients requiring an immediate 000 emergency response (the most costly response). It facilitates triaging to be managed by qualified and expert professionals in the community and health sectors to provide appropriate and less costly services such as the 'Safe in the Community' outreach response and 1800respect's 24 hour / 7 day counselling and support.

Specific to family violence, the revised operating model and multi-disciplinary call centre would ensure:

- A more effective "000" emergency services model to meet growing demands. Callers are directed to the most appropriate service or response to meet their needs, at the earliest possible time.
- That the experience of the client would be improved through more timely and responsive service provision. Currently, some experience long waiting times because emergency resources are tied up servicing those that could be provided a response by non-emergency services agencies.
- Reduce demand for emergency ambulance and police responses and hence improve emergency availability and response times for those at greatest risk.
- Improve responsiveness and reliability of non-emergency services, through improved availability and scheduling.
- Improve financial viability, as a more cost efficient service delivery model will be introduced.
- Promoting improved collaboration, relationships and interfaces between emergency services and the community and health sectors.
- Improve the ability to share and transfer data about individuals across emergency service and the community and health sectors.

- Provide a more appropriate targeted service to meet community needs.
- Better co-ordinate and integrate emergency services with the community and health sectors.

The case study below is presented to highlight the situation many at immediate risk of harm are currently faced with. [REDACTED] has provided her story and permission for it to be included in this submission, in the hope that others who desperately look to the police for support when their lives are threatened receive an immediate and appropriate response.

**Case study** - *'When you see the amount of police cars parked on suburban roadsides, waiting for someone to merely exceed the speed limit, it makes you wonder what the majority of Melbourne police are doing to fill up their day, and if in fact, is this as severe as the crime gets in Melbourne? When you are locked inside your apartment under severe threats of violence and the police will not show up to your apartment because you only managed to shout out the street number instead of the specific unit number, your question is answered. It is upsetting and unnerving that in our society, the system is based on trying to catch people out to add points to their efforts for the day, instead of being there when someone's life is in danger.'*

*Last November I had a life changing experience in my apartment building in [REDACTED], and with very little help from the police lost a lot of faith in our system. My boyfriend came to my work at 3am, which was at the time the [REDACTED], and before there is any judgement, this was not someone I met through this industry. He showed up to my work in a heightened and obviously drug influenced state, of which I had never seen him in before, I had no idea of his involvement with these substances. After an altercation he returned back to my residence and refused to leave. The sad thing for me is that I first thought of calling the police, and then I immediately discarded the idea, both because of fear of what little ongoing protection I would have against someone so aggressive; and also because of the multiple stories I had heard from work colleagues about the lack of help in these circumstances. Eventually when I was locked in my apartment, furniture smashed, blood everywhere and being held up to the wall I realised I had no choice. I tried to subtly dial 000 and was so disgusted at the system whereby it may not always be easy for an individual to calmly say 'oh yes I need the police. Here is my address. There is a psycho holding me to a wall...' I managed to incorporate into my text clues to help them and even stated my address. After hours of no arrival I messaged my girlfriends and told them to*

*run to the station and send someone; eventually they came. When they did come, my ex partner was trying to jump off the balcony, the amateur level at which the situation was handled was borderline hilarious. I was also informed that they were not intending to come because I had only given my apartment building and not the specific unit number, though it would be safe to say that in a block of ten units the one with the girl screaming would be a safe bet.*

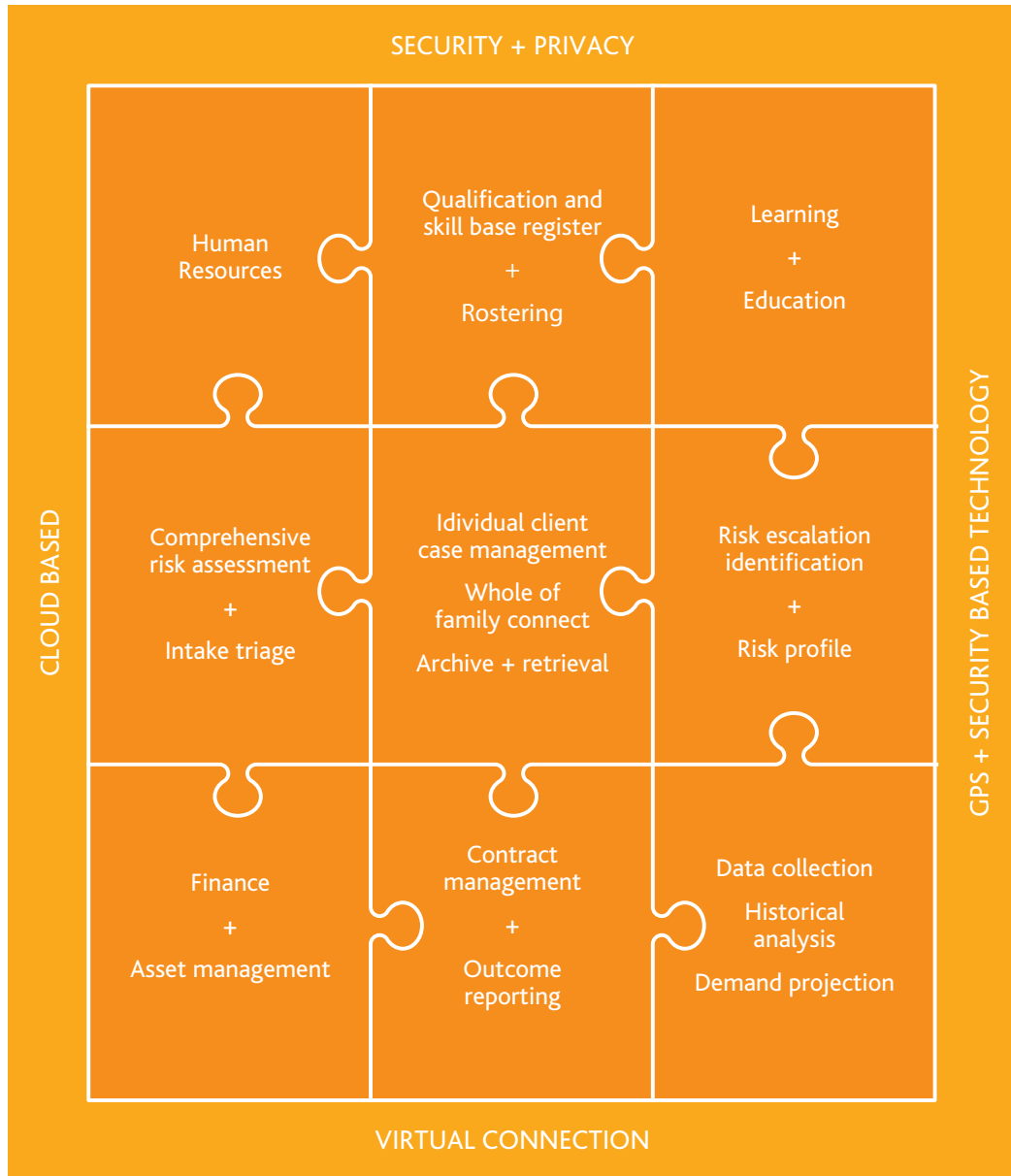
*I underwent the court process to get an intervention order placed against this person, who now comes down for a criminal trial every month or two. Given the nature of my work, and the fact that specific death threats were made against me, I was assured that I would be notified each time he arrived and what the outcome was. Of the four times he has come down I have been notified once, only after much complaint, and when I rang to question, I was actually told that they couldn't give me that information because 'how [did] they know that it was me really ringing?' I have zero faith in our police system and have felt so frightened throughout the whole process that I had to go through an alternate organisation to secure myself a security card and support – this is the only time in the process that I have felt like I have some support and some proven success.*

*I take responsibility for my choices and outcomes which have happened to me in my life, however the justice system is supposed to be there to aid people of all walks of life, all career choices, in all circumstances. I feel that if we stop waiting to catch people out and actually help out those in danger, whether it is harder work and longer hours for the constable, then our system will be one that mimics what it preaches.'*

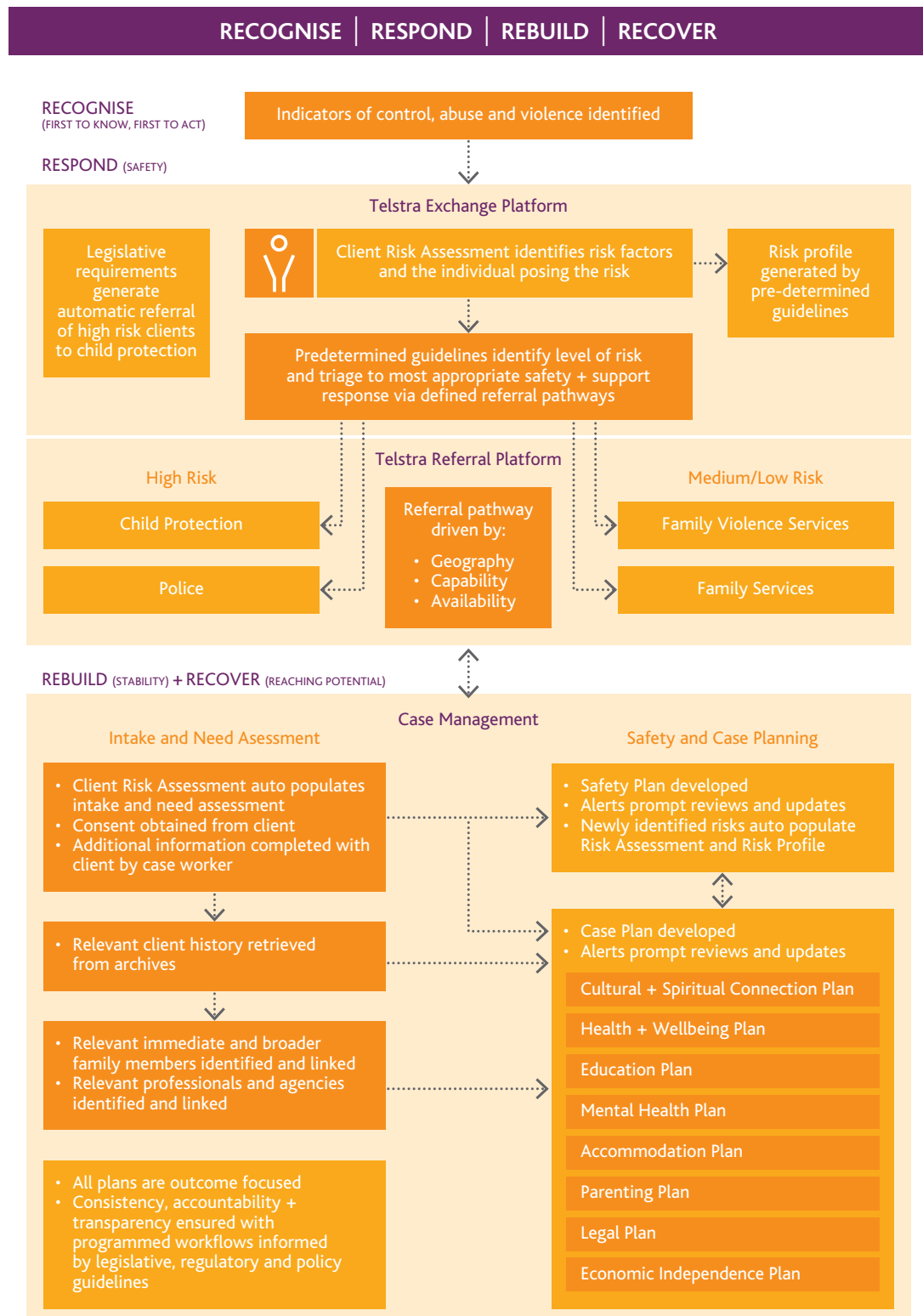
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The diagram below highlights the minimum requirements and connectivity for individual organisations internal communication within an integrated cross sector ICT strategy.

INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS



The diagram below highlights the triage and management capacity within a response model that focuses on the individual from the 'First to Know, First to Act' perspective.





In Australia, statutory child protection is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Departments responsible for child protection provide are required to respond to vulnerable children who are suspected of being abused, neglected or harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection. Currently over one million children in Australia are reported to live in homes where they experience control, abuse and violence. Child Protection departments are inundated with rapidly escalating numbers of reports from professionals and the community alike. In addition to supporting responses to address the epidemic of family violence, the related challenge of responding to reports to Child Protection can be addressed with the above ICT solution.

The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) details the statutory requirements for a Child Protection intervention. The current system inadvertently directs the majority of reports to Child Protection intake teams where significant resources are required to triage and allocate cases for investigation and case management. The above response model is programmed to automatically identify and refer cases to Child Protection and community sector organisations based on legislative requirement, geography, capability and availability. An automatic triage and referral response has the capacity to significantly increase the capacity of Child Protection to respond to children in situations of high risk, and to further streamline collaborative relationships and seamless interfaces with the family violence and family services sectors. Enabling the right agency to provide the right response at the right time will ensure government and the community are better able to protect children and young people who are at risk of abuse or neglect, and ensures that child safety and wellbeing is a collective and shared responsibility. A system that sits the child at the centre, whilst also providing appropriate supports to the parents, broader family and kinship groups will build greater confidence in the community that children's safety and wellbeing are always the primary consideration.

Safe Future recently consulted with women on their personal experiences with Child Protection and found they had little confidence in the current system...

*'When you are a protective mother child protection do not keep you informed. The process is quite traumatising'* [REDACTED]

*'My partner used child protection reports as another way to abuse me and tell lies'* [REDACTED]

*'Shared safety plans between child protection and family violence services would ensure shared understandings about a mothers protective behaviours'* [REDACTED]

### **Duty of Care and Penalty**

Safe Futures is concerned that there is little accountability for those charged with the responsibility of providing safety for those at risk of harm. Significant confusion exists across sectors as to the level of responsibility that is exacerbated by concerns that privacy legislation will be breached when information is shared. Furthermore there is little scrutiny or accountability for professionals whose failure to respond results in escalated risk and consequential harm or death. Safe Futures strongly recommends a legislative review with the objective of establishing a 'Duty of Care' legislative response that has applicability across sectors and professions. The legislation should take into consideration of responsibility to identify and respond. It should also encompass consequences for breach of 'Duty of Care'.

## Chapter 5.

### Respond.

Every day thousands of Victorian women and children silently scream for help. The community often does not hear nor understand their fear; it does not stop the violence or address the trauma to which they are subjected. They are also hidden amongst the statistics that continue to increase an already over utilised emergency, health, mental health and justice service systems. Education services continue to struggle with the ever-increasing challenge of working with traumatised children. These women and children often don't recognise their experiences as family violence; they have not yet reached the point of crisis and they do not realise that support is available; they have not reached the stage where they must leave their homes to survive. The distress they feel when they think of leaving home because of the violence all too often now becomes a reality when they become homeless.

### Family Justice and Wellbeing Centres

Safe Futures strongly recommends exploring the introduction of the highly successful Family Justice Centre model in Victoria. The Family Justice Center model is a highly successful model developed in the United States providing co-location of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who work together, under one roof, to provide coordinated services to those experiencing control, abuse and violence. Family Justice Centers deliver the co-location of staff members from multiple agencies under one roof. While a Family Justice Center may house many partners, the basic partners include police officers, prosecutors, civil legal service providers, and community-based advocates. The core concept is to provide one place where survivors can go to talk to an advocate, plan for their safety, have an interview with a police officer, meet with a prosecutor, receive medical assistance, receive information on accommodation, and get help with transportation and immediate needs.

The Family Justice Center approach was originally established on the San Diego Family Justice Center model that opened in 2002. The model has been identified as best practice in the field of family violence intervention and prevention services by the United States Department of Justice. The documented and published outcomes of the Family Justice Center model have included: reduced homicides; increased victim safety; increased autonomy and empowerment for victims; reduced fear and anxiety for victims and their children; increased efficiency and coordination among service

providers; and reduced recantation and minimization by victims when wrapped in services and support.

### **Technology Assisted Emergency Response Strategies**

In a world of escalating violence, particularly against women and children, the global community is demanding governments prioritise the development and delivery of safety solutions. Governments in turn are now looking to their corporate and community partners in the search for creative, sustainable, replicable and joined up technology solutions.

The Safe Futures Foundation has led the development and implementation of the Safe in the Community family violence pilot program. The Safe in the Community response is an early intervention initiative developed to enhance the safety of women who have separated from abusive partners yet are still at risk. The primary aim is to support women and their children to stay in their own homes when safe and appropriate. The project complements comprehensive case management with the utilisation of world leading accredited technology including personal safety devices that provide GPS tracking and live streamed audio / visual in conjunction with CCTV camera's located on the external of properties that live stream visual footage. The objectives are to improve the safety of those at risk, deter perpetrators from offending and provide admissible evidence to ensure appropriate justice responses. When a client is unable to call 000 the technology provides access via an A1 Telstra approved security call centre to a priority 000 co-ordinated response. All audio and visual data is live streamed via the Telstra emergency services band to Telstra secure storage for retrieval by police when required. A comprehensive evaluation of the pilot identified that the use of such technology had significantly improved the safety of women and children at high risk whilst also decreasing the demand on emergency services. Telstra's visionary expansion from telecommunications to security and community health and wellbeing has seen a corporate commitment to the development of safety, communication and technology driven initiatives that are unprecedented. Safe Futures are committed to further partner with Telstra and Government to drive change that will build lasting improvements to personal safety, community resilience and national economic sustainability.

Whilst the Safe in the Community pilot has demonstrated the positive impact such technology can have for those living with the control, abuse and violence associated with high risk family violence, the nature of the safety strategy can have broader appeal to women who proactively wish to ensure their safety. With at least one in three

women experiencing family violence the need for a safety response is indisputable. Add to this the many situations of potential risk that all women face with random street violence and the appeal of having an affordable and effective safety device and emergency response strategy has mass appeal. For the woman, her family and friends, it is reassuring to know that when she is potentially at risk she can immediately alert an expert to co-ordinate an immediate police response if a situation presents, for example walking alone, travelling at night on public transport, leaving a night club, or attending schoolies. The same applies for international students where statistics evidence a high risk of violent crime.

Almost daily we are reminded by the media that acts of terrorism are taking place somewhere in the world terrorism that continue to inflict pain and suffering on innocent people. These acts indiscriminately affect those who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Countering this scourge is in the interest of all nations and the issue has been on the agenda of the United Nations for decades. The additional benefit of a scalable family violence solution is the potential to link to national security. With the current high risk associated with international terrorism many governments are looking to develop technology and CCTV grids capable of providing surveillance to support the management of high-risk incidents. The proposed integrated technology solution has the potential to trigger CCTV grids and live stream visual and audio data to incident response co-ordinators. The response has the capacity to improve and extend important capabilities including:

- Gathering, recording, and sharing of relevant information
- Quality and speed of command, control and deployment for incidents of risk and harm
- Collaboration between different agencies and different organisational levels
- Flexible and efficient use of the various emergency services and systems

The next stage of this response should be to introduce tracking devices for men that identify when they are within one kilometre of the woman. The device would alert the woman to potential risk due to his proximity to her. She would then have the ability to not only take immediate safety measures but to also trigger the alarm if a situation of risk occurred. Current suggested models do not have connectivity between devices and as such only alert call centres to the perpetrators whereabouts rather than potential risk.

### Key components of the Safe in the Community Response

- Comprehensive risk assessment and risk management framework to identify at-risk women and children
- Risk profile of those posing a risk of harm
- Supported pathways into integrated policing and justice responses
- Comprehensive intake and assessment of case management support requirements
- Development of client centred, family focused 'Client Advocacy Resilience Education' (C.A.R.E) case management plans
- Provision of case management support and referral to appropriate community services for those experiencing control, abuse and violence and also for those posing the risk
  - Ease of use for those that cannot use traditional modes of communication for example those with a disability or where English is a second language.

### Specialist Family Violence Legal Centres and Remote Court Facilities

The justice response for those experiencing control, abuse and violence is highly problematic in Victoria. There are significant inconsistencies for those requiring a justice response, and often risk is further escalated at the time of court attendance. Safe Futures strongly recommends the introduction of specialist family violence legal centres where staff employed are funded directly by government rather than the inconsistent and costly model of legal aid funding for private practitioners. Remote access facilities could be provided at the centres, such as provided for criminal hearings, to minimise risk for those requiring a justice intervention and to significantly reduce the resources currently required at Magistrates, Children's and Family Courts.

## Chapter 6.

### Rebuild and Recover

#### Respond to early indications of family violence

Identifying indicators of family violence and providing targeted referrals to specialist family violence responses at an earlier point in the cycle of violence can reduce the long-term demand on mainstream services. This can ultimately result in tangible and timely client outcomes, opportunities for more appropriate utilisation of resources in mainstream services, and the increased ability for mainstream services to focus on core business.

#### Triage

Safe Futures have successfully developed, refined and implemented an alternative service model to the traditional refuge model. The model expands referral from traditional sources to include organisations that provide specialist responses to women and children who have a disability, indigenous women, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and government agencies such as Centrelink and hospitals. The system is open to all who have experienced control, abuse and violence. This is a responsive and individualised model of care that is premised on a triage approach with comprehensive assessment of safety and need, and immediate access to a range of supports. The Safe Futures response is premised on an early intervention approach with comprehensive assessment of risk, safety and support requirements, and direct access to services and resources ranging from safety strategies, emergency crisis responses, short term accommodation, refuge or other crisis accommodation, as well as assistance to re-establish accommodation within the local community. Critical to this is the capacity of the system to triage clients to the most appropriate response. It is broadly accepted that if a woman and her children can remain in their own home or community with safety and support wrapped around them it is by far the best response to ensure recovery and self-determination. Safe Futures has developed a specialist response, '**Safe in the Community**', to provide increased safety, security and support for those able to remain in their own homes and communities. For those where no intervention will provide the safety they require, support is provided to relocate and create a safe and stable life in a new community. Safe Futures '**Community Connect**' program has been developed to ensure that safety strategies and holistic support is provided to the client and they are connected to all the supports required to commence a new life in a new community. An innovative

program, '**Housing Connect**', had been developed as a result of a partnership between Safe Futures and Wesley Mission. It ensures that those needing to relocate within their own community, or to a new community, are provided with every opportunity to secure safe, affordable and appropriate accommodation.

Respect for the clients connection to their community, culture and spirituality is of paramount importance. Accessing specialist support for those with a disability, physical or mental health diagnosis, substance addiction or no permanent residency is a priority.

### **Provide tailored and responsive services**

Safe Futures directly supports women, children and young people experiencing family violence by developing, implementing and integrating comprehensive and tailored services that are:

- Accessible to all women and children regardless of their background or circumstances
- Confidential and safe
- Responsive to individuals' physical, emotional, cultural, social and spiritual needs
- Respectful and empowering

Working closely with women and their children, Safe Futures staff take the time to understand their history, belief systems, experiences and relationships while encouraging and supporting them to make informed decision about their future.

### **Circles of Support**

The Safe Futures C.A.R.E plan model is embedded in an innovative client centred case management response the 'Circles of Support'. Safe Futures has long held the belief that in order to provide most benefit; all should be provided with their own advocate and an individual C.A.R.E plan and safety / risk plan. The Safe Futures Foundation C.A.R.E plan incorporates comprehensive risk assessment and safety planning, comprehensive support and needs assessment and intensive case management and therapeutic recovery programs. At Safe Futures Foundation an advocate works with each individual woman and child to identify their safety and



support needs within a holistic framework, and then assists with referrals to appropriate support agencies.

## Safe Futures Foundation Circles of Support

Recognise, Respond, Rebuild, Recover



### SAFE IN THE COMMUNITY

Safe Futures Foundation's 'Safe in the Community' program is an early intervention model that has evolved to offer women and children a range of options and to make informed choices about remaining safely in their own home and community.

Safe in the Community provides an increased support and safety response that has considerable benefits to the woman and her children including:

- Stability, safety and security for woman (women remaining in their home/community enables them to continue on with their lives, with less disruption, allows continuity of employment / education, connection to cultural, spiritual and health and wellbeing supports, ensuring economic participation and self empowerment)

- The innocent parties have been able to remain in their own home and community and the perpetrator has had to leave; and,
- A possible shift in the power relations between the woman and the perpetrator, where the woman is empowered by reclaiming her own home.

The Safe in the Community program involves early identification of those at risk through a comprehensive risk assessment process and utilises joined up interventions (integrated work practices) to:

- Walk with the client from the point of connection, building on her strengths and those of her children;
- Maintain and develop positive links with the clients' community, friends and support networks;
- Address the immediate control, abuse and violence leading to homelessness;
- Provide a broad range of support (financial, legal, immigration, parenting, health, counselling, education, employment, cultural and spiritual) and safe housing options and supports for the clients to consider;
- Assistance to obtain an application for an intervention order with exclusion provisions, brokerage for increased security upgrades for the property, negotiated police responses and community supports
- Minimise exposure to situations of higher risk; and
- Provide access to the Safe Futures Foundation suite of crisis programs should the safety need escalate.

Although many women and children have been successfully supported to remain in their own home or community by Safe Futures, we found many women felt frustrated and disillusioned with the current judicial system. Many when granted a FVIO, that is meant to protect them, found that when it is breached, unless there is sufficient evidence, the police cannot act and the perpetrator cannot be made accountable.

### **Improving Safety in the Home Response**

The Improving Safety in the Home is a component of the Safe in the Community Program. It is an early intervention, holistic response and the primary goal is to support women and their children to stay in their own homes when safe and appropriate and

enhance their safety outcomes. It includes a comprehensive risk and safety assessment, specialist case management support, IT, and cyber safety information and advice, a specialised safety and risk audit of their property, identified safety upgrades on their property, access to funding, negotiations with landlords, and notifications to police. Collection of evidence that can be used to substantiate and to successfully pursue breach offences in court is a vital component of the response.

### **A. Goal and Key Objectives**

The primary goal of the Improving Safety in the Home response is to enhance SAFETY outcomes for women and children and to raise women's awareness of their personal and environmental safety. Alongside this provision, the Improving Safety in the Home response has five key objectives:

- To act as a deterrent to perpetrators breaching intervention orders
- To increase detection and accountability in relation to perpetrators, and improve the prospect of conviction in cases of intervention order breaches
- To improve the responsiveness of police and courts to victims of family violence and supporting judicial process outcomes
- To directly reduce police call-outs for family violence thus indirectly increasing police resourcing and public value
- To support police response aimed at recidivism

### **B. Key Components of the Improving Safety in the Home Response**

Key components of the response include:

- Comprehensive risk and safety audits of the home, IT and cyber environment, and assessment of cultural risk
- Home safety and security upgrades for families identified as at-risk (which may) include:
  - Appropriate property identification
  - Key changes and lock upgrades to doors and windows
  - Installation of sensor and security lighting

- Installation of security screen doors
- Installation of external CCTV cameras, training and monitoring
- Installation of internet
- Provision of a smart phone
- Provision of SafeTcards and training – Personal safety devices that provide GPS tracking; live audio streaming to a security centre via an emergency services band. When the safety alert is activated in a situation of risk the security centre facilitates calls to Police and / or Ambulance with an exact location and can provide updated information to emergency services as the crisis unfolds.
- Case management and support.

### C. Key Achievements of the pilot

From the feedback received through the formal evaluation process, Safe Futures is confident that the primary goal to enhance SAFETY outcomes for women and children and to raise women's awareness of their personal and environmental safety has been achieved with remarkable success. It is clear from the feedback that after having a Home Safety and Risk audit and receiving safety upgrades the women felt much more reassured of their safety. All of the women evaluated stated that the Home Safety and Risk audit improved their awareness of their personal and home safety. One of the key objectives of this response is to deter perpetrators from breaching intervention orders.

All of the women participating in the response have intervention orders in place and a majority of them were being breached prior to their inclusion in the response. There has been a significant decrease in the level of breaches for women participants and all of the perpetrators, who were made aware of the safety upgrades, have stopped breaching. Because the SafeTcard response records evidence that can be used as admissible evidence in Court, the legal system can better support the women. This has hugely enhanced their sense of control over their situations and given them the courage to stay in their own homes where they have community support, schools for their children and familiar surroundings.

Safe Futures Foundation has worked closely with Victoria Police at all stages of the development and implementation of this response. This work has seen the deepening of relationships between Safe Futures Foundation and police strengthened. Police are

now better informed of women at risk in the eastern region and the risk level of their perpetrators.

The women provided with SafeTcards reported that they felt they had regained a sense of freedom. Knowing that they were connected to the monitoring centre, they felt as if someone was there with them 24/7, a feeling they did not have previously. The women involved in the pilot also reported feeling less stressed and more confident. This has empowered them and changed their ability to function in many other significant areas such as parenting, employment, social interaction, shopping, exercise and performing other day-to-day tasks.

#### **D. Quotes from the women on their level of safety BEFORE the implementation of the safety upgrades**

*“If the perpetrator saw my phone he would grab it off me so I couldn’t call the police”*

*“My car was being tracked and I was being stalked. I was committed to a psych ward due to extreme paranoia as the perpetrator was constantly stalking and harassing me”*

*“I felt unsafe – I didn’t know I could get support like this from services”*

*“Not safe at all – I was like a prisoner in my own home and didn’t go out”*

*“Really vulnerable and frightened as he knows where I live”*

*“I couldn’t sleep, and I was always fearful”*

*“The perpetrator always breached the IVO and stalked me. He always got away with it. I was always having to look over my shoulder and was constantly paranoid that he may be there and harm me”*

*“I didn’t realise the dangerous situations I put my family in until I was informed”*

#### **E. Quotes from the women on their level of safety AFTER the implementation of the safety upgrades**

*“My home is isolated. I felt very vulnerable. I didn’t have any security doors at the time. I also have cameras now and I feel much safer. I want to regain my old life where I had no fear”*

*“As the SafeTcard is discreet I can now press it if required without my ex knowing I am getting help – it provides me with a sense of control over the situation”*

*“I am extremely happy with the safety upgrades, they have helped to make me and the kids feel safe as I feel there is someone with me 24/7”*

*“Having the SafeTcard assists with day to day tasks like checking the letterbox and hanging out the washing – I can do these now”*

*“The SafeTcard feels like my personal alarm. I don’t leave the house without it. I keep it in the same place at home so we all know where it is. I now feel I have more freedom to go out. I love the GPS function as someone always knows where I am”*

*“I wear my SafeTcard all the time and even my kids are aware and asking if I have my card – It makes us all feel safer”*

*“If I didn’t have my SafeTcard it would be hard to function. The SafeTcard gives me back confidence and freedom”*

*“I can now sleep and I know if something happens when I am on my own with the kids I’ve got support and assistance if required immediately”*

*“The security cameras offer an additional level of reassurance that I didn’t have before. If my ex-partner saw the cameras there is no way he would come near my house as he would know he would be caught and charged and I would have the evidence I require”*

Safe Futures Foundation would like to acknowledge the women involved in the pilot and the invaluable feedback they provided that is encapsulated in the final evaluation report. The words of these women cannot be ignored as this response is focused on their improved personal sense of security and safety outcomes, subsequent to them feeling at extreme risk.

### **COMMUNITY CONNECT**

Safe in the Community response, some families experience escalated risk and are therefore no longer able to stay in their own home. Safe Futures has a suite of responses that also provide emergency accommodation and support for their immediate needs. Safe Futures Foundation provides a twenty-four hour, seven day a week crisis response for women in the Eastern Region. The response allows women and children at imminent risk to leave their homes and receive immediate support and safe accommodation. Every woman referred to the Community Connect response is accommodated with her children in a fully self-contained unit providing a significant increase in security and independence in a home-like atmosphere. Safe Futures has

five dedicated emergency units (3 with disability facilities) where women and children can stay. Women from the Safe in the Community response experiencing escalated risk have priority access into the Community Connect response. The response is premised on a triage approach with comprehensive assessment of support needs, risk, and safety informing the referral pathway. A clear benefit of this assessment is that women are able to determine if it is possible to return home with increased safety strategies, or go to a new home in the same community with improved safety measures and community support. If it is decided that this is not a safe or preferred option, then the Community Connect team will assist with relocation to a new community. By undertaking a comprehensive assessment, the woman's advocate will explore the woman's preferred outcomes and prepare individual C.A.R.E and safety plans for her and her children. If communal refuge living is not suitable, the woman and her children will remain with Safe Futures until single entry self-contained accommodation becomes available in one of the organisations dispersed crisis properties. Women who are assessed as suitable for communal living become clients of Safe Steps who will facilitate referral to another high security family violence refuge. A satellite classroom, healthy eating program, art therapy and a supported playgroup program are just some of the other programs that are provided on-site for children at the service. The construction of the children's well-being room has provided the opportunity to develop specific supports for children and their mothers.

### **Crisis Accommodation and Intensive Case Management**

The core business of Safe Futures, for the past 35 years, has been the provision of crisis accommodation and support for women and children at imminent risk. With the successful introduction of intensive case management Safe Futures is now able to provide longer-term responses to clients with multiple and complex support requirements. A dispersed model of accommodation provides seventeen self-contained crisis accommodation properties that provide safety, security and privacy. The two properties of which are modified for women with disability include one with independent facilities for a carer. Partnerships with Eastcare Housing, Community Housing Ltd, Women's Housing Ltd and Housing Choices provide transitional accommodation in approximately 50 properties located across the Eastern Region.

## Diverse Responses

Many women referred to the Safe in the Community response have a range of specific requirements that Safe Futures Foundation can provide specialist responses for.

### A. Women with Disabilities

Women with disabilities continue to be at risk of being assaulted, raped and abused at a rate of at least twice that of non-disabled women. For women and children with disabilities, being able to remain in their own home has significant benefits. Their own home may contain disability modifications and they are often reliant on sub-regional disability responses and links to community supports and resources. Children with a disability are often attending schools that cater to their specific needs. Links to health agencies, home and community care responses, travel and other specialist community supports are also often key to the woman or child receiving the most appropriate support to meet their requirements. Change can be destabilising and supports almost impossible to link to if the family moves from their home and community.

Safe Futures has addressed this alarming situation and developed the first integrated state-wide Safe in the Community response, an emergency, crisis accommodation and support response for women and children with a disability experiencing family violence. This comprehensive response provides early intervention, emergency and crisis responses to women and children with a disability at risk of or experiencing homelessness due to violence in the home. Comprehensive assessment of risk and needs, safety planning, intensive case management and case co-ordination, and referrals all form part of a continuum of response that looks to provide safety, individual outcomes, community connections and the most appropriate accommodation available. In providing this innovative response, Safe Futures also successfully lobbied for immediate crisis access to personal care support packages valued at \$9000 each. Safe Futures was a lead agency in the development of the Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative that assists women with a disability experiencing family violence that may require immediate disability support to access a family violence crisis accommodation response or be supported to remain safely in her home within her community. Safe Futures recommends this should become a long-term funded strategy under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.



## **B. Women with Mental Health Issues**

Women with mental health issues are often reliant on local community supports, and resources close to their home. Women with fragile emotional health issues will often feel more comfortable when dealing with their familiar local specialist support services. Safe Futures priority is to continue women's links to existing supports. If this is not possible, local partnerships attempt to facilitate a smooth and timely transition to a similar support response.

## **C. Older Women**

Older women, like younger women, can experience physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse at the hands of their partners. They often endure abuse for many years for the sake of their families. Family violence that a woman may have experienced throughout her life evolves and changes but does not necessarily cease as she reaches a mature age. As women age, there is also increased vulnerability to abuse from adult children, grand children and carers which is often referred to as elder abuse. Older women often have been in the family home for many years and can be very dependant on local supports and services. Often the fear of being removed from the family home and placed into residential care can be a major deterrent to reporting abuse. The Safe in the Community response is a safe and appropriate option that reassures older women to gain a sense of security and stability.

## **D. Cultural, linguistic and spiritual diversity**

Safe Futures often work with women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and spiritual backgrounds, women who have no permanent residency as well as female international students experiencing control, abuse and violence in the home. These women often have a multitude of complex issues, which require a culturally sensitive response. A long-term partnership with In Touch, a culturally sensitive family violence state-wide service, assists in providing a culturally appropriate response to meet the needs of women and children from CALD backgrounds. More often than not women from different ethnic backgrounds have built social and support resources within their local area and having to move to a new community can often have many negative impacts. The Safe in the Community response assists woman and children from different cultural backgrounds have built social and support resources within their local area to remain connected to those supports.

## E. Aboriginal Communities

A successfully negotiated partnership with Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service assists in providing a culturally appropriate response and counselling programs for Aboriginal women and children affected by family violence.

Safe Futures Foundation recently provided consultation and support to Morwell VACCA to open a new Aboriginal women's and children's service. The strong partnership that has ensured will enable the organisations to partner across Victoria to facilitate the development of culturally supportive and sensitive early intervention Safe in the Community responses.

## HOUSING CONNECT

The partnership between Wesley Mission Victoria and Safe Futures recognise that in order to provide holistic responses that address the multiple and complex needs of survivors of control, abuse violence that risk identification comprehensive assessments and support within an integrated service model is essential. Women who are housed and living with violence are considered homeless due to the insecure and unsafe nature of their housing. The risk of sustained poverty after violence is real for women as the costs of leaving the family home are substantial and sometimes prohibitive, yet safe affordable housing is critical for recovery from family violence. Survivors of violence have identified that finding safe, affordable, appropriate accommodation post-separation is their single biggest concern. Homelessness as a result of family violence also has a devastating impact upon children. Children who experience homelessness and family violence report feeling scared and unsafe. Stability is important in children's lives; however, it is inevitable that routines and predictability will be disrupted as a result of family violence and homelessness. Living in emergency accommodation and facing an unknown future, places tremendous pressure on families. Many are forced to move several times requiring children to adapt to unfamiliar surroundings, change schools, leave their possessions and friends behind, share living space with strangers and abide by new rules. Children exposed to family violence are at greater risk of psychological and emotional trauma, however the needs of children during this time may be overlooked as their mothers are often stressed and consumed with finding longer-term housing. Homelessness associated with family violence compounds trauma. Families may reside in temporary housing for periods ranging from three months to four or more years. Living day-to-day, not knowing when you will be forced to leave is stressful and during this time families may be navigating; on going safety, family court, health, legal, settlement and property issues. Typically, just when families

have managed to assemble some form of community connectedness and security again, they are forced to move again when longer-term housing is secured. Once again they may be required to sever supports and friendship networks they have begun to forge. In a bid to reduce the trauma experienced through homelessness as a result of family violence Safe Futures and Wesley Mission and 'Housing Connect' program in 2012. The partnership brings together recognised experience and highly regarded expertise in the provision of proactive, innovative and responsive service models. Wesley Mission Victoria's Homelessness and Support Services provide an experienced housing worker with sound knowledge and links to the homelessness services sector, the family violence sector and the private rental market. Based between both services, the worker bridges the gaps between sectors through building skills, knowledge and competence. 'Housing Connect' works with women and children:

- Wishing to remain in their own community but unable to remain safely in their home
- On entry into emergency or crisis accommodation
- Those residing in temporary housing due to family violence

The housing advocate works with Safe Futures staff by providing information advocacy and support to identify obtain and maintain sustainable long-term housing options. The role enables the negotiation of referral pathways to existing resources across all service providers and utilises networks forged with real estate agents to promote better outcomes for clients. 'Housing Connect' has had a positive impact on the flow through of clients accessing emergency and crisis accommodation. As a result, the 'Community Connect' program has increased the number of clients able to move on from emergency, crisis and transitional properties that frees up valuable resources for those in need of safe accommodation and support. The 'Safe in the Community' early intervention response to women and children still living with violence recognised that these women also required individualised assessment, advocacy and advice regarding tenancies and rights. The program assists women to understand what's involved in securing a safe and affordable home when they are ready to leave. Through working together 'Housing Connect' and 'Safe in the Community' have prevented homelessness for many women and children and reduced the pressure on both the family violence and homelessness crisis systems. This unique Housing Assistance Program provides a truly integrated response.

## SAFE CHILDREN, BRIGHT FUTURES

Family violence is the best-kept secret of many families. Currently over one million children in Australia are reported to live in homes where control, abuse and violence exists. In reality these statistics only identify those where the 'secret' has been discovered. The shocking truth is there are so many more that we, as a community, are unaware of.

### How do children feel when they live with control, abuse and violence?

- Children who grow up with control, abuse and violence are expected to keep the family secret and often feel isolated and vulnerable.
- Many are scared and anxious, always watching and waiting for the next incident to occur. They live in fear, never feeling safe. They worry for themselves and those around them.
- Often the 'secret' is so well hidden from the outside world that children may appear fine. The 'secret' masks the feelings of pain and hurt resulting from the often-unseen physical and emotional scars.

### How do control, abuse and violence affect children?

- Children who experience control, abuse and violence respond in many and varied ways, none of which should ever be the lived experience of a child. Fear, guilt, shame, sadness, depression and anger are common. Stomachaches and headaches, bedwetting and disturbed sleep, and the loss of ability to concentrate are typical symptoms.
- Many children are labelled as problematic when the trauma impacts on their behaviour and they are seen to be acting out, withdrawn, or anxious to please.
- For many children the 'secret' at home denies them the opportunity to reach their potential. School attendance may be sporadic and the thoughts of what is happening at home can lead to difficulty with memory and learning. Poor results and disengagement from school are all too common.

### What are the long-term effects?

- Children from violent homes have significantly higher risks of alcohol/drug abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder as young people and adults.

- It is the number one reason children and young people become homeless. Safe Futures provides over 120,000 nights of emergency and crisis accommodation a year, seventy five percent of our clients are children. The national cost of child protection and out-of-home care services annually is over \$3.2 billion.
- Experiencing control, abuse and violence as a child is the single best predictor of juvenile delinquency and adult criminality. Over eighty percent of those in our prisons experienced family violence or child abuse when young.

### **Victoria's Vulnerable Children's strategy 2013-2022**

The Victorian Government is committed to strengthening the practice of adult service providers to ensure that the needs of children are considered as part of the everyday service engagement of parents, especially more vulnerable parents or families. The Victorian Vulnerable Children's strategy 2103- 2022 strategy emphasises the need for community services to change the way they engage with vulnerable children and families. Schools, health services, early childhood services and other services need to foster safe, inclusive environments to enable the identification of family or child vulnerabilities and the provision of positive interventions. Goal 2, "Act earlier when children are vulnerable" identified in the Victorian Vulnerable Children Strategy states that early intervention is required when vulnerabilities are identified. There is significant opportunity to turn around the high risk of abuse and neglect through early and coordinated action. In addition, early attention to those children who suffer abuse or neglect, ensuring that their developmental needs are being met, can have a huge impact on children's and families' lives. There is a significant body of research regarding the lifelong benefit of the improved brain development for very young children when they are engaged in positive parenting and quality care settings. Similarly, poor participation in school leaves significant learning gaps and reduced future employment opportunities.

### **Safe Children Bright Futures response**

Recognising the significant gap in services for children and young people living with control, abuse and violence Safe Futures determined that a holistic and multidisciplinary approach was required. The organisation has come a significant distance in the development of a model that could be scaled across the state; the requirements to complete a scalable response are contained in recommendations detailed below.

Children and young people are referred to the Foundation's Safe Children Bright Futures program and are supported by the multidisciplinary Children Advocacy Resilience Education (C.A.R.E) team. The C.A.R.E. team aims to provide an early intervention, holistic program model in which the services wrap around the child, the sibling group and the family. The service model has been designed specifically to work with each child's best interests and to respond to children with comprehensive service delivery at each stage of their families' journey. The C.A.R.E team has a broad range of skills and is able to support children with a disability and diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds. It is the aim of the C.A.R.E. team that every child who accesses our services be given skills and support that will aid them to have a successful childhood and a safe future.

### **What does this mean for the children who come to Safe Futures Foundation?**

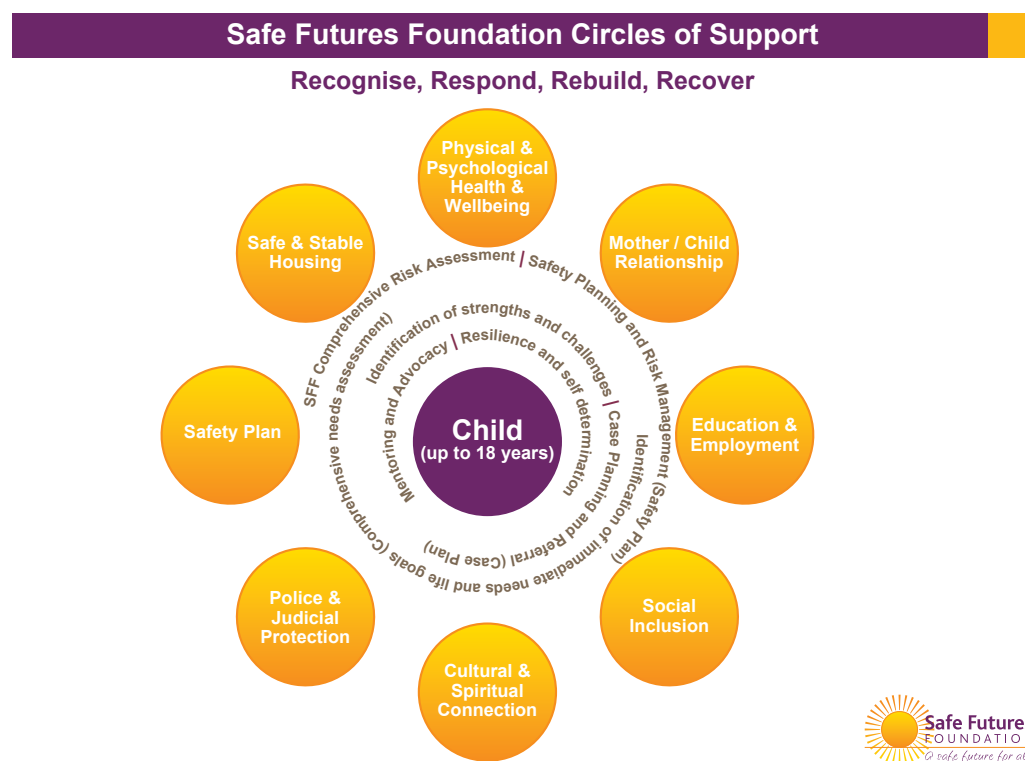
Many children and young people who access Safe Futures Foundation's programs have been exposed to or been the recipient of control, abuse and violence. What we recognise is that this can impact every area of a child's life. This includes their:

- social skills and ability to form relationships;
- academic and employment skills and the ability to have success within educational settings;
- overall behaviour patterns;
- ability to trust in care givers;
- overall development and ability to meet generally accepted age milestones;
- emotional regulation and abilities to problem solve.

All are forms of trauma responses. We also know that families that have several members who are experiencing trauma responses also can experience difficulty communicating, difficulty sharing the same space, difficulty managing and negotiating day to day tasks (such as getting to school!) and are likely to be unable to create new ways of thinking without support. The latest research shows that the majority of children living with control, abuse and violence are likely to experience Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), which unrecognised and untreated stays with them throughout their life. Depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol addiction and anger are some of the many of the signs.

## How does the Safe Children Bright Futures program help?

Children's responses to family violence are varied and need to be assessed in the context of their own unique story. The C.A.R.E. team's multidisciplinary approach and range of service delivery responses provides the vehicle for children to drive their own unique recovery story. The C.A.R.E. team is a Children's Multidisciplinary team that utilises the Safe Futures Circle of Support model aimed at addressing the needs of children who come into contact with Safe Futures Foundation through early intervention, crisis and recovery pathways. A comprehensive and holistic assessment is provided for every individual child that is supported by the C.A.R.E. team. The aim of the team's work is to create safety, stability, and promote healthy development for all children and their families. The team also actively seeks out resources to ensure every child has opportunities to reach their potential.



### A. Advocacy:

The C.A.R.E. team works with children who often have been 'lost' or 'silenced' in the violence, specialist children's advocates look for opportunities for children's voices to be heard. Advocacy with each individual child and with sibling groups is aimed at supporting the child or family unit to have access to everything they need to increase

their safety and stability, improve health and wellbeing and aid recovery. The C.A.R.E. team case management philosophy is child and family centered and focuses on capacity building around the child in the local community creating their safe future. We actively help children plan for their own safety and participate in their own advocacy.

### **B. Resilience:**

Family violence attacks the parent-child relationship. We recognise that family violence impacts attachment and therefore we must focus on rebuilding the mother/child and father/child relationship. Family therapy is a process that aims to rejuvenate this attachment. This process enhances and reforms communication patterns that have been damaged by family violence and provides resilience to further withstand difficulty.

Safe Futures Strengthening Families response currently employs a family therapist to build the resilience of individual children, sibling groups, families and communities. The Strengthening Families response has the capacity to offer three levels of therapeutic responses, structured family therapy, group therapy and one-on-one therapy.

Research shows that children, mothers, fathers, sibling groups, families and communities who are resilient are better able to adapt to changing circumstances, are able to bounce back and have strategies to 'cope' with difficulty, importantly they are also able to reduce their exposure to risk.

Safe futures would like to see therapeutic group work included in the Strengthening Families response as group work is an important therapeutic component which promotes the development of social skills and emotional intelligence as well as teaching skills of resilience and role modelling relationships.

This includes a range of children's therapeutic groups including art therapy, play therapy, relaxation and pet therapy. A healthy eating program to teach children, young people and their mothers / fathers how to create nutritious, healthy easy to prepare meals is proposed.

To ensure a child's emotional and physical health and well-being and development, appropriate to age are fully addressed, co-located specialist Maternal Child Health Nurses are required. Health and dental checks could be performed on all children entering Safe Futures responses to improve their health and well-being. Health checks promote early detection of lifestyle risk factors, delayed development and



illness, and provides the opportunity to introduce guidance for healthy lifestyles and early intervention strategies.

### **C. Education:**

Safe Futures recognised that when children come to emergency and crisis accommodation, they often lose connection with the community, friends and their school abruptly; it is often a few weeks before the children and young people can return to school or access education due to difficulties rehousing families in crisis. Our C.A.R.E team believes in the value of providing ongoing education opportunities and encouraging and supporting children and young people to achieve successfully by removing the barriers to education that could potentially limit their achievements and lead to disengagement from schooling.

Safe Futures recognised that the provision of appropriate educational programs was a priority and in partnership with the Department of Education Early Childhood Development, the C.A.R.E team is providing an exciting and innovative initiative aimed at ensuring children and young people have access to continuing education.

In October 2012, the C.A.R.E. team welcomed their first teacher who has the role of Outreach Teacher of the Safe Futures Foundation's Satellite classroom. The Outreach Teacher plays an integral role in ensuring children who have become homeless due to family violence continue to be engaged in their learning despite becoming disengaged from their regular school community. The Outreach Teacher develops an Individual Learning Plan for each child based on numeracy and literacy assessments and information gathered from previous schools. Safe Futures Satellite classroom provides a safe and nurturing education environment onsite and a caring and supportive outreach teaching access for students at home. The Department of Education and Early Childhood curriculum are delivered to the appropriate year level. The Individual Learning Plan provides valuable information to inform strategies that increases the understanding of how family violence can affect a child's capacity to concentrate on learning, cope within a school setting and develop and maintain relationships when the transition process to a regular school setting occurs.

### **Evaluation of the Safe Futures Foundation Satellite Classroom (Outreach Teacher Program)**

Through this ground-breaking project a model of teaching has been developed that not only supports a child's individual learning needs, but has at its centre an understanding

of the impacts of trauma and embeds educational support within broader family violence responses and support.

#### **Key goals of the project:**

Key goals of the project were to:

- Minimise disruptions to learning and provide support to children and young people to continue learning while receiving the additional service supports that Safe Futures provides to the whole family
- Address both the learning and emotional needs of children and young people through a range of activities including teaching social and communication skills
- Facilitate transition back into regular schooling

#### **Key features of the model include:**

- Embedding of education within broader family violence responses
- Comprehensive assessment of risk and support needs for each child and young person in a case plan that is regularly reviewed
- An Individual Learning Plan developed for each child and young person based on their current learning stage, as assessed by the Outreach Teacher and the school they most recently attended
- Consideration of the full range of support needed by each individual child and young person.

The model recognises the importance of:

- Young people having access to a trusted person
- A focus on holistic thinking around child wellbeing
- Changing thinking more broadly about children and the impact of domestic violence (e.g. building schools' capacity to understand how children become vulnerable and the strategies for supporting them).

The program aims to continue the child or young person's education until they can return to their own school or enrol in a new school.

Prior to the funding of the Youth Partnerships Outreach Teacher Program, Safe Futures had no capacity to deliver individual learning support to children and young people in a way that offered routine, individual tutoring and structured learning assessment and support. The purpose of the Outreach Teacher Program is to address this gap by providing an outreach teaching model that complements the existing supports offered by the children's advocate.

## Evaluation:

### A. Outcomes for children and young people

Stakeholders who have been near enough to observe the impact of the program believe that it has been transformative for the students. The Principal at Croydon Community School says it has had a hugely positive impact. The Outreach Teacher notes that students have responded to the quiet and structured environment and the high expectations of behaviour without dispute.

*“The children have greater calmness and are excited about the next step. They are more confident about their academic capabilities. They’ve worked on what family violence means and can be more open. And they have better relationships and better communication. They are going to their new school and new home with a lot of new strengths.”*

Feedback gathered from students found that the primary age students like coming to school each day and working in small groups. They like the quiet and calm atmosphere of the classroom and enjoy activities like cooking. The secondary students like the encouragement they get to maintain contact with, and access to homework from, their base school. They find the tutoring they get at Safe Futures helpful and the moral support they receive encourages them to persist. Student comments include ‘*Best school I have been to*’. Data collected by the Outreach Teacher shows that of the students attending the program in 2013 90% reported greater confidence in their potential.

### B. Outcomes for mothers

The programs at Safe Futures Foundation are designed so that mothers have a ‘nurturing person following them through’, an approach reflected in the Outreach Teacher Program. Mothers are pleased that their children can continue with their

education despite the disruption to their lives. They are very thankful for the assistance in arranging a new school enrolment or supporting a return to their existing school. They find it useful that the schools are informed about their child and their education and welfare needs. Many mothers are relieved that the Outreach Teacher can ring the child's prior school to inform them about the family's absence, which had often occurred abruptly without communication to the Principal or class teacher. This was worrying for the children who were often unaware they were moving. The Outreach Teacher informs the school of the situation and plays an important role as the conduit for communication regarding the child's progress and return to school – allowing the school to plan for this. The teacher also provides an ear for the school staff to discuss the distressing circumstances experienced by these children and young people. Support with the transition to a mainstream school has particular benefits for the mother. This provides someone who can take the pressure off them, make the connections and be the translator. Safe Futures staff commented that the Outreach Teacher Program has provided a positive benefit for mothers by inviting them in to the classroom and getting them used to working within an educational environment. The Outreach Teacher has also worked closely with mothers on how to relate to their children's schools.

### Outcomes for schools

One staff member at Safe Futures noted that before the Outreach Teacher Program they would try and place children in a local school, but schools often had difficulties dealing with the uncertainty that the child might only be there for a short time and teachers were not trained to deal with any disruptions that might occur in the classroom.

*“The children going to school felt embarrassed about what to say about their position. Sometimes they would experience isolation and bullying and come back to the refuge crying.”*

Safe Futures staff have noted the enormous improvement in relationships with schools since the Outreach Teacher took on the liaison role. The schools have confidence working with the Outreach Teacher who demonstrates a professional, responsive and caring approach with school personnel (Principal, Assistant Principal, teachers and office staff) and is aware of the timetables, expectations and constraints that exist within schools. The schools also appreciate that the Outreach Teacher is able to follow up on any issues or queries they may have. Schools benefit from having a complete picture of the student, including information about their ability levels and welfare

needs. Information about the student's previous contacts in the school can assist with class placements. Schools are also pleased to know the status of the students when their absence has been unexplained.

### Where to from here?

Data on the incidence of domestic violence and its impact on children and young people suggest the ongoing need for programs such as the Satellite Classroom Outreach Teacher Program across the country. The information collected through the evaluation indicates the many potential benefits that could flow from such an investment in terms of students' re-engagement with education, developing confidence and resilience, overcoming trauma, and helping to break the cycle of violence. By working with a group of students who are facing particular barriers to education and potentially face disengagement from learning, this type of program helps achieve government objectives of providing consistently high-quality education for all Victorian students. The findings from the evaluation suggest that as a transitional program dealing with students who are often highly traumatised, benefits are more likely to be realised where:

- The program is provided in a quiet and structured environment that is safe and welcoming and sets firm boundaries around behaviour
- The program is delivered to students in a classroom with children in similar circumstances – so that they are able to openly discuss the issues they are facing
- Mothers are able to be involved in the program and be part of the decision-making – especially in relation to the transition of their children back into regular schooling
- The Outreach Teacher is part of a wider support team focusing on the wellbeing of the students, enabling embedding of education within broader family violence responses.

To scale this model across Victoria Safe Futures believes strongly that the establishment of a virtual school with satellite classrooms is an essential first step.

The definition of 'virtual' school applied here means that no new physical infrastructure is required. Classrooms would be established in locations deemed to be most appropriate in the local context. For example, in one area there may be

classrooms in a local school that are not required for the school's programs; in another it may be that space is available in an appropriate local community facility. The campuses of the school would be managed by a single principal and governed by a single school council, with membership including representatives from groups with expertise and responsibility for the wellbeing of the children and young people participating in the education programs. Local governance groups would be established for each classroom to build, strengthen and maintain local partnerships.

The strength of this model is that it places the best interests of children and young people involved in the programs as the number one priority for the school. If funding is allocated to different schools across the state then conflicting priorities can potentially lead to funds, resources and programming not being fully utilised for implementation of the program. Essential elements of the current program such as professional supervision, ongoing and specialist professional learning in the effects of trauma on learning, and a network of teachers who are involved in similar work, would also be protected under a 'one-school' model. Funding could continue through deemed enrolments determined by local data relating to the average number of children in local refuges.

Curriculum units at all year levels would be developed and held on a central data management system for use across the state. Teachers would network with each other in online forums and face-to-face as teachers within one school. A separate Principal would be responsible for staff management, professional learning, Performance & Development, OHS/safety requirements, monitoring community partnerships, and so on.

Over the past two years it has become increasingly apparent that school staff do not readily recognise signs of domestic violence. Further, those individuals who are aware that 'something is not quite right' often do not have a strategy or the right networks to be able to act on their concerns. Families who are subjected to violence at home can be very secretive of their situation and the perpetrators may even threaten to repeat or increase their levels of violence if the mother or children tell anyone. Children may be absent from school for increasing amounts of time; they may lack concentration whilst in class; their academic achievement may drop; they may become withdrawn or they may lash out at others without warning. Recognition of these warning signs are opportunities for schools to show support

for families by linking them with professional community support agencies such as Safe Futures.

The addition of Safe in the Community workers who would work specifically to educate school staff about the warning signs of domestic violence, the supports available within the community for women and children, and the most effective strategies for linking family members with these services. Concerns could also be taken to the Safe in the Community worker for further strategies, or to report possible victims to agencies to link with away from the influence of the school. It is hoped that this broader family violence prevention will be implemented in trial stages in the next two years if separate funding can be sourced but our preference is for the Safe in the Community worker to be part of the virtual school package in the longer term. The Safe in the Community- Schools Liaison Advocate will work collaboratively with the Outreach Teacher and draw on the strengths of the Satellite Classroom model, directly linking with mothers and children in the community to provide an early intervention model of service delivery focusing on the educational needs of the children. Children who can remain in their school retain peer friendships and relationships with teachers that build a sense of belonging with the school community. With a better-informed understanding of the family's situation, the school is able to meet the individual learning, social and emotional needs of the student.

## **STRENGTHENING FAMILIES**

The costs of unrecognized and untreated complex trauma are enormous. This is not only in terms of reduced quality of life, life expectancy and loss of productivity, but in significant increases in the utilisation of medical, correctional, social, mental health and family violence services.

Complex trauma and its effects are often unrecognized, misdiagnosed and unaddressed. People impacted by trauma may present to multiple services over a long period of time; and care may be fragmented with poor referral and follow up pathways. A 'merry go round' of unintegrated care risks re-traumatisation and can compound unrecognized trauma. This can lead to escalation and entrenchment of symptoms which is psychologically, financially and systematically costly

The aim of the 'Strengthening Families' response is to link women, children and men into community supports while supporting them to improve their situation and re-establish themselves.

Self-restoration is offered through the 'Strengthening Families' therapeutic program which provides a space for those who have experienced control, abuse and violence to build their resilience and move forward. Therapeutic care is underpinned by the following understandings:

- 'Attachment' theory, in relation to therapeutic practice, rests on the assumption that people have a basic need to form attachments to other people throughout their life. If people are unable to form these attachments, their longer term emotional and social wellbeing will be compromised. The capacity for attachment is shaped by early experiences with caregivers. The principles of attachment theory suggest that if a child does not develop a safe and secure bond with their early caregivers, then they may find it difficult to form trusting relationships with others later in life. Early experiences of loss can also effect a child's emotional development.
- The 'Intergenerational Cycles of Violence' theory asserts that children and young people who are exposed to family violence are at a greater risk of perpetrating relationship violence in their adult lives. It has been reported that young children perpetrate violence towards their mother, siblings and social settings; however, children and young people are often responsive to and critical of their abusive father's behaviour.

### **A. Family Therapy**

The 'Strengthening Families' practitioners use a number of approaches including:

- Structured Family Therapy or Family and Systemic Psychotherapy to help family members help each other. Enabling people to talk together and individually about difficult, distressing and 'unspeakable' issues can help to respect their experiences, invite them to engage and support their recovery. Exploring the relationships that a woman has with her children, other family members and people who are significant in her life can assist and enhance recovery from trauma for the woman and those close to her.
- Narrative Therapy which centres people as the experts in their own lives assumes that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values,



commitments and abilities that will assist them to change the problematic relationships in their lives.

- Systems Theory which explores the shared values that provided the glue for keeping the family together and changes that 'broke' the glue so values and beliefs are no longer shared
- Strength Based approach which acknowledges the positive aspects of the family and looks for the problem-saturated descriptions. It's about looking for what parents and children do well despite problems, how they overcome their problems, what they do well and exploring their aspirations and hopes.

### **B. Group Work**

Group work is another way that individuals experience restorative therapy. There are many alternative responses that have proven success such as art and music therapy, yoga, pillates and dance, pet therapy and shared cooking.

### **C. Coaching**

Following the theme of 'help me to help myself so that I might help others', Safe Futures is committed to broadening opportunities for those who have rebuilt and recovered from their experience of control, abuse and violence (both survivors and those who used violence) to support others who might welcome support to build their strength and sense of hope. Safe Futures supports the development of 'coaching' courses whereby those who have completed the Safe Futures Circles of Support to become resilient and self-determining are able to formally support others. When faced with a situation when support is needed often your case manager or therapist is not able to be there. With a coach who understands your circumstance and can be called for support, it gives a sense of 'having someone else in your corner' and decreases the sense of isolation often felt by survivors and perpetrators alike.

## Chapter 7.

### Working with men

#### Manspace

Safe Futures Foundation is seeking to open the first Victorian holistic community based healing centre for men that will be known as 'Manspace'. Many men that use control, abuse and violence are also dealing with the trauma associated with witnessing or experiencing violence themselves. Recent studies in America have found that over 80% of those incarcerated in prisons experienced family violence or child abuse as children and young people. Safe Futures is firmly committed to policing and justice responses to make sure those perpetrating family violence are made accountable for their crime. We however believe that the community must also provide support for men to address their anger and violence if we are to change the cycle of violence and create a safe future for our children. The 'Manspace' model is proposed initially as a response to compliment existing Safe Futures responses for women and children and will be for men whose partners have been granted an intervention order following control, abuse and violence. 'Manspace' will focus on the provision of:

Therapeutic counselling to coach and provide strategies for men to heal, become resilient and self-determining after experiencing or using control, abuse and violence in their family or personal relationship. This will include:

- Understanding the effect of anger, control, abuse and violence on the individual and family
- Recognising, understanding and maintaining healthy relationships
- Life and relationship education
- Self worth, self respect, and self care
- Gender roles and gender equity in relationships.
- Personal and family safety
- Father child relationships including
- Positive parenting
- Understanding ages and stages of childhood development

- Healthy eating and physical fitness
- Cultural expectations and traditions
- Access to practitioners specialising in physical, mental and allied health
- Numeracy and literacy assessments that inform learning plans and support pathways to education, training and employment
- Support at court including information on the legal consequences of breaching and subsequent criminal charges
- Housing support and referral
- Financial counselling

### **Violence Free Families - Online Men's Behaviour Change Program**

Violence Free Families is an independent nationally registered charity dedicated to reducing family violence in all of its forms. VFF recognises that the most serious element of this complex problem is violence perpetrated by men against women and its current programs are directed towards this element as a priority.

VFF's Online Men's Behaviour Change Program represents a new direction in the attempt to prevent family violence. The key objective is the delivery of a men's behaviour change program using the web. The program is intended for those men who find it difficult to attend a face-to-face session. Many men find it extremely challenging to share their history and establish meaningful change in a face-to-face group. For others their geographical location or work obligations limit their ability to participate. The cost of facilitating scalable face-to-face group is also restrictive for both government and organisations alike.

The Online Men's Behaviour Change Program is a collaborative experience designed to simulate group interactions in an online environment. Although this psycho-educational program is provided online it is not a self-directed website. Instead the program is a 13 week structured course that uses synchronous online group sessions, similar to online video conferencing, but without the visual component. In addition to the program, there is a preliminary induction week to establish the men within the online environment.

The Online Men's Behaviour Change Program has been trialled and subsequently evaluated by Melbourne University. The outcomes have proven to be ground-breaking.

Safe Futures sees the Online Men's Behaviour Change Program as an intrinsic part of the holistic Manspace response. Engaging men online and then progressing to face to face responses once trust has been established will increase long term commitment to change. Connecting men to the supports they require to address other challenges in their life will also contribute to their ability to fully participate in a program to promote self determination and a life free from anger and violence.

### Safe Futures Foundation Circles of Support

Recognise, Respond, Rebuild, Recover



## Chapter 8.

### Client Participation

**Advisory Councils** – Every person has their own experience of living with control, abuse and violence. For many part of the process of changing their story, healing and becoming resilient is to talk of their experience. To be recognised as an expert because of their lived experience also gives many the opportunity to make a difference and meaningful change in the lives of others. The phrase **‘help me to help myself so that I might help others’** offers many an opportunity to take strength from their experience and support others to build their own strength.

Safe Futures Foundation recently developed a Women’s Consultative Council for women who have experienced control, abuse and violence. The Women’s Consultative Council will play a key role in providing expert advice (gained from their own experiences) into improving Safe Futures Foundation service delivery, the overall family violence integrated service system, and informing Safe Futures and Victorian Government policy development. The first objective of the Women’s Consultative Council was to provide direct input into the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Safe Futures plans to establish a Youth Consultative Council to ensure the voices of young people are heard and that their expert advice provides insights to the changes required to provide best practice safety and support responses.

Safe Futures also plans to establish a Men’s Consultative Council. As a community we constantly promote the message that women predominantly are the survivors of family violence. What has been overlooked is that at any given time the majority of those living with control, abuse and violence are children. Half of these children are boys who then as adults are in fact men who have survived childhood family violence. Our strong messages encourage them to keep the ‘secret’. By providing male survivors of family violence and child abuse the opportunity to speak out and provide their expert advice will provide insights previously unheard. It also supports healing and provides opportunity for them to also sign onto ‘help me to help myself so that I might help others’. When we consider statistics that show over 80% of men in prisons, living with drug and alcohol addiction, mental health concerns and disengagement from education have experienced childhood family control, abuse and violence it is critical that we provide public recognition of male survivors. Only

when this occurs will we be able to 'change their story so that they might change the story of their children'.

Safe Futures strongly recommends that Consultative Councils are formed around Victoria to ensure broad ranging opportunities are provided to all in our community. Safe Futures has developed terms of reference and the supporting model. We also believe an essential element is the opportunity to have emotional support during and after each meeting and encourage the Royal Commission to consider a viable funding model and state-wide coordination capability.

## Chapter 9.

### Building a resilient workforce.

Resilience in the workplace is about individuals, teams and organisations functioning well during normal operating conditions, as well as in times of stress or trauma. It can be thought of as a protective barrier that shields people, helping them to cope effectively in times of change, high pressure and stress. Levels of resilience can change over time and the workplace can help to build resilience.

Professionals working to support those experiencing control, abuse and violence are dealing with stressful and challenging situations on a daily basis. It is essential that workplaces have clearly identified strategies to support staff to continue to support clients achieving the best possible safety and support outcomes.

#### Right person in the right job

A highly skilled and committed workforce is essential for guiding clients along pathways to healing, resilience and self-determination. Safe Futures Foundation has designed and implemented a community sector human resource strategy to an employer of choice standard. The strategy ensures the right people are in the right positions, has the highest regard for workplace safety, health and wellbeing, and offers flexibility, career opportunity and reward to staff. Central to the strategy is utilising world leading competency-profiling tools that ensure those employed are suited to working in high stress environments. The model is then complemented with state of the art safety and security support including the use of Safecards by all staff at all times.

#### Training and professional development

An essential element of a professional workplace is quality and consistent training. Safe Futures has recognised that there is no sector or cross sector training that ensures that all working to provide consistent practice and responses to those experiencing control, abuse and violence. Partnering with Knowledge Community, Safe Futures have developed on line training that is embedded into the Circles of Support ICT solution. Legislation, regulation, policy and procedure are programmed as workflows that ensure all staff follow a consistent and best practice framework of practice. If a staff member fails to adhere to workflows an immediate flag is raised for the individual, if this is not rectified the line manager is also then

flagged and can ascertain the reason and rectify the situation if required. Regular programming ensures workflows are updated to reflect changes in legislation, regulation, policy and procedure. The ICT tool is efficient, scalable, integrated and interoperable. The software has also been developed to deliver multi-agency interoperability and coordination whilst supporting the capability for agencies to operate autonomously.

### **Vicarious Trauma training**

Safe Futures recognise that many working with those living with control, abuse and violence are often confronted with traumatic and challenging experiences.

Vicarious trauma is an invisible outcome for many and carries with it the unseen long-term burden of ill health. Safe Futures has partnered with 1800RESPECT, a national provider of Vicarious Trauma training and experts in the delivery of counselling services for those impacted by family violence. The training, compulsory for all staff has the following content:

- Understand the construct of vicarious trauma
- Differentiate vicarious trauma from other work related psychological hazards (i.e. burnout)
- Understand what predicts vicarious trauma
- Recognise the symptoms of vicarious trauma and its impacts on workers
- Get an overview of strategies that individuals and organisations can adopt to manage vicarious trauma effectively

All staff are also able to access 24/7 counselling from 1800RESPECT if they identify signs of vicarious trauma or post a challenging or critical incident.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

The health and wellbeing of the workforce is seen as vitally important to ensure an environment of support in any workplace. Safe Futures understands that individuals require tailored solutions to ensure ultimate health and wellbeing and as such provide on going group training and an allowance for staff to purchase personal well being options such as gym memberships and massage.



## Chapter 10.

### Sector Reform Funding – Crime Prevention Authority

Commonwealth and State governments have all recognized the need to provide responses at the earliest possible time to those at risk of harm from control, abuse and violence. Statistics show a rapid escalation in the numbers of children, young people and adults experiencing family violence, bullying at school and in the workplace, cyber-bullying and stalking, and sexual harassment. It is imperative that Government look to establish a national approach to supporting those identified as being at risk or experiencing these crimes. Rather than waiting until a crime has occurred and providing compensation to the victim, access to practical cost effective packages of support to minimize risk will significantly decrease the cost the individual and government.

The Safe Futures Foundation proposes the establishment of a national 'Crime Prevention Authority' (CPA) to hear and determine applications for financial assistance to increase safety and support measures for those assessed as at risk of harm.

#### Purpose and objective of the Crime Preventions Authority

The objectives of the CPA are:

To provide financial assistance to support early intervention:

- Increased personal safety with practical measures:
  - Home security upgrades
  - Workplace security upgrades
  - CCTV
  - Personal safety devices
- Training
  - Personal safety
  - Cyber safety
- Mediation

- Family
- Couples
- Workplace
- School
- Sporting Clubs

To provide financial assistance to support recovery and build personal resilience:

- Counseling
- Rehabilitation
- Therapeutic group work, for example: art therapy, pet therapy, music therapy
- Wellbeing packages, for example: gym membership, massage, relaxation classes
- Courses to build economic independence

### **Resourcing of the Crime Prevention Authority**

It is proposed that resourcing for the Crime Prevention Authority come from a number of existing revenue resources:

- Proceeds of crime
- Proceeds of gambling

It is also proposed that a new revenue streams be considered:

- A penalty related fine would automatically be imposed on those having an Intervention Order granted against them. Any breach of the order would incur another penalty, increasing for each subsequent breach. Any non-payment of the penalty would impact on individual credit rating. The penalty fine would have the additional benefit of creating another deterrence measure to those putting others at risk of harm with the use of controlling, abusive or violent behavior.
- Workcover penalties imposed on those workplaces not introducing minimum anti-bullying standards, policies and training.

## Conclusion

Safe Futures commends the Victorian government and those tasked with conducting the world leading Royal Commission into family violence. We have committed to support and participate in the Royal Commission in a comprehensive and inclusive manner. We have sought the expert voices of our frontline staff with the formation of a Staff Consultative Council who have submitted a report following broad ranging consultation. Likewise we have also sought the expert voice of women who have experienced family violence with the formation of a Women's Consultative Council. A range of individual and group consultations informed a separate submission. We have also collaborated with a number of our specialist partner organisations, Eastern Domestic Violence Service, Safe Steps, Wishin and the Victorian Women's Trust who have collaboratively lodged a submission. Finally we have invited the commissioners to visit our organisation to see first hand the innovative response models outlined in this submission. We would welcome the opportunity to present at the public hearings and encourage the commissioners to invite a number of the experts that we have engaged to inform the development of our model to also present.

We have not wished to duplicate the information or expert voices contained in the above mentioned submissions and as such this submission has focused on high level systemic change that we believe will make real difference for those experiencing control, abuse and violence.

