



THE SALVATION ARMY'S SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE (VICTORIA)

**BY THE SALVATION ARMY VICTORIA
SOCIAL PROGRAMME AND POLICY UNIT**

29 MAY 2015

"I remember waking up one morning and I was just crying. I couldn't stop crying. And I said to him, 'Why can't we be a normal family? Why does it have to be violent? Why do you have to hit me? Why do you have to put me down in front of my children all the time?'" Sarah



*The Salvation Army, Australia Southern Territory – Victoria State Council: **The Salvation Army's submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria)***

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1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Salvation Army would like to thank the survivors of family violence who participated in the development of this submission. We acknowledge the courage involved in telling their stories, in the hope that doing so will prevent other women and children from experiencing family violence. We would also like to thank staff in our family violence services across the state for making this submission possible and for the on-going work that they do supporting women and children affected by family violence. Finally, we would like to thank Dr Raeleene Gregory for conducting the interviews for this submission.

2. TERMINOLOGY

The terminology used to describe family violence, which includes ‘domestic violence’ or ‘intimate partner violence’ has changed as attempts to understand and define this subject area have evolved. ‘Family and domestic violence’ is often used in legislation and literature to describe a systematic attempt by one person to exercise power and control over another person in a family setting. In many cases the terms are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this paper, The Salvation Army has chosen to predominately use the term family violence, because this is more commonly used in the Victorian community and to recognise the impacts that violence can have on wider family relationships including children. Where a different term has been given in a direct quote, the terminology has not been changed.

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3. INTRODUCTION

Family violence is internationally recognised as a violation of human rights¹ and has recently been classed as a national emergency in Australia. Approximately 90 per cent of family violence is perpetrated by men against women.² This makes family violence a gendered crime. The gendered nature of family violence both feeds off and perpetuates the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women and an adherence to rigidly defined gender roles.³

Family violence occurs across all cultures and socio-economic spheres. It is estimated that one in three women in Australia will experience some form of family violence in their life time. Male intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for women aged 15 to 44 years of age.⁴ In 2014, on average, one woman every week was killed in a family violence incident. Tragically, since the start of 2015 the death rate has increased to two women being murdered every week. Urgent action must be taken to reverse this trend and the violent context from which it occurs, and in which, too many women live their daily lives. The Salvation Army hopes this Victoria Royal Commission into Family Violence will be a driving force towards that change.

The voice of women who were directly affected by family violence has been used as a primary source for this submission. In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven women who had accessed Salvation Army specialist family violence services across the state.⁵ Each woman was interviewed about their experiences of family violence, the police, courts, specialist family violence and homelessness services, the impacts on their work, their children, and what they would like to see as part of future family violence responses. Staff from The Salvation Army's four family violence services in the Inner and Middle South, North West, Barwon and South Gippsland/Bass Coast areas were also consulted in a group forum to discuss current gaps in the system and how the response to women and children experiencing family violence could be improved. Each section of this submission has been drawn together under broad themes, sometimes these have been further broken down into component parts. In general, the structure explains the current state (where we are now), the elements of a preferred future (where we'd like to be), and some possible ways to get there. Recommendations are included along the way and summarised at the end of this document.

¹ UN 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women

² <http://www.hurt.net.au/dfv.htm>

³ Vic Health (2007) *What are the causes of family violence?*

⁴ VicHealth (2004) *Preventing violence against women in Australia.*

⁵ All of the names of the women interviewed for this submission have been changed in order to protect their identities.

4. COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES

4.1 The Current State: What needs to change

Understanding family violence

Even though family violence has been getting a lot of media attention recently, misunderstandings about family violence remain. Family violence is not just physical violence. It also includes emotional, psychological, verbal, social, financial and sexual abuse and other forms of intimidation, like damaging furniture or threatening pets. Family violence is a pattern of coercive control, using fear and physical or psychological harm, that one person exercises over another in order to get their way.

“He would, you know, embarrass me in front of people – make me look like a mental. And that is what he used to call me – a ‘dumb cunt,’ ‘mental retard.’ And he would be like, ‘See! See what she’s doing? This is what she is like!’ And he put me down in front of my children all the time. I had no self-esteem. I thought I was the ugliest, most terrible person because my body is horrible after having kids with stretch marks and ... I felt worthless.” Sarah

“That’s the thing. It’s the psychological stuff. People don’t get it. I mean, I am an educated, intelligent person and I have been living with someone who without saying the words ‘You’re stupid’ makes you feel like that and says ‘You need to go see my psychiatrist. You don’t understand’. So you are continually being told that you’re mad ... I lived in a world where this man, who was meant to be, you know, on my side, would continually shift the goal posts. So I was continually trying to please him, to keep him subdued, and he would shift the goal posts all the time.” Angela

Misunderstandings about family violence mean that members of the community, including women experiencing family violence, are not able to recognise its signs (particularly if the violence is not physical). Many people do not know that this type of behaviour is illegal under Australian and State law.

“[The abuse] was probably happening for a long time, I just didn’t realise. When I realised it was after I had my children. ‘Cause it’s mental abuse, not physical. Mind you it wasn’t obvious it was happening either. It was very subtle and discreet and manipulative ... people in the room wouldn’t have noticed.” Vanessa

“I didn’t realise that it was [family violence] before he actually started hitting me ... but there was a lot of emotional abuse in the family.” Mary

“I had no idea of the extent of the damage that had been done ... The domestic violence that I have been experiencing for a decade, or however long, has permeated every single relationship I have. And I had no idea. I had no idea of the power imbalance that I had allowed to happen in other relationships with friends because that is what I had lived. I had lived a life of being treated like excrement by this man and so that was my norm. I had allowed it in my work place, I had allowed it socially. It is just the way life was ... When I contacted The Salvation Army, I was contacting them because I was scared of my husband. But I didn’t label it domestic violence ... I grew up in a household with a man who was very loving and caring to his wife and me. I had no real concept of what domestic violence was.” Angela

“I didn’t understand the concept of family violence. I didn’t have anyone to talk to. I just thought, ‘This is my life.’” Susan

Non-physical forms of abuse are often unrecognised as family violence. However, emotional, psychological, verbal and financial abuse, manipulation and social isolation are often precursors to physical violence, so it is important for members of the community to be able to recognise unhealthy patterns of behaviour as forms of family violence before it escalates and to take these forms of abuse seriously. In some cases, violent relationships may never include physical violence but this does not make the impact of family violence any less real, serious or harmful.

“This is the mindset, just so you can understand the damage done: I wouldn’t buy strawberries for over six months. [My daughter] told me ‘You can buy strawberries now,’ because I had been told I was a failure in buying strawberries. It was ridiculous. The amount of nonsense I was subjected to. It has taken me well over 12 months to just start seeing the absolute ridiculousness nature of what this person said.” Angela

“There are still days when you think to yourself, ‘Are you better off going back?’ You just ... you don’t know. They mess with your mind that bad that you don’t know if you are coming or going half the time. And it’s silly because why would you think of ever going back? To live like that – on egg shells every day and for your kids not to be able to play and have friends. But it does, sometimes you think it would probably be easier just to go back.” Mary

“For 20 years I have been told, ‘You are nothing. You’re a nobody if you leave me.’ And you believe it. You start believing it. And then because things are going so wrong you think, ‘I am a nothing. He was right’. And you start questioning yourself.” Sarah

Unfortunately emotional, psychological, and verbal violence and manipulation are not always taken as seriously as physical violence. However, for many women the emotional abuse they experience as part of family violence is more damaging and longer lasting than the effects of physical violence.

"I realised there were people [in the support group] who had never been touched, never been injured. But they had been damaged – the psychological damage." Angela

Physical violence is almost always preceded by emotional abuse, which legitimises the physical abuse by making women believe they are worthless and that they deserve it. Some people, particularly men, struggle with the idea that repeatedly swearing, yelling, calling names and putting their partner down is considered family violence and is illegal under Australian law. Too often this type of behaviour is dismissed as a normal part of a relationship. It is not normal and should never be considered acceptable.

Social isolation as a form of violence

"He capitalised on the fact I didn't have a family." Susan

"I had closed off so many networks. We weren't going to see friends; it was a very chaotic life style. You are hiding it and you are exhausted." Rebecca

"That is part of the strategy. That is a key part of the strategy, to isolate you from friends. Because for years I told my friends I wasn't allowed to talk on the phone. So one friend would ring me on one night that was safe. Yeah, I just didn't talk to people." Angela

"I didn't have a relationship with anyone that close because I wasn't allowed to. I wasn't allowed to work anymore. I wasn't allowed out. I wasn't allowed to have any friends. I was kept isolated. Not even allowed to see my own family. And I think that is how they do it – to make you feel worthless without them" Mary.

"Girlfriends [asked if I was alright] but then also you need to limit what you say because when I started realising things were bad and I wanted to talk, the few people that were still coming around to the house, I didn't want to scare them away. It's a very fine line because getting the courage to leave, I was already so isolated. I felt, I didn't want to tell too much because then, you know, they will be worried sick and then they may not feel comfortable coming round, bringing their kids. I told another girl in my mother's group, just little bits and pieces and again I didn't want for her to feel uncomfortable bringing her daughter around." Rebecca

Social isolation is also a key aspect of family violence that is not recognised or understood properly by the general public, but it is a key contributor to a perpetrator's ability to keep their victim quiet and prevent her from leaving. Isolation also becomes a barrier that prevents women from leaving a violent relationship, even if they want to. Many women, as will be discussed throughout this paper, remarked on the fact that they simply did not have anywhere to go if they left their family home. Most women did not have any family nearby or have any family at all and did not have friends they felt they could turn to.

Stigma, shame and judgement

“There is so much shame. Like even now. There is so much shame with domestic violence. It’s just ridiculous. It’s not my bloody fault.” Angela

“My situation was so intense and quiet at the same time because I didn’t want anyone to know what was going on.” Vanessa

“It needs to be talked about and that it is not ok. Everyone is too busy trying to keep it a secret, because they are so ashamed that it doesn’t get spoken about ... We shouldn’t have to be ashamed because we are the ones that are being abused. The men are the ones who should feel ashamed for what they do. And they don’t. And we get ridiculed by their families – ‘Why are you dragging your kids around the country side?’ You know? ‘Why are you doing this? Why did you take them out of their home?’ They blame us for leaving.” Mary

“I compare family violence to depression. If you break your leg or have cancer, you tell the work place. And everyone says that’s terrible, they are full of support – ‘What can we do? How can we help?’ The stigma around family violence, you know, because people say, ‘Is it you? What have you done? Why did you behave this way? Did you force this to happen?’ It’s a terrible thing actually.” Rebecca

In addition to isolation being used as a tactic by perpetrators of family violence, a strong sense of shame, fear and fear of judgement from their family, friends and the wider community, or that they simply won’t be believed, keeps women silent and prevents them from reaching out to people for help.

“You think people are going to judge you, like, why did you stay or what did you do wrong?” Mary

“I had one person who wasn’t helpful at all, saying things like ‘Well you have excused it for years.’ And that was extremely unhelpful of someone that I had helped in the past and who I thought was a good friend. That was actually quite hurtful.” Angela

“So much of it does happen behind closed doors and my biggest fear was who is going to believe me?” Rebecca

The community needs to have a better understanding of what actions actually constitute family violence, but perhaps more importantly, the community also needs to understand that family violence is *never* the victims fault. Reactions to disclosures of family violence like ‘What did you do to provoke him?’ or accusations that a woman is making up allegations of family violence because she is crazy, vindictive or bitter are very damaging to victims of family violence. This type of judgement is a key reason that many women don’t leave a violent relationship.

Family violence can happen to anyone

“Now this is a family that went to a Catholic primary school. We did out-of-school sports. We were known as the perfect family. And I say to people, ‘It’s true.’ People look at you and think ‘Wow’ but behind doors it is not a ‘Wow.’ I went from working full time, looking after three teenage kids, running them to their sports and work, and doing a child care course. I was on the ball, being a great mum and being praised for it because I was only in my 30’s ... only in my 30’s and I was paying off a home and so proud of being a home buyer. I had the perfect Australian dream. I had the home, the cars, the kids, the holiday. Everything I wanted, but I had the domestic violence in with it.” Sarah

“You think of yourself as being strong and independent and you can’t believe someone has manipulated you in that way.” Vanessa

“I am quite intelligent. I am tertiary educated and whatever, but I mean, you know, who wants to think you [are with someone] whose mission every day is to make your life hell?” Angela

“I always thought that I was a strong person.” Mary

“I was a career woman earning my own living on quite, you know, a reasonable income by Australian standards. I am educated. My perception of people in domestic violence and on welfare [was that it happened to others] ... I wouldn’t be someone who is, you know, caught up in family violence. I feel so naive now ... I was thrown into world with a man that, really, I had never experienced before.” Rebecca

There is a perception among the public that family violence only happens to poor, uneducated people, families with alcohol or drug problems, is specific to certain cultures, religions or races, or that men only use family violence if they have been victims of violence or abuse themselves. These perceptions are completely untrue. Family violence can happen to anyone regardless of socio-economic status, education levels, race, culture or family background. The fact that one in three women will experience some form of family violence within their life time actually means that *everyone* is likely to personally know a woman who has been a victim of family violence. Helping the general public recognise that family violence does not just happen to ‘other people’ would go a long way towards reducing the stigma associated with it.

Understanding the barriers to reporting and leaving

“I should have left [much earlier]. But I don’t know. That’s all I ever wanted, was having a family. And being young and being weeks off having a baby to someone – I didn’t want to be another teen mum and be single at home. You know what I mean? ... [but it got harder the longer it went on] Twenty years I was with this man! He was everything I knew! I knew what was wrong, but I just ... stayed. It was my family. It’s not like you are just leaving your partner. You are leaving your life.” Sarah

“I feel I really pushed our leaving time [out] to as far as I could. I had made lots of calls. I knew things weren’t going to get better. But I knew if I left, I would leave with nothing, my house, my car, nothing, no job. I mean what were we going to do? I have got no family here.” Rebecca

“I wanted to leave. And I couldn’t. I had no job. The house and everything was in his name. I had nowhere to go. I had, yeah, nothing. So I just stayed. And more or less, that was my life.” Mary

“You are sharing a bed with this person. It was a very challenging thing for me to accept. That this man, who I cared for, was seeking to make my life miserable.” Angela

“I would basically let him off the hook, I guess, and not believe that the way he was acting was actually possible. I thought if you cared about someone you didn’t treat people like that. So I guess I would make excuses for him. And after years of his actions not adding up to his words, and seeing how he treated the children, I realised that my feelings and my thoughts were actually right. And I had to learn to trust myself again and not listen to anything he said.” Vanessa

Just as responding to disclosures of family violence with questions like ‘What did you do?’ are very hurtful, asking ‘Why doesn’t she just leave’ is very damaging to victims. The quotes explain why women don’t leave violent relationships, but it is still the wrong question to ask. The question people should ask is ‘Why does a man think it is ok to be violent?’.

“Knowing the person I was dealing with, I knew couldn’t run. Because he wouldn’t have let me run. And the police have said that to me too, ‘He is not the sort of person that would let you go. He would hunt you down.’” Vanessa

4.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

In this section we have seen that community awareness and attitudes are key contributors to the problem of family violence. What would a better vision of community look like and how could we begin to measure our progress towards eliminating family violence? Below are some statements that, as a community, we should all strive to make true:

- Everyone in the community understands that family violence is any behaviour that consistently seeks to exercise power and control over another person through the use of fear.
- Everyone in the community understands that family violence is an inherently gendered issue tied to systemic inequalities between men and women in our society.
- School kids, teenagers and young adults are taught in school and in social clubs that violence is not just physical and it is not ok. They learn that family violence includes name calling, put-downs, bullying, emotional and mental manipulation

through guilt, fear or shame, controlling the finances, cutting someone off from social networks like family and friends, and using threats against children and pets to get what you want.

- Men and women all understand that the above behaviours are actions that people choose because they want to get their own way and be in control. These actions are not a result of alcohol or drug use. They are not a result of stress, financial pressures or mental health issues. People have a choice to use controlling behaviours even if they had rough childhoods, experienced abuse, or came from poor backgrounds. While these factors can increase the risk of family violence, they are contributing factors, not the cause of family violence.
- People are aware that family violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, culture, and religion or socio economic background and do not think that it only happens to 'other people'.
- There would be no stigma attached to family violence due to increased community awareness and education. Everyone understands that family violence is not ok and is illegal under Australian law and Victorian law.
- Public responses to family violence are 'Why is he abusing his partner?' not 'Why doesn't she just leave?'
- If someone is in a relationship, or knows someone else who is in a relationship, that they think is unhealthy and may be violent, they are not afraid to say something and know where to go to speak to someone and get help if necessary.

4.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

Increasing understanding of family violence

"I think men need to be, maybe even as they are growing up in schools – for it to be spoken about. For them to be taught to respect women and that it is not ok to hit women. I think it has to be taught to them from a young age." Mary

"[We need] more support ... for women on relationships – how and what is expected. What should young people expect in a relationship? What should be their guide? How should they see that what is healthy and what is not? I think it starts as a teenager, to be honest. I think when you are a teenager you need to be guided through what is healthy and what's not. And, setting good habits when you are a teenager ... I think teenagers are the ones that need the support." Kathy

"He had always had a temper but it had never been directed at me. So I probably tended to overlook it, because you know, we were in love ... But there were many incidents like his reaction when we had been out with my friends and my friends had said things to me ... or the way he drove, or the things he said. There are things, I learnt now, that are called red flags." Rebecca

Respectful relationships in schools

Respectful relationships programs in Victorian schools were well documented by VicHealth in 2009 on behalf of the then Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).⁶ They found that intensive and long-term education programs in schools can produce lasting change in attitudes and behaviours in young people.⁷ However, to date, sustained, state-wide anti-violence and respectful relationship programs have not been funded and implemented consistently across all Victorian schools.

Many isolated education programs have been developed, implemented and evaluated as successful within their sphere of influence. Examples of these are LOVE BiTES,⁸ developed in NSW by the National Association for Prevention for Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), White Ribbon's Breaking the Silence program,⁹ and DEECD's Building Respectful Relationships program.¹⁰ However, no program has been rolled out consistently across the state for schools to implement. Consequently, pockets of good practice have emerged within Victorian schools but a wide-spread community impact has not been achieved and myths about family violence and what constitutes a healthy relationship remain.

The Salvation Army is aware that respectful relationships education is a focus of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* and that including such education in the Australian curriculum is being considered. We are very supportive of this measure and would advocate that private, independent and public schools alike should all be required to implement standard respectful relationships education throughout multiple year levels.

However, we do not believe that the Victorian Government should wait for Commonwealth reforms before acting. The evidence documenting best practice among respectful relationship programs and their effectiveness has been gathered. It is now time to act. All that is needed is a requirement for schools across the state to implement these programs and funding to support them in doing so. Continuing to do nothing is putting our current young people's futures, and future generations, at risk of being involved in violent relationships.

Recommendation 1: Act on existing evidence to develop, implement and fund a mandated, state-wide respectful relationships education program in all schools in Victoria.

Respectful relationships in religious organisations and sporting clubs

It is important to reinforce the messages around healthy relationships in other community settings in addition to schools. Religious groups and sporting clubs provide an ideal environment to reinforce the principles of respectful relationships.

⁶ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/health/respectfulrel.pdf>

⁷ Flood, M. (2005–06) *Changing Men: Best Practice in Sexual Violence Education*. Women Against Violence, 18: 26–36.

⁸ <http://napcan.org.au/our-programs/love-bites/>

⁹ <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/schools>

¹⁰ <http://partnersinprevention.org.au/tag/building-respectful-relationships-stepping-out-against-gender-based-violence/>

Within religious settings, there is good collaborative work being done on a local government level and within church groups themselves. For example, The Northern Interfaith Respectful Relationships project with the City of Darebin and the Regional Interfaith Network¹¹ are two leading examples of faith communities talking about family violence, its existence within faith communities and how these communities should respond. This type of work is vital to reinforcing respectful relationships training within schools among young people as well as reaching their parents, and CALD and other communities in which religion plays a significant role in cultural norms and relationship dynamics.

In addition, sporting clubs play a valuable community and social role within Australian society and it is important to foster respectful relationships, particularly among young men, in these settings. The AFL is already doing good work in this area through its Be the Hero campaign and participation in White Ribbon events. While much of this work needs to happen organically, the Victorian Government and local governments should engage with these faith communities and other community groups to support the work they are doing and ensure these types of efforts do not remain isolated but rather become a united community effort to effect change.

Reducing community shame and stigma

“This is the big thing that I want changed out of the Royal Commission: that society has to just get rid of the shame factor. If society can get its head around that, if they can lift the shame associated with it, it would help women come forward. And I am doing this because I don’t want any woman going through this another day than what she already has been experiencing.”
Angela

“Those marches that we are starting to have. We need more men involved. And men are realising, finally now, it’s against the law.” Sarah

“I believe there is a lot to be said about media and campaigns, public awareness. I will never forget the AIDS campaign in the 80s. No one forgets the Grim Reaper. Something that was so undercover became so the norm. And something that was a dirty secret became [a public health issue] ... People ask how far do awareness campaigns go? I think they help a lot. Because it helps change other people’s perception, which then makes it easier. I mean back in my day before Slip Slop Slap, you wouldn’t be seen dead wearing a hat. Now, kiddies grab their hat. Things can change. And that is all through campaigns.” Rebecca

¹¹ <http://www.regionalinterfaith.org.au/component/content/article/85-women/540-interfaith-and-family-violence-violence-against-women.html>

The Salvation Army was a founder and continues to be a key supporter of the annual Walk Against Family Violence in conjunction with White Ribbon day. This event has proven to be successful in raising community awareness of family violence and bringing key groups within the community such as police, the AFL, family violence services and the general public together to support the cause. These walks should be supported and expanded in regional areas to increase awareness across the state.

The community services sector, and the family violence sector in particular, have also been calling for a sustained media campaign against family violence for years. Changing community attitudes and norms takes a long-term, sustained effort. However, success stories such as the AIDS campaign mentioned above and anti-smoking campaigns prove that with the right resources and commitment from both sides of politics, community attitudes and norms can be shifted. The Salvation Army is pleased that the Abbott Government has committed to a National Anti-Family Violence campaign. This cannot be a short-term effort. This needs to be the start of a long-term, sustained media campaign exposing the prevalence of family violence, what family violence is, the warning signs, how to respond and where to get help.

Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government should partner with the Commonwealth Government and family violence services to develop and run a long-term, sustained Anti-Family Violence media campaign to shift community attitudes around family violence.

5. WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY RESPONSE

5.1 The Current State: What needs to change

General Practitioners

"[The GP] wasn't really caring. He was just, you know, 'Hurry up, get the report over. What's wrong with her?' Because I would say to him, 'I just want you to state this down.' Because I didn't go all the time but I thought as long as I go every now and then they are going to know it is happening." Sarah

"I told [the doctor] I fell over. He said, 'It doesn't look like you fell over.' And then after that I would go to different doctors. I had to go to the local hospital but then I would drive out of town and go to another hospital and go to different places. When he broke my collar bone, I said I was in a car accident. Just make up stories." Mary

"I had black and blue bruises so I ended up having to go see the doctor so I put that information in so I could get the intervention order. The [GP] tried to tease the information out of me but I said my son had kicked me accidentally. But I think she was fully aware of what it was and kept trying to tease it out of me. But it just so happened that the [GP] I could get into I knew from when I was at Uni. So it was even more awkward because ... you know." Angela

“It probably wouldn’t have been helpful [if a doctor or someone had asked]. I wasn’t willing to admit anything was wrong. ‘No, everything is fine. This is a great person.’ I was scared and I was young.” Susan

When asked if they ever spoke about family violence to any kind of mainstream service, the most common service the women interviewed said they had approached was their GP. As these interviews showed, some women actively avoided disclosing family violence and other women who did had mixed experiences.

Doctors, particularly GPs as a primary port of call for most health issues, can be an important doorway into other services by assessing women for risk, helping women understand the concept of family violence if they are found to be at risk, and helping refer them on to specialist services. As primary health providers, the reaction of a GP to the disclosure of violence can have a profound impact on women and their families. It takes a lot of courage to disclose family violence and a poor response can reinforce the belief that no one will believe her if she says anything or that there is no help available.

“[My ex-husband] was angry and came in the room and smashed stuff near me. The pieces went into four rooms of the house and it just damaged everything. And I went to the doctor and the doctor wrote in front of me, I could see it, and it was something like ‘No physical danger.’ And I thought, ‘Surely you have seen me enough to know that I am not making this up?’ You know, let’s have somebody come in from another room and smash stuff near you and make your kids hysterical and see how you feel that there is no danger.” Angela

Women’s possible reluctance to disclose that they are experiencing family violence, does not excuse medical or other service professionals from asking the question. The difficulty in disclosing family violence is a consequence of the shame, fear and stigma discussed earlier in this paper. As the women interviewed have articulated, even once women begin to realise that they may be experiencing family violence, it is difficult to accept that a person they love is doing this to them and community stigma and shame can cause women to actively avoid disclosing.

Even if women do not readily disclose that family violence may be happening at first, asking the question and prompting women to think about the possibility of family violence and making them aware of services available can increase the likelihood that they will access services in the future.

“I think if someone had asked me [if I was experiencing violence], like now, I think I would have just broken down. It would have been obvious. But while you are trying to be strong and put up a front you manage. But when someone actually asks, it’s like ... as soon as it’s mentioned, you just break down. But you are so busy trying to hide it.” Mary

"I will tell you, when I went to the domestic violence women's group [that the GP referred me to], I thought maybe he is [committing domestic violence]. I don't think so, but I will go. It is ignorant of me not to explore the option. So I went, thinking maybe he is. The first week I came out of there thinking 'Oh, I think it's quite likely he could be.' Then the second week, one of the people came over to me before things started and said 'Get out.' That was pretty damn powerful when another woman from what I had said in one session comes over to me makes a special point." Angela

Medical and other service professionals must be given the skills to confidently and sensitively ask about family violence and then know what to do with that information if it is disclosed. For many women, it is a journey to come to the conclusion that the best option for them to do is leave their relationship. Women must be given the chance to make that journey for themselves. However, mainstream services like medical professions, particularly GPs and midwives who are likely to build a relationships with their patients over time, can assist in that journey by being sensitive, asking the question and knowing where to get help. When this works, it can make all the difference.

"My doctor has been amazing." Vanessa

"I talked to the GP about the violence. She recommended counselling." Kathy

"I just felt I needed to tell someone else. [The GP] listened. I told him I was feeling anxious and he just gave me a bit of encouragement, really. And that's the only time I actually spoke to a professional medical person." Rebecca

Maternal Health Services

"The violence at home started pretty much when we fell pregnant. Three weeks after falling pregnant he was screaming at me, yelling at me, and then he held me down by the back of my neck." Rebecca

"First belting came a month before [my first child] was born." Sarah

"I think [the violence] started after my daughter was born. Not long after that." Mary

"I realised there was something wrong when I got pregnant. I knew from then it wasn't right. But I didn't understand the concept [of family violence.]" Susan

Four of the seven women interviewed for this submission identified pregnancy as the trigger that started the violence or what made them realise that something was wrong in their relationship. Research supports these women's experiences and has found that as many as one third of women will experience their first incidence of family violence during pregnancy.¹² This is largely attributed to the fact that relationship dynamics change significantly during and after pregnancy. Some men may be concerned that they are no longer the centre of attention, or that they are losing control of their partner and use violence to try to regain control.

The high risk correlation between pregnancy and family violence makes it critical that midwives, maternal health nurses and all other medical professions associated with pre and post natal care have a sound understanding of family violence *and* the skills and confidence to ask about family violence and then know where to refer women for additional help.

Schools

"The school was helpful. They helped me to put a plan in place with books and the Salvos helped me with uniforms." Kathy

"The kinder was supportive. It was actually my children's kinder teacher who asked me to report to the police what was going on. They were asking me to talk to police. The school is a different story. He has manipulated the court orders and now the school is stuck in a situation where he says he can be there and he is not supposed to be and that is really messy ... I think they are understanding but they are not helpful because they are bound by what is legal and trying to be neutral. They are as helpful and understanding as they can be." Vanessa

Every woman interviewed for this submission had children while experiencing family violence. As a universal access point for children, schools play an important role in the detection and early intervention of child abuse as outlined in the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children. Close links between family violence and child abuse mean that it is important for schools to have a sound understanding of family violence, the warning signs, and how to respond to children who may be at risk of family violence.

Mental Health and Counselling Services

"I have tried different forms of counselling and psychologists on and off for years. But nobody had labelled the issue as domestic violence." Angela

"I met with this fantastic gentleman from Relationships Australia and here I was actually sitting in this room with someone who is well versed in relationships who said to me 'It's very dangerous.' Because I had normalised [all the incidents] thinking 'One incident wasn't as bad as last time' and 'Oh but it wasn't that bad' but when I heard them all recounted together – they were really bad. But in my head ... I just ..." Rebecca

¹² <https://app.griffith.edu.au/news/2015/03/10/midwives-can-help-detect-domestic-violence-heres-how/>

"[If someone had asked me if I was ok] I probably wouldn't have told them anything. I didn't want to [talk about it] because it upsets me too much. "

Vanessa

"I probably would have played it down [if anyone had asked me if I was experiencing family violence] if I was still in the situation at home because I was trying to deal with it in my own way. I didn't feel it was something I could talk about."

Kathy

The majority of women interviewed for this submission reported that they accessed counselling after accessing a family violence service. A number of women felt that counselling would not have been helpful prior to accessing a family violence service because of their reluctance to admit anything was wrong. However, for the women who accessed counselling before making the decision to leave their partner, their experiences were very different. Like GPs and other medical professionals, psychologists can either be instrumental in helping women make the decision to leave or hinder them. It is important for counsellors, psychologists and other mental health professionals to have a good understanding of family violence and be able to recognise the warning signs. It is also important for mental health professionals to reinforce the message that family violence is never the victim's fault and be able to refer them to appropriate services.

5.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

In this section we have seen that a range of general services and systems throughout the community can play a role in the identification and elimination of family violence. Some of these systems are working better than others. If we were to aim for a more consistent response across service systems, what would that look like? This is what we think an ideal service system would look like:

- A whole-of-community approach is taken to help identify instances of family violence and prevent the violence from continuing.
- Education and training courses (university and TAFE) for service professionals like doctors, midwives, maternal health nurses, schools, mental health services, alcohol and drug services, Child Protection, Child First, and Family Services include improved units of family violence competency training to ensure these professions are adequately trained to recognise signs of family violence, know how to ask about family violence and know how to respond and where to refer to for extra support.
- All of the above professions received regular training and professional development courses to help refresh their skills in identifying and responding to indicators of family violence and child abuse.
- It is understood that children are affected by family violence and even if 'It wasn't in front of the kids' or 'They were asleep/not in the room,' this does not mean that they are not impacted.

- Each school has an early intervention program response that includes training for teachers and staff to recognise warning signs and school welfare officers who understand family violence and know where to refer children and families for help.
- It is common knowledge within the community about where to go for help for family violence. Brochures, posters and contact phone numbers are prominently displayed at health services, mainstream services, local councils, libraries, pubs and clubs, etc.

5.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

Improved links with mainstream services

“I think maybe [doctors] can let women know that it is illegal in Australia. And it is not normal. It’s not ok for your man to come home in a bad mood and take it out on his wife and belt the shit out of her in front of your children.”
Sarah

“I was very lucky; my local council gave me an 1800 number for being a new mum and things were getting worse and worse and worse. The woman I spoke to on the help line asked how my relationship was with my child maternal health nurse and it was really good so she suggested I go speak to her. So I went and saw [my maternal health nurse] and she gave me a few different numbers for the Women’s Domestic Violence hotline and Relationships Australia because at that stage I thought I could fix the relationship.” Rebecca

Ending family violence will take a whole-of-community response. This means that the responsibility for recognising and responding to family violence does not only sit with specialist family violence services, but is also the responsibility of universal services such as General Practitioners, hospitals and other medical professions more broadly, schools and mental health services.

In some cases, universal services like GPs, hospitals and schools are amongst the few places that women experiencing family violence are regularly allowed to go. For this reason, it is important for these services to have a good understanding of family violence. Individuals working in these services do not need to be specialist family violence workers, but they do need to be able to recognise warning signs, talk about it sensitively and know where to refer women and their families for more specialised help. Training and tools to help mainstream service staff identify and respond to family violence already exist; however, the breadth to which they have been utilised remains a concern.

For example, the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) tool in Victoria is specifically designed to help staff in mainstream services identify family violence and prompt the questions that should be asked. The CRAF training program has been delivered to many services across the state. However, the rollout of this training is still largely dependent on services expressing an interest and organising training for their staff and therefore falls far short of training all mainstream and community services across the state. Training and use of the CRAF tool needs to be significantly expanded if it is going to increase family violence awareness and consistently improve responses in mainstream services across the state.

More family violence training should also be included in vocational course work and professional development days for key mainstream service professionals like doctors and teachers. Most of the applicable tertiary courses currently offer little more than a single lecture on family violence, which is hardly reflective of the prevalence of this problem in our community. While the Australian College of GP's 'White Book' does provide GPs with additional information about family violence, it is unlikely that a GP will gain the skills necessary to properly interact with a patient experiencing family violence with such a level of training. A similar level of training is available for teachers. The amount of time during a teaching course devoted to working with disadvantaged or troubled kids, including those who may be being abused or experiencing family violence, is very small and is likely to leave teachers ill-equipped to properly respond to a student experiencing family violence. As a result, The Salvation Army believes that family violence training should be fully integrated in a sustained way into university curriculum for all relevant medical and teaching professionals.

Tertiary education should be followed up by regular professional development courses to help medical professionals and teachers refresh their knowledge and ensure that their skills and links to local community support services are maintained. Research into midwives and maternal health nurses revealed that many have a sound understanding of family violence but still felt that they lacked the skills to confidently ask women about family violence and respond appropriately if the women disclosed a problem.¹³ This research indicates that a good understanding of family violence may not be enough to ensure that victims receive an appropriate response. Regular training is needed to ensure that medical professionals and teachers have the skills and confidence necessary to ask the right questions and respond appropriately.

¹³ ABC Radio, (8 December 2014) Fran Kelly. *Pregnant women face increase in domestic violence*. Interview with Kathleen Baird from Griffiths University.

Finally, co-locating family violence and mainstream services, increased interagency partnerships and outreach have also enhanced links between sectors and improved the early intervention capacity of mainstream services. For example, co-locating a family violence worker at a maternal health clinic a few days a week would ensure that specialist expertise is available to women should they disclose family violence. It also creates an opportunity for the family violence worker and medical staff to share ideas and gain a greater understanding of how each sector works, increasing the opportunity for improved referrals and partnerships. Similarly, interagency partnerships based on local areas provide a good opportunity for services across a range of sectors to come together and deliver a whole-of-community response to family violence. The Regional Family Violence Partnership model has done a good job of bringing family violence services and other community services together. However, the degree to which these networks have been able to engage mainstream services such as doctors and schools has varied. The capacity of these networks could be expanded to increase their ability to engage with more mainstream services.

Recommendation 3: Family violence training should be expanded within the existing curriculum for all mainstream service professionals including doctors, nurses, midwives, maternal health nurses, mental health professionals and teachers.

Recommendation 4: Offer dedicated funding to training providers to facilitate increased professional development and partnership opportunities between mainstream and family violence services.

6. POLICE

6.1 The Current State: What needs to change

“Mostly [police] are really good. It’s really frustrating because of the systems. The individuals understand my situation, they are trying to help. But there is that much tape they have got to get through and processes they have to do. I don’t want to basically put it down to the police. I think they are doing the best job they can do under the system. But I have been to [the police station] more times than you can imagine.” Vanessa

“I went to the police station and said I needed help. I needed an intervention order. The last big incident had happened a few days before. The police response was ‘Why didn’t you call us to the incident?’ and [the police officer] said he couldn’t help me and that I needed to call the Magistrates Court and apply for an intervention order. And I was just in shock and took the number. To even make a move like that, it’s just so exhausting. You are going against everything you believe in life.” Rebecca

“The Sergeant of the police lived next door to us. He was the same. He used to bash his wife. She had black eyes and he and [my husband] were best mates. So no, I didn’t call the police. We were in a small town. I never had a positive experience with the police. I just wanted them to do something.” Mary

Almost all the women interviewed for this submission, except one who was still in refuge, had many interactions with police and been to the police station “more times than you can count”. Most of their experiences were good. Some of them were not. These women’s experiences support the experiences of our family violence services: Victoria police have dramatically improved their response to family violence, but inconsistencies still remain.

“It was a really harrowing time [after my ex was removed from the house]. The police were not very supportive during that time. [My ex] insisted in getting back into the house. He said he needed to come get things and a Senior Sergeant phoned up and bullied me, actually. He said, ‘He is alright to come and get his things’ and ‘Don’t tell me he is allowed to come in the day after you have left.’ So I gave him a date [for my ex to come get his things] and then I called Women’s Legal Service and they said ‘No, the intervention order is in place and he is not allowed to come, police supervision or not.’ And I was so scared. And I didn’t want to see him. So I called back and asked to speak to that constable but he had finished for the day. So I spoke to someone else and [cancelled the appointment]. And the original constable called me back and said ‘How dare you call up and cancel. How dare you. We had an agreement. You said this was happening. We agreed on that. You are speaking to other people.’ And I don’t know where this courage came from and it totally changed his tune, but I said – I was shaking in my boots – ‘No, you told me what I had to do and the reason I spoke to someone else is because you had finished for the day. You are bullying me.’ And he took a step back because it was me accusing him. And I don’t know where that word came from because he just totally changed.” Rebecca

6.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

The Victorian Police force have made positive strides in practice and culture in order to deliver better responses to family violence, however there is more that needs to be done. What kinds of responses should victims of family violence expect from Police? Here is what we think it should look like:

- The police response to family violence is experienced as consistently positive towards and supportive of women.
- Police officers working on the front line and on reception are trained to respond appropriately to reports of family violence and make women feel heard and believed.
- When police show up at the house they believe the woman until proven otherwise.
- Incidents are not dismissed because ‘She was drug/alcohol affected too’.

- Women are always referred to the police Family Violence Unit for follow up after an incident.
- Cases are investigated when police are called out for domestic disputes that involve a perpetrator who has previous charges of assault or a known history of violence.
- Police always remove the perpetrator from the home and keep track of him, allowing the woman to stay in the family home.
- There are housing options available for police to place male perpetrators when they have been removed from the home so the risk of an IVO breach is decreased.
- Breaches of intervention orders are attended to quickly and followed up seriously.
- Women are not seen as being aggravators to his behaviour.
- A room is available in all police stations for women to report incidents and breaches.
- When making statements to police, children are supported in another room where they are not exposed to their mother's distress.

6.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

"[The police] could have done it sensitively instead of blaming me. They made me feel like I was stupid and it was my fault. I was pregnant and had a baby."
Susan

Victoria Police have dramatically improved their practice responding to incidents of family violence over the last decade. The improved Police Code of Practice, the introduction of Family Violence Liaison Officers and the more recent creation of a Victoria Police Family Violence Command have all improved the way police respond to women, helped increase women's confidence in reporting, and raised public awareness that family violence is a serious and prevalent issue in our communities. They should be commended.

However, the unfortunate reality is that although the police response has drastically improved, it is still not perfect. Victims of family violence and staff from family violence services both report inconsistencies in the ways in which police have responded to incidents and reporting. The discrepancy in police officer responses might eventually be addressed through ongoing training and evaluation of current officers and future cadets. The Salvation Army is aware that a significant amount of work has been done to affect cultural change within Victoria Police. This work should be congratulated and actively built upon.

Notwithstanding differences between individual police officers, interviews with women also highlighted that the police response varies considerably from metropolitan Melbourne and regional areas and seems to be heavily correlated with the level of resourcing available to each police station. Family Violence Liaison Officers and Family Violence Units at police stations are valuable resources available to women experiencing family violence, but they feature only at metropolitan or large regional stations. Similarly, only large police stations are likely to have a private room for women to give statements away from children. Unfortunately, this means women living in smaller regional and rural communities are unlikely to benefit from these resources. Indeed, most of the negative comments regarding police responses came from women living in smaller and more remote communities.

Women from small communities already face significant barriers to reporting family violence due to shame and stigma, stronger gender norms, the close knit nature of relationships and fewer alternative housing options. Receiving a poor response is an added barrier to reporting that women in small communities do not need. Improved training specifically for police officers in regional areas, as well as dedicated Family Violence Liaison Officers and Units in all police stations across the state, are needed to ensure women receive a consistent response when reporting family violence.

Recommendation 5: Increase resources for regional and rural police stations to establish Family Violence Liaison Officers and Units and upgrade facilities.

7. COURTS

7.1 The Current State: What needs to change

"[The court experience] is the most emotionally exhausting and draining thing. There is justice for the perpetrators. Not for the victims." Susan

"[Court] was terrifying. Nothing prepares you for being in the witness box. I was freaking out. It was awful." Angela

"He tried to take an intervention order against me so he dragged me into court for that, which got laughed out. He dragged me into court to vary his intervention order. That got laughed out. It's still time and stress. I can't tell you how many times I have been into court for intervention orders. Then there is the Family Court. I have been in the Family Court so many times." Vanessa

Unlike feedback about police responses, which was mostly positive, feedback about the court process was consistently terrible. In the most extreme cases the court process was used as a forum for the perpetrator to continue abusing their victim. In other cases drawn out court processing times, inadequate court support, inequitable legal representation and poor responses from magistrates compounded the trauma victims had already suffered at the hands of their partners.

“To me, the perpetrators are just protected. They can do whatever they want. They can say whatever they want. They can lie as much as they want. And they are not challenged enough. I think it comes back to – because they are innocent until proven guilty – it is just way beyond extreme.” Vanessa

Delays in court hearing

“I waited 12 months to have my case heard.” Sarah

“Police have to go to the top family violence people to ask for determinations and things before they can put a charge down. Then it takes six months to go to court. Then he doesn’t turn up at court. Then it gets adjourned and adjourned and adjourned. He has got a list of things pending but he hasn’t actually been charged with anything. I have been into court that many times, it is beyond ridiculous.” Vanessa

It is no secret that the court system is overburdened. Increased reporting rates of family violence have added to the already overwhelming demands placed upon the court system. However, a number of the women interviewed have been dealing with legal issues for years after leaving their partner. This drawn out process places an incredible burden on victims of family violence and their children at a very vulnerable time when they are trying to rebuild their lives. Extended delays also reduce accountability for perpetrators. Failing to lay a charge or finalise a sentence until months after a perpetrator has committed an offence does not send a message that their actions will not be tolerated and undermines victims’ confidence that justice will be served.

Waiting at the courthouse

“I would turn up to [court] at 10 in the morning and we would be the last one out at 2:30 in the afternoon.” Vanessa

“Quite often, I used to go into court by myself. It’s very busy in [the courts.] I often got interim orders. It’s terribly busy up here [in a smaller regional court]. There is nowhere private up here. It’s very different to Melbourne. You find there is nowhere to speak in a private room.” Kathy

I knew [the court waiting area] was set up as a big room. There was no way I wanted to see [my ex]. So I called up and they told me to go to a certain floor and wait there. So I am so blessed that I didn’t have to go up and see him, sit in a room with him, all in that open area. And even where I was, it wasn’t a proper closed off, safe environment. Nothing for a little kiddie, it was like an open room where you could see others come and go and we were hiding behind a small wall. I was like ‘Oh my God, I hope he can’t see me if he is coming in to go to that floor.’ So I felt great because I knew to go up there but I didn’t feel safe. That was very harrowing sitting there. And you know we were there from 8:00am to 2:00pm in the afternoon.” Rebecca

"I arrived before lunch and the court has to have lunch so I was there for a few hours. He had paid for a barrister for the whole mention, directions and when it reached the day for the contested hearing. His barrister had a nice little room for him. I never had a room. I was in the foyer like you are at the train station. You are not even in a nice foyer at the Magistrate's Court, just plastic chairs." Angela

Women consistently brought up the fear of having to be at court all day in an open waiting area with their ex-partner. Courthouse facilities vary widely across the metropolitan area and between metropolitan and regional courthouses. Some courts have private rooms but The Salvation Army's experience is that unless a woman appears extremely distressed and is assisted by a support worker these rooms are not made readily available. Instead women are left to fend for themselves in a busy and often confronting environment where they are in constant fear of their partner.

Court Support

"I always spoke with the clerk. I was lucky to speak with the clerk. They were really good ... But the courts seem to have very little to do with any sort of support. It's mainly their processing." Kathy

"I called the magistrates court and spoke to a Clerk of Courts, fantastic young fellow. I will never forget him. He asked me what was going on, started to take my details and 10 minutes in told me stop and said 'It's too dangerous.' He told me they didn't have an open position for three weeks. He put me on hold and came back and said, 'I have just tried to pull strings and there is nothing, you need to call the police.' I said 'I have been and they told me to call you guys.' He told me, 'No you have got to go to another police station.' He said, 'I want you to say this when you call. Say, 'I am part of the community in this local council and you have a duty of care to look after me.'" And I got put through." Rebecca

"No support was offered in court." Angela

The women interviewed for this submission had varying experiences of being supported at court. One woman in particular spoke very highly of the support she received illustrating the difference support can make to a woman's overall experience. Unfortunately, the majority of women interviewed for this submission did not receive support. Access to these services largely depended on which court they attended, although it is possible that in some cases there were supports available but that women were unaware of them.

Legal Support

“It cost me too much money. I did [hire a lawyer] once because he tried to take an intervention order out against me, which the police told me later I shouldn’t have done because it cost me \$2,500 for the day and it was all just a bogus claim ... I was so nervous, even though I knew he had no grounds, I just needed representation. Because you never know what the magistrate is going to do. You never know whether they are going to feel sorry [for him], because he plays the victim and gets up there and cries and does all of this stuff and I just couldn’t risk it. But most of the other times with the orders, I have just gone in on my own and not been represented because it is just too expensive. But I am not eligible for Legal Aid because I had my own private legal advice for a while – as soon as you have that, everyone just goes ‘Off you go’. There is too much demand so I understand Legal Aid is busy and can’t work with everyone.” Vanessa

“His lawyer cost him \$1,500. My lawyer cost me \$16,000. And you know why I did it? Because he told me, ‘You leave – you are going to be nothing. I will make sure you are nothing’ I have a good [lawyer] now. She is really helping me from Legal Aid.” Sarah

“I am not entitled to Legal Aid because I own my own home - which is a new law. So I represented myself. I didn’t have representation of course, I couldn’t afford it. I had a little bit of half hour guidance from a local, she was very good.” Kathy

“Women’s Legal Services were phenomenal. I called Women’s Legal because they are a free service and they told me, ‘Make sure you get your son’s name on the order. It’s so important.’ And see I wouldn’t have known that. And the first thing my ex’s barrister said is they are happy to go with the intervention order once my son was not on it. And that was a really big decision with me. I was very out of my depth and I just stuck to my decision.” Rebecca

Access to legal support is extremely limited for women experiencing family violence. Cuts to Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid have resulted in tightened eligibility criteria for their services and many women experiencing family violence no longer qualify. However, most cannot afford to pay for a private lawyer. In circumstances where women did pay for a lawyer, they reported paying significantly more than their ex-partner. This suggests that women are either not being made aware of other, cheaper legal support options or their partner is accessing them first, making the woman ineligible for services due to a conflict of interest. In other instances, women experienced adverse legal consequences because their partner had been able to afford legal representation but they could not.

“My husband had a barrister representing him who just walked in there with all these words and tried to make me look bad ... the magistrate did the best he could do but the police weren’t really prepared, because the police were representing me. Basically I got torn to shreds. And even later, [the police and I] had a conversation and they just went, ‘I am so sorry, I don’t know what happened in there.’ Vanessa

Only a couple of women reported speaking to a duty lawyer or receiving any sort of legal advice prior to representing themselves, which suggests that this service is not readily available, not being made known to women or simply unable to assist everyone in need. Accessing legal representation was highlighted as particularly problematic in regional areas. One service in Gippsland reported that they were only able to refer women for a phone interview with a community legal service several hours away because they did not have a local service. Unfortunately feedback about this service was that the advice offered was vague and not particularly helpful for women’s specific circumstances. Unsurprisingly, the local court also did not have a support worker most days of the week, leaving women in this area completely unsupported.

Magistrates

“The magistrate when I was getting the IVO made me cry. He literally made me cry, I mean sob.” Sarah

“[The magistrates are] scary ... I can barely speak. I have actually heard some of the transcripts and you can’t even hear me talking because I will be shaking and nervous ... I have had so many different magistrates. One of the magistrates turned around and said to me, ‘Are you being vindictive?’” Vanessa

“In Melbourne, I had not an issue, the magistrates were very good ... I have good ones and not so good ones up here [in a regional town].” Kathy

“The magistrate [that heard my intervention order] was nice. Not all of them have been.” Angela

Women had mixed experiences with magistrates over the course of their involvement with the legal system, with many reporting unsatisfactory legal outcomes as a result. These women’s experiences corroborate our services’ experience that magistrates’ understanding of family violence can vary significantly resulting in gross inconsistencies in how victims are treated and how perpetrators are held to account. In many cases, these inconsistencies do not achieve justice for victims and excuse perpetrators’ behaviour. All magistrates need a solid understanding of family violence in order to make just rulings.

Family Court and Children's Court

"By the time we got involved with the Children's Court [my son] was actually in out of home care. It was unfortunate that it got to that stage, but he got so violent, and all the services I rang couldn't help. And DHS said they could bring him in with them for a month and see what they could do and in the process they said I had relinquished him and unfortunately it took me two years to get him back. And it took \$40,000 of assets I had to sell to give to the lawyers to get him back." Kathy

"I am working with the Children's Court about keeping the kids safe from him. They are really supportive." Susan

"The court system keeps saying, unless the children speak up, they can't do anything. And then when they did speak up to the family report writer, she chose to ignore it. And my children have told me they don't want to talk to anyone else. I would like the courts to consider that they are children. That they can't ... [the court] needed to realise that [the children] were being manipulated. And that [children] can't give direct answers like [adults] can." Vanessa

Not all women had significant contact with either the Family Law or Children's Courts at the time of interview. However, of the women that did, only one had anything positive to say. Consultations with services highlighted similar themes to those which were highlighted in the women's interviews. It was generally felt that magistrates in these courts do not take the evidence concerning family violence into account when making their decisions. Visitation rights are often deemed to be inappropriate given the perpetrator's history and the rights of the parents, particularly the perpetrators', are considered over the safety or even wishes of children involved. In the case of the woman and her son being taken into care, the presence of family violence resulted in the mother bearing the cost of regaining custody despite it being the father perpetrating the violence.

"The Family Law and Children's Court don't work at all. They are absolutely horrendous and I am totally disappointed in their lack of ability to care for children. They were aware of absolutely everything [about the family violence]. They chose to ignore it." Vanessa

7.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

It seems that there is much to be done before Victorian Courts are more consistently experienced as a place of justice for victims of family violence. What should we be aiming for in a court system? Here is what we think it should look like:

- All courts set aside a sufficient amount of time every week to hold a specialist Family Violence Court Division.
- All women have their case heard in a Family Violence Court Division no matter where they live in the state. Women do not wait more than four weeks to have their case heard. Once at court, the court schedule prioritises specific types of

family violence hearings so that women have an idea of when their case will be heard and do not have to wait all day.

- All courthouses have separate entrances through which victims of crime, including women experiencing family violence, can enter separate from perpetrators.
- Women experiencing family violence across the state are automatically offered access to a safe room that is equipped to accommodate children away from the perpetrator. Child care would be provided by all courts while women are physically in the court room.
- All courts have a remote video conferencing room where victims of crime can give witness instead of needing to be physically present in the same room as the perpetrator. Women experiencing family violence are automatically told about this resource upon arrival to court.
- There are enough court support workers to support all women while at court, including in all rural and regional areas. All court staff receive regular and compulsory training on how to respond to the needs of family violence victims. Support workers and duty lawyers also have common position descriptions across the state to ensure that practice is standardised. Interpreters are readily available at all courts.
- By having all family violence matters across the state heard in a Family Violence Court Division, one magistrate is able to rule in regards to family violence, family law and child protection matters to streamline the number of times that families must appear in court.
- All women experiencing family violence can see a family violence trained and qualified duty lawyer/solicitor. Victims of family violence have a right to representation in court if they want a lawyer regardless of whether they can pay or not. Women also have a right to legal support and representation during the period of litigation in regard to property and children's custody.
- All magistrates have a good understanding of the gendered nature of family violence and rule consistently. They are mandated to attend regular family violence training as part of their professional development and undergo an accreditation/review framework for competence in family violence matters.
- Lawyers who are engaged with family violence and family law must meet best practice guidelines for working with victims of family violence and undertake continuing professional development in managing the intersection of these two fields of law.
- If family law issues are not heard in a Family Violence Court Division, the Family Court recognises family violence issues when making their decision. Instances of child abuse that are addressed in the Children's Court also spark an investigation of possible related instances of family violence.
- Men are not allowed to continue their abuse by drawing out proceedings in the Family Court, perpetuating the financial abuse of women and children. If family violence is identified, the perpetrator is obligated to attend parenting courses prior to having unsupervised access to children. Rulings are based on the best outcome for women and children. They consider the impacts of exposure to family violence

on the behaviours of young people in the court system and also consider children's thoughts and wishes when deciding access and shared care.

7.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

Expanding Specialist Family Violence Courts in Victoria

"I believe the legal system has let us down. All the support in the world isn't going to change the legal system. I can cry and talk to as many people as I want and as many psychologists and whoever and most people will turn around and say 'Oh my goodness I can't believe what you are going through and I can't believe he can do that'. But he is still doing it and unless the legal system changes ..." Vanessa

"We need to get in [court] when we're battered. The magistrate needs to see what that man has just done to us!" Sarah

Victims of family violence are not getting justice through the courts. As far as they are concerned, our legal system doesn't work. Family violence is core business for most Magistrates' Courts in Australia.¹⁴ It is time that both the physical and business structures of our courts reflected the needs of all those involved with family violence.

Tools to improve the court system for victims of family violence exist, but they need to be implemented consistently across the state. Currently, women's experiences in court are too reliant on *where* they attend court and *which* magistrate presides over their case. The same support services do not exist in all areas of the city or in regional and rural areas putting women in certain areas of the state at a disadvantage. Justice should not be dependent upon where a person lives.

The Family Violence Court Division operating in Ballarat and Heidelberg and the Specialist Family Violence Service put in place in 2005¹⁵ offer good models to expand upon.¹⁶ Every court in Victoria hears cases related to family violence so every court should set aside a designated time every week to hear these cases. The amount of time set aside for family violence related issues should be adequate to ensure that cases are heard by the court in a timely manner, with no more than four weeks before your case is heard. During these designated times, matters related to family violence, but outside protection orders and criminal proceedings, could also be heard such as claims for civil and statutory compensation, child support and family law matters.

Setting aside specific times in each court to have family violence cases heard and streamlining court appearances for matters related to family violence would:

- Minimise the delay in court hearings by prioritising family violence hearings,

¹⁴ A Day, T Richardson, E Bowen & J Bernardi, (2014) Intimate partner violence in prisoners: Toward effective assessment and intervention. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*. 19:579-583.

¹⁵ <https://www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au/jurisdictions/intervention-orders/family-violence-court-programs>

¹⁶ Australian Law Reform Commission (2010) *Family Violence – A National Legal Response*. Section 32: Specialisation <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/32.%20Specialisation/expanding-specialised-family-violence-courts-australia>

- Minimise the amount of time women need to be in court on the day of their hearing by making it clear when they can expect their case to be heard,
- Make it possible to ensure that a magistrate with a good understanding of family violence presided over all family violence cases,
- Minimise the number of times women and children need to appear in court to settle other matters related to the family violence including child custody and parenting orders, and asset settlement, and
- Ensure consistent rulings across a range of matters by ensuring families appear before the same magistrate.

Recommendation 6: Expand the Family Violence Court Division model currently operating at Ballarat and Heidelberg to all courts in Victoria to ensure that women, regardless of where they live, get a magistrate well trained in family violence that has jurisdiction over the range of matters impacted by family violence.

Support in all courts

“We need more support [in the courts] because it’s already emotional. I know they have the Salvation Army workers there but maybe have some women there that have been through it but have got help for it – because it’s really emotional. It’s really bad. You feel like you are just cracking in there, especially giving IVOs.” Sarah

“If there was a community service person or someone there in a separate or private room where you could go to speak to someone at the court on the court day. I mean you are there the whole day. And you are sitting there, so I am thinking in that time you could be getting valuable information from someone in the community that is willing or able to do this.” Kathy

A key component of specialist family violence courts is access to support services. Support services exist in most courts across the state but as the women interviewed highlighted, many women are not being supported. Even in large, well-resourced courts, support staff are unable to cope with demand and cannot support everyone. Support offered in regional courts is even less adequate. In one regional area, services reported that a support worker attended their small local court from the regional hub only one day *a month*. Under these circumstances, the chance of a woman’s court appearance correlating with the day in which support is available is an unfair lottery that should not be part of our Justice system.

Support services must be increased so that every woman at court can access a support service. As highlighted by the quotes above, most women experiencing family violence are not getting assistance through Legal Aid or Community Legal Centres and cannot afford to pay for private legal representation. If women cannot access a support person either, they are forced to go to court and face the perpetrator on their own. This is unjust and a failure of the system.

“I was very fortunate because I had got there early and I had spoken to Women’s Legal Service and I knew there was a support person there. She sat with me the whole time. She went and cued up for me to hand in the forms. That was amazing because really you are alone. She was really good, you know, she stayed there right until the very end. Because you know, Women’s Legal they have lots of people to look after in one day, but she was able to have that time to be with me and help me out.” Rebecca

Currently support workers offer women practical support like filling out forms explaining court processes and emotional support that can be as simple as sitting with them while waiting. A number of women suggested that having women at court who had personal experiences of family violence would also have been helpful to talk them through the process and offer encouragement. A couple of women consulted for this submission supported this and felt that offering this type of support to women currently going through the system was empowering and gave them a way to ‘give back.’ Giving women who wish to use their experience to help other women could be a good way to empower them and help increase the level of support available in courts and throughout the system. Ways to empower and skill-up women for this work should be further explored.

Recommendation 7: Increase courts’ capacity to support victims of family violence which could include increasing staff expertise, increasing the number of support workers at court and utilising women who have personal experiences of family violence to support others.

Training for magistrates, court staff and lawyers

Having specialist family violence courts in every court in Victoria will not ensure that women and children experiencing family violence get a just outcome unless magistrates are properly trained. As illustrated by women’s quotes above, experiences with magistrates can be terrifying or supportive. Inconsistency in court hearings can significantly undermine women’s confidence in the legal system and can reduce women’s willingness to engage with the system and seek help. It is therefore absolutely critical that magistrates are trained to respond to family violence appropriately.

While having the same magistrates preside over family violence cases in their local area (as would be recommended under a Victoria Family Violence Court Division model) has several positive benefits, it makes it even more critical that the magistrate presiding has a good understanding of family violence, including the gendered nature of family violence. Unfortunately, our experience suggests that the number of magistrates with a firm understanding of family violence still remains scarce. The Salvation Army is pleased that family violence training is now being offered to all magistrates but feels that a one-off, two day course¹⁷ is not sufficient. This type of training should be part of ongoing professional development for magistrates that requires them to complete a regular refresher course. This would ensure their skills are up to date and that a culture of sensitivity and respect is built into the way magistrates work with women and children experiencing family violence.

An even more robust system would include a framework for evaluation of magistrates' engagement in family violence cases, possibly including the examination of court transcripts. This would ensure that training has been effective.

Recommendation 8: Magistrates be required to attend regular family violence training to ensure consistent and informed decisions are made regarding family violence cases.

Service consultations also highlighted the need for improved training for court staff. While many women and family violence workers could point to positive experiences with court and support staff, it was felt that this again depended too much on the individuals women spoke to. Sensitivity and understanding was not considered to be embedded in how staff responded to victims across the state and in many cases services felt that staff did not offer information or supports to women unless asked directly. In some cases, services recognised that this could be due to the busy nature of courts and the inability of staff to respond to everyone in need. However, it was felt that improved training could help to mitigate this.

A number of staff also raised concerns that the quality of support staff and duty lawyers varied considerably from court to court. For example, some women come to court after having accessed a family violence service and are more likely to have received some kind of support from that service prior to coming to court. However, other women come to court prior to accessing any service and have little knowledge of the services available to them. In such cases, duty lawyers and support staff could help link women to other services such as a family violence service, housing service or legal support. However, this doesn't always happen, as this referral capacity is not considered a standard part of the role. Standardising the role of support staff and duty lawyers to include making referrals would help to ensure that women in all courts receive similar support. It is particularly important to ensure the quality of support workers as the number of support staff are expanded to meet demand. Staff could be given a screening tool similar to CRAF to help them assess women's needs and make appropriate referrals.

¹⁷ <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/magistrates-to-receive-family-violence-training-20141126-11ucdl.html>

Recommendation 9: Require all court staff to complete regular training on how to appropriately respond to victims of family violence and the information that is to be provided.

Upgrade court facilities

“You line up in this horrendous queue in the same queue as the man who has been perpetrating. It’s just absolutely disgusting that there is no separation.”
Angela

“A private room, where you could speak to someone who could further direct you in what is going to be suitable for your specific situation ... If they had something like that in the court house somewhere; I think they would be really helpful.” Kathy

All women interviewed for this submission and all family violence services mentioned the inadequacy of courthouse buildings in helping keep women safe. Many talked about their fear of seeing their ex-partner while waiting for their case to be heard. Others spoke of the anxiety they experienced in the court room with their ex-partner.

Courthouses need to be renovated with the safety of women and children experiencing family violence in mind. Women are at heightened risk of being killed by an ex-partner immediately after they leave a relationship. Appearing at court may be one of the first times that victims and perpetrators are in the same place following separation. As Fiona Warzywoda’s tragic murder in Sunshine following a court appearance with her husband last year highlights, the risk is very real.

Our consultations produced a list of specific issues with the physical layout of courthouses:

- Women and their perpetrators must enter and exit through the same door,
- Women are forced to wait in the same open foyer as the perpetrator, sometimes for hours, before their case is heard,
- There are no private rooms available,
- There are no facilities for children.

These deficiencies in courthouses need to be rectified immediately. The most common change to courthouses mentioned by women interviewed was a desire for a private room to wait in. While The Salvation Army recognises that it may not be feasible to offer every woman experiencing family violence a private room, there should be a room for women experiencing family violence to wait that is separated and secured from the perpetrator. This room should be equipped to entertain children while waiting. Offering such a room would provide women with a secure place to wait away from the often hectic nature of the courthouse and the perpetrator. It would also help support staff and legal support services to identify victims of family violence and connect them with appropriate supports.

The issue of remote video conferencing for witnesses also arose during consultations for this submission. Currently this service is not available in all courts across the state. One woman pointed out that even at VCAT such facilities are available but they were not when she appeared at court. However, feedback from consultations suggests that even in courts where this service is available it is not commonly offered to women, unless they are extremely distressed or a support worker makes them aware of it. The power imbalance that exists within a violent relationship can make it extremely hard for women to assert themselves in court and get a just outcome. Appearing in court alongside their perpetrator also opens them up to continued belittling and intimidation while in court. This should not be allowed. Offering women access to video conferencing would help to address the power imbalance in the relationship while at court. This support should be made available in all courts across the state and should be offered to women as a matter of course when they register upon arrival.

Recommendation 10: Courthouses should be renovated to better meet the needs and ensure the safety of women experiencing family violence including: private and secure rooms for women experiencing family violence to wait in, facilities for children, separate entrances and exits, and video conferencing facilities to allow witnesses to give testimony remotely.

A right to legal representation

Only one woman interviewed for this submission qualified for Legal Aid and that was after she had spent \$16,000 on a lawyer and had to sell the family home. The rest of the women interviewed either hired a private lawyer for specific hearings until they could no longer afford to do so or went without representation. Australian legal systems are not designed for self-representation and the ability to have a fair trial is severely called into question when victims of a crime are required to face their perpetrators without representation.

Currently anyone accused of a crime has a right to Legal Aid if it is determined that they cannot afford to pay for their own counsel. However, victims of crime have no such right. This inequity serves to exacerbate the power imbalance already experienced between women experiencing family violence and their partners. Stories from the women interviewed for this submission highlight the number of ways in which victims of family violence are further disadvantaged through lack of legal representation, either by being discredited in court, bearing a disproportionate financial burden or suffering adverse legal outcomes. Victims of family violence should have a right to legal representation regardless of whether they can afford it or not. Until this is the case, the system cannot be considered to be delivering justice to victims.

Recommendation 11: Establish a right to legal representation regardless of socioeconomic circumstances to victims of family violence.

Cuts to Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres have exacerbated the already unjust nature of the legal system by further reducing women's access to legal services. At a time when the extent of family violence in Victoria and across Australia is coming to light, it is unacceptable that access to the legal support that women experiencing family violence need is being reduced. Cuts to these services have been felt most severely in regional and rural areas of the state, further disadvantaging communities who are already less likely to be able to afford private legal representation. Expanding Legal Aid and other Community Legal Centres in all regions of the state in order to meet demand should be a matter of priority.

Recommendation 12: Increase funding for Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres to enable them to work with all victims of family violence across the state who cannot afford legal representation.

8. HOUSING

8.1 The Current State: What needs to change

Homeless as a result of family violence

"The day the Salvos rang me I was erratic. I had been living in a caravan. And for your mental state when it is already not good, it's not making it any better. And it wasn't making me feel good because I just kept beating myself up thinking, 'I was buying a house six months ago. I was working.'" Sarah

"I said, 'I really need somewhere to live. I am in my car. I have a friend who has allowed me to stay for only a few days but I can't stay there.' They put me into a motel until they could work out the process. I was happy enough just to have somewhere warm and safe." Kathy

"My living situation changed dramatically. I stayed on in the house but the intervention order gave my son and me a safe, calm environment to be able to work out what the next step was. And having that opportunity to not have to flee our home and leave everything so then have nothing – no job, no money, not even a coffee cup. That space that we had – because I knew I couldn't afford the rent, but during that time I called up VCAT and spoke to the domestic violence worker who referred me to the tenancy worker, and the tenancy worker took up my case. And they were phenomenal. They were able to get the tenancy reduced because of the circumstance, because I would have been left high and dry. He has got no accountability this person. He doesn't care if his name is tarnished for renting. For me, I knew that I was going to have to find a roof...I was introduced to [a private rental] service which was amazing because it's a full time job looking for a place." Rebecca

“And they get, you know...we are the ones that leave. We have to leave our homes ... everything. We leave with nothing. They get to keep everything. They’re the ones that abuse us. And we are the ones that still have to struggle to rebuild our lives. From scratch again, after you build a home and everything.” Mary

“I don’t have family and my thing was...because people say ‘Leave, leave, leave’ and I thought ‘No.’ Why should three people leave? I had nowhere to go. I have nowhere to go. I don’t have family in this state. When the other person, who is actually inflicting the misery on people, has family to go to.” Angela

Family violence is the most common reason women and children become homeless. Having nowhere to go is one of the most common and significant barriers that women face when considering to leave a violent relationship. Lacking affordable housing is also the leading reason women return.

“The motels! It’s not the kind of environment where when you have just been bashed and tortured for a while to go and – it’s depressing. I mean it’s depressing. I got put on anti-depressants and I reckon it was probably the lowest point in my life, being there. It’s a confined space. You don’t have any cooking facilities. No washing up facilities. You are spilling water everywhere. No space ... you get frustrated! You wake up every day in that limbo that you know you have left him. You know you don’t want to go back. You don’t want to find an excuse to go back. But it’s hard. The system is so hard to leave. I can understand why women go back.” Sarah

“Well I often felt that it had to change but I went back thinking, ‘Well there really is nowhere else for me to go,’ because I had a family home and he has to find somewhere else to go and he couldn’t get anywhere else to live. He couldn’t find a rental because he had been unemployed for such a long time, he didn’t know where to turn to.” Kathy

Every woman interviewed for this submission mentioned the lack of housing as a barrier to leaving their violent relationship. Women’s housing options varied according to their circumstances. One woman was able to remain with her children in the family home with a Safe at Home response. Two women were able to access a private rental brokerage service. Unfortunately all the other women became homeless and spent significant amounts of time moving between refuge, motel crisis accommodation and transitional housing. A number of these women were still looking for permanent housing at the time of the interview.

Staying in your local area

“They moved us across town which really got me upset because my son failed year 11 for it because I couldn’t him to and from school every day. I didn’t have the funds. I told them, ‘This is his school.’ Then the social worker argues with me and says ‘Change your school.’ I said, ‘I just changed! Isn’t it enough that I have upped and moved him at 14? And he has just made a few friends!’ I was trying to keep things as good and normal as things could be during that time.” Sarah

“We stayed in a motel for 10 days. Then from there we went to another place for 5 nights. Then we went to another place for a couple of weeks and now this place where I am now. I have been here for about 4 months. It’s supposed to be temporary until they find temporary housing or transitional housing or something like that, but for now nothing has come up.” Mary

“The [private rental worker] explained what the maximum rent was that I could pay. And I didn’t want to leave my local area. I had been here for a long time and I didn’t want to isolate myself. But then rent in my local area is not cheap either so it was a full time job looking for a place.” Rebecca

Many of the women spoke of the importance of staying in their local area and not being cut off from the few connections to friends, family and the community they had. Maintaining children’s schools, friends and a sense of normalcy was of primary concern to women. However, the shortage of affordable housing options often made this difficult for women to maintain.

8.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

In this section we have seen that safe and affordable housing options are critical elements in dealing with family violence. What should we be aiming for when it comes to housing and the implications for both the victims and perpetrators of family violence? Here is what we think it should look like:

- No woman or child becomes homeless as a result of family violence.
- Women escaping family violence do not have to stay in a motel for more than a few nights while their partner is removed and locks and other security measures are taken. Women have access to crisis accommodation, or refuge as needed, no matter where they live in the state.
- Safe at Home programs are available across the state so that helping women to stay in their home and making the man leave becomes the default response from police and courts.
- Women are able to access reduced rate mortgages for a period of time to support them to retain the family home.
- If it is not safe for women to stay in the family home, they have safe and affordable housing options, including access to private rental brokerage, community and public housing, readily available no matter where they live.

- Women in violent relationships who want to leave can apply for priority public housing whilst still in the relationship.

8.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

“For the first time in 38 years I have a home. I feel like I have a home. It’s mine. I am not going to get thrown out. I am not going to get bashed here. I am not going to get hurt. I feel safe. And I feel like I can provide a safe environment for my babies, which is the most important thing for me. And I kept saying through the mental breakdown, ‘I just need a home. If I had a home, I will get better.’” Sarah

Safe at Home and Private Rental Brokerage Programs have been successful in housing women who can remain in their home or can afford private rental. Both of these programs make it easier for women to remain in their local area and maintain ties to children’s schools, work, friends and family. They also cost significantly less than housing women in crisis accommodation and transitional housing for extended periods of time. An evaluation of a Safe at Home program in the Hume region found that women’s homes could be made safe for an average of \$3,700 per property. This is compared to an average cost of \$10,200 to house women in a refuge or crisis accommodation and then transitional housing.¹⁸ The Salvation Army’s Private Rental Brokerage Program in the Inner South found that it cost an average of \$2,000 per family to help women access private rental by helping them find and apply for properties, providing references, and covering the bond and first month of rent or partially subsidising rent for up to 12 months.

Unfortunately these programs are not available in every area of the state and inadequate funding levels limit the number of women that these programs can support. For example, The Salvation Army’s Safe at Home program in the North West has been able to leverage funds from a range other sources to provide holistic safety upgrades to women’s properties including improved outdoor lighting, changed locks, safety screens, alarm systems, support to gather legal documentation regarding a property and in high risk cases a personal safety alarm for women. However, other Safe at Home programs have nowhere near the same amount of funding. In some cases, programs have as little as \$20 per property, which is not even enough to change locks. For most women, changing locks is not enough to ensure their safety and they have to leave, which pushes them into homelessness. Rising rental prices are also limiting the ability of Private Rental Brokerage Programs to house women. High housing prices and other rising costs of living such as utilities, transport, childcare and food are making it increasingly difficult for women to find housing and they are being pushed into the outer suburbs, usually far away from children’s schools, work opportunities and public transport. For women on fixed income support payments, or those working part time or in low-paying fields accessing private rental is becoming impossible.

¹⁸ Taylor, E. and Mackay, R. (2011) *Bsafe final evaluation report*. Women’s Health Goulburn North East.

These programs can keep women and their children out of the homelessness system and increase their ability to stay in their local area. However, data from our services indicates that only two to seven per cent of women accessing our services are currently able to be supported by these programs. To maximise these programs' impact they need to be funded at appropriate levels and expanded across the state.

Recommendation 13: Increase funding for Safe at Home and Private Rental Brokerage Programs to be available consistently across the state and be able to provide enough support to keep women and children out homelessness.

Despite the above programs' success at housing women and children, the reality is that some families will not be able to utilise these programs. Many women are not able to safely remain in their family home regardless of safety improvements. Others may not be able to afford their housing even if they wanted to stay. These women are not eligible for a Safe at Home response and will need to be rehoused.

Many women will also not qualify for private rental. Women accessing private rental through a private rental brokerage program cannot be housed in a property that will cost them more than 55 per cent of their income. It is not uncommon for women experiencing family violence to have experienced financial abuse. Women may lack an employment history and independent income and have no rental history or rental references. In this situation, women will not be able to afford private rental and will be pushed into homelessness. For women who are unable to access the above two programs, social housing remains their only option.

Unfortunately the supply of social housing has not kept pace with demand and wait lists, particularly for public housing, can leave women and their children in crisis or transitional housing for extended periods of time. Keeping women and children in short term accommodation for extended periods of time prevents families from being able to make plans for the future and move on with their lives. Children's school is often disrupted multiple times and women struggle to get and maintain employment or return to study. In these situations, the long-term effects of family violence are more likely to affect children later in life and women become more likely to return to their partner.

Women and children need to have a suite of affordable and safe accommodation options available to them so that families in all circumstance can quickly be housed. Rapid rehousing models are the most effective way to help families avoid the long term effects of homelessness and recover from violence. However, the housing affordability crisis in Australia is preventing this model from being effectively put into practice. If Governments are serious about helping women and children escape family violence a range of housing options, including crisis, rapid rehousing and long-term housing, need to be made available to women and children to fit their particular needs and prevent them from becoming homeless.

Recommendation 14: Invest in a range of housing options that are able to meet women and children's particular housing needs including rapid rehousing, crisis and long-term housing options.

9. SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

9.1 The Current State: What needs to change

"[Calling] is the start of the services. It's really hard. Once you speak to one [service] they can advise you to another but to get the courage to call one – and as you call one, you realise it's not as hard. And then you get advice. But you know, it's hard. You have to do it yourself. But the lines, the numbers, are there. Being referred to The Salvation Army service where you actually have that physical person and support, not just some information over a phone line. Prior to being referred and then being given the funding to take me on, everything had been me phoning, phoning, phoning ... I mean I was so out of my depth. I will never forget the day when I was interviewed by The Salvation Army and just said 'I don't know what I am doing.' I was in shock. I needed help and guidance. Through that service so much happened." Rebecca

"They gave me and my daughter somewhere safe to stay and at the time that is all I wanted ... Even that made me cry, like, how supportive and how helpful everyone was ... I think everything that we need is there. They can access counsellors or someone for [our kids] to talk to, or help us go to the school and explain to the schools what is going on. I haven't had to ask them for anything to help me with my daughter. I have had a good experience with my worker. She is, as me, probably more concerned about my child's welfare than anything else, and I think that is really good. After everything I had been through, there were actually people that were willing to help. If I had known earlier..." Mary

"I came to The Salvation Army, they helped me fill out the paper work and I got [the intervention order]. And I tell you what, that is why I am here today. I tell every single person, if it wasn't for The Salvation Army, I would still have that man in my life. And he has already done so much damage." Angela

"I attended a women's support group but it was a long way away and the fuel was expensive and I couldn't afford it." Kathy

"I am always thankful for everything but there are things the government could change. It's not services' fault. They are doing everything they can. They understand that when you are being beaten and you are down and out. There is always someone kind there and they do listen. My social worker tried to help me in so many different ways in paying my kid's sports fees. She was good, but there were other things like how it took two years of transitional housing and my son to fail year 11 because they had to put me on the opposite side [of the city] of where his school was." Sarah

While women interviewed for this submission mostly spoke positively about their experiences with specialist family violence services, it was recognised that family violence services operate in the context of a wider systemic response that can impact on women's over all experience and impact on services' ability to support them. While it is encouraging to hear that women largely feel supported, family violence services constantly feel the strain of trying to support the growing number of women reporting family violence with a limited amount of resources. As reporting rates increase, services are finding it increasingly difficult to meet demand and support women to the full extent desired.

In the last year alone, just one of The Salvation Army's family violence services received over 3,000 L17s, a 30 per cent increase from the year before, for one area of the state. Each L17 is followed up with four phone calls in an attempt to make contact with the woman affected. Responding to these L17s takes a significant amount of case workers' time, yet services receive no funding for this work. Case workers have to reduce the amount of time they spend providing case management support to respond to L17s.

Despite services' best efforts to stretch resources and respond to all women in need, services report that there is still a large number of women who are not receiving services. L17 data suggests that only 38 per cent of L17s received result in women receiving any kind of service which may include information and advice. The remaining women either are not able to be reached or refuse a service. Unfortunately, data shows that these women and their families are the most likely to be the most complex, be well known to police and involved in child protection. This means that despite huge improvements in the police response and reporting rates, specialist family violence services are still struggling to engage with and get good outcomes for the most complex families.

The time spent responding to L17s also diverts services' resources from other valuable activities such as building cross sector partnerships with other services like mental health, financial counselling, AOD, the police and child specific services. Services across the community services sector are reporting that clients' complexity is increasing and family violence services are no exception. However, the limited amount of resources available makes it difficult for services to find the time to actively build and maintain partnerships.

9.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

Specialist family violence services play a vital role in supporting women and children who have been affected by family violence. However, the gap between resources available and demand being experienced is not allowing these services to do all that they should. What would specialist family violence services look like if they were fully funded to meet presenting needs? Here are some ideas:

- Family violence services are funded to hire enough staff to respond to all L17 calls without having to take resources from other services like case management.
- Women can be supported for as long as they need.

- Specialist family violence workers are in partnership with housing, legal, Centrelink, AOD and mental health services, financial counselling and police. Co-locating workers from specialist sectors is common, particularly between housing and legal services, to ensure that women in each service get good advice, referrals and the holistic support they need.
- Family violence services hubs are resourced with specialists to provide women with all the support they require to leave including accessing intervention orders, property settlement, and children’s custody and litigation.
- Supports are available for debt incurred during the relationship. Services such as utility companies and Vic Roads have staff trained in responding to victims of family violence and policies and procedures for supporting women.
- Women from rural and regional areas have equal access and availability of services and programs.
- Programs and supports for families of CALD backgrounds are readily available. Female interpreters are easy to access and are trained in family violence.
- There are crisis options available for pets to be safe and secure so that women are able to leave the violence and know their pet is safe.
- Self-development opportunities, including volunteering and support groups, are available to women affected by family violence particularly in regional and rural areas.
- Greater financial assistance including financial counselling is available to women and children who leave abusive relationships.

9.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

“We need counselling, especially for us women. Because one day you are like this, the next day you are like that. You are petrified. And you are petrified of your next step. If you have someone that is going to say, ‘You might go down. This might happen. You are going to find it hard, because of course it’s hard.’ That would be helpful. It’s fearful living a life of getting bashed every day or whenever they feel like losing their shit. It’s more fearful to leave. So you really need that support and that extra person saying you are doing the right thing ... giving you that reassurance that ‘You can do it. It’s possible.’” Sarah

The most common support asked for from family violence services was more counselling. While counselling is often provided through family violence services, this is usually time-limited and does not always meet women’s needs. Some women, including several women interviewed for this submission, accessed a family violence service for the first time after decades of violence. Recovering from this kind of sustained abuse takes time and women should have access to this support for as long as they need including throughout their crisis, post-crisis, and recovery responses.

The increased number of L17 faxback reports from police is limiting services' ability to provide this type of sustained support. Improved practice on the part of police and courts, improved community attitudes and more affordable housing will all help women escape family violence. However, if the services are not there to help women when they leave, they will continue to struggle to rebuild their lives.

Increased resources would help services bridge the gap between the number of women police visit in response to family violence incidents and the number of women actively engaged in a family violence service. Taskforce Alexis in the South Eastern suburbs is a new partnership model between police and a Salvation Army family violence service that is dedicated to reducing this gap by embedding a family violence worker with the family violence police unit. Having this family violence worker actively involved in the team means they can respond to incidents, share information and actively participate in decision making with the police about the best response for families. By bringing a family violence worker closer to the interaction between families and police, the risk that families will fall through the cracks of the L17 referral system is reduced. While this model does not replace the need for the L17 system, it does enhance the system's ability to engage families that are currently difficult to reach. It is currently considered best practice between police and family violence services and should be actively expanded.

Recommendation 15: Fully fund family violence services to meet demand, including responding to L17 faxback reports and providing case management support.

Recommendation 16: Expand the Alexis Taskforce model allowing family violence services to embed an extra worker in police units across the state.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD and Women with Disabilities

Women interviewed for this submission were not asked to identify their race or cultural background. However, based on research and our own practice experience we know that women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities are at increased risk of experiencing family violence.

Women from these groups do not experience an increased risk of family violence because their communities or cultures are more violent than others. Their increased risk of violence is a result of increased levels of structural inequalities and discrimination, such as the effects of colonisation, racism and exclusion that, combined with wider social gender inequity and power imbalances, increase women's vulnerability and isolation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have long been over represented in all areas of the community services system, including family violence services, and are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence.¹⁹ Yet many services continue to find it difficult to engage with these communities due to distinctive cultural practices, family structures and a historic distrust of services. In addition, increasing refugee and other CALD communities are resulting in an increase in CALD women presenting to family violence services which creates new and unique challenges for services.

Additional resources are needed to work with these groups of women. Increased cultural training and opportunities to link with Aboriginal services are needed to enhance family violence services' ability to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Similarly, family violence services need increased training and resources to enable staff to work with CALD women who often speak little or no English, need interpreters, are socially and culturally isolated and have outstanding immigration issues.

Recommendation 17: Resource family violence services to increase training on how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and make improved links with local Aboriginal communities and services.

Recommendation 18: Resource services with brokerage for the extra supports needed for CALD women, including interpreters and improved links with immigration lawyers and culturally specific services.

Research also demonstrates that women with disabilities are another subgroup of women who are at increased risk of experiencing family violence. Over one third of women with disabilities experience some form of intimate partner violence and more than 70 per cent have been victims of sexual violence at some time in their life.²⁰ However, the nature of their disability makes this group of women very difficult to engage. Many women with disabilities are dependent on the perpetrators of family violence for their care and have limited capacity to make changes to their circumstances or contact services for help. More research and service innovation needs to be done to explore how family violence services could better engage this group of women.

Various levels and types of disability also have significant implications for the level of support needed from family violence services and raises questions about the appropriateness of traditional family violence responses when working with women with disabilities. Unique intersections between family violence, institutional abuse and structural barriers to independence²¹ can make it difficult for services to respond. Services need ongoing support to work in this area and further explore how to better work with this unique population of women.

¹⁹ Productivity Commission (2014) *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators*.

²⁰ VCOSS *Budget Submission 2015*.

²¹ Women with Disabilities Australia (2015) *Preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities: Integrating a human rights perspective*.

Recommendation 19: Support family violence services to explore how to improve engagement with women with disabilities recognising the unique circumstances that women with disabilities face.

10. CHILDREN

10.1 The Current State: What needs to change

The catalyst to leave

“My children drive me. It’s for me and for them.” Susan

“My daughter was young. I had to protect her. I had to show her that she is never to accept what I accepted from him for years.” Angela

“You hope that being a family unit is going to be the best thing for them but once you realise it’s not going to stop, this family violence, if you keep going back and the situation is not changing ...” Kathy

“When my youngest was two months old, he started a massive fight with me and I knew it straight away. I was like, ‘uh oh’. So we were fighting and he started really yelling and stuff and I told him to be quiet because I had three under three. He deliberately woke my youngest up and I was like, ‘How can you do that? He is 8 weeks old.’ I started to realise then that maybe this was family violence.” Sarah

“I wasn’t quite ready [to leave], but I was really going into protective mode for my son. I realised ‘This may work, it may not. But I really need to start [making plans to go]’...That’s when I started making some calls.” Rebecca

“What triggered me to notice [the violence] was his behaviour towards the children. He was treating me badly but I didn’t, I guess, identify that and do anything until I saw how he treated our children and then I realised that I wasn’t in a good situation. [I decided something had to change] when my children were continually crying and scared of him and didn’t want to be alone with him.” Vanessa

“He just wanted [our daughter] to sit there and do nothing. And then she started to answer back and speak up for herself. And then he started to smack her, but smack her where he left bruises. So I came home and they were fighting and she goes, ‘But mum, I didn’t do anything. I just said the truth’. And I said, ‘I know, but sometimes ... just, when I am not here, don’t say anything’. And he went to work that night and I packed up the car and we left.” Mary

All of the women interviewed for this submission spoke about their children and the need to protect them being a driving force in their decision to leave their partner. Several women described the extent to which they had come to accept their partner's behaviour towards them but when seeing it directed at their children realised that something was wrong and had to change. Many spoke of the need to show their children, particularly their daughters, that their partner's behaviour was not acceptable.

The effects of family violence on children

"The worst thing is, we go through it but our babies are watching. They are feeling. They know. They know. And it doesn't matter what age ... they know when there is not something right in the environment." Sarah

"My son went through an awful lot. We all did. It was like grieving, it was an awful situation. I wouldn't want anyone to go through that again. My daughter became quite withdrawn in her early years. And she is very reserved about who she will speak to for counselling. She did do counselling in the early years but lately I am going to try to have to coax her." Kathy

"And after [the violence], you try to talk to your daughter and tell her if something [happens], like now ... scream or run to the police or ring the police. And she is like, 'Well what are they going to do? They will tell dad.' You know what I mean? She is scared the police will tell her dad." Mary

"My daughter's depression is worse again and she has just dropped out of something. And here I am paying out thousands in legal bills to keep this man out of the house who at the end was trying to get his son to assault him and bait him ... it's just ... He is damaging his own kids so much." Angela

All the women spoke about the effects family violence had on their children. Several of the women spoke about their families being torn apart. Women spoke about the effects of violence continuing to be realised in their children even years after having left. One woman spoke repeatedly of the guilt she felt and the need to apologise to her children for not realising she was experiencing family violence earlier.

"Their mental health has been impacted on so badly. It's really hard for me trying to hold down a job and going home every day to this. When your kids tell you that they have suicidal thoughts ... I just used to get up in the morning and hope that neither of them had self-harmed. In my work place I would deliberately sit with people that I don't mix with socially so that I wouldn't really talk about my stuff. And I would hear normal conversations that I knew were normal. And I just wouldn't really get involved in them and I would think 'I just got up and all I am hoping is that my kids are alive.' And that is what I was thinking for months. And I did whatever I could to try to keep my kids alive and safe." Angela

"The whole family has been torn apart, even the siblings. My daughter thought for a while that it was ok for her dad to hit me. Until I left and said to her, 'It's illegal!'" Sarah

Intergenerational Effects

"My oldest daughter is now with an abusive person. She has left thank God. But she keeps thinking she is going to go back. But at the moment I have been spending a lot of time trying to talk her out of that. I feel like if I had of been stronger and left earlier when she was younger, maybe she wouldn't have stayed when she saw what was going on. She would have known not to stay. I don't know. It's hard to break the cycle I think." Mary

"My oldest son is hyper alert and anxious and he is starting to mimic his dad's behaviour. He takes out his frustration on his sisters." Susan

"I had a recent incident with my 10 year old son being violent and had to call the police. The police response was good. They were able to go through it with him so he was able to understand. He had a history of being violent ... throwing things. They came pretty quickly, about 15 minutes. I was very happy about the police response and it has changed my son's behaviour. Even his dad has come on board." Kathy

A number of women highlighted the intergenerational effects of family violence, expressing concerns for their children's relationships and behaviours. One woman was anxious that boys might grow up to use violence like their father. Women also brought up intergenerational violence in regards to their partners' past.

"You know [my ex-husband] had family violence in his own home growing up. You see? For him it was no different really. He himself was quite severely reprimanded by his dad." Kathy

"He had grown up in a household with domestic violence. So for years I would excuse his behaviour because I kept saying well it wasn't as bad as his father's." Angela

"His father was very abusive to his mother. And I would say, 'Don't you see the similarities?' and that would get him really angry. He said that he has worked really hard not to be like his father. But, he was exactly like his father." Mary

Two of the women spoke about their own experiences of growing up with family violence as well.

"I tried to talk to my mum about it once. And she was more or less like 'That is how it is.' My dad was the same. He was an alcoholic and a violent drunk. And she put up with it. And I think I thought of that, and I thought ... well, I don't want my girls to think it's OK like I did." Mary

Women's description of violent behaviours being passed down from generation to generation highlights the failure of the system to adequately support children who experienced violence while growing up and the effects of that failure on future generations. Experiencing violence in childhood does not excuse the use of violence later in life. Indeed, many people who experience violence in childhood never become violent as adults. However, the women's quotes above do highlight the increased risk of using violent behaviour in adulthood if violence is experienced as a child and not properly addressed, supported and healed. Helping children recover from family violence is an important task for services when working with women and children.

10.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

Having recognised the potential for family violence to impact future generations, the need to invest in better protective and therapeutic responses for children becomes increasingly clear. What would that investment look like and what would it hope to achieve? Here are some of the things we think should be considered:

- We live in a community where it was never acceptable for a child to witness or experience family violence.
- Trained children's workers are available across the state to work with all children and teenagers on the impacts of family violence related trauma.
- Through these children's workers, children experiencing family violence are offered child specific counselling and support. If needed, children's counsellors are available to follow up with children over time and address trauma issues and PTSD.
- Children of all ages can also access specialist camps that address trauma, loss and grief issues as well as a range of therapeutic programs like art and music therapy, groups, and social opportunities and individual case planning if needed. Access to these services is equitable across the state, including regional and rural areas.
- Children's needs are considered and able to be accommodated when working with families experiencing family violence including: not being moved out of their communities and being able to stay in the same school.
- Schools have a good understanding of the impacts of family violence on children such as disruptions in attendance and coursework and associated behavioural issues. Childcare and after-school care are readily available to children including in rural/regional areas.

10.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

“My youngest sees a doctor, one of my doctors, that she talks to and my support worker here has been to places with her so she has someone to talk to. Because there are things that I know she wouldn’t be comfortable talking to me about. And she needs to be able to do that. She needs to be able to say how she feels.” Mary

“My son was offered support through a local youth service. He got a youth worker and she helped him enrol in TAFE. But she really couldn’t do much because the funds were cut there once again.” Sarah

Currently family violence services are only funded to work with women experiencing family violence and not with accompanying children. However, as the women’s interviews and a significant body of research prove,²² children and young people are significantly affected by family violence and are at risk of developing mental health issues and behavioural disorders. Many of these children do not meet the threshold for support through ChildFIRST or involvement with Child Protection but that does not mean they do not need support.

Family violence services do their best to work with children knowing that they need support. However, family violence support workers may not have specific training in child development and already overburdened services struggle to find the additional resources needed to work specifically with children and young people.

Salvation Army family violence services work with an average of just over 800 children every year making the demand for child specific services and support within family violence services substantial. Research into the use of therapeutic responses with children affected by family violence²³ and children in out-of-home care²⁴ has demonstrated that therapeutic support can help vulnerable children and young people recover from violence and trauma. Embedding child-specific, therapeutic services in family violence services would help children affected by family violence recover from trauma and mitigate the risk of intergenerational violence and increased risk of mental health and behavioural issues.

Recommendation 20: Fund all family violence services to provide specialised services to children of all ages who have been affected by family violence.

²² Campo, Monica et al (2014) Australian Institute of Family Studies. *Children affected by domestic and family violence*.

²³ Eastern Metropolitan Region Family Violence Partnership. *Safe and Secure: A trauma informed practice guide for understanding and responding to children and young people affected by family violence*.

²⁴ Frederico, M., Long M., McNamara, P., McPherson, L., Rose, R., and Gilbert, K. (2012) *The Circle Program: an Evaluation of a therapeutic approach to Foster Care*. Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, Australia

11. WORK

11.1 The Current State: What needs to change

“Work knew about it. My boss was really good. He thought I was an idiot for staying but he gave me a lot of leeway because he knew my partner from footy and he offered to have me go stay at his house. He told me that it’s cowardly for a man to hit a woman. If he really loved you, he would not hit you. He said to me, ‘I want you to go and ask him, if someone was to go and give you a black eye what would he do to them? And why isn’t he doing that to himself?’” Sarah

“I am [working] now, but I wasn’t ... I was working for myself. My ex-husband didn’t help once we had the children so I had to sell my business so that I could look after them.” Vanessa

“That’s another big stress as well, the idea of work finding out what was going on. I thought it would be detrimental to my career. Even now, because I am from the private sector, I get one year [of maternity leave]. But a second year is really dependent on your work place and at this stage I had lost all sort of esteem. I work in a very male dominated industry and they have approved a second year which is a weight off my shoulders because there is no way I wanted them to know why I needed a second year. Unfortunately, that kind of private sector environment would be ‘Oh there goes so and so, that loopy ...’ It’s terrible. If I wanted any career advancement it wouldn’t happen so it was important to protect that.” Rebecca

“I couldn’t keep a job. One work started to know [about the violence]. They tried to be helpful but [my ex-partner pressured me] to leave because I actually enjoyed going to work. It was only three days a week but I loved it, to get out of the house and talk to people and meet people and talk to customers. But because I liked it, I had to quit. I wasn’t allowed to work anymore. I was getting accused of having an affair at work or ... things like that.” Mary

“I have said to people [at work], I think I am going to have to go away for a week. It’s this ongoing thing. I said to [my daughter] about a month ago, if your father had died, I would have been given a week off work or something. I haven’t had any time off apart from one day after the first court case because there was a special event involving [my daughter]. But, you know, I can’t just take a day off without planning ahead. I have to go and plan in detail and leave the plans for someone else so I can go to court which is very, very stressful.” Angela

Many of the women interviewed for this submission discussed the impact family violence had on their ability to work. Unfortunately, the majority of women had not been able to remain in the work place due to family violence which not only increased women's isolation and contributed to keeping the violence hidden, but also created additional barriers to them leaving. As many women explained, they had no money and nowhere to go. Several women had not been able to participate in the workforce for some time and expressed their concern about how they would care for their children if they left their partner. Helping women stay in, and re-enter, the work force is essential to enabling women to escape violence, rebuild their lives and care for their children.

11.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

Workplace reforms are an essential part of the cultural and structural change needed to build a better future for women who have experienced family violence. This isn't just about employers being more compassionate but in many cases, it is about the fundamental social inequities that result in women earning less on average and having less career opportunities than men. Here are some of the changes that would make a difference:

- Women earn as much money and are offered the same opportunities as men in the same jobs and with the same skillsets.
- Work places are understanding and supportive of women experiencing violence. All work places have a Safe at Home, Safe at Work policy which offers specialist leave and provides ongoing counselling and support through an Employee Assistance Program.
- Women can access training and development programs such as TAFE courses, across the state, at reduced cost after leaving abusive relationships to help them gain the skills needed to re-enter the workforce and become independent.

11.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

"It's always easier to get a job when you have a job, you know. It's just the way it is. So whether I want to do that role or not, it's there. And then when I go back to it I am already reassessing. I feel like that part of my life has changed so much. But the job is there and that is most important. You know, there are fabulously qualified women but they have been on maternity leave and unfortunately their role wasn't held for them and they have to go out and apply for work and it's just so hard." Rebecca

Approximately two thirds of women who experience family violence are in paid employment.²⁵

²⁵ McFerrea, Ludo. (2011) University of New South Wales, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. *Safe at Home, Safe at Work? National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey.* <https://www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au/research>

Maintaining employment is a key pathway to economic independence for women leaving a violent relationship. Evidence shows that the employment history of women in family violence is more disrupted, often resulting in lower incomes, more frequent job changes and with a greater likelihood of being casual and part time.²⁶ The disruption to their careers makes women more vulnerable to poverty after leaving a violent relationship. The heightened risk of poverty, and associated risks of becoming homeless and not being able to care for their children, increase the likelihood that women will return to their violent partner.

Workplaces can also be settings where women continue to experience family violence. A 2011 survey²⁷ of 3,600 union members across the country found that 30 per cent of respondents had personally experienced family violence. Of those, nearly half reported that family violence had affected their capacity to get to work either due to physical injury or restraint, hiding keys, or failure to care for children. Nearly one in five respondents had also experienced family violence directly in the workplace, in the form of abusive phone calls and emails or their partner physically following them to work.

It is imperative that workplaces are safe environments for women to disclose family violence and that employers and peers are able to sensitively and flexibly respond.

Even after a woman has left a violent relationship, workplaces can remain dangerous places for women. Regular work schedules mean that work may be the only place that perpetrators know when and where women will be, making it likely that if they try to make contact, it will be while she is going to or leaving work. The 2011 survey also found that over a third of respondents said they had reported the violence to the police and a quarter had obtained a protection order. However, less than half had included their workplace in that order. This increases the likelihood that perpetrators of violence will attempt to contact their partner while at work, so it is important for women to be able to work with their employer to manage their safety.

A number of workplaces in Australia have adopted Safe at Home, Safe at Work policies designed to support women experiencing family violence and help them to manage their safety while at work. Over 550 work places²⁸ including major banks, unions, large retailers, airlines and a number of local councils and not for profits now have Safe at Home, Safe at Work policies for employees. The Salvation Army is proud to be one of these organisations and pleased to note that the introduction of this policy has been warmly received by staff.

²⁶ Domestic Violence Workplace Rights and Entitlements Project. (2011a) *Workplace bulletin* (Winter 2011). Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of New South Wales.

²⁷ McFerran, L. (2011) *National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey*. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse UNSW, located at <http://www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au/research>

²⁸ <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/workplace-costs-of-domestic-violence-in-focus-under-safe-at-home-safe-at-work-20150503-1my5cy.html>

Safe at Home, Safe at Work policies include provisions such as protection from discrimination due to their disclosure or experience of family violence, special leave for victims of family violence to care for children or attend court, flexible work arrangements and referral capacity to counselling and specialist family violence services. Safety planning for women while at work is another important component of a Safe at Home, Safe at Work policy. Safety plans may include changing emails, telephone numbers and, where required, work locations or schedules. They may also include auto directing emails from perpetrators to a special email to help collect evidence and accompanying women to their cars when coming to and leaving work.

Reviews of Safe at Home, Safe at Work policies have found that these policies are remarkably cost effective. Family violence presents a major cost to employers in terms of lost productivity, excessive and/or repeated absenteeism, staff turnover, staff replacement and retraining costs. Access Economic reports that the annual cost of lost productivity due to family violence for Australian businesses in 2002-03 was \$484 million.²⁹ Comparatively, Safe at Home, Safe at Work policies results in limited financial impact on organisations.³⁰

The Salvation Army would like to see all employers adopt a Safe at Home, Safe at Work policy as part of the National Employment Standards to support women experiencing family violence to maintain their employment and income. However, in the absence of a national policy, The Salvation Army encourages the Victorian Government to lead the way in developing supportive workplaces and offer a Safe at Home, Safe at Work policy to all Government employees.

Recommendation 21: The Victorian Government implement a Safe at Home, Safe at Work policy for all public servants to support women experiencing family violence to maintain employment in the Government sector.

12. MEN

12.1 The Current State: What needs to change

Why do you think he thought it was ok to treat you that way?

“It makes no sense to me. There are two possible options. One is that he just hates my guts and wants revenge. But I don’t think it is that because it has been too long. He now sees his children and has everything he says he wanted and he is still doing it. I think it is mental health. I think he actually really believes the lies that he tells and I think he actually really believes that he is this victim that he is trying to betray himself as. And he thinks that by treating me this way, I deserve it or something. That is the only think I can, logically, come up with.” Vanessa

²⁹ Access Economics (2004) *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy, Report for the Australian Government’s Office of the Status of Women*

³⁰ Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. *Why Domestic Violence Entitlements Make Economic Sense: The Economic Costs of Domestic Violence on the Workplace* <https://www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au/research>

“His words were, ‘I am pushing his buttons.’ ‘I am making him get upset and angry to the point where he loses his cool.’ That’s what he says.” Kathy

“My ex-husband has a very high self-opinion of himself. He thinks he is vastly intellectual, vastly more intellectual to most of the people on the planet. He thought it was ok because of his sense of entitlement given from both of his parents. Male entitlement and first and specifically, his entitlement. Whereas my thing was, the world doesn’t owe you anything.” Angela

“It’s his mentality and the way he was raised. He can do what he wants. It’s ok. He doesn’t have to answer to anyone. He believed he owned me. He still believes it.” Susan

“They think that you are theirs, like property. And, you know, they say they love you. They can’t love you. It’s more, you know, I couldn’t think of hurting someone I love. I don’t know why they think [it’s ok to treat us that way] ... if we knew why maybe we could help them.” Mary

Amid the realities of a broken legal system, under resourced community support services and stigmatising community attitudes about what family violence is and who is at fault, is the overarching question: Why do men believe it is ok to be violent? The answers from the women we interviewed reveal some of the excuses that men give for being violent, including being provoked to the point of losing control and the notion that some men appear to think that they are entitled to treat women however they want.

The gendered nature of family violence suggests that this problem cannot only be blamed upon individuals. Just as each perpetrator must take personal responsibility for their own actions, as a society we also need to ask collective questions about why so many men continue to act in these ways. To the degree that violence against women can be explained as part of a continuum of inequities and gendered power imbalances in our community, we all share a social responsibility for making change happen.

Men’s Behavioural Change Programs

“He did go to a men’s behavioural change program apparently. It didn’t help. He’s not changed. I can tell by his talking and the way he is. He’s not changed.” Sarah

“He doesn’t think he has a problem. So the only reason he would attend something like [a behavioural change program] is if it was court ordered.” Rebecca

“No [I don’t think men’s behavioural change programs would work], because he didn’t think he was doing anything wrong. [He thinks] if I had just shut up and shut my mouth and done what I was told it wouldn’t have happened. So it was my fault, not his.” Mary

“He was referred to a behavioural change program. It didn’t work.” Susan

“The barrister got him off [being referred to a men’s behavioural change program].” Angela

Several of the women interviewed didn’t know if their partner had attended a Men’s Behavioural Change Program (MBCP). Others thought their partner had been referred to one but doubted he actually attended. All of the women said that even if their partner did attend, it didn’t change anything.

Comments about the effectiveness of MBCPs from the women interviewed raise some concerns. Indeed evidence of MBCPs’ effectiveness is mixed and in many ways remains inconclusive.³¹ As several of the women interviewed put it, “How do you work with someone who doesn’t think they have a problem?”. However, general consensus about MBCP’s is that they were only ever designed to be one part of an integrated community response to family violence.³² When used as a tool within an effective system response that enforces perpetrator accountability, some men, at least, can find participation in a MBCP a meaningful experience.

Perpetrator Accountability: Respecting Intervention Violence Orders (IVOs)

“There was an incident when he breached the IVO six months after it was on. The police took 45 minutes to arrive that night because as far as they were concerned he had been and, as usual, gone. Every time! I mean, I have got so many statements in this folder. I went down to the police station. How many breaches? And that man – after six breaches and a bashing of a 16 year old daughter – he still walked free. He still walked free! ... Because there ‘wasn’t enough evidence’ and he still didn’t get locked up in the end. Please explain. A couple of little fines; it’s disgusting.” Sarah

“The [police] didn’t turn up until after everyone had left because it took four to six hours to respond to the call ... He has been fined \$500 for breaching an intervention order.” Vanessa

“I have had eight intervention orders. He respected them to a point, yes, most of them. Well, you know, it’s debatable. There are so many metres you can be within and, you know, there are so many ‘coincidences’, so stretching a little bit but not going so far as to go into the family home.” Kathy

“He breached interim intervention orders constantly. They responded and remanded him for two weeks. Then he got a community corrections order for eight months. I finally got a full exclusion order for two years but he keeps breaching it. He has been arrested and remanded but he is getting out soon. It’s a worrying time. I have moved, reported it. I am trying to get on with my life.” Susan

“[He respects the IVO] within the letter of the law, yes. In the spirit of the law, most certainly not. He went right along the edge [of the IVO].” Angela

³¹ Laing, Lesley. (2003) Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. “What is the evidence for the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes?”

³² RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice (2015) *Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing Perpetrators of family violence into view*. P 34

The regular breaching of intervention orders was a consistent theme among the women interviewed. Many women spoke of the frustration they faced that IVO breaches were never followed up and lamented the number of times they had been to police stations to make statements and to court to try to enforce the IVO. Even when police responded to breaches, women felt the consequences were either lacking completely or insufficient. The interviews with women consistently demonstrated that the responsibility for reporting and enforcing IVO breaches fell entirely upon the victims of family violence and were either not supported or were actively undermined by the legal system.

The inability of police and the court system to make perpetrators accountable for a criminal offence is unacceptable. The failure to enact consequences for men who abuse their partner and continuously breach intervention orders sends the message to men that their behaviour is accepted, reinforces the power imbalance in the relationship and perpetuates the violence. If the police and courts cannot demonstrate through enforcement of the law that family violence is unacceptable and that perpetrators of family violence will be held accountable for their actions, no amount of community awareness campaigns, education or men's behavioural change programs will ever end men's violence against women.

Child Support

"He pays child support when he feels like it. He lies to child support about how much income he earns." Vanessa

"He pays \$13 a fortnight in child support because he won't work." Sarah

Out of the seven women interviewed for this submission, only one said that her ex-partner regularly paid child support. Two, quoted above, said their ex-partners paid child support when they wanted. The remaining four women received no child support from their partners. Most said that it was simply not worth the emotional and legal fight to try to get their partners to pay. As one woman put it, 'He is costing me money!'

The failure of the courts to make men pay the appropriate amount of child support is another demonstration of the system failing to enforce perpetrator accountability and perpetrating the financial vulnerability of victims.

12.2 A Better Future: A vision of change

A frequent frustration with our existing legal system is its apparent incapacity to hold perpetrators of family violence to be fully accountable for their actions. What would need to happen for this to change? Here's what we think a better system would look like:

- Initial contact with the police and court system starts an active monitoring and engagement process with men over their behaviour.
- Men are removed from the family home immediately following an incidence of family violence. Housing is available to men when they are removed from the

home. This allows police to keep track of men and make sure that services can engage with men about their behaviour.

- Police respond quickly to reports of IVO breaches. Men appear before court within four weeks of having breached an IVO.
- Men are referred to a men’s behavioural change program and other supports such as mental health or addiction services within two to three weeks of having contact with police.
- Men receive legal support and advice which reinforces that their behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated by the court.
- Bail conditions are used to engage men in behavioural change and other health support programs and allow courts to monitor men’s behaviour.
- Family violence cases are heard by the same magistrate, ensuring that magistrates understand the history of a man’s behaviour and enforces consequences accordingly, including prompt and certain consequences for breaching an IVO or failing to complete a men’s behavioural change program.
- A suite of stepped-up punishments and consequences are available for magistrates to employ with men who breach their IVO, only resorting to incarceration as a last resort. This recognises that jail is not an ideal environment for men to learn to be less violent.

12.3 How To Get There: A plan for change

“The people that are breaking the orders have to be answerable to it. He won’t bring the children home when he is supposed to bring them home. If I call the police and if it is not someone I already know, I have to explain the situation to them. There should be some way of tagging someone to show that this is repeatedly happening. I shouldn’t have to explain it every time. They will ring him and he will say he just forgot to bring them home. They shouldn’t be allowed to get away with lousy excuses like, ‘I forgot’ over and over again. And they shouldn’t be allowed to interpret orders and rules the way they want it to be. Because my ex-husband is getting away with everything he wants to do just by saying ‘But I read this order this way, but I believed this ...’ I understand that people read orders wrong and people make mistakes. However, you can’t continually do that. You can’t have someone with a past like my ex-husband who is repeating things and then just say, ‘Oh I didn’t understand that.’” Vanessa

“We need to toughen up [as a society]. There are so many laws that could be changed to help us women ... I believe that they should be locked up for at least the first 24-48 hours to calm down and think about what you have just done to your family. Not just your wife, your family.” Sarah

“We need to look at the cause. You know, these men don’t think they have a problem. So that is hard. I sometimes think, how can you be proactive with a group of people who don’t recognise that there is an issue and not accountable?” Rebecca

Recent research suggests that the main barrier to changing men's behaviour is that the legal system currently does not hold men accountable for their actions. It is not, therefore, that MBCP's are ineffective per se, but rather that the rest of the legal system is continuously undermining the message that MBCPs are trying to send to perpetrators: that their use of family violence is unacceptable.

Research into the effectiveness of MBCPs suggests that these programs are the most effective when:

- Men are intensely engaged with MBCPs within two to three weeks of their first interaction with police, when men are most likely to feel remorse, reflect on their actions and complete the course,³³
- MBCPs are attached to a swift and certain criminal justice response for failing to comply with an IVO or a condition of bail, and
- MBCPs actively interact with courts to report back on men's attendance and compliance with court conditions.³⁴

Conversely if court hearings are extensively delayed and consequences for their actions are not enforced, perpetrators can come to feel vindicated in their belief that they are above the law.³⁵

"Make people accountable. I don't know what else to say. If people just keep getting a smack on the wrist and doing the wrong things, what message is that sending? You are not going to stop it if you don't have a consequence or held accountable. And don't let them just keep doing it over and over again. How many chances to people have to have? Especially when they are showing they are doing the same things. If someone can't be responsible for their actions you have to stop them from doing it." Vanessa

³³ RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice (2015) *Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing Perpetrators of family violence into view*. P 34

³⁴ Ibid P 38

³⁵ Ibid p 39

Relationships between Victoria Police and community support services will need to be continuously improved to ensure that women, children and men are appropriately supported and referred. The Salvation Army feels strongly that ensuring women and children's safety should remain police's primary priority. However, initial contact with police does provide an opportunity for men to be actively linked into support services. These links could be fostered through increasing collaboration between community services and police. As part of Taskforce Alexis, the partnership between the police and the family violence worker has not only increased the understanding between the two services and enhanced referral capacity for women and children through the L17 faxback process, but has also increased the family violence service sector's capacity to work with men. Embedding a family violence worker in the police response increases the ability of services to engage men immediately after police contact when they are most likely to be open to support. The Salvation Army feels that this model could be expanded across the state between family violence services and men's behavioural change programs to help link victims and perpetrators of family violence into the necessary supports.

Engagement with police and subsequent referrals to support services needs to be quickly reinforced by the court system. Implementing specialist family violence courts in all courts across the state, as previously recommended in this paper, would help ensure that a timely and certain response would be garnered from the court. Having perpetrators appear in a specialist family violence court, before the same magistrate, would allow courts to recognise and understand perpetrators' actions and make appropriate decisions to mitigate their behaviour and keep women and children safe. It would also allow magistrates to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions and reinforce that their behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Finally, bringing men promptly before a court that has jurisdiction over multiple matters related to family violence, including family law matters such as parental responsibilities and child support, would make it clear to men that failure to comply with IVOs and other court orders can and will be considered when making determinations in other matters.

Increased referrals to support services for perpetrators of family violence and an increase in the incentives to attend will have a dramatic effect on the demand placed on MBCPs. Currently, MBCPs get a referral for every L17 faxback sent to family violence services following a police call out. MBCPs are severely underfunded to meet this demand and already have long wait times to access these programs. Wait lists inherently mean that opportunities to work with men will be lost as many men will lose their motivation to participate and become lost in the system. MBCPs need to be considered a critical part of an overall systemic response to family violence and perpetrator accountability. For this part of the system to function properly it needs to be funded according to demand.

Recommendation 22: Ensure perpetrators of family violence promptly appear before a specialist family violence court after initial contact with police and for follow up hearings.

Recommendation 23: Increase funding for MBCPs to meet current and projected demand as more perpetrators are linked into support.

Finally, a critical component to addressing men's behaviour and reducing family violence is making sure that men have a place to go when they are removed from the home. The Salvation Army fully believes that the primary aim of the family violence system should be to keep women and children safe. Part of that response includes helping women and children stay in the family home whenever possible. However, ensuring that perpetrators of family violence are housed also contributes to keeping women and children safe.

Two women interviewed for this submission specifically mentioned concern for their partner and where their partner would live as being a barrier to them ending the violent relationship. Despite being victimised themselves, women expressed concern that their partner had nowhere to go and would not be able to support themselves on their own. Ensuring that their partner had a safe and secure place to live enabled them to end the relationship. In the end, one woman left the family home so that her partner could stay and another managed to find her partner accommodation so that she could remain with her children in the family home.

Providing perpetrators of family violence a stable address also protects women by making it less likely perpetrators will attempt to return to the family home to avoid homelessness. The prioritisation of housing means that there is very little housing available for single men. While The Salvation Army believes that it is appropriate to prioritise women and children for housing, the lack of housing for men highlights the need for more affordable housing in general to accommodate perpetrators of family violence and reduce the likelihood of violence in the future.

As the quotes regarding IVO breaches also demonstrate, women often experienced delayed police responses to reports of breaches because police assumed the perpetrator would be gone upon arrival and they had no way to locate him. Ensuring that perpetrators have a stable address that is known to police and the courts would ensure that court orders and IVOs could be properly enforced and that services could remain engaged,³⁶ again reinforcing the message that the use of violence is unacceptable.

The lack of housing is a barrier to women and children leaving and a barrier to keeping women safe. Increased investment in affordable housing is desperately needed.

Recommendation 24: Increase affordable and secure housing options for perpetrators of family violence to reduce their ability to continue violence in the future.

³⁶ | RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice (2015) *Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing Perpetrators of family violence into view*. p 50

13. OTHER MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

13.1 Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD)

Three of the women interviewed for this submission mentioned the presence of drugs in their relationship, usually either through their ex-partners using or dealing illicit substances. While themes of drug and alcohol use did not feature strongly in the interviews for this submission, our practice experience and research demonstrate close relationships between substance abuse and family violence.

It is important to reinforce that family violence is not a result of alcohol or drug use. Many people use alcohol and other drugs and do not commit family violence. Additionally, not all men who perpetrate family violence use alcohol or other drugs. Nevertheless, alcohol is recorded as a factor in almost half of all police call outs for family violence incidents.³⁷ Research has also found that the risk of male to female aggression doubles on days when men have misused alcohol or cocaine.³⁸ Our services have also recently reported a concerning increase in the use of Ice (methamphetamine) in conjunction with family violence incidents. Victims of family violence may also use alcohol or other drugs to 'self-medicate' to try to deal with the violence they are experiencing.³⁹

Co-occurrences between alcohol and other drug use and family violence mean that cross sector understandings are important for each specialist workforce. This could be done through increased training, cross sector collaboration, co-location or outreach, and screening for co-occurring issues in each sector's assessment tools.

13.2 Problem Gambling

A complex relationship also exists between problem gambling and family violence. Once again, while problem gambling is not a cause of family violence, there is an increased incidence between the two compared to the general population. Over one third of problem gamblers reported being the victim of family violence or the perpetrator of it and 11 per cent of perpetrators of family violence report gambling problems.⁴⁰ Links between problem gambling and family violence are being further researched. However, in the meantime increased awareness and screening for family violence among clients of problem gambling services may be beneficial.

Recommendation 25: Increase cross sectoral training and links between the AOD, gambling support and family violence sectors through flexible funding that allows increased partnership, outreach and colocation.

13.3 Financial Counselling

³⁷ VAADA (2011) Position Paper: *Alcohol related violence position paper*.

³⁸ Fals-Stewart, W 2003, *The occurrence of partner physical aggression on days of alcohol consumption: A longitudinal diary study*. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 71, No. 1, pp. 41–52.

³⁹ VAADA (2012) Position Paper: *Connections: Family Violence and AOD*

⁴⁰ Suomi, A et al. (2013) *Problem gambling and family violence*. *Asian Journal of Gambling Issues and Public Health* 3:13

Intersections between family violence, housing and homelessness, mental health, AOD, gambling and child specific services are discussed at various points throughout this paper. However, services are also increasingly expressing a need for more access to financial counselling. Financial abuse was a key theme throughout the interviews with women. Many were not allowed to work. Others had to sell assets to pay for exorbitant legal costs. One woman spoke of her partner stealing her money which impacted on her ability to feed her children and resulted in large amounts of debt including fines and late fees. Accessing financial counsellors has become essential for women to overcome these financial hardships and become financially independent. However, financial counselling services remain scarce and women sometimes have to wait weeks to get an appointment. As the costs of housing, utilities and food continue to rise, access to these types of services is becoming even more critical. These services need to be expanded so women can access them in a timely way.

Recommendation 26: Increase the number of financial counselling services across the state to ensure women escaping family violence can access them in a timely way to reduce the effects of financial abuse and gain financial independence.

13.4 Other Victims

This submission has been shaped by the overwhelming experience of Salvation Army family violence services who engage every day with women who have been the victim of men's violence against them. This experience is reflected in commentary about the gendered nature of violence, in pointing to structural and social inequities and in the gendered language we have used to describe both the victims and the perpetrators.

However, this submission would not be complete without an acknowledgement that men's violence against women, although the biggest part of the problem of family violence, is not the only problem. We have alluded to men's violence against their own children and (usually male) children's violence against their parents. Violence also occurs in same-sex relationships and in other domestic environments that don't reflect the nuclear family. When men are the victims of family violence, they suffer additional consequences related to gender stereotypes and a service system that is generally incapable of meeting their needs.

None of this diminishes the reality that most family violence is committed by men against women and the gendered significance of this fact for our society. However, any future system that entirely precludes access to victims who are not women will create additional gaps that further marginalise and disadvantage a smaller but significant group.

14. CONCLUSION

Family Violence is a complex social ill with strong roots in structural inequalities between men and women. However, this blight on our community can be fixed. This Royal Commission will find a wealth of evidence from Victoria and beyond that demonstrates significant work exploring the cause of family violence, gaps in the system and what to do about it. Many of these findings have been echoed in this paper.

The answers to ending family violence are known to us. In many cases, trial programs and service models are already operating and have been doing so for some time. These programs have been proven to work and need to be expanded in order to create community-wide change. However, such change is also a long term project and will need to be sustained over successive terms of government. Because of this, it will require bi-partisan support and ongoing evaluation against set goals. The recently announced Family Violence Index has the potential to be a very helpful tool towards this longer term accountability.

We leave the last words in this submission to the women who know this experience best.

14.1 What would have improved your experience the most?

“Being able to stay in our local area. Going into an unfamiliar zone – grieving, broken, my heart was broken, I was broken. My children were broken. But getting moved out of our security, our area, our friends, what we knew, our sports. We had to quit our sports, and that was big. We trained two nights a week and played Saturday, so that was a big family thing. That was gone.” Sarah

“What would have improved our experience the most is if people took mental abuse seriously. Because we don’t have bruises. The amount of times I heard this in court ... because we don’t have physical bruises and people don’t listen to what children say and they don’t believe a word I say because they think I am just trying to get revenge or something.” Vanessa

“I wish I had known about the services that exist. Because they knew, like, they are involved in it every day. They see it first hand and they just knew the right people to put me to ... It’s about being able to access support in the system. If you don’t know where to go and get it then you won’t be able to do it.” Kathy

“A feeling of support. First of all, from medical practitioners. It was a medical practitioner who ... helped [with] things like getting me into that support group and whatever. But the other medical practitioner that wrote ‘no physical danger’ or whatever they wrote. [Maybe if another man had spoken up to my ex, told him that what he was doing was unacceptable?] That could have changed everything. We could have actually had maybe some hope of living as a family and we would be together. But no.” Angela

“Having a special room set up [at court] for women and children or anyone that is experiencing violence or crime and is fearful. If I had to sit upstairs ... you know, I had broken every sense of trust and I am still in fear of this guy. If I had had to sit up there in that room and have him looking at me, the intimidation – I probably would have just fled.” Rebecca

“At the start, all the moving. It’s hard on the kids as it is, but then having to move three, four, five times and then ... I was lucky at the time it was school holidays. But since we have left she has been to two different schools now and we still haven’t finished moving. And that is why I have asked if I can stay in the area where I am so – for her benefit. They make friends and then they have to leave. I don’t want that to happen. I just want to make it as easy as possible for them. It’s just hard.” Mary

“Not being made to feel that I am doing something wrong by reporting breaches. The cops say, ‘We don’t have time for this’. Just be more sensitive. And the Courts need more detail. It’s not black and white. I made statements with my solicitor and phone calls. None of the evidence was looked at. No one that knew us was consulted or asked to speak on my behalf and more family support, more support.” Susan

14.2 What would you say to other women experiencing family violence?

“Make that first phone call. It’s the hardest thing you will ever do because just the shame of breaking the silence. You feel like you are breaking that trust with your partner and you children. But once you call once ... you know it’s unlimited the number of times you can call ... and I couldn’t believe they are so ... you know, they would be like, is it suitable to talk now? Can we call you back at a certain time? You know, because I was really scared at the start. I was deleting numbers on my phone, storing numbers under different names, because he would know that I was seeking advice.” Rebecca

“I would say, don’t feel alone. Don’t be afraid that you that you are going to be on the street without help with your children, that you will not be able to feed them. You will be able to house them somewhere but you have got to reach out. There would still be people out there that would be in my situation that would think ‘I don’t know if I am going to be happy in some strange place, in a strange house’. But when you are in the strange situation, people are there for you. They will help you and I think I was probably most frightened of that –of having to cope with it totally on my own.” Kathy

“To leave and to go get help. There are people out there who can help you and do care. You know when you do it, you just leave and you think, maybe they will help you a little bit but you will have to do everything yourself and you’ve got no money. That is what I thought and I thought, ‘I don’t know what I am going to do.’ But it’s not like that. You have help and people to support you.” Mary

'[I want] for other women to feel ok about just reporting it to the police. Don't press charges if you don't want to. But report it, so that it is there if you change your mind in the future.' I mean I should have said stuff to the police way back years ago. But I didn't. There is so much bloody shame. I couldn't. I just thought I wouldn't be believed. When I was finally in tears on the phone to the police, I was just so grateful that they had believed me." Angela

"You are not doing anything wrong. It's not right. They should have to take responsibility. Don't feel guilty or ashamed. Taking that first step is the hardest part. It's for yourself and your children." Susan

"It's not a way to live, in fear. The minute the man raises his hand to you, it's time to go. That light at the end of the tunnel is amazing." Sarah

"My advice to anyone would be stay strong and just believe in yourself. And don't keep quiet." Vanessa

15. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Act on existing evidence to develop, implement and fund a mandated, state-wide respectful relationships education program in all schools in Victoria.

Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government should partner with the Commonwealth Government and family violence services to develop and run a long-term, sustained Anti-Family Violence media campaign to shift community attitudes around family violence.

Recommendation 3: Family violence training should be expanded within the existing curriculum for all mainstream service professionals including doctors, nurses, midwives, maternal health nurses, mental health professionals and teachers.

Recommendation 4: Offer dedicated funding to training providers to facilitate increased professional development and partnership opportunities between mainstream and family violence services.

Recommendation 5: Increase resources for regional and rural police stations to establish Family Violence Liaison Officers and Units and upgrade facilities.

Recommendation 6: Expand the Family Violence Court Division model currently operating at Ballarat and Heidelberg to all courts in Victoria to ensure that women, regardless of where they live, get a magistrate well trained in family violence that has jurisdiction over the range of matters impacted by family violence.

Recommendation 7: Increase courts' capacity to support victims of family violence which could include increasing staff expertise, increasing the number of support workers at court and utilising women who have personal experiences of family violence to support others.

Recommendation 8: Magistrates be required to attend regular family violence training to ensure consistent and informed decisions are made regarding family violence cases.

Recommendation 9: Require all court staff to complete regular training on how to appropriately respond to victims of family violence and the information that is to be provided.

Recommendation 10: Courthouses should be renovated to better meet the needs and ensure the safety of women experiencing family violence including: private and secure rooms for women experiencing family violence to wait in, facilities for children, separate entrances and exits, and video conferencing facilities to allow witnesses to give testimony remotely.

Recommendation 11: Establish a right to legal representation regardless of socioeconomic circumstances to victims of family violence.

Recommendation 12: Increase funding for Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres to enable them to work with all victims of family violence across the state who cannot afford legal representation.

Recommendation 13: Increase funding for Safe at Home and Private Rental Brokerage Programs to be available consistently across the state and be able to provide enough support to keep women and children out homelessness.

Recommendation 14: Invest in a range of housing options that are able to meet women and children's particular housing needs including rapid rehousing, crisis and long-term housing options.

Recommendation 15: Fully fund family violence services to meet demand, including responding to L17 faxback reports and providing case management support.

Recommendation 16: Expand the Alexis Taskforce model allowing family violence services to embed an extra worker in police units across the state.

Recommendation 17: Resource family violence services to increase training on how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and make improved links with local Aboriginal communities and services.

Recommendation 18: Resource services with brokerage for the extra supports needed for CALD women, including translators and improved links with immigration lawyers and culturally specific services.

Recommendation 19: Support family violence services to explore how to improve engagement with women with disabilities recognising the unique circumstances that women with disabilities face.

Recommendation 20: Fund all family violence services to provide specialised services to children of all ages who have been affected by family violence.

Recommendation 21: The Victorian Government implement a Safe at Home, Safe at Work policy for all public servants to support women experiencing family violence to maintain employment in the Government sector.

Recommendation 22: Ensure perpetrators of family violence promptly appear before a specialist family violence court after initial contact with police and for follow up hearings.

Recommendation 23: Increase funding for MBCPs to meet current and projected demand as more perpetrators are linked into support.

Recommendation 24: Increase affordable and secure housing options for perpetrators of family violence to reduce their ability to continue violence in the future.

Recommendation 25: Increase cross sectoral training and links between the AOD, gambling support and family violence sectors through flexible funding that allows increased partnership, outreach and colocation.

Recommendation 26: Increase the number of financial counselling services across the state to ensure women escaping family violence can access them in a timely way to reduce the effects of financial abuse and gain financial independence.



The Salvation Army

Crossroads Family
Violence Safe@Home
Program

Crossroads Family Violence Services

4/29/2015

CONTACT: Karen, Natasha or Mojdeh on Ph 9353 1011

Sincere appreciation to Rachel who facilitated this report



Safe@Home aims to enable women and children experiencing high risk due to family violence perpetrated against them to remain in their home, or return to their home through provision of specialised holistic and comprehensive risk assessment, safety planning and implementation of individualised safety measures

CONTENTS

The Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008 defines Family Violence as: any behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive. This also includes behaviour that is threatening or coercive as well as controlling or dominating that leaves a person to fear for their safety or that of another person. Behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness or be exposed to any of the above is also recognised under the definition of family violence.

Why are we Talking About this?.....

So What is Safe@Home?.....

How are the Funds Utilized?.....

What About the Children?.....

What the Women have Said.....

The Salvation Army

What Programs Do Crossroads Family
Violence Service Provide Offer?.....

Why Are We Talking About this?



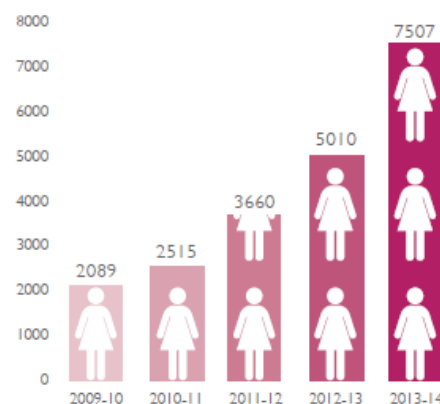
In Northern Metropolitan Melbourne in 2012-13 there were 9,861 reported incidents of family violence, with an average of 190 incidents reported to Victoria Police each week. New research shows that funding the Family Violence system to respond more appropriately to women escaping violence in the first instance will significantly reduce the cost to the system in the long term

(Women's Health in the North ⁽⁷⁾.)

In reality, when entering the system, a woman will usually be unable to receive the appropriate support, causing her to enter another 6 times, resulting in a cost

of \$53,279 to the community ^(1 & 2). This can be dramatically reduced via much needed funding to a figure of only \$29,825, that's \$23,454 LESS. Not only will funding benefit the community in the long run, but it will also break the cycle of women re-entering a violent relationship.

NUMBER OF POLICE REFERRALS TO WOMEN'S INTAKE SERVICE 2009-2014



259%
increase over
5 years from
2009-10

“We strive to assist women and children uphold their human right to live free from violence”

So, What Is The Safe@Home Program?

Safe@Home (S@H) is a service provided by The Crossroads Family Violence Service. S@H responds to the immediate and long term safety and wellbeing of women and women with children experiencing family violence through enabling them to remain safely in their homes.

S@H aims to assist in returning dignity and authority to the woman's hands by enabling her, and where relevant, her children to remain safely in their home.

Violence is never caused by the victim and the choice to use violence always rests with the perpetrator. Perpetrators should be held accountable for their use of violence and challenged to take responsibility for their actions.

S@H assists women and children reclaim personal safety and emotional wellbeing. It also provides empowerment opportunities for women through enhanced self-determination and security.

Assessment of risk to victims and family violence must be structured and informed by the woman's own assessment of her safety and levels of risk, consultation with police and other people relevant to the individual's safety. A sound evidence base and professional judgment of specialist case-management is also required. All women participating in S@H program are experiencing a high level of risk due to family violence. Interventions provide support during the crisis period and through to post-crisis and recovery.

S@H service provides a flexible and timely response to women and

their children experiencing family violence, not only keeping them safe, and also preventing the women and women with children from becoming homeless. CFVS provides women needing S@H case management through their specialist team who undertake comprehensive family violence risk assessment and safety planning. These tools are informed by the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF). CFVS has access to a team of highly qualified and experienced property and tenancy personnel who also assist in the assessment of S@H interventions. Combined, the use of these tools and qualified personnel assist in allowing a woman to exercise her right and remain in their own home, as S@H is adapted according to each individual circumstance.

(The CFVS Safe @ Home Program is funded by Department of Human Services, Funding has also been provided through the City of Whittlesea 2014 Governor's Charity Golf Day and The Salvation Army Red Shield funds.)

The Protective Group

When the family violence risk assessment indicates an extremely high level of risk, S@H will collaborate with *Protective Group* to further inform the specialist family violence assessment and subsequent high risk intervention.

Safe-T-Card

A family violence high risk assessment may indicate a Safe T Card (STC) would be beneficial to the woman (and children). The STC device is a verified and corroborated alarm monitored 24/7.

"A risk assessment is conducted on the victim, the perpetrator, the property and strategies are put into place to wrap the victim in a safety net."⁽⁶⁾

How Are The Funds Utilized?

There are a range of Safe @ Home interventions which may include

- High risk Collaborative assessment with Protective Group security consultant
- Consultation and collaboration with Victoria Police
- Installation of external security lighting, removing foliage near doors and pathways
- Door and window locks being changed
- Repairs to walls damaged through the perpetrators actions
- Assessment and installation of security devices such as CCTV
- Provision of Safe-t-Card including monitoring
- Material aid to replace items damaged by the perpetrator or left behind
-i.e. Clothing, bedding, white-goods, mobile phone purchase, toys, toiletries, baby equipment etc.
- Airfares and taxi transportation
- Replacement of official documents withheld by the perpetrator
-passports, birth certificates
- Repairs to items damaged by perpetrator
- Removing and storing women's property until alternative safe accommodation can be accessed
- Emergency accommodation if existing premises assessed as unsafe while S@H intervention is implemented

Family violence is the **NUMBER ONE CAUSE** of women's homelessness in Victoria. Over half of women who access homelessness services cite family violence as the reason for their homelessness.³

On an average day, nearly **60%** of all new requests for immediate accommodation are unable to be met by Australian homelessness services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.⁴

These changes not only dramatically help reduce a sense of fear in the woman and her child's home, but can significantly enhance the well being for each individual.

From inserting security doors, to plastering over damages in the walls, etc (caused by the perpetrator) both the tenant and the property owner are able to benefit from the important work done by S@H. Poor rental history, or entry into homelessness services due to damages caused by the perpetrator is no longer a concern for the woman.



Safe@Home is putting **DIGNITY AND POWER** back in women's hands by letting **THEM** stay at home rather than the offender. It moves the criminal from the family, not the family from the criminal. -Community Member

What about the Children?

Family violence is a form of child abuse. Whether the children experience the violence directly or not, it affects a child's sense of stability, safety and also the development of a child from the womb to adolescence.

It is understood that once a child feels secure in their housing, many of their anxieties and concerns appear to diminish.



[Interviewer: What's it like for you when you move house?] "Sometimes a bit angry, sometimes a bit weird... Like, I, like, go inside and pack everything so we can go to the new house.. [What would make you feel better ... what would you like to happen?] I would have liked the house if it was a bit bigger and more stuff not happening... me and mum would have stayed there. But then I wanted to stay there for a long time, and mum said, "We won't be moving until you're in grade six", and she was a bit wrong." ⁽⁵⁾

Homelessness for Australian children is a significant issue with numbers rising. ⁽⁵⁾.

Safe@Home empowers both the women and women with children by

enabling them to reside in their family home. By remaining in that home they do not have to leave their employment, school or friends. They are able to maintain connection and stability within their community.

What the Women have Said...

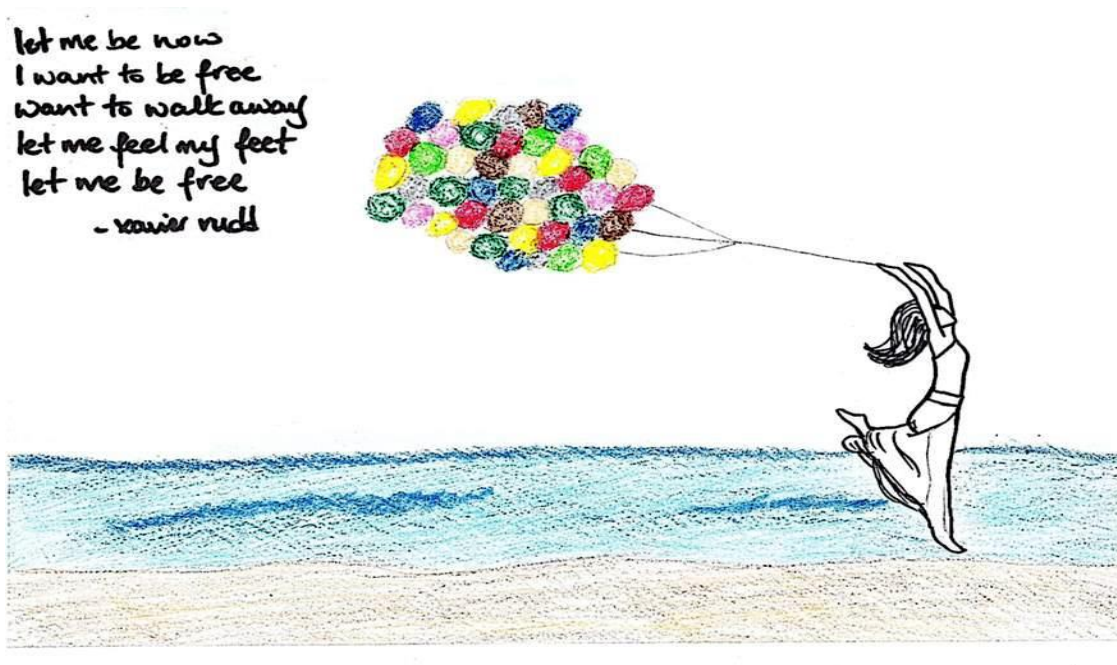
Women reported there had been numerous breaches of the intervention order, some women reported stalking behaviours, their comments included “scared, couldn’t hide anywhere, stayed inside the house all the time, too afraid to go to work”-

“I wanted to run away all the time, I had that fear, having the fly door replaced, the holes repaired in the walls, I felt more confident with police, I understood courts and intervention orders, I had MY OWN safety plan. Finally we did not have to move again.”

Women generally reported that their personal confidence had increased; they were feeling safer in participating in day to day activities, reclaimed a sense of normalcy and gained in personal confidence.

“Able to piece my life back together- I just have to press that button and someone will hear my distress- I am not alone’

“... When he came again he did not get into my house, and the card meant I did not need to speak English, the people who monitor the calls understood.. what he said was recorded and could be used as it was OK for court evidence...”



The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army has been providing services for woman and women with children since 1887. Hope Hall was established on Exhibition Street in Melbourne, as the original Salvation Army Women's emergency housing service.

By 1986 Hope Hall had evolved into the Mary Anderson Lodge and provided specialist high security, communal, family violence refuge and casemanagement support for women and women with children.

In 2004, the service continued innovating and working toward improved outcomes for women and women with children. At this time the service was renamed Mary Anderson Family Violence service and provided a spectrum of effective responses including crisis and emergency responses, intensive outreach program as well as community based support.

The Mary Anderson Family Violence Service underwent further development and was renamed, The Crossroads Family Violence Service (CFVS) in 2013.

Today the CFVS fosters specialist non-discriminatory family violence responses with an emphasis on woman's right to self-determination. The service continues to be safe and secure for service users - women and women with children – as well as staff members.

Services provided are flexible, multi-faceted and comprehensive. These services include a state-wide family violence refuge service and a Safe@Home outreach service which supports women and women with children from crisis through post crisis and recovery. CFVS incorporates preventative measures and strategies to enhance safety and divert women from homelessness.

The Salvation Army is one of the world's largest Christian social welfare organisations with more than 1,650,000 members working in over 124 countries. They have been in Australia for over 130 years. Currently The Salvation Army has more than 8,500 active officers and staff delivering in excess of 1000 specifically designed social programs across Australia. The Salvation Army helps more than 1 million Australians every year that's one person every 30 seconds!



SAFE AT HOME

Aims to enable women and children at high risk (due to family violence) to remain in their home, or return to their home through provision of holistic and comprehensive risk assessment, safety planning and implementation of individualised safety measures

We recognise the support of Protective Services, SafeTCard, Whittlesea 2014 Governors Charity Golf Day, Salvation Army and State and Federal Government funds

NORTHERN INTEGRATED MOTEL OUTREACH SERVICE

Collaboration with Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Georgina Martina Refuge Inc.
Providing outreach support and casemanagement (incl S@H) for women and women with children residing in emergency motel accommodation

SUNBURY COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Family violence case management service provided for residents of Sunbury as well as Sunbury Community Support Service (CSS)

CSS acknowledges the support of volunteers from the local community and TSA Asylum Seekers Service Brunswick.

PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Short term projects and planning and facilitation of family violence group work

HAMDEL PROGRAM

An Our Watch program in Partnership with Whittlesea Community Connections and Women's Health in the North

OUTPOST SERVICES

Integrated assessment and case management in the local government area of Whittlesea and Sunbury community.



Crossroads Family Violence Service (CFVS) aims to assist women and women with children to uphold their human right to live free from violence.

CFVS celebrates the uniqueness of every individual.

We strive to ensure that all individuals have equitable access to resources and opportunities available both within the program as well as the broader community.

CROSSROADS FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE (CFVS)

CASE MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT

Emergency, crisis and post crisis family violence risk assessment, safety planning and intervention,

Outreach case management,
High risk case management,
Telephone support and consultation for women, professionals and members of the community.

ON-CALL

24 hour 7 day a week specialist after office hours service available to women and children working with CFVS

MARY ANDERSON FAMILY VIOLENCE REFUGE SERVICE

Emergency and crisis specialist family violence high risk refuge accommodation provided in dispersed self-contained units and houses.

CHILDREN

Programs and assistances for children including case-management, services and access to education as required.

Programs for mother and child are also available.

FAMILIES @ HOME PROGRAM

A Partnership with The Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service, Kildonan and Homeground.

An early intervention family violence program for families at risk of homelessness in the Whittlesea LGA. Provides collaborative co-case management for woman and children alongside specialist men's family violence service. CFVS short term place based refuge house is allocated to F@H

NORTHERN CRISIS ADVOCACY RESPONSE SERVICE (NCARS)

Victoria Police, Women's Health in the North, Safe Steps, Crossroads Family Violence Service, Georgina/Martina Refuge, provides outreach crisis intervention and support to the Northern suburbs outside office hours 7 days a week.

Office hours response by phoning CFVS on 93531013

WOMEN & PRISON PROGRAM

Groupwork and pre and post release support.

A collaboration with The Salvation Army Prison Gate Ministry and Melbourne City Mission

NOTES

Costings were developed by Kristin Diemer (PhD) Senior Research Fellow (Family Violence Research Program - University of Melbourne). Costing analysis is based on information supplied by members of the integrated family violence service system in Northern Metropolitan Melbourne.

These costings are based on the services provided to a woman who accessed family violence services in 2014. This woman had a seven-month-old child and initially accessed refuge for three months, before returning to her partner. Her case is taken to be representative.

Costs do not include: case related operating overheads and infrastructure expenses, worker salary on-costs, overall staff management and supervision, non-client direct costs (administration), professional support such as accountants, HR or professional development costs.

If the system were adequately funded, it is less likely that women would return to violent partners and more likely that they would be able to build lives away from family violence.

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An Analysis of

Best Practice Program Models In Family Violence

Authors: Dr. Lisa Harris, Dr. Guy Johnson and Naomi Bailey





Acknowledgement }

The Salvation Army gratefully acknowledges the funding support of the Victorian Government Department of Human Services for this research and publication.



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The Salvation Army Crisis Services Network }

Family Violence Outreach Program Best Practice Papers

Good practice is built one interaction at a time. It is often hard to find the time to reflect and examine good practice, let alone document it. And yet, as Marg Hamley who is now at Berry Street, once commented ‘Good practice remains isolated and individual unless we document it and share it’. The opportunity provided by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) Best Practice Grants is to do exactly this. However, the provision of these three grants has resulted in much more than just the documentation of good practice for the organisation. It has also allowed us to create a space for reflecting and sharing our practice experience.

The process required us to examine our practice in the context of the rest of the organisation, the various partnerships we value immensely and the changing nature of the sector. Rather than just the opportunity to document ‘what is’, these papers have spurred us on to recognise the work still to be done and learn from the challenges of the past.

The Family Violence Outreach Program (FVOP) has always been an exemplary program but these reports speak to the importance and value of working in partnership to achieve sustainable outcomes for clients. The practice partners that have collaborated on these three projects are HomeGround Services, Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative and The Salvation Army Crisis Contact Centre (CCC). As demonstrated by the private rental program, our practice partners have yet again shown a willingness to step outside of program boundaries and to ‘paint the canvas afresh’. The indigenous paper exemplifies the importance of relationships in our work and the importance of building on these relationships to form structural change in mainstream organisations. The CCC – FVOP paper provides an excellent example of programs working collaboratively to achieve flexibility and improve access for clients in case managed programs.

Each of these partnerships represent innovations in practice and program design that not only improves service provision for the women accessing the FVOP, but has positively influenced organisational culture and ensured staff and management of the Crisis Services Network have been supported and challenged to explore and improve their own practice.

Much thanks also goes to one of our important research partners, RMIT University, and in particular to Dr Lisa Harris of the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning (GSSSP), Dr Guy Johnson and Naomi Bailey of the Australian Housing Urban Research Institute (AHURI) for both the process they engaged us in and for their final reports.

Jenny Plant

General Manager

The Salvation Army

Crisis Services Network

A Best Practice Report Family Violence Private Rental Access Program:

**Successfully delivering the
Family Violence Private
Rental Access Program via
a partnership model: an
opportunity for organisational
capacity building through the
sharing of service cultures.**

prepared by

Dr Lisa Harris

*School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning
RMIT University*

March 2008



Introduction }

The Salvation Army Crisis Services network has embarked on a number of partnership arrangements to deliver services to clients. This paper reports on one extremely successful model used to facilitate private rental outcomes for women and women with children from the inner and middle south region of Melbourne who have experienced family violence. This program, the Family Violence Private Rental Access Program (PRAP), which is delivered via a partnership arrangement between the Family Violence Outreach Program (auspiced by The Salvation Army Crisis Services) and HomeGound Services, successfully leveraged 42 women into the private rental market in 2006/2007, despite record low rental vacancy rates and increasing rental prices in the southern region. Significantly 41 of the 42 tenancies were sustained, with only one woman returning to her parent's home for security reasons. The success of this program is due to a combination of the quality of the service practice and the environment created by the partnership arrangement between the family violence and housing services. This partnership arrangement provides for a transparent, accountable and supportive environment, which is both enabling for the worker and facilitates a level of capacity building and knowledge sharing in the areas of housing and family violence for both services. This best practice report will outline the program, discuss the partnership arrangements, why they were developed this way, explore what occurs at a practice level, and importantly, discusses why the program is as effective as it is.

In summary the key elements of the success of this program are:

- The environment provided by the partnership arrangement
- The partnership arrangement facilitates capacity building and knowledge sharing in family violence and homelessness between the services.
- The flexibility of the funds available
- The effectiveness of the worker
- Continuous capacity building for the service user
- A clear understanding and boundaries between support and tenancy
- Early intervention rental assistance policy to support sustainable tenancies in both organisations
- A clear understanding of the rental market as a business for agents and landlords

Program Outline }

The PRAP model was initially piloted through the VHS Pilot Housing Options for Women Experiencing Family Violence (HOW) and the Family Violence Private Rental Brokerage (PRB) Pilot at three sites from 2003 to 2005:

Inner South Domestic Violence Service, Women's Health West and Quantum. The pilots of the HOW and PRB programs were evaluated by consultants Thomson Goodall Associates in late 2004. This evaluation found that a 'good practice' model of service provision included aspects of both the HOW and PRB programs. This resulted in the development of the PRAP service model description in 2005, which was subsequently expanded and funded to other regions¹.

The aim of the PRAP is to assist women and women with children who are escaping, or who have experienced family violence, to access and/or retain private rental as a long term housing option.

The objectives of the service are to ensure eligible women and women with children are assisted to establish and maintain private rental accommodation through the use of a range of flexible financial packages together with related forms of assistance and support. The program is designed to complement the family violence outreach services in providing an alternative to refuge, transitional and other forms of supported housing.

The service model comprises of:

- Assistance to secure private rental
- Brokerage funds to provide a time limited rental subsidy
- Housing related practical information, referral and establishment assistance
- Regular on-going contact and housing related assistance for the duration of the brokerage period
- Liaison / partnerships with relevant housing providers (landlords), family violence support services, and other community based resources and organisations including police and courts.

The partnership model –Why it was developed as it was.

The decision to deliver this program via a partnership arrangement came about through a mix of historical relationships and difficulties in recruiting staff for the program. The PRAP clearly aims to invest a level of specialist housing capacity into the existing family violence outreach program.

The specialist nature of the program, with its emphasis on securing sustainable private rental outcomes, provided traditional family violence workers employed into the position with the challenge of shifting their focus away from public housing options, to engaging directly with the world of the private rental market. While family violence workers had achieved some outcomes in this area, it is fair to say that within the inner and middle south region, the lack of low cost local rental and the lack of specialist housing knowledge tended to focus workers attention on other aspects of case management, with workers generally relying on applications to the segmented waiting list and transitional housing options to secure medium term accommodation. As such, the service found it difficult to recruit staff with the appropriate mix of housing and family violence knowledge. Clearly there would be some benefit in thinking differently about this position, with the idea of purchasing this type of specialist housing knowledge into the family violence team through some sort of partnership model, being an obvious way forward.

The Salvation Army (TSA) Crisis Services had previously encouraged a co-location model of service delivery when new resources became available in housing, AOD, health and mental health services. This often improved the sustainability of the specialist services in the area while also ensuring access for TSA Crisis Services service users on-site. Generally these arrangements have worked well but there have also been some drawbacks. Firstly, over time, and for various operational reasons, some specialist services have reduced on-site delivery. Secondly, the partnership arrangements have not always successfully built capacity within the TSA Crisis Services teams to

¹ For further information regarding these initial pilots, the evaluation and subsequent service model consult the Evaluation of Victorian Homelessness Strategy Pilot VHS Housing Options for Women Experiencing Family Violence and Private Rental Brokerage Pilot report (2004) and DHS Linking to the Private Rental Market – Private Rental Brokerage Program Service Model Description (2005).

The partnership model }

better respond to the needs of our service users in these specialist areas. In light of these issues, the family violence PRAP provided an opportunity to further develop and refine a partnership model that might address these issues.

The partnership model – How it was developed.

TSA Crisis Services and HomeGround have worked in partnership over a number of years to deliver services and conduct research in the homelessness sector.

This partnership is based on shared resources, collaboration, trust, a commitment to quality services and, crucially, a common practice framework and shared practice principles. Shared practice principles are particularly important because the PRAP program is built around the concept of a shared staffing resource, in the form of a single worker, across the family violence program and HomeGround's St Kilda HIR service. Shared practice principles reduce the likelihood of conflict or tension, on practice grounds, for a worker straddling the two organisations and the two cultures of housing and family violence. Shared practice principles are the cornerstone of any discussions between the organisations, whether that relates to management of the program, resource allocations, dispute resolution, or the development of organisational policies to improve the delivery of service. The agreed principles are:

- Service users are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Service users will play a significant role in decisions relating to service provided.
- Service users' rights and entitlements will always be advanced, service quality assured and confidentiality respected.
- Open channels of communication and collaborative decision-making.
- Occupational health and safety, equal opportunity and non-discrimination.
- Honesty in all dealings.

The partnership commitment was formalised through an MOU in early 2006 and over the life of the agreement the following arrangements have come to constitute the the day-to-day reality of the partnership:

- TSA Crisis Services provides the funds to HomeGround to employ the Private Rental Access (PRA) worker including salary and on costs, program and administration costs, and the brokerage funds for the program.
- HomeGround provides the costs of a car, mobile phone and laptop computer.
- The PRA worker is located 4 days per week at the Family Violence Outreach program (FVOP) office.
- The PRA worker is located 1 day per week at the HomeGround services office.
- The PRA worker attends both the HIR and FVOP weekly team meetings.
- Formal supervision of the worker is provided by HomeGround
- A dispute resolution process was provided via the MOU
- A process for variation and review of the arrangements was provided via the MOU
- Regular communication occurs between the managers of the FVOP and HomeGround St Kilda.

The partnership model - On the ground.

These arrangements have resulted in the PRA worker clearly feeling, and being, part of both teams. The partnership arrangement provides for a level of accountability of practice that is both transparent between the two organisations, and engenders collaborative, creative approaches to service delivery that has produced outstanding results.

The partnership also creates a culture that supports the PRA worker in sharing knowledge and skills across both housing and family violence teams, ensures sector specific changes are communicated across teams,

What does good practice look like? }

provides housing induction information and training to family violence team members and provides secondary consultation on family violence issues to the housing team. There are many practice related flow on effects to this shared worker resource across the two teams. For example PRAP service user's access resources from both organisations more efficiently because the one worker is managing both processes. This has a practice outcome implication. For example, this timely access to flexible resources has been a critical factor in service users securing rental outcomes because it has allowed women to submit rental applications with the guarantee of providing the funds required within 24 hrs of an application being accepted. However, good practice relies on more than just the structures of the environment to support a worker; it also relies on the quality of a worker's practice.

What does good practice look like?

Anyone who has managed community services knows of the odd worker who just seems to be able to work with service users in such a way that they produce sustainable outcomes time and time again. Often we recognise this and comment on how fantastic they are, but how do we learn from their practice?

Can we break their practice down into component parts of practically what do they do with a client – and what are the human capital skills they bring to their interactions with service users? How do they engender trust? How do they communicate? How do they ensure the service users are driving the outcome? What intuition does the worker bring to the environment in which they are trying to achieve an outcome in? It is clear the worker employed in the family violence PRAP is one such worker. From a series of interviews, this worker's practice has been broken down into these practical and human capital components, and presented here as a guide.

One of the significant measures of the worker's human capital skills was her understanding of the importance of

linking cultures and the need to develop the capacity to be able to communicate between them. She effectively linked the homelessness and family violence cultures, and linked the cultures of the community sector with the private market. The worker created a sense of overlap in the cultures of homelessness and family violence by being very present in both teams. This not only included attending both team's staff meetings, but working actively to ensure she understood the work of both teams. i.e. being part of the duty roster at HomeGround for several months to ensure she understood the availability of resources and the experience of homelessness by those who presented at the service and those who worked with them. Attending the case management meetings of the family violence outreach program so she could understand what the family violence outreach workers were doing with women and why. In this way she is able to comfortably move between the cultures of homelessness and family violence, communicate in language appropriate to the culture and understand the differing priorities that might exist even though both services work from a service user focused model.

Secondly she actively worked to link the cultures of the community sector and the private sector. This is best summed up via her own words:

'Before I started this work I used to think our clients got a rough deal from the [real estate] agents. But now I know agents, they are not social workers, they are businessmen. Their clients are the landlords, not my clients. They have to know there is money to back the client up. ... Agents want to rent the property. You have to get the focus of the agent at the right time, they have to be able to put a face to the name on the application. ... It is all about getting the right information about the client to them at the right time. It is just about getting enough information to them at the right time for them to make a decision in favour of the woman. This is what I do with my clients.'

It is clear from the worker's observations that she has worked through the culture of how and why agents make decisions. She then tailors the service user's engagement with the real estate agent accordingly. Through these three simple ideas - ensuring the client is known to the agent, ensuring the agent has enough

Engagement and assessment }

information to make the decision, and ensuring the agent knows there will be funds to support the client – she creates a bridge between the needs of the client and the needs of the real estate agent.

The other factor that was evident from the interviews with this worker, her management and co-workers, is her clarity on boundaries. The boundaries between the support a service user will receive from her family violence worker, and the nature of support she will receive from the PRAP. The boundaries between the responsibilities of the real estate agent, the responsibilities of the woman and her responsibility as a worker to simply do the things she has agreed to do, in the timeframes she has committed to do them in, and to communicate with all involved if she needs to alter an arrangement. Significantly she doesn't try to co-opt the agent into becoming part of the support system for the woman, nor does she allow the agent to communicate through her rather than the client if issues arise. The clarity on these boundaries, and her capacity to communicate them to clients and agents, engenders a sense of trust for everyone involved. She develops and fosters this trust by working through a series of practical steps with the women she works with.

Achieving a successful outcome is, if nothing else, about working through a series of practical steps with a client. At each step good workers make decisions about the capacity of the service user to complete a step, possibly on their own, possibly with support, possibly via the worker (but with a clear goal of the service users building this capacity). This was particularly evident in the PRAP delivery. At every point the worker reflected on making decisions, with the service user, about who would work through the practicalities of the next series of tasks. Although what is outlined below appears to be a series of linear steps, obviously case management requires a level of flexibility and the capacity to redefine timelines and appropriate goals according to the needs and self-determination of the service user. An outline of the PRAP practice model is provided via five steps: Engagement and assessment, finding a property, securing a property and signing up, moving in, and follow-up.

Engagement and assessment

The majority of referrals to the PRAP program are from the family violence outreach program, but the program also receives referrals from family violence refuges and HomeGround.

Irrespective of where clients are referred from, engagement relies on a clear understanding of what the program offers in the way of resources and support, and what will be expected of the client in achieving an outcome. Service users are assessed according to the guidelines provided for the program. These clearly target the program for women with low support needs². The PRAP has interpreted these guidelines to include a woman's capacity to financially sustain private rental, to have no or very low support needs in the areas of substance abuse and/or mental health. If there are concerns about the clients support needs then the PRAP program will complete a segmented waiting list application for public housing.

If a client is referred from a non-DV service, then the initial assessment includes a DV assessment. If it is clear that the woman may require, or would like, addition DV related support then a referral to the Family Violence Outreach Program is made.

Once it is clear that a woman meets the program's criteria, there are discussions about safety and the areas she would like to move to, the market rental in particular areas and the type of property that would be appropriate.

The different models of financial support the program and other sources³ can provide are discussed. The program model provides for three timeframes over which support is provided: significant initial funding (e.g. 6 weeks rent-in-advance), medium term support (e.g a contribution to the initial rent-in-advance plus some funds each week for three months) or longer term support (e.g. financial support each week for six months). The worker and the woman agree on a probable mix of funding support for the first few weeks to establish herself, support with applying for a bond loan, support over the first six weeks

² The DHS service model descriptor suggests 'women who require an intensive ongoing level of support to address a broad range and high complexity of service requirements may not be able to sustain private rental, and public housing may be more appropriate.' ³ The PRAP has its own brokerage funds but it also accesses Housing Establishment funds, the Bond Loan scheme and a range of flexible funding available from The Salvation Army St Kilda Crisis Contact Centre.

Finding a property? }

or longer, etc. The amount of financial support relates to the woman's income level and capacity – if she is only on family support she may require six weeks support, if she is employed she may require help with the first few weeks of rent for example).

The worker also starts to establish a relevant housing and employment related history. For example the woman may be waiting for the sale of the property from her previous relationship, she may have been in stable employment for a number of years, or she may have recent qualifications that will improve her employment prospects. All of this information may become important when talking to real estate agents prior to applying for a property. The worker is trying to establish a detailed picture, which she will then use with the woman in preparing her for her first housing inspection.

Finding a property

Having established the level of rent, location and property type, the worker uses various real estate sites to search for properties (e.g. realestate.com.au – Frankston, 2 bedroom +, unit, max \$200). The worker prints out all the available properties and asks the woman to read through them over the next day or so and mark the ones she is interested in.

If possible and appropriate (i.e. the woman seems confident and has access to a phone), the worker arranges with the woman to contact the agents of the properties she is interested in and to make an appointment to view the property. The worker generally makes a time to meet within 2 days to talk about how it is going.

At this next meeting, or sometimes via a phone call from the woman if she has organised an inspection, the worker gets a clearer sense of what tasks in the process the woman will be capable or comfortable of

completing herself. Importantly once a woman had made an appointment with an agent, the worker clearly believed it was important to reschedule her diary, if necessary, to accompany the woman. This was important for two reasons. Firstly, because transport is a significant issue for many of the women accessing the program it may prove to be a critical barrier to her following through on an appointment. Turning up late or failing to return a key on time due to some transport issue, all work against the idea of making a good first impression. The worker pointed out that often an agent's office can be many kilometres from a public transport hub, and the property might be some kilometres from the agent. Relying on public transport to get to the agent, get the key, look at the property and return the key to the agent in a reasonable time, really left too much to chance. Secondly, the worker believed once a time was agreed upon with an agent, it was important to stick to it. If the appointment clashed with another arrangement in the worker's diary, she would change that appointment in order to take the client to the inspection. The worker believed this type of attention to detail exuded a sense of reliability and gave the agent confidence in subsequent dealings with the woman.

In preparing for the open for inspection, the worker spent time with the woman talking through the idea of making a good first impression. This included things like, dressing appropriately and ensuring they had all the correct paperwork required to make an application on the spot. The strategy here for a one-on-one inspection is to make a good impression, provide the agent with a verbal reference from the worker, communicate that the woman will have the financial support of the program for the tenancy, and then submit an application immediately after the inspection. For open showings, which might have as many as thirty people viewing the property at the same time, the approach is similar, except during the inspection the woman will actually submit an application for the property completed earlier with the worker. Once again these strategies are designed to ensure the agent remembers the woman and has all the required information to make a decision on renting the property.

Securing a property and signing up }

Obviously the distinction between finding a property and securing a property, is where this sort of program can fail to deliver. For the PRAP this is where the worker's understanding of the culture of the real estate agent's decision-making processes and the rental market was critically important. The idea of making a good first impression, ensuring the agent could put a face to the name on the application, and ensuring the agent had enough information to make a decision in favour of the service user at the time of submitting an application, were all important strategies in securing a property.

Using the housing and employment history gathered during the assessment process, the worker and woman discuss how this history might be applicable in securing a property. This information might be provided via a reference or it might be provided in a more relaxed manner. For example, if the woman feels comfortable with the worker talking to the agent on her behalf, while she is looking through a property, the worker might mention to the agent the recent qualifications the woman has achieved and her improved work prospects. Or, for example, that the woman actually owns a property and is waiting for the sale of that property in order to purchase another. Or that the woman's current accommodation is always spotless whenever the worker has visited. Or that the woman has a very stable employment history. These brief comments are designed to ensure the agent will remember the highlights of a woman's application. The worker was very clear that this was not bending the truth. It was important not to set expectations in the agent's mind that would create difficulties for the woman either during this tenancy or later if she sought to renew the lease.

Once again the idea of capacity building throughout this process is central. If a woman doesn't feel confident to go into the agent's office to leave her details and get a the key, the worker will explain what she is going to do, then they would both walk into the office and the worker would provide her details and collect the keys. Once they are back in the car, they will talk about any issues the woman might be concerned about, and then she will go into the next agent. This process requires the woman to engage and offers lots of opportunity for the

woman to reflect on the skills she is developing. If they haven't been successful in securing a property from the first selection of available properties, the worker might suggest that they go to the local library and she will show the women how to access the internet and look up the properties herself. Once again this is about building skills and confidence.

Once a woman is accepted for a property, the worker described this as her 'crisis work', in that she needed to drop everything and work with the women intensely to get the required bond and rent together and finalise the signing of the lease as quickly as possible. Generally this is achieved within 24 to 36 hours. The worker and the woman will have agreed on the make up of the funds required (bond, bond top up and rent-in-advance), which organisations will provide the various parts of those funds and how much the woman will be contributing. Usually the worker picks up the woman, gets written confirmation from the agent, then returns to the Crisis Centre for a cheque, drives to the Office of Housing to complete a Bond Loan application. Next morning the worker will pick up the woman, go past the Office of Housing, the bank for any funds from the woman, and finally on to the real estate agent's to sign up. The typical problems that might occur relate to securing the bond or the make up of the other funds. This might involve discussions with the agent. For example offering 6 weeks rent-in-advance with the bond to follow in a week. Importantly, the worker suggested it was the flexibility of the various funding sources and her management's capacity to be client and solution focused, which allowed her to tailor the best combination of funds to suit a particular client's situation.

Moving in }

After finalising the lease, the worker discusses what other types of material aid or financial support the woman is likely to require for the initial setup. This might include furniture vouchers, funds for whitegoods or bonds for utilities setup. This might also include support such as food vouchers to provide for her family for the first week or until she gets paid again. The worker and the woman agree on a time for the move, usually within the next 24 to 48 hours.

Once again the worker was keenly aware of the type of issues that create barriers for women. In most cases the worker organised to transport the woman, her children and belongings directly into the new accommodation. While this might take a couple of trips, the worker usually provided the woman with the utilities numbers and her mobile phone to call the various companies and organise connection or billing. This ensured everything went smoothly but also meant the worker was on hand if there were any issues.

Before leaving the woman for her first night in the new accommodation the worker also made a point of providing her with all the relevant tenancy information and telephone numbers to ring if anything should go wrong. These include numbers for further financial assistance should she require it. Importantly if the woman is renting privately (not through an agent) the worker also provided a standard rental agreement and condition report to complete. This is lodged later with the landlord as a way of protecting the woman against any claims for property damage.

Follow-up

Usually the worker called or arranged to visit a week later to see if everything is okay, see how the woman is feeling, if there is anything else they needed and to organise to get copies of any further rental receipts for funds the agencies might be providing. The next call, if everything is going well, is in three months. Once again just to check how things are going.

Technically the worker is supposed to contact the woman again in six months; however she has started to question this practice. Her experience suggests that either there has been an issue and the woman has recontacted already, or the woman has 'moved on with her life' and as the worker suggests:

'me calling her again can almost be intrusive and some of them just want to get on with their lives. Some just want to forget they were ever part of the system. For some they feel it was a part of their lives that was a failure because of what happened, so moving on is about not having contact with me. Some women send me emails every three months and tell me how they and their kids are going. But for most it is about moving on.'

Sustaining the tenancy }

Obviously the process outlined above is rarely achieved in such a linear manner. Likewise achieving a sustainable tenancy is more than just securing a property at the appropriate rent. Sustaining a tenancy may require providing further assistance to a woman and her children.

The PRAP worker coordinated with HomeGround and TSA Crisis Services Network to develop a rental assistance policy for women on the program. This policy allows women to access further funds during the life of the tenancy should they require it. Access to these funds is for women who were clearly in a sustainable tenancy that was at risk due to unforeseen circumstances. For example a woman with a sick child needed to spend \$70 on a taxi in the middle of the night to take the child to hospital and then return home. Another woman's brother was killed in a car accident inter-state. She lost her hospitality work because she spent two weeks organising the funeral with her mother, burying her brother and clearing out his flat. She was quickly able to secure work on her return but the loss of income threatened her tenancy. In both these cases the women required minimal funds to ensure they maintained the tenancy. Importantly, the funds ensured that these unexpected events didn't result in the women experiencing housing stress, which all too often spirals into other forms of debt. Achieving this type of cross service policy innovations are also an element of the partnership agreement. The agreement brings the two agencies together through the worker, who is able to highlight to both teams the benefits of coordinating this type of policy development, which will produce a more consistent response for service users.

Evidence of the effectiveness of the program

The PRAP program has clearly had outstanding results. The typical client is a woman with children, aged in her late 20s to mid 40s on either parenting allowance, new start or in paid work.

In 2006/2007, despite a 65% increase in the number of clients on the previous year, 42 women accessing the program achieved private rental and a further 10 women gained access to public housing. Of these 42 private rental tenancies only one failed. This was because he ex-partner started to harass her in the new accommodation and eventually she moved back to her parent's home for safety reasons.

The program used \$52,225 of Private Rental Brokerage funds and \$8,178 of Housing Establishment funds to achieve these private rental outcomes, representing just under a \$1500 cost for each tenancy.

Why the programs works as well as it does

The program supports women to achieve sustainable private rental results because of the effectiveness of the worker and the environment created by the partnership arrangement. The worker is effective not just because of a wealth of knowledge about the various resources available from across the region, but also because of her understanding of the rental market and a capacity to appropriately manage the agents.

Managing the agents is a mix of being clear about support boundaries and a commitment to engaging with agents. This included ensuring the agent knew that the woman had the full support of The Salvation Army behind her. As the worker commented 'Most agents think family is very important. They want to know the women have roots. We are the women's roots for the year. The agents know The Salvation Army and they know we are an organisation that will still be here to support these women.' The worker was also very clear about always pushing the agent to work directly with the woman. One agent contacted the worker to inform her that a client would be 14 days in arrears the next day, the worker responded 'well you are an agent, you know what to do, issue her with a notice. I am sure it will be alright but you need to contact the tenant not me.' Inevitably there will be some times when

In Conclusion }

an agent is renting to more than one client of the program, providing really clear but supportive messages to agents has been important in managing the agent's expectations of what the PRAP worker can do. Some agents are now starting to refer clients to the worker. Although they are not aware that the program is only for women who have experienced family violence⁴, they refer clients who are in rent arrears. Generally the worker will connect the referral to the appropriate agency, and then follow up with a phone call to the agent thanking them for the referral. This led one agent to ask the PRAP worker to organise a briefing session for all the rental account managers at the agency on the various types of support available and which community organisations they should contact or refer their tenants to.

Understanding the market has also been an important element of success for this program. It is clear that there are very few properties in the local, inner south, area. This has often meant looking in areas such as Frankston, Seaford, Dandenong, Noble Park and Hampton Park. While this has involved managing the expectations of the service user of where they might achieve their first tenancy, it also involves understanding how the market is changing in various areas. One strategy used, particularly in areas where open for inspections are attracting 30 people to an opening, is to offer slightly more rent than the asking price. For example, if a woman can afford \$200 per week, she might apply for properties that are advertised at \$190. In her application she will offer \$200 per week plus six weeks rent-in-advance. This type of strategy is often enough for her to secure the property and to begin on the road of establishing a rental history.

In Conclusion

The Family Violence Private Rental Program is a success because of the quality of the worker's practice and because the environment created by the partnership between the FVOP and the HomeGround HIR service.

This partnership supports innovative and creative use of a flexible funding base to secure sustainable private rental outcomes for women. The worker's practice successfully bridges the cultures of homelessness and family violence, while also managing to work with the private rental market on its own terms. Importantly for the women accessing this program, they are continuously building their own skill base and have a clear understanding of the various types of support the program can offer. Once they have secured a property, they can be assured of further rental assistance should the need arise, providing them with a level of stability and security upon which they can rebuild their lives.

For further information regarding the program contact Ivana Janicijevic, Private Rental Access worker, on 9536 7797 or Jenny Plant, General Manager, TSA Crisis Services Network.

⁴The worker has generic business cards and never mentions that the PRAP program is to support women who have experienced family violence. This is obviously for privacy reasons for the women accessing the service but also because the worker feels it should have no relationship to the decision making process the agent engages in.

Integrating Generalist Crisis and Family Violence Responses

by

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August 2008



Introduction }

Improving services to marginalised and vulnerable households remains a central concern of policy makers and service providers. There are many ways that services and the outcomes they deliver can be improved – they can be enhanced through structural reforms, through increased funding, better targeting or through a focus on the practice of workers and managers. Services can also be improved through a focus on the better integration of different systems and agencies within these systems.

This paper examines how better integration between homelessness and domestic violence services can have benefits for clients and services. We examine the integration of two programs within The Salvation Army Crisis Services network - the Crisis Contact Centre (CCC) and the Family Violence Outreach Program (FVOP) - to answer two important questions. These are:

- 1) What benefits does successful program integration have for clients and services?
- 2) What factors are critical if program integration is to be successful and sustainable?

The paper has five sections. In the first part we discuss the issue of service system fragmentation before considering current Victorian Government policy initiatives designed to address this problem. The next section provides an overview of the Crisis Contact Centre and the Family Violence Outreach Program. Following this we describe how the integrated Crisis Contact Centre/FVOP model operates. In the fourth section we unpack key components of the model to examine the questions listed above. In the final section we offer some concluding comments.

1. Background & Context }

1.1 The issue of fragmentation

A long held view in policy circles is that homeless services are poorly integrated and lack cohesion. In the early 1990s the Victorian government identified the lack of integration between youth services as a major failing. The theme of a lack of integration re-surfaced in the Victorian Homeless Strategy (VHS) 15 years later.

The VHS identifies a lack of integration, and its associated inefficiencies, as one of the key issues facing organisations working with homeless people. In Victoria the importance of an integrated service system remains a central element of the State government's reform agenda. In a recent statement it claimed that:

When services are well coordinated, they are usually easier to access and able to deliver better outcomes for people who use the services, as well as the people who provide them (Department of Human Services [Vic] 2006:10)

Similarly, poor service coordination has also been identified in a number of reports on family violence. For instance the *Reforming the Family Violence System* (2005) report found that:

The response to family violence is fragmented and dispersed across a range of providers, which operate autonomously with differing philosophies, practice approaches and responses. (Department for Victoria Communities [Vic] 2005)

Poor integration creates additional barriers that vulnerable people struggle to negotiate. When consumers were consulted as part of the VHS they reported that accessing services is a complicated and time consuming process. They were frustrated by the need to re-tell their stories to different workers at different services with no guarantee of assistance.

1.2 The 'Opening Doors' Initiative

Addressing service system fragmentation was a key outcome of the VHS and the Victorian government has initiated a number of sector reform projects aimed at improving the response to people who are at risk or experiencing homelessness. The *State-wide Homelessness Assessment and Referral Framework* led to the development of an:

... area-based service coordination framework called Opening Doors – a practice and systems approach to provide timely and effective access to homelessness and social housing services to people seeking assistance (Department of Human Services [Vic] 2008:1)

The 'Opening Doors' framework streamlines access to services via the formation of local areas service networks. Each local area service network has a clearly visible entry point (front door) that undertakes initial assessment, prioritisation and resource allocation. Through local area service networks, a comprehensive knowledge of available resources is concentrated at a 'front door' point of contact, referrals are streamlined and services can be delivered more consistently. This enables the better targeting of resources according to local need. Underpinning the success of the Opening Door framework is the importance of local service collaboration and consistent high quality assessment to improve needs identification and the referral of clients to appropriate resources.

1.3 The Integrated Family Violence Service System

The Integrated Family Violence Service (IFVS) system is a whole of government approach that is overseen by the Department for Victorian Communities. The IFVS supports close partnerships between the Victoria Police, the Department of Justice and programs funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS), including Housing and Community Building and the Office for Children. Specific initiatives include the implementation of *The Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*, a Family Violence Court Division of the Magistrates Court of Victoria, specialist Family Violence Services to support victims of family violence in their contact with the legal system, the development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy, and DHS funded programs that deliver support services to women and children and to perpetrators of violence.

A recent initiative of the IFVS was the launch of the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management framework, which is currently being implemented throughout Victoria. This framework promotes a consistent approach to the assessment and management of family violence across the service system. It states that:

Adopting a consistent approach for assessing and managing family violence throughout the service system ensures the focus of intervention and support remains on the safety of the victims. It also ensures all professionals involved in identifying and responding to family violence are approaching their clients' safety and needs consistently, and that victims receive a response that is respectful, informed, holistic and understanding, regardless of their background or an organisation's culture. (Department of Victorian Communities [Vic] 2007:5)

Underpinning the success of the framework is its effective implementation across all parts of the service system where people experiencing family violence present. This includes the integration of family violence services with mainstream responses as well as with generalist services in the homelessness service system.

2. Service Overview }

2.1 Crisis Contact Centre (CCC)

The CCC is a generalist service that offers a Statewide, 24 hour, crisis service to people of all ages. It is open for face-to-face and telephone assistance every day of the year from 9:00am until 11:00pm. Crisis support and assistance is available through a Toll Free telephone number outside these hours. The CCC is a high volume service that assists over 6000 households a year, most of whom are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Clients present with a vast array of needs and a crisis response can include financial assistance with sourcing emergency housing, providing food vouchers and material aid; advocacy on behalf of clients with government bureaucracies, including the Department of Human Services, for anything from Office of Housing tenancy issues to child protection concerns, to advocacy with hospitals and health providers for provision of mental health assessments or other health services. The CCC is also frequently a first point of contact for women and children fleeing domestic violence. This crisis response is augmented by strong links to support providers; referrals are often made for assistance with case management of needs and risks identified in the initial contact. CCC clients can also access other services that are co-located on site including the Centrelink Community Support Unit, HomeGround Housing Information and Referral services and a Legal service. The CCC provides a practical crisis response and follow up referrals very much in the model of the Opening Doors initiative.

2.2 Family Violence Outreach Program (FVOP)

The FVOP is an outreach support service for women (including women with children) who are at risk of, or experiencing, family violence. The FVOP is funded by the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program and operates in the inner and middle southern metropolitan region of Melbourne. As part of the IFVS system, the FVOP works in close partnership with Victoria Police, the Department of Justice and other DHS funded programs, including services for women and children and men's behaviour change programs for perpetrators of violence.

The program has formal links with Transitional Housing Managers to provide access to transitional housing for its clients.

The FVOP provides assistance with legal issues, housing and relocation, advocacy, and referrals for emergency accommodation, counseling and other supports. In addition, a Private Rental Access worker is employed in partnership with HomeGround Services to assist women secure private rental accommodation.

Although the CCC and FVOP are delivered under the Crisis Services umbrella, until recently they operated independently. This resulted in the duplication of some service responses and problems managing demand, particularly at FVOP. Both issues undermined the ability of either agency to deliver good outcomes for women and families experiencing family violence.

2.3 The Need for Integration

Operating the two programs as separate entities had three key limitations. First, the FVOP had, over time, assumed responsibility for a family violence crisis response during business hours. This consumed considerable FVOP resources and also weakened family violence expertise among staff at the CCC. As detailed above, the demands on the CCC, both in terms of client numbers and breadth of knowledge, are considerable. In response to these demands, CCC staff would call on FVOP to appropriately respond to women experiencing family violence. While consultation with FVOP is encouraged as it provides access to expert knowledge, overtime, the CCC became reliant on FVOP presence to assist women experiencing a family violence crisis between 9am and 5pm. As much family violence occurs at night and on weekends, the de-skilling of CCC workers had consequences for the after hours crisis response.

Second, both CCC and FVOP were maintaining a full-time duty (or intake) response. In a resource scarce environment the duplication of a crisis response increased workload for staff resulting in decreased access for clients. It is

¹ [http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Fact+sheet++Family+violence+funding+announcement/\\$file/Fact+sheet++family+violence+funding+announcement.pdf](http://www.women.vic.gov.au/web12/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Fact+sheet++Family+violence+funding+announcement/$file/Fact+sheet++family+violence+funding+announcement.pdf)

3. The Integrated CCC/FVOP Model }

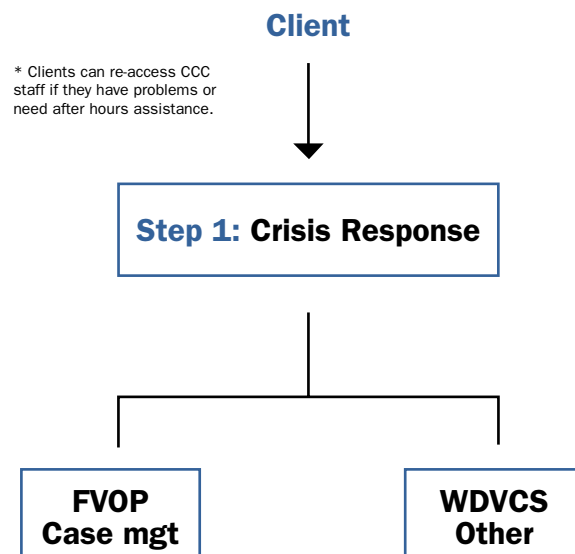
important to keep in mind that family violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44¹. For many women and children, timely provision of appropriate services is critical. A double duty system was not an effective and efficient use of CCC and FVOP resources, a point further emphasised by the fact that the crisis role is the CCC's central function and its reputation has been built on a capacity to quickly and comprehensively respond to a broad range of complex needs. Finally, the independent operation of the two services meant there were limited opportunities for sharing practice expertise and program resources.

In 2005 the Crisis Services network employed consultants to undertake external review of its Women's Services arm, which included the FVOP and the Young Women's Outreach Program. The review recommended disbanding the Women's Services operational unit and the integration of FVOP with the CCC to enable a streamlined service continuum that incorporated 24 hour crisis assistance and support towards long-term stability. The recommendation highlighted how progressive changes in the operating environment had, over time, changed the FVOP model. The original approach, which was established in 1992, emerged in response to the number of women presenting at the CCC who were experiencing violence but were inappropriate or ineligible for refuge accommodation. When first established FVOP staff worked very closely with the CCC desk to develop responses that ensure these women received appropriate assistance. As the FVOP expanded, the linkage between the two services weakened. The re-alignment of Crisis and Family Violence Services as an operational arm of the Crisis Services Network in July 2006 coincided with the CCC formally receiving funding to deliver an after hours family violence crisis response as part of Stage 2 of the IFVS system.

3. The Integrated CCC/FVOP Model }

Women seeking assistance with family violence can access the FVOP service in two main ways. First, partners in the IFVS system such as the police, the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, refuges and family violence counselling providers refer directly to the FVOP. Second, women who contact the CCC (by phone or in person) are referred through to FVOP following the resolution of any immediate crisis.

Figure 1: Client Pathway- Integrated CCC/FVOP Model



There are 4 key elements to the integrated model that promote the objectives of the 'Opening Doors' initiative and the IFVS. The model reinforces the core competencies of each service: CCC crisis assessment skills and FVOP's case management practice. The model provides an after hours response that is informed by family violence expertise. The four elements are described below. (See also Figure 1.)

4. Benefits and sustainability }

Step 1: Crisis response, risk assessment and safety planning

The CCC undertakes the initial assessment for women who are at risk of or experiencing family violence. The CCC addresses any urgent needs such as immediate accommodation (through negotiation with the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service or arranging of motel accommodation), material aid, negotiating with police and organising transport. The CCC also takes responsibility for risk assessment and safety planning.

Step 2: Assessment and referral

Following resolution of the immediate crisis, where it is appropriate, the CCC outlines the nature of FVOP and the services it offers. With the client's permission, the CCC completes a one page assessment and referral form that is provided to the FVOP for follow up (see Appendix). On receipt of the referral, FVOP staff contact the woman and initiate case management support.

After hours support for existing FVOP clients

Clients of the FVOP are routinely informed about the availability of after-hours assistance from the CCC and, when the FVOP has concerns about a particular client, workers, with the client's consent, update the CCC client file to alert staff to the situation. This arrangement extends the FVOP presence beyond 9-5 operating hours.

Secondary consultation and shared resources

During business hours FVOP workers are available to CCC staff for secondary consultation and, where women are particularly vulnerable, a FVOP worker will go to the CCC to meet with the client directly. In addition, FVOP staff provide training on family violence to members of the CCC team and staff of both programs regularly attend each other's team meetings for practice discussion. The manager of the CCC and the manager of the FVOP also work in close partnership.

The integration of Crisis and Family Violence Services is in line with common assessment approaches, and the Opening Doors initiative being implemented across the state by DHS. It has a number of benefits for clients and staff of both programs.

4. Benefits and sustainability }

The fragmentation of the service system, identified by both the VHS and the IFVS, causes specific hardship for women experiencing family violence. The very nature of family violence requires a co-ordinated response, particularly when children are involved. The resource mobilisation spans public and private institutions who act independently with varying philosophical approaches, financial resources and organisational priorities. One attempt to address this fragmentation has been the 'partnership model', characterised by memoranda of understanding that outline how different service plan to work together to achieve better integration.

Such partnership agreements can, however, struggle when there is a lack of philosophical cohesion or no common culture of practice 'on the ground'. The CCC/FVOP model has approached integration from a practice focussed perspective. Sustaining the integrated approach does, however, require commitment, resources and ongoing attention to ensure the arrangements are continually monitored, evaluated and improved. The benefits have been borne out in improved access to crisis and long term support, sustainability, transparency, and improved program's capacity and better practice standards.

4.1 What benefits does successful program integration have?

Immediate Access and Access After Hours

24 hour access to a crisis response through the CCC has benefits for clients, particularly as many incidences of violence occur at night and at weekends. In addition, women who are not in immediate danger but contact CCC after hours to discuss an experience of violence have access to family violence expertise, risk assessment, safety planning and information on the FVOP and the range of other supports available in the service system. For those who are interested in outreach support, 24 hour referral is available. The model also builds on the strengths of the respective programs, capitalising on CCC expertise in addressing crisis situations. In practice this means that the “books never close” for referrals at FVOP and clients never receive an answering machine message in response to a request for assistance.

The benefits of the model are illustrated in the following case study.

Melody and her young daughter presented at the CCC on Sunday from NSW. They were escaping a violent ex-partner and her travel to Melbourne had been arranged by a women's refuge in NSW. Melody arrived at the CCC with no accommodation, limited funds and no friends or family contacts. Conversation with the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service confirmed that refuge accommodation was inappropriate as Melody was not at immediate risk of violence. The CCC team arranged immediate accommodation and provided food vouchers and nappies to ensure Melody's material needs were met. The CCC worker then explained the availability of an on-site FVOP and outlined the range of services the program could provide. Melody indicated an interest in the FVOP and with the assistance of the worker completed the one page referral form. The CCC worker noted that Melody's daughter had some behavioural issues and, after discussion with Melody, they decided to contact Child Protection. Transport to the motel was arranged and Melody was told that a worker from the FVOP would be in contact within two working days. In the interim Melody was invited to re-contact the CCC at any time – either in person or via the toll-free number.

On Monday a worker from the FVOP contacted Melody and arranged to meet her at the hotel. Over the next 9 months, with the support of the FVOP, Melody secured transitional housing from the local THM, was assisted with a priority application for public housing (Segment One), and was linked in with a specialist family violence counsellor. Melody and the FVOP also worked closely with Child Protection to ensure that her daughter also received specialist support.

Integration of the CCC and FVOP programs has also increased access to resources for existing clients of the FVOP program. Where an FVOP client or a worker identifies that assistance may be required after normal business hours, the CCC is alerted by a response plan developed by FVOP and implemented by CCC accordingly. This streamlines the response should after hours assistance be required and ensures women are not required to re-tell their stories when seeking after hours assistance.

Improved Access to Support.

The ability of welfare agencies to deliver successful outcomes is often compromised by the high level of demand for services. As a result agencies prioritise their responses and often resort to demand management strategies such as waiting lists or placing limits on the services they provide. Demand for family violence services is increasing and the southern metropolitan region, in which FVOP operates, has one of the highest incidences of reported family violence in the state². Prior to allocating the crisis and assessment function to the CCC the FVOP had problems remaining open for referrals. The time spent staffing FVOP's crisis response line significantly reduced time for case management and networking. Not only did this duplicate a role already undertaken by CCC, it created stress for FVOP clients and for staff, and failed to effectively capitalise on the expertise of each service. Since the implementation of the new model, however, this duplication no longer exists.

Since July 2006 the FVOP has remained open for referrals except for two brief periods when they had staffing vacancies. In other words, all referrals from the CCC and IFVS partners have been responded to and case

² Victorian Family Violence Database: Five Year Report, www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/connect/DOJ+internet/Home/crime/research+statistics pg 33 figure 22

management support initiated within two working days. This timely access to support also accrues benefit to the CCC in that it ameliorates the re-presentation of FVOP clients for crisis services. The consistent accessibility of FVOP despite a sustained increase in demand due to the involvement of the police, courts and other service providers in the IFVS, emphasises the effectiveness of integrating the two services.

Transparency

Services working with marginalised and disenfranchised households are often criticised for 'cherry picking'. Cherry picking is the practice of selecting clients with the least complex needs. Similarly some services are criticised for selecting clients who are most appropriate to program vacancies or targeting services to sub-groups of a particular population. FVOP created a higher level of transparency around client access to services by directing the assessment and intake function to a third party, the CCC.

Improved Practice Standards

Integration of the programs has operated to assist in the maintenance of high practice standards at both services. For example, if a CCC worker does not undertake a good assessment or develop a thorough safety plan, the FVOP are quick to raise the issue. Furthermore, if the FVOP is not responding appropriately to referrals and women re-contact the CCC, again the situation is raised for discussion. Ongoing and open dialogue between the two programs is critical to this success. In the words of the FVOP manager,

If the CCC is dropping the ball assessment wise I hear about it straight away and bring it up with [name of CCC Manager] as soon as I see him. Similarly – if the DV team are not doing what they should be the clients are pretty quick to head back to the CCC and let them know. If a few issues come up a couple of FVOP staff go to the CCC meeting and talk it all through, revisit the model, etc. So far it has been working well but you need to keep up the communication.

Increasing Capacity

An emphasis on retaining and developing family violence expertise at the CCC has enhanced its capacity to deliver a family violence crisis response and this has a number of direct benefits for clients. First and foremost it contributes to the maintenance of thorough, broad based assessment skills in CCC workers, assessments that identify family violence as a possible issue in a crisis presentation even if it is not raised directly by the client. Second, the 'mainstreaming' of a family violence response via the CCC directly addresses the system-wide reform identified as crucial by the IFVS. Third, good family violence practice is supported by the availability of FVOP staff to provide secondary consultation when CCC is faced with a particularly complex case. This creates a culture of exchange that promotes a cohesive philosophy and consistent service practice. Fourth, as one of the only 24 hour services available in Victoria, CCC is funded to deliver an after-hours family violence. Concerns about de-skilling due to over-reliance on FVOP have been addressed through a transfer of assessment and referral responsibilities back to the CCC, and supported with training, peer support and exchange. Fifth, the focus on post crisis support has allowed the FVOP management to identify networking opportunities in the local community. These networks are fundamental to ensuring that FVOP is proactive in addressing family violence in the community and not just reactive to client demand. Finally, the improved post-crisis response by FVOP has reduced the number of women who return to the CCC requiring crisis response, further enhancing CCC's capacity to respond effectively.

The following case study illustrates the maintenance of CCC skills and the exchange of information through secondary consultation:

Pamela lives in an Office of Housing property with 6 children, including 2 children fathered by the perpetrator. Pamela was also 7 months pregnant and mobility was an issue. The perpetrator had a history of physical violence for which Pamela had obtained an intervention order in the past. The intervention order was withdrawn. The perpetrator also had no citizenship status which became significant as

Pamela was very concerned about the effect the IVO would have on his residency and relationship with his children. She was referred to CCC by Women's Domestic Violence crisis Service (WDVCS).

Pamela's ex partner was not living with her; however, he had harassed her, stolen mail and followed her on occasions. The previous day his behaviour had escalated. He had turned up outside their daughter's kindergarten and tried to abduct her. Pamela states that she had reported this to the police but they did not assist due to "lack of evidence".

The CCC worker discussed Pamela's safety and discovered she had a well-established safety plan. Pamela said that she was comfortable staying in the family home and felt safe as she had others staying with her as an extra precaution. Pamela identified her main concerns were getting another intervention order immediately, her children's welfare and needing some assistance with the Immigration Department.

The CCC worker outlined FVOP and the services they offer. A call to FVOP was made to discuss strategies and an appointment was made for following day. Pamela identified that the other issues could wait until the FVOP appointment, but she really needed the IVO immediately.

The CCC worker then made calls to advocate for Pamela in obtaining support from the Support Network and he Family Violence Applicant Support Officer at Melbourne Magistrates Court. A discussion was also had about emergency services in case the perpetrator showed up at her house. These details were communicated to FVOP.

The shift away from time intensive crisis response has increased the capacity of FVOP to participate in broader integration projects such as the establishment of an intervention order applicant support service at the newly opened Moorabbin Justice Centre and the development of a comprehensive training kit for local police. The FVOP is also an active participant in the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group and other networks that facilitate better integration between services.

The FVOP recently worked in close partnership with the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group to design a full day workshop – Family Violence from an Indigenous Perspective aimed at bringing together mainstream and indigenous family violence services. The FVOP participated in planning meetings, prepared the flyer, arranged nametags, and assisted administratively on the day.

This presence in the service delivery community allows for a proactive response to emerging issues and strengthens existing relationships to ensure an environment of trust in which stakeholders can raise issues or make suggestions about meeting the needs of their community members experiencing family violence.

4.2 What factors are critical if program integration is to be successful and sustainable?

Staff Retention and Knowledge Sharing

A good practice model is one that endures and further develops over time. The ability to sustain a good practice model is often compromised by a dependence on key staff. High staff turnover in the homeless and family violence service sectors means that the accumulated knowledge, which is often located in a small number of workers, simply walks out the door. As a result, integrated models can be fragile and the underlying principles and process that support them tend to atrophy over time. If good practice models are to be sustained over the long term addressing this problem is essential.

This model addresses these problems by diversifying program knowledge through the two services. It does this by systematically embedding the practice skills necessary to uphold the core principles of the model: shared resources, regular communication, ongoing practice discussion and joint training. More specifically, FVOP staff provide regular in-house family violence, risk assessment and safety planning training to staff at the CCC, and new staff of both programs spend time observing practices at the other program during their induction to the organisation. In addition FVOP team members regularly

5. Conclusion }

attend CCC meetings and vice versa. Perhaps a strong example of the positive relationship this develops is the pathway that has developed of CCC staff transferring to FVOP and vice versa. This pathway strengthens the model through a novel form of ‘staff retention’.

Management Cooperation

While this approach has certainly strengthened the level of integration between the two services, there is more to successful and sustainable integration than just training new staff. In this context the roles of senior managers are vital to maintaining the relationship. When and where bad practices occurs managers take a lead role in raising the issues with their colleague manager, identifying the source and the nature of the problems and then outlining steps to address it. Services such as the CCC and FVOP are often under sustained pressures and systems do, on occasion, breakdown. What is important here, and what characterises the CCC/ FVOP relationship, is the rapid and open identification of problems and a commitment to addressing them.

Documentation and Reflection

Documenting the model also provides an important record of its history, rationale and the benefits. Reflective practice, which requires time and energy, is crucial to sustaining and developing models of practice.

5. Conclusion

This report sought to answer two questions:

- 1) What benefits does successful program integration have for clients and services?
- 2) What factors are critical if program integration is to be successful and sustainable?

It identified a number of limitations to the operation of FVOP and CCC as two separate services and outlined the benefits of integrating the two programs. Furthermore, the integration of the CCC demonstrates that effective partnerships between generalist and specialist services can enhance access, transparency, practice and capacity. This is particularly pertinent in the current policy context and the ongoing implementation of the ‘Open Doors’ approach.

The CCC/FVOP model approaches integration from a “practice focussed” perspective. This avoids the pitfalls of ‘lip service’ memoranda of agreement and reinforces the core competencies of each agency- CCC in crisis assessment and FVOP in case management. The benefits have been borne out in:

- Improved practice in crisis response incorporating a family violence skill set,
- Improved access to long term support.
- Transparency as a key goal in developing accountability and responsiveness is met through the third party assessment tool.
- Sustainability, including staff retention and transfer of organisational knowledge is achieved through cross service training and observation and staff transfer between services.
- The program’s capacity has remained strong: referral capacity has improved and a crisis response available 24hrs, 365 days a year.
- Practice standards have been supported and augmented by an open exchange between program staff and program managers.
- Organisational networking, which is necessary for effective practice that allows for proactive responses to emerging trend and beneficial as it strengthens service relationships, has been an increasing focus as an organisational priority. This is in part due to clear role definition promoted by the model.

This model represents a profound shift in the way services can be delivered to women experiencing violence. It challenges the mind set that only specialised women’s services can provide assessment and referral to women experiencing domestic or family violence. Such specialisation, in a resource scarce environment, often leads to a lack of responsiveness to major shifts in patterns of clients need, resulting in a silo mentality, a lack of accountability and, ultimately the loss of effective advocacy. In short, it can turn apparently open systems into ones in which the underlying practice focus shifted. This approach shows that an integrated model between generalist and specialist services can do much to address these issues.

Appendix }

CCC referral to the FVOP

Agency Referring to CCC _____

Contact Details: Name: _____ Ph: _____

CCC Worker: _____ Date: _____

Type of Support Requested (circle) **Supported Accom.** Outreach Counselling

Client Details

Name: _____ DOB: _____

Contact No: _____

Safe time to call: _____ Safe to leave message? _____

Accompanying Children (Name/age/sex)

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

5. _____ 6. _____

Language other than English? _____ Interpreter required? _____

Income Type: _____

Current Living Situation (circle) Living with perpetrator? _____

Contact with perpetrator? _____

Legal

Intervention Order? _____ Family Court Order? _____

Child Protection? _____ Other? _____

Presenting Issues/Brief History

Other Services Involved

Service Name: _____ Contact Details: _____

Service Name: _____ Contact Details: _____

Client Safety Plan in Place?

Brief of presenting issues relevant to client/worker safety (if any)



THE SALVATION ARMY
crisis services

Authority to Release/Exchange Information

I _____ /_____/_____
(Name) (d.o.b.)

give permission for the Salvation Army **Family Violence Outreach Program** to contact the person/agency/s listed:

The Salvation Army Crisis Contact Centre

to exchange information about myself (and my children if relevant). This information is to be used for the purpose of providing appropriate services in line with mutually agreed case plans and will be kept as part of my confidential case file at The Salvation Army Crisis Services located at 27-31 Grey Street, St Kilda.

I am aware that this Consent Form is valid until I withdraw my consent or until the expiry date noted below.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name (please print): _____

Expiry Date: _____ (no more than three months from date of signing)

VERBAL CONSENT FOR THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION

(**ONLY** to be used when the client is not present to provide written consent)

Verbal consent obtained Yes _____ No _____

Worker's Name: _____ Signature: _____

Expiry Date: (no more than three months from date of providing verbal consent) _____

**Taking Time:
A model for building
respectful and sustainable
partnerships between
Indigenous communities
and mainstream services**

prepared by

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September 2008



Taking Time }

Taking Time: A model for building respectful and sustainable partnerships between Indigenous communities and mainstream services.

Despite goodwill and the best of intentions, the history of working relationships between Indigenous and mainstream organisations has often been a difficult one, characterised by patchy engagement and a lack of long-term outcomes. This paper provides a discussion on building sustainable, respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships between Indigenous communities and mainstream service providers. Its focus is the relationship between The Salvation Army (TSA) Crisis Services Family Violence Outreach Program (FVOP) and its Indigenous partners. This partnership, developed over two years, has provided the environment for improving service delivery to Indigenous women accessing the FVOP, provided the relationship for successful co-case management of clients between Indigenous and mainstream services, developed the understanding and practice of mutual secondary consultation roles on Indigenous issues and family violence for all workers, improved the FVOP's representation and contribution to Indigenous programs and services in the area and most importantly created a series of sustainable relationships which will live on beyond individual workers within agencies.

This paper will:

- Explore the factors that contributed to the development and success of these partnerships. These factors include: creating the right organisational environment to foster partnerships, building the partnership one step at a time, dealing with stereotypes, and taking the time required to build trust.
- Provide evidence of the benefits of this partnership for clients, Indigenous and mainstream services and groups. Evidence is considered over 5 key partnership sites with other specific projects, forms of secondary consultation and capacity building explored as additional benefits of the partnership.
- Explore the transferability of this model beyond the Melbourne inner and middle south.
- Provide recommendations for the further enhancement of this partnership via a formalised MOU and an Indigenous Internship program

Factors that contributed to the development and success of these partnerships:

'Paying the Rent' - Creating the right organisational environment to foster the development of partnerships

The FVOP sits within a suite of services situated at TSA Crisis Services Network in St Kilda. These services include the crisis contact centre, a youth and family refuge, a young women's program and a primary health care service. Despite a reasonably strong representation of Indigenous clients across the Crisis Services network, the development of the primary health care service (Access Health) presented both a challenge and an opportunity to the organisation to develop strong links with the Indigenous community. The challenge was to ensure that the local Indigenous community felt confident¹

¹ Confidence here is both a mixture of knowledge of the services provided as well as the assurance of being treated in a culturally appropriate way.

Factors that contributed to the development and success of these partnerships }

in accessing the new service. The physical development of the new service, both in space and capacity, provided an opportunity to build non-crisis² focused relationships with the Indigenous community in the form of ongoing groups and activities. It was at this time that the organisation decided to formalise its commitment to building sustainable engagement with the local Indigenous community through the employment of an Aboriginal Access Worker (AAW). This role, bundled together with other responsibilities at Access Health, created a .8 EFT ongoing position. This structural commitment provided the necessary environmental conditions to support future partnerships, not just because it provided the resources, but also because it signalled to workers in the network that Indigenous issues were important to the organisation and their external engagement would be supported. When questioned about the allocation of these resources, the General Manager of TSA Crisis Services Network likened the decision to the early 1980s Indigenous rights concept of 'Pay the Rent'³, adding 'if more mainstream organisations backed their commitment to Indigenous issues with real resources we would all have a stronger platform to work from. So often Indigenous people choosing to work on Indigenous rights issues have insecure or piecemeal employment, we wanted to ensure a level of job security that would allow the worker to develop her role over time and with confidence'.

While this position is focused on ensuring Indigenous access for the primary health care service, the role broadened to include a secondary consultation capacity to other services within the network seeking to develop stronger links and partnerships with the Indigenous community. It is important to make the distinction here between a model of Access and Equity worker, found in many organisations, which situates responsibility for the building of external relationships with that worker – versus the secondary consultation or conduit capacity provided by this role at TSA Crisis Services Network. While the AAW has significant links within the Indigenous community and can make introductions to relevant elders or Indigenous workers, it is the responsibility of the program to develop, foster and resource these relationship. The

FVOP has developed the most successful and enduring of these partnerships to date. Building partnerships with Indigenous services and the local community uses many of the elements expected in any partnership development, with some significant exceptions. These exceptions include the time the relationship will take to develop, a significantly different starting position of trust, and a real valuing of time and process over immediate deliverables and outcomes.

These factors, particularly the latter, do not always sit well with competitively orientated notions of public sector management. However the partnership between the FVOP and the local Indigenous community provides an alternative way of viewing the value of such relationships, providing a sense of social capital and capacity building with Indigenous organisations that becomes a reliable, sustainable resource to be called upon. It is important to recognise the development of any good partnership requires both a philosophical, as well as a practical approach, particularly with Indigenous partnerships. Core to the FVOP philosophical approach were the ideas of owning the history of Indigenous relations in this country, the need to take time to see what might emerge, and the basic requirement of building respect into every interaction. Moving from philosophical rhetoric to actual partnership requires that people embark on a process of day-to-day engagement with each other; the partnership becomes the stuff that is represented by people's actual work practices and interactions. What does this actually mean on the ground, how did it develop?

Building a partnership one interaction at a time

The initial engagement in this partnership came from the Assistant Program Manager of the FVOP (FVOP APM), who noticing the number of women accessing the Indigenous group activities in the primary health care facility⁴, enquired with the AAW about the prevalence of family violence in the local Indigenous population. She was concerned that Indigenous women were generally not referred to the FVOP and sought advice on how to improve referral pathways. It was agreed that key to improving

² Prior to the development of the primary healthcare facility, services at TSA Crisis Services Network were based on either a non-appointment based crisis response via the Crisis Contact Centre or case managed response via the various funded programs.

³ 'Pay the Rent' was a social justice movement in the early 1980s, emanating from the Tent Embassy in Canberra in the 70s, that made the point Australia was Aboriginal land and as such the non-indigenous community should be paying the rent to live here.

⁴ Indigenous people currently represent 14% of service users at Access Health

access for women was the need to lift the profile of the FVOP within the local Indigenous community and that this would require the development of long-term relationships within the community.

The AAW, agreed to introduce the FVOP APM to a local elder, who was involved in a number of local services and initiatives, including Chairing the FV Regional Action Group (RAG). This introduction occurred in a social setting, which allowed the FVOP APM and the Chair of the RAG some hours to talk and get to know each other. Importantly this allowed the Chair of the RAG time to gauge which Indigenous organisations or networks it would be suitable or useful to introduce the FVOP APM to. This might sound strange, but it was clear from interviews with the various members in this multifaceted partnership arrangement that mainstream organisations and services need to recognise and respect that for Indigenous people any initial contact with mainstream services is built on a deep sense of mistrust. Mistrust that, at a very minimum, the service will not understand nor be respectful of Indigenous culture, and at its very worst, that the service will choose to intervene in an Indigenous persons life in ways that cut across their right to self determination. Obviously this sense of mistrust has a strong historical reality which cannot be denied and nor is it helpful to ignore.

Dealing with Stereotypes

Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers interviewed agreed this deep sense of mistrust forms a virtually invisible and almost impenetrable stereotype of mainstream services for Indigenous people. The FVOP APM recalled the comments from representatives of one Indigenous service, invited to St Kilda as part of the process of building connections with various services - 'We have been very wary of referring to mainstream services because of your lack of knowledge about our culture and our women don't want to be told what to do'. The FVOP APM noted 'you can get defensive or you can hear that, know where it is coming from, and go okay we understand, and move on to talking about how we work with women'. It was clear that in the development of this multifaceted partnership, time and time again the FVOP would encounter this stereotype with each new

organisation it contacted or engaged – importantly the FVOP saw it as their responsibility to own the history of this mistrust and be accountable to it.

Taking time

This phrase, 'taking time', came up again and again when talking to those involved with this partnership. On further examination this term became synonymous with a mix of ideas or philosophical approaches to people's day-to-day interactions. These included: commitment to process, being faithful to commitments, getting to know the culture of specific Indigenous services and literally taking time to be with people – all of these ideals were designed to build trust and respect. On the ground these ideas meant very practical things.

Commitment to process included an inherent understanding of the right to self-determination for Indigenous people. Not getting involved in community politics but recognising one's place as 'outside of it', waiting and willing to respond to requests and engagement that were about the core issues of reducing the incidence of FV for Indigenous women and children. Recognising that the collective experience of the process - of how an outcome was achieved or not - can actually become a future resource that an individual or group can draw upon if the time is taken to reflect on what has happened.

Being faithful to commitments is a mix of actually doing what you say you are going to do and was also one of those 'don't blink now' type experiences. Previously the FVOP had attempted to build relationships with local organisations like Winja Ulupna with little ongoing success. Winja Ulupna, or Winja as it is known within the community, is the only Indigenous female detox-rehab in Australia. Previously a worker would commit to attend on a weekly or fortnightly basis, provide information about the FVOP and what the service could offer, with the view to increasing access to the service for Indigenous women. However the dominant focus on service-user case management, rather than community capacity building and secondary consultation capacity, eventually resulted in workers feeling disengaged and disengaging from the commitment to Winja⁵. In effect, over a 10-year history of attempted engagement, FVOP

³ With one notable exception of a worker who maintained a fantastic commitment to Winja until resigning from the FVOP. This type of individual 'good' worker form of engagement with Indigenous services is inherently problematic because it lays bare the lack of depth and accountability of relationship required to provide the type of ongoing commitment Indigenous services should be able to rely upon if we are committed to a mainstream service model approach to tackling Indigenous disadvantage.

Evidence of the benefits of the partnerships for clients and Indigenous and mainstream services and groups



often 'blinked' before it had been present long enough to develop the ease in the relationship that would allow them to work through what was actually useful to the workers and the women living at Winja. Indigenous workers interviewed for this project talked about how this felt from their service's experience. Mainstream services often want to engage, come for a while, no one was too sure exactly how things would work out, then they would either up and leave or contact would peter out. Interestingly this process tends to leave responsibility for the accountability of mainstream organisations with the Indigenous organisation – a position which, for historical and resource reasons, is likely to result in everyone 'blinking'. In effect the FVOP reversed the onus of accountability with Indigenous services. Resource and historical reasons aside, this responsibility for calling on the accountability of a mainstream service relies on either a position of power⁶ or a relationship of deep trust between organisations and workers. Given the inherent lack of structural or formal power held by most Indigenous services, partnerships such as this must rely on the development of deep trust. In any field of human relations deep trust takes time.

Getting to know the culture of specific services takes both time and a capacity to be present. As one Indigenous worker commented 'we're not another species you know, we are people just like everyone else'. This response was part of a discussion that ranged from the idea that 'getting it right in working with Indigenous women' usually meant a service was getting it right in working with most women (because it was based on respecting an individual's right to self determination and actually being present to the person in front of you) – to not expecting all Indigenous services or people to be the same just because they are Indigenous. While we would not expect the culture of a housing service in the southern region to be the same as that in the northern region, there was this sense that any service with the label 'Indigenous' could somehow be slotted into the same basket – that once we got a sense of how to work with one Indigenous service we would be right in working with any other. This, once again, is based in the historical reality of stereotyping Indigenous people. Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers in this partnership both spoke

of the need to come to new interactions with a sense of openness and respect for an emerging relationship, rather than a fear of 'stuffing it up'⁷. In a sense recognising that relationships with trust and respect, built over time, actually have capacity we can call upon to work through the 'bits we get wrong'.

Evidence of the benefits of the partnerships for clients and Indigenous and mainstream services and groups

Sites of partnership

Partnership arrangements are a collection of what we actually do, the people we interact with, what we can expect to occur in a given situation, and the promise of a commitment to work through a response in an unfamiliar situation. Often they involve financial commitments for a set purpose, in other situations they represent a holistic commitment of organisational will (which might include a raft of organisational resources including financial, labour, planning, support, advocacy, leadership, networks or advice). In examining this partnership it is clear that there are 5 sites of committed interaction from which the other elements of the partnership flow. These five sites do not represent the extent of the partnership; rather they are critical sites of regular commitment from the FVOP from which other satellite events, relationships, meetings or projects emerge. These are:

- The FV Regional Action Group
- Winja Ulupna
- Veg Out at Rainbow Place
- Elizabeth Hoffman House
- DHS Regional Indigenous FV Support Worker

⁶ Power in this context really relies on either formal power (i.e. funding and service agreement type contractual obligations) or status power (e.g. a large organisation with significant footprint in the sector who could comment publicly and would gain attention in doing so).

⁷ Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers recognised that for some non-Indigenous community workers the appalling history of human services interventions in Indigenous communities meant many felt paralysed and unable to engage. At the heart of this was a fear that they too would become part of a litany of possibly well-intentioned, but ultimately disastrous, actions against Indigenous people.

FV Regional Action Group – the foundation stone of the partnership

The initial meeting with the Chair of the RAG was important in engaging with the broader Indigenous community because, firstly, it demonstrated a level of respect for her as an elder, and secondly, it enabled her to facilitate further introductions into the community. Initially the Chair of the RAG invited the FVOP APM onto the Regional Action Group and from this engagement the FVOP has gone on to develop links with other local Indigenous services and workers. The FVOP has made an ongoing commitment to the RAG as the foundation for future partnership arrangements. This commitment has been significant for a number of reasons. The FVOP has brought to the RAG a level of capacity and resources that have contributed to the goals of the group and helped it stabilise and grow. This has included a diverse mix of contributions that include financial resources for events, desktop publishing capacity for brochures, and bringing onboard a financial counselling service as a regular member of the group. The meeting location is rotated and is now regularly held at the FVOP site in St Kilda. Engagement with the RAG has also brought a wealth of resources to the FVOP. These include both connections and introductions to people and services, and increased FVOP confidence in broadening its partnership arrangements to include other Indigenous services.

An important element to note in this has been the relationship between the Chair of the RAG and the FVOP APM, and the development of a type of social capital out of their connection. In a sense the FVOP APM's capacity to make the commitment to the group and bring the various resources she has, reaffirmed the Chair of the RAG's existing and highly respected capacity and judgement as an elder. The Chair of the RAG's acceptance and inclusion of the FVOP APM has become like a passport for workers in the FVOP into other services – even those that the Chair of the RAG does not have contact or membership with. An example of this is the FVOP renewed engagement with Winja.

Winja – a work in progress

As stated previously the FVOP engagement with Winja has been well intentioned but patchy and certainly not a resource Winja could readily rely upon without initiation on their part. One of the important elements to come out of the ongoing commitment to the RAG has been a renewed

confidence to engage 'a fresh' with Winja but with a different philosophical approach. The most important aspect of this has been to shift from an outcomes focus, to that of being a resource to the workers and women at Winja. This takes many forms including providing information to women on the services in their area of origin, safety planning for when they return home and providing secondary consultation capacity for workers. In a sense the relationship is more relaxed because the FVOP no longer feels the need to demonstrate the benefit of the relationship in direct referral statistics.

In understanding the complex web of relationships that support this partnership it is useful to note that while the Chair of the FV RAG doesn't have any formal connections with Winja, the AAW, encourages women from the Winja program to attend programs at Access Health. The Chair of the RAG commented 'you see it is about getting known. The more you are known as Indigenous sensitive, the greater the trust. It gets out, it gets known. You get to know you can trust that mob.' This getting known, becoming a mob to be trusted is central to the FVOP approach in positioning themselves as a long-term, sustainable and reliable resource to Indigenous partners.

Veg Out at Rainbow Place – a work in progress

Veg Out is a weekly BBQ at a local community house called Rainbow Place attended by a vast array of Indigenous and Mainstream services and local people. This is one of those events that the FVOP regularly attends and just spends time at, talks to individuals and services, laughs with peoples, gets angry at stuff, plans new events, tells stories – it is a place where FVOP workers get known and get to know how to be. At one level it is cultural sensitivity training for workers by being and doing. At another, it is taking time to have experiences that become part of the shared history of individuals, and services, part of the thing that is called *partnership*. It is the stuff in a partnership that we often avoid writing about because it is hard to quantify and hard to assign value to. It is about a deep knowing of each other, developed over time, that becomes the very capital we draw upon to sustain relationships when things are not going to plan or to innovate and explore new visions for achieving new ways of working with people or getting things done. It is just about spending time together.

Elizabeth Hoffman House – A work in progress

Elizabeth Hoffman House is the only Indigenous Family Violence service in Victoria. The FVOP has had a long history of engagement with the service, which once again, has often been based on an individual worker-to-worker relationship. However it is clear that the FVOP Indigenous partnership process, which has been developing over the last 2 years, has ensured a level of commitment to this services and resulted in direct co-case management of clients and in a rich two-way form of secondary consultation. The co-case management takes the usual form. In this case if women are housed or hope to resettle in the inner or middle south the FVOP takes on responsibility for working with them on housing, legal, counselling, childcare, financial matters – while workers from Elizabeth Hoffman maintain support links with the woman and also facilitate any children’s access visits mandated by the Family Court for ex-partners. Staffing changes recently at Elizabeth Hoffman House will require a renewed engagement from the FVOP to the service. The FVOP sees it very much as their responsibility to approach, build, resource and maintain this relationship.

DHS Regional Indigenous FV Support Worker

It was clear from all those interviewed that, for want of a better word, the ‘site’ of engagement with the formal structures of the department, and its goals relating to the eradication of family violence in Indigenous communities, came via the close working relationship between the DHS Regional Indigenous FV Support Worker and the various workers employed at TSA Crisis Services Network (including the AAW and members of the FVOP). This engagement included working on projects like the 10-year action plan to eradicate family violence, mutual support and guidance regarding the RAG, and an important form of extended secondary consultation. While many aspects of the FVOP Indigenous partnerships is about ensuring access for, and improving working with, Indigenous women directly – the relationship with the department is often about structural change, reflection, identifying gaps and working through change. This mutual relationship, developed through the partnership, guides and sustains both parties in improving the outcomes for women and children.

Work in progress?

Partnership often implies an ideal of equals coming together, however the FVOP recognises, as part of a large mainstream organisation, it enjoys a privileged position compared to many Indigenous organisations. This level of privilege is reflected in the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous social and health indicators. These figures highlight not only the level of disadvantaged experienced by Indigenous service users, but also the level trauma and grief experienced by many Indigenous workers, not directly related to their work, but experienced as individuals within their own communities. Each of these partner services have been identified as a ‘work in progress’ in this paper to recognise and highlight that the majority of Indigenous social services are, at various times, thrown into crisis. This crisis is not merely a result of often being under-resourced for the scale of need, but also reflects the day-to-day reality for many of their Indigenous staff, their families and their extended communities, of living with the real history of colonisation. This includes the grief and loss a 20-year difference in life expectancy alone, would bring to any community. The FVOP recognises there will be times when, due to staffing changes or other issues, services will not be able to engage. Importantly the FVOP recognises it will be their responsibility to ensure it holds itself accountable to the partnership and extends whatever support might be of use in ensuring a response is made to Indigenous women and women with children experiencing violence.

Other projects, events or engagements

As stated previously the partnership extends beyond these five sites and includes connections with Indigenous services and workers, and other mainstream services interested in working towards improving service provision to Indigenous service users. These connections can be about developing referral pathways, co-case management of clients, providing one-off resources, collaborating on projects or providing secondary consultation. Various partners interviewed for this paper conveyed case studies of working with women collaboratively to ensure they received support. While all partners argued for increased resourcing of Indigenous services, some of the Indigenous partners made the point that some women preferred accessing mainstream services because they felt they

could 'get lost in mainstream'. For others there was the simple recognition that many mainstream services were better resourced and therefore able to gather a suite of resources to respond to a woman experiencing violence. Many of these case studies provided examples of services working collaboratively across DHS boundaries (either state or regional) to effectively make a response. At the heart of these collaborations was this sense of 'knowing each other' and of 'knowing' services capacity to respond which came out of this 18 month period of spending time together. The partnership became the foundation for response.

Collaborative projects beyond the five sites mentioned previously included forums such as the recently held 'Everything you need to know but are afraid to ask... Family Violence From an Indigenous Perspective' forum. This forum was designed to bring Indigenous and mainstream services together to better inform and equip mainstream service providers to respond to family violence concerning Indigenous clients and communities. The forum was a collaboration between the Inner South Community Health Service, RAG, FVOP and the Caulfield Community Health Service and included representatives from all the regional Indigenous services, the DHS Regional Indigenous FV Support Worker and numerous workers from mainstream organisations.

Secondary consultation

Partners provided numerous examples of different workers providing forms of secondary consultation to each other regarding the needs of service users. In a sense this was evidence of the richness of the relationship the partnership provides. Generally secondary consultation refers to the process of specialist services providing advice and support, often regarding a specific client, to more generalist workers. While this form of support was a common aspect of this partnership there was also evidence of an extended form of this type of inter-service support. For example both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners contacted each other for advice regarding culturally appropriate services to refer women to who were out of area or region. As one Indigenous worker put it 'sometimes you just want to check if this other mob will be okay to send a woman to – usually Gae (FVOP APM) could tell you straight over the phone'. In other examples

Indigenous workers referred other mainstream services, which were interested in working on Indigenous issues, to the FVOP to talk things through. This was an extension of the trust engendered by the partnership, but also recognition that the FVOP understood the issues involved and respected Indigenous people's concerns.

Capacity Building

Probably the most enduring feeling left from the series of interviews for this project was a sense of capacity building for all the partners involved. Whether it was the Regional FV worker, the chairperson of RAG or workers from FVOP, there was a sense that there was a lot in the reserve tank, yet to be touched. Some of this comes from the stability and longevity of the commitment from TSA Crisis Services Network and the FVOP team, but it was also evident in the way partners spoke about each other. For example the Chair of the FV RAG commenting 'It was a good day for us when Jude (AAW) introduced Gae (FVOP APM)'. The lived experience of the partnership provided a sense of ease and abundance between the key members that actually facilitated or created an expectation that partners would ask for assistance (either resourcing or advice) if something were required. There was almost a sense that if one partner heard via a third source that another partner was experiencing some difficulty, there would be disappointment that they hadn't called upon the partnership. While this obviously had some basis in the deep sense of trust developed between individuals in the partnership, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members generally referred to the organisations in the partnership (rather than individual workers), which seems to suggest there was a belief that the capacity was situated within the capability of the organisations to respond and a hope that it was sustainable beyond the individual workers involved.

Transferability of the model }

Obviously this partnership is built on a series of personal and organisational commitments, the development of an approach and culture that supports individuals within TSA Crisis Services Network to work on Indigenous issues, and the development of sustainable relationships between individuals, but there are also a number of structural elements that come together to form the basis of a model that might be appropriate to explore in other regions. Elements of this structure already exist in many regions, such as the Regional Indigenous FV Support Worker. Where possible Family Violence Regional Action Groups are likely to include female elders. However the provision of the AAW role, in the form described here, by medium and large mainstream organisations is less common. Clearly this added resource provided the conduit for the building of relationships between mainstream workers, committed to improving access to their service, and the 'thin black line' representing funded or partially funded Indigenous workers and services. Importantly the development of this partnership sought to provide a net benefit to the Indigenous workers and services involved. This is a critical factor in the transferability of this model because it is an enabling starting position. Once trust is developed, Indigenous workers and services can draw on the resources and capacity of a mainstream organisation both in their day-to-day service provision, and in networking and future planning.

Future directions – recommendations for the further enhancement of this partnership

It is clear this partnership arrangement is multifaceted and provides enormous promise, however there is a sense that the partnership is still reliant on individuals. While this is to be expected – at the end of the day our practices are made up of individuals relating – there is a lack of an overall policy overlay that would consolidate what, is currently good practice, into a sustainable commitment which would hold the TSA Crisis Services Network (and therefore FVOP) accountable to their current and future

engagement with the Indigenous community. While this is clearly the 'will' of those involved currently, there is no formal mechanism for reflection should individual workers move on.

As discussed previously, this idea of accountability in relation to these types of partnership arrangements has often been through blunt instruments. While funding bodies have created the expectation that we can measure this type of arrangement via the percentage of Indigenous service users accessing a service, and to be clear this should remain an important ultimate measure of mainstream organisations provision of services to the indigenous community, the review of this partnership arrangement has prompted the question: how do we mature our understanding of accountability beyond this type of blunt measure?

This would involve the articulation of an understanding of accountability around relationships and networks, rather than outputs. Sustainability of the partnership would be about going from counting numbers, to articulating how the relationships between mainstream and Indigenous services are built, maintained and, ultimately, through what mechanisms mainstream organisations hold themselves accountable. Mechanisms that don't rely on Indigenous services holding up a mirror to mainstream services when they disengage.

Clearly this partnership arrangement's strength is its multifaceted nature, having a number of people and services involved across a number of sites. In a sense there is the possibility this opens the individual relationships to scrutiny or makes them 'public' in an Arendtian sense⁸. However this will only occur if the appropriate practices and norms become part of the day-to-day arrangements, part of the environment individuals find themselves operating in. To this end there are a number of ways of thinking about creating this type of environment, an environment that openly encourages stakeholders to call to account a mainstream service that 'blinks'. This should happen at both a structural level and at a practice level. Suggestions from the partners interviewed included the idea of formalising the partnership via a MOU, formalising a consulting role between senior management of TSA Crisis Services

⁸ Social theorist Hannah Arendt, made the distinction between private space (a space not open to challenge or question); and a public space which is characterised by open dialogue, discussion and debate. So, for example, a traditional Catholic mass would be seen as an intensely private space because irrespective of the number of people present, nothing about the practices or norms in the environment would tolerate much less encourage debate and dissent.

Network and the Chair of the FV RAG to oversee the development of an Indigenous Overlay for the network of services, and the development of an Indigenous Internship program to run in conjunction with the existing Student Placement Program. This combination of arrangements would provide several sites within TSA Crisis Services Network around which activity could occur, across a number layers within the organisation. This type of commitment would build on the fantastic work of the partnership to date and provide a pathway for future development.

Acknowledgements

Key individuals who have worked on this partnership:

Maria Starcevic

– Chair Family Violence Regional Action Group

Courtney Boi

– Regional Indigenous FV Support Worker

Rose Solomon

– Previously from Elizabeth Hoffman House
(Not Interviewed)

Judy Hanley

– Aboriginal Access Worker, TSA
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Gaewynne Old

– Assistant Program Manager, FVOP

Also interviewed for this project:

Sue Grigg

– Manager of the Family Violence Outreach Program

Karen Webb

– Worker Family Violence Outreach Program

Jenny Plant

– General Manager TSA Crisis Services Network

Building on previous work:

Documentation of the Victorian Indigenous Blood Borne Virus/Injecting Drug Use Training Project (BBV/IDU Training Project) provided an initial starting point to analysis the unique elements of this partnership. The BBV/IDU Training Project was a successful partnership between two Aboriginal community controlled organisations and three mainstream organisations. See 'Learning from a successful partnership between mainstream and indigenous organisations' by Peter Waples-Crowe and Priscilla Pyett, Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal, March/April 2006, Vol 30, Number 2.

Further Information:

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