

Joanne Sheehan-Paterson, Chair  
Mallee Family Violence Executive

**Submission to Family Violence Royal Commission  
29<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

**Question One**

***Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?***

No.

**Question Two**

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

The Risk Assessment Management Panel, or RAMP, is a network of police, court, corrections, and support service representatives who have recently come together in the Mallee area and are working together to address the safety of those at high risk of serious harm from family violence. We see this as a significant step forward in reducing the risk of death and serious injury in our community.

Family Violence units within Victoria Police will improve the welfare of families especially in regard to engagement with family violence services and court processes. Police play an important role in responding to, intervening in, and preventing family violence, and are the first point of contact for many victims. Police and family violence victims are better able to form good relations when the first contact is effective and efficient.

It is of critical importance that Police have powers to offer family violence victims immediate protection from the perpetrator. Police are often the first people called to the scene of a family violence incident, particularly if the violence is of a physical nature. Sometimes the police can directly issue Family Violence Safety Notices (Safety Notices), which give immediate protection for people experiencing abuse outside of normal court hours. They operate similarly to Family Violence Intervention Orders, but for a shorter period of time. A police officer can apply for a safety notice phone or fax while they are at the family violence incident. A sergeant or higher ranking police officer looks at the application. If they agree the affected family member needs protecting, they can issue a safety notice. A police officer can apply for a safety notice even if the affected family member does not want them to. The officer will make it clear to the respondent that applying for a safety notice is a police decision. A safety notice has conditions (rules) to stop the respondent from using family violence. They may include the same conditions in an intervention order. If the respondent disobeys the conditions, the police can arrest them.

To protect family members, the police can include a condition that the respondent must leave the family home. This means the respondent must not live in, re-enter or visit the home until the first mention date. A magistrate will decide then what happens next. This option befits the Vision of the Mallee Family Violence Executive that women and children should live free from violence. If the respondent has nowhere to stay, the police will do their best to help find emergency accommodation. If the respondent refuses to leave or returns to the family home, the police can use reasonable force to remove them. The police can also charge the respondent with a criminal

offence for breaking the intervention order. This level of response helps to emphasise the need for perpetrators to be held to account for their actions.

It is our view that the victim of violence will in many cases need immediate protection from the perpetrator. We welcome the measures mentioned above. We wish to emphasise the critical importance of police having the power and means to offer family violence victims immediate protection rather than waiting for the next opportunity to go to Court. Furthermore, we wish to emphasise that the victim of family violence should not have to 'jump through hoops' to get the protections they deserve. For instance, to apply for a family violence intervention order in Victoria, a person must fill out a 12-page form or have a police officer do it for them. For many applicants, it can be a difficult exercise. The trauma of violent or intimidating behaviour can be debilitating and answering such a comprehensive range of questions in that moment can amplify the problem. The long FVIO application form is just one of the many facets that form part of a complex and long journey through the family violence system for victims.

Judicial education around family violence and around indigenous cultural awareness would be an effective step forward. There is a lack of consistency in the approach taken by different magistrates.

We would advocate for specialist family violence courts in all regions. If this is not possible, the most essential element is that there is a need for specialist advice to be available to both parties at court and also ideally before they reach the courtroom.

The Mildura Magistrates Court sits regularly and hears a large number of cases involving family violence. The court can make intervention orders to protect people who have experienced violent, threatening or abusive behaviour. On 26 November 2014, the Victorian Magistrates Court released its response to family violence which details six initiatives aimed at increasing the safety of women and children by ensuring a consistent service across the state, delivered with greater sensitivity, ensuring co-ordination and efficiency in the management of cases, and the ability to refer victims and offenders to services.

These six strategic priorities that are set out in the plan will greatly improve the local experience of the Magistrates Court in the Mallee:

- Expansion of Family Violence Services
- Video Conferencing Pilot
- Fast Tracking Listing Model
- Professional Development
- Online Engagement
- Improved use of technology and information sharing

Various family violence services use a 'silent number' so that the organisation calling cannot be identified on the phone of the call recipient. This is designed to protect the privacy and safety of the call recipient in the event that someone else sees their phone ringing and may not approve of them receiving calls from a family violence service. The disadvantage of this silent number is that the recipient also does not know who is calling them and may not answer due to fear of answering calls from abusive persons or persons their abusive partner does not wish them to speak to.

The delaying of National Domestic Violence Orders is a significant issue in our region. We routinely have clients from across the Victorian and New South Wales border. We work with clients and services on both sides of the border and a regular problem is that Domestic Violence Orders taken out by a victim on one side of the border are not protecting them once they cross the border.

The Mallee Family Violence Executive exists in the Mallee to give a coordinated response to family violence across the area. The Executive and the Regional Integration Coordinator work together on coordinating family violence prevention, intervention and response work across the Mallee. This process facilitates inter-agency collaboration and aims to deliver the best practice and most effective service to all family violence victims across the Mallee. We also now have the Risk Assessment and Management Panel working in close contact with us and this will further enhance the effectiveness of our ability to respond to victims.

A particular issue in the Mildura and Mallee region is that in summer with extreme temperatures we notice an increase in family violence incidents. This reality is exacerbated by the lack of air conditioning in public housing. We feel that residents of our area are suffering when the temperature hits extremes due to the connection between family violence and high temperatures. The lack of air conditioning in public housing is a factor which needs to be changed.

The Indigenous Family Violence 10 Year Plan, Strong Culture, Strong Peoples and Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities, launched in 2008 provides for a partnership approach to address Aboriginal family violence in the short, medium and long term. This 10 year plan along with other local plans is informing the work done locally on family violence in the Mallee. The 10 Year Plan is a significant guide to how and where services can be improved in our area. Working with members of the local Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group also informs the work of family violence services across the Mallee and is an essential collaboration point.

The establishment of services such as Meminar Ngangg Gimba (Aboriginal Women's Service) has significantly improved the response capacity for Indigenous Women experiencing family violence, the provision of support both through case management support and refuge support has seen Indigenous women accessing the services that they require. This service coupled with the support that is being provided to Indigenous men through our local Aboriginal Community Corrections Officer, for example Men's Time Out, Men's Behaviour Change, Warakoo and others, has improved the supports available to Indigenous people overall.

Victoria Police has seen a clear increase in family violence reports. Since 2011 there has been a 61% increase in reported family violence to Police. This is in line with the launch of Victoria Police's Strategic approach to family violence in particular around the implementation and rollout of Family Violence Tasking Units.

At Child FIRST in the Mallee we are receiving increased reports of family violence which is impacting on children, not just parent against parent but family violence involving extended family members or an increased rate of young people perpetrating violence against their parents, in particular young males. It is not possible to extrapolate specific data around this but there is certainly anecdotal evidence from Child FIRST staff about this increase. The way that the service system responds to these incidents of violence is complex and requires additional supports to ensure that everyone is safe.

### Question Three

***Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?***

Multi-disciplinary Centres (MDCs) have become a highly effective system. Mildura has an MDC and we would recommend that a single family violence hub of this nature is a most effective way of meeting community and victim's needs in relation to family violence. MDCs enable a specialist response to sexual offences and child sexual abuse. The centres co-locate Child Protection

practitioners with: Victorian Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCIT) - specialised investigative teams of detectives trained to provide a victim focused specialist investigative response to the complex crimes of sexual assault and child abuse; and Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) - government funded organisations which provide women, children and men who have experienced sexual assault access to comprehensive, timely support and intervention to address their needs.

The MDCs also have close ties with the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) and Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service (VFPMS) that provide forensic medical examinations in Victoria, VFPMS for child victims of sexual or physical assault. These specialist professionals work collaboratively to provide a victim/survivor centred, integrated and holistic response to victims of sexual assault from a single location. The primary Child Protection response at all MDC sites is for child sexual abuse. Some sites have capacity to respond to child physical abuse. Further rollout of MDCs would enable this comprehensive and effective response to be continued for the benefit of staff and family violence victims across the state.

A continuing difficulty is the short funding cycles that make successful programs difficult to carry through into long term programs. A number of highly successful and promising programs including those focused on primary prevention of family violence and on awareness raising, would be of long term benefit and are needed long term. A funding cycle that reflects this ongoing need would enable staff and programs to take on a long term focus and would give the community a better assurance that effective programs will be continued.

A significant gap exists in services and supports for male victims and male perpetrators. A lack of service including a lack of housing for men has led to situations that in turn increase the vulnerability of victims and their families. We have had occasions where a lack of housing for males has resulted in them being placed in hotels. If there are separate services attending to the needs of the victim, then there is a risk that the victim is placed in the same hotel for emergency accommodation as their perpetrator. This is a particular risk where Indigenous men are concerned because there are a limited range of accommodation options in this area to cater for them and the risk of the victim being placed in the same accommodation then increases.

We welcome the appointment of a designated Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon. Fiona Richardson MP, and look forward to outcomes from the increased attention being paid to family violence at this level of Parliament.

The development of specialist family violence teams within Victoria Police has been a significant step forward in service provision, in improving relationships between victims and the police, and in improving the coordination of police services with services provided by other organisations for family violence victims. The specialist family violence teams and their understanding of family violence has improved significantly in the past ten years and continues to improve. The presence of Victoria Police at the Mallee Family Violence Executive has resulted in service coordination in the Mallee being strengthened and enhanced.

The Men's Behaviour Change Program can be seen as an effective initiative to address perpetrators of violence against women. The program focuses on the safety of women and children and respectfully challenges participants' values and beliefs on the use of violence to address their perceptions of power and control. Providing a conducive, respectful and engaging environment for participants has seen numbers of participants maintain their commitment to the Program with an overall retention rate of 80-90% for voluntary clients. Mandated/court clients have a higher retention rate. The ability of trained facilitators and how they deliver the program, the venue and flexibility in scheduling of group sessions is crucial to the retention of participants within

the program. Evidence exists that some participants may benefit from repeating the program to cognately reinforce program contexts.

In regard to the referral that is sent from police to local organisations; known as an L17, the referral system is now fool proof in so far as the actual referral occurring. For many years it was a system reliant on members faxing forms. It was previously very open to non-compliance and gaps regularly appeared.

The introduction of intervention orders many years ago was revolutionary. Prior to this, unless there were criminal charges connected there was nothing done to afford protection of the aggrieved family member (AFM). The protection order process requires further streamlining. Safety Notices went a long way to achieving this but are still somewhat restrictive to affording urgent protection. It is our belief that safety notices should be as simple as an instant ban to a perpetrator issued then and there by any member of the police force prohibiting further family violence being committed. Any breach would result in instant remands until the very next available Court time.

A Risk Assessment Management Panel (RAMP) has been set up in the Mallee area. We welcome this development. In 2014, the Victorian government committed another \$12.5 million to fund 17 RAMPs—one in each DHHS area across Victoria. The RAMPs involve representatives from family violence services, Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria, DHS Child Protection, Child FIRST, men's behaviour change programs, local hospitals, Maternal and Child Health Services, Centrelink, the Office of Housing, mental health services and alcohol and other drug services. Other services are invited on a case-by-case basis including Aboriginal and homelessness services. We are excited to see how this new Panel can enhance our response to family violence in the Mallee.

#### Question Four

***If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.***

School education programs on family violence and sexual abuse have been conducted in schools across the Mallee area. These are tailored to the age groups they are delivered to and include primary and secondary college age groups. These programs are seen as highly effective in awareness raising and in producing an increased likelihood of schools and students reporting incidents of concern rather than choosing not to report. These programs are evaluated pre and post education delivery. The staff of organisations delivering this education are also trained counsellors who work with individual students and their schools in supporting the needs of family violence victims and their families. Additional resourcing to run regular and ongoing programs in schools in relation to healthy relationships would certainly be welcomed.

Developed jointly by organisations with significant research and practice expertise in primary prevention of men's violence against women in Victoria, this following statement is intended to inform the work of the Royal Commission into Family Violence:

Many of us have designed, implemented and evaluated projects that have been successful among participants at shifting attitudes, behaviours and practices supportive of violence. But we know we cannot prevent the deeply-entrenched social problem of violence against women across the population by undertaking 'good projects' alone. Broad, deep and sustainable change requires both a comprehensive, society-wide approach to prevention, and an 'architecture' or set of supports that only government can provide. This document outlines the building blocks of such an architecture.

We know that the key driver of men's violence against women is gender inequality – both structural and normative. Prevention efforts must address gender inequality across both its structural and normative dimensions. But importantly, preventing men's violence against women cannot be done in isolation to social justice, human rights and public health endeavours in other areas. Policies, structures and community attitudes that maintain or reinforce economic disadvantage, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and ageism, for example, can limit the efficacy of programs addressing sexism, gender inequality and gender-based privilege.

We know that we cannot change behaviour at the individual level alone. Prevention requires changes to the social conditions that excuse, justify or even promote violence – and this means addressing the structures that support gender inequality in social, economic, educational and political arenas, as well as in individual attitudes and beliefs.

We know that isolated initiatives are not enough. Broad and sustainable change can only be achieved where prevention efforts are planned and implemented to go 'wide and deep' – across the numerous settings where people interact and that influence them, such as schools, local communities, the media, workplaces, sporting clubs and faith institutions.

We know that many prevention activities have been effective at addressing the drivers of violence, and some have reduced future perpetration and victimisation. We do not know what is effective in many contexts and for different groups. An evidence base is still being built that details what works for particular population groups in specific contexts (e.g. teenage boys in a sports setting). We have not yet seen a whole-of-population primary prevention approach applied to violence against women. Experience in other areas, such as smoking prevention, shows that initiatives only start to achieve 'traction' when scaled up to the population level. While practitioners, researchers and experts within and outside government have advocated for population-level prevention of violence against women policy and practice, efforts to date have been hampered by limited and short-term funding, ad hoc approaches to programming, small-scale implementation and evaluation, a lack of attention to upscaling and systematization, and limited attempts to link programmatic efforts to the kinds of structural and institutional level strategies that are needed to challenge the social and cultural norms, practices and power imbalances that drive and support men's violence against women.

Support and funding for ongoing research and evaluation for knowledge building and innovation remains crucial. This will enable practitioners and researchers to continue to build the evidence-base in this respect. All new prevention activity should take an 'action research' approach, learning from implementation and building capacity among practitioners and organisations for ongoing evaluation.

#### Question Five

***If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing programs, campaigns or initiatives of this kind, we are interested in your conclusions about their effectiveness in reducing and preventing family violence.***

It is difficult to tell if programs are reducing or preventing family violence. There is a debate as to whether family violence is increasing or whether we are improving our pick up of the issue and therefore seeing increased numbers of incidents reported to police and increased numbers of victims and victims' families seeking assistance. There is no doubt that there are no quick fixes to family violence. Long term outcomes are the focus and our diligent work to encourage victims to seek help, and our work to hold family violence perpetrators to account will help to ensure that family violence incidents reduce in our community.

The Victorian Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths began in 2009 and needs to be kept on the agenda for government. This pioneering research into the causes of family violence deaths was designed to provide evidence to coroners to help them make recommendations to reduce family violence. The review works through specialist case investigators, who examine cases of family violence-related deaths to determine areas for improvement in public health and safety systems, family violence service systems or justice administration service systems. The findings of this research directly inform the best practice of the work we are doing in the Mallee and it needs to be kept on everyone's agenda in this sector.

Long term investment in programs with a focus on primary prevention needs to occur, short term activities will not achieve the cultural change around respect and healthy relationships that is needed if we are to see a change in the rates of family violence.

The Victoria Police Family Violence Tasking Unit was set up here in November 2011. Figures collected by Victoria Police in Family Violence incidents show an increase in reported family violence incidents of 61.7% from 2010 to 2014. An annual figure of 1315 was reported in 2010 and an annual figure of 2127 was reported in 2014. Early figures for 2015 cover the period of January to April. For this January to April period, there has been an 84.1% increase from 2010 to 2015. A figure of 430 was reported in January to April of 2010. A figure of 792 was reported in January to April of 2015. It is hoped that improvements in picking up family violence incidents and having them reported to police will result in the best possible outcomes for victims and families suffering from family violence.

#### Question Six

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

It is our experience in the Mallee that the following factors are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence in our area:

- extreme heat and lack of air conditioning in public housing,
- the use of the drug ice and its related crime consequences,
- economic downturn especially in local industries such as manufacturing and crop production,
- geographic isolation from other cities and regional centres and between small local towns and our own local cities,
- lack of public transport,
- transient populations,
- cross border issues and the lack of consistency and transferability of information and protections like Domestic Violence Orders across state borders,
- lack of affordable housing including public housing,
- increase in domestic violence among refugee communities who have been placed in the Mallee area at an increasing rate,
- Immigrant community members without the same rights or economic and social support and local people are facing additional risks and barriers which exacerbate family violence incidents, and having a high Indigenous population in our area means that the gaps in the system to cater to their needs are especially evident.

At present in Australia the status of a migrant person's citizenship has significant implications for the range of supports and services they have access to as victims of family violence. We are aware of European countries where migrant non-citizen victims of family violence are afforded the same rights of access to services and supports as citizen victims of family violence. We feel that more attention should be given to such measures being implemented in Australia.

## Question Seven

### ***What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?***

Adequately addressing the factors associated with an increase in family violence will hopefully help to reduce the rate of violence in our area. Factors such as adequate affordable housing and adequate accommodation for victims of family violence are two of the most important factors that would help reduce the impact of family violence locally.

In addition to this, increasing attention is rightly being paid to the prevention of family violence through education and awareness raising. This focus on prevention will help to prevent family violence incidents occurring in the first place, it will encourage the reporting of incidents, and will encourage victims to recognise the signs of family violence and to seek assistance.

The indigenous history of the area around Mildura, Swan Hill and Kerang is known to date back more than 40,000 years. Cultural Awareness Training is something that is highly sought after and supported in the Mallee. The training is led by Mallee District Aboriginal Services who are also a member of the Mallee Family Violence Executive. This training is especially relevant for local business and non-government enterprises. It is core training for anyone providing services to, or working with, Aboriginal Peoples. It is designed for any Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal workers or management who provide direct service to Aboriginal clients.

The training consists of a one-day package that covers the following:

- A Journey Through History: White Australia has a Black History
- Prejudice and Racism
- Culture and Communication
- Shared last words

This program recognises the importance of reconnecting the community with its culture and building pride in local Koori heritage and traditions. Across the Mallee and through this training in particular we are working to foster understanding and respect in the wider community about traditional culture and customs.

## Question Eight

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

We have identified that there are a lack of consequences for perpetrators of family violence who breach court orders. Whilst we acknowledge that not all perpetrators can or should be sent to jail, we feel that the court could have greater accountability for imposing effective consequences for perpetrators who breach court orders.

We are frustrated by the number of highly successful programs that are on limited funding time frames. When a good program is developed and rolled out and evaluated as being successful, there is a passion within organisations and communities to continue to drive these but unfortunately without additional resourcing they are unable to do so.

Legal representation options and services for children could be improved. Children are often the ones missed in the court and legal services discussions. They need professionals advocating for them.



Wiimpatja Healing Centre (formerly Warrakoo Rehabilitation Hostel) is a program that provides an alternative to traditional incarceration for Indigenous detainees, on remand, sentenced or on warrants. The main strength of the program is that it is sensitive to the complex cultural needs of Indigenous people within the broader context of a predominantly white society. We feel it could be beneficial to add a family violence component to the Aboriginal Justice Program here. We also feel it could be beneficial to bring men who are undergoing the program to meet younger men and boys face to face to give the message that family violence is not acceptable and that life in the justice system is no good.

We feel that more could be done to bring Aboriginal law back into aboriginal communities alongside mainstream law. This could be part of a wider initiative to bring education programs to communities on such topics as promoting culture and the need for respect of different cultures including Indigenous culture. It is important for young people especially to know their culture and where they come from.

Access to legal information and support for both the victim and the perpetrator is a significant gap in our community. The Murray Mallee Community Legal Service has been advised there will be two more years of funding for the Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) program; to provide advice, information and court assistance for victims of violence (applicants) applying for IVO's or AVO's . This funding will pay for one Solicitor to cover four local courts in our catchment (3 courts in Vic and one in NSW, with Swan Hill being three hours one way from Mildura) and can not offer the breadth of service required. This service cannot also give advice to respondents. Respondents have access to duty lawyers, funded by VLA, however, at times this service is not adequate due to issues such as conflicts (it is only private solicitors in our catchment who provide VLA duty lawyer services as we have no VLA office or VLA solicitors as such), availability of solicitors and distance. Without access to adequate legal support we believe that there are increased rates of orders being breached because people do not fully understand the legal orders and what they mean.

The Mallee Child and Family Services Alliance believes that there must be a better way of responding and supporting families where family violence is an issue and where the mother does not engage with family violence services, not recognising this then places her children at risk and which then results in a referral to either Child FIRST or Child Protection. We are seeing increased number of referrals coming to the attention of Child FIRST and Family Services where family violence is the primary issue. We would certainly welcome the opportunity to pilot any new initiatives which will result in increased engagement in services and better outcomes for children.

#### Question Nine

***Does insufficient integration and co-ordination between the various bodies who come into contact with people affected by family violence hinder the assessment of risk, or the effectiveness of (early intervention, crisis and ongoing) support provided, to people affected by family violence? If so, please provide examples.***

A vital part of the Integrated Family Violence System (IFVS) has been the establishment of Family Violence Regional Integration Coordinators (RICs). The role of the RICs is to develop and support partnerships between regional family violence services (women, children and men's services) and other key sectors and services, such as Child FIRST/Family Services, child protection, mental health services, homelessness services, and housing services, Courts, Police and Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups.

RICs also convene local Family Violence Regional Integration Committees, groups of services that work with family violence and meet regularly to identify issues and potential improvements in the system's response to women, children and men. The local Committees feed information to regional and state-wide committees who monitor and work to improve the system response across Victoria. The local committee in the Mallee is known as the Mallee Family Violence Executive.

Our Executive group and our working groups across the Mallee are working hard to improve integration and coordination between services who come in contact with people affected by family violence. We aim to help reduce the different 'hoops; that victims must jump through to obtain best practice services and supports in the Mallee. Similarly, we work to improve the coordination of services across the Mallee so that each client is met with a seamless and effective range of services and supports that suit their needs.

An identified issue that stems from a lack of coordination of services for clients is that clients will often have a large number of appointments with different organisations. Attending all of these appointments can sometimes have the effect of limiting their chances of engagement with employment opportunities and other opportunities because they are simply too busy to settle in any one place and put down roots. We watch with much interest the establishment/piloting of Services Connect models across Victoria as potentially this can reduce the impact on people who require multiple services.

### Question Ten

***What practical changes might improve integration and co-ordination? What barriers to integration and co-ordination exist?***

We have identified the following issues are barriers to integration and coordination:

- Privacy – maintaining privacy for clients and weighing this against benefits of sharing information between services to produce the best possible outcomes for clients.
- Funding complications – some funding packages come with stipulations on how and when they can be used and how the funding must be distributed. Sometimes this adds significant layers of complication and administration to funding.
- Geographic distance – the Mallee is a wide and diverse area and having dispersed services means that there is no 'one stop shop' for clients across our area. Even in the largest population centre of Mildura there is no 'one stop shop' with all the services that a family violence victim will need.
- Most of the services working in this sector in the Mallee are not funded adequately to spend time on integration and coordination of family violence work.
- We have experienced stalls in partnering between organisations due to OH&S and work cover issues. For example, an initiative of partnership work between Victoria Police and Domestic Violence Service has encountered barriers due to OH&S.
- Assertive outreach models need to be used more
- Enabling family violence victims to have a choice between accessing Indigenous or main stream services is important but not always offered to Indigenous clients.

### Question Eleven

***What are some of the most promising and successful ways of supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by violence? Are there gaps or deficiencies in our approach to supporting ongoing safety and wellbeing? How could measures to reduce the impact of family violence be improved?***

- We have been heartened by the emergence of workplace laws on domestic violence leave
- We see a real change in community attitudes about family violence and in community awareness of family violence – especially the fact that violence is not only physical.
- Family violence unit at Victoria Police have been effective in reducing incidents of family violence recidivist offenders and their recidivist figures are reducing.
- Working with community based organisations such as AFL and the Country Fire Authority has been encouraging. We see a bright future in partnerships with community based organisations

and sporting groups who are keen to raise awareness of family violence and to take steps to address it.

- Building and improving relationships between indigenous and mainstream services and service users will be an important and ongoing way to support the safety and wellbeing of people affected by violence.
- The Mallee Child and Family Services Alliance, which is a member of the Mallee Family Violence Executive, is very supportive of initiatives that improve the services to families experiencing family violence where children are involved. Family Violence is in the top three presenting issues for families accessing support from Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services. Parenting, Child Protection involvement and Family Violence are the top three issues that families and the broader community seek assistance from Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services for.

Some possible examples of initiatives could include:

- Family service workers and family violence workers undertaking joint home visits to families assisting the victim (non-abusive parent) to engage with support services, which improves their capacity to protect children,
- Increasing resources to the family violence sector so that they can undertake a more assertive outreach approach to engage women in the service,
- Family Services staff working with Vic Police Family Violence Unit to engage with families where there is limited acceptance that family violence is an issue by parents but where police have attended the family home on numerous occasions in response to these concerns.

#### Question Twelve

***If you, your partner or a relative have participated in a behaviour change program, tell us about the program and whether you found it effective. What aspects of the program worked best? Do you have criticisms of the program and ideas about how it should be improved?***

We will cover this in Question 14 where we discuss our knowledge of client experiences.

#### Question Thirteen

***If you, your partner or a relative have been violent and changed their behaviour, tell us about what motivated that change. Was a particular relationship, program, process or experience (or combination of these) a key part of the change? What did you learn about what caused the violent behaviour?***

We will cover this in Question 14 where we discuss our knowledge of client experiences.

#### Question Fourteen

***To what extent do current processes encourage and support people to be accountable and change their behaviour? To what extent do they fail to do so? How do we ensure that behaviour change is lasting and sustainable?***

The Dilly Bag program is an innovative program promoting Aboriginal women's strengths and resilience. This is a two day program and is Indigenous specific. The program covers indigenous history but also where to go for help and how to get referrals for services. We see that this program would be very good to roll out further and to more Indigenous women. We also feel that the Indigenous Men's Behaviour Change Program which helps connect men to their culture is a very positive program. It helps the men become stronger, to 'find themselves' and their culture, and to connect with their Elders. This increased awareness and connection to their culture does encourage and support the men to be accountable and change their behaviour.

The mainstream Men's Behaviour Change Program is seeing an increased uptake of voluntary referrals. Those men who attend the program on a voluntary basis rather than being court-ordered do change the dynamics of the Behaviour Change group in a positive way.

We feel that additional options need to be made available that are alternatives to jail. It is our experience that in a significant number of cases, the victim does not want the perpetrator to go to jail, they simply want the violence to stop. Rehabilitation programs and services for perpetrators could be improved in a number of ways. This could include TAFE programs and other partnerships with tertiary education institutions being introduced whilst rehabilitation is being undertaken so that the prospects of employment and its resulting benefits are improved for the future. Family violence education would also be of benefit during this rehabilitation phase so that the nature and extent of family violence consequences are better understood.

It is encouraging to see that media programs are starting to increase in number and reach, and that they are starting to improve societal attitudes and awareness of family violence. An increase in these types of programs for Indigenous and CALD communities would be very effective.

The Sunraysia Community Health Service (SCHS) is a member of the Mallee Family Violence Executive. SCHS facilitates Men's Behaviour Change Program groups. Their groups have 70% of participants who are voluntary. Retention within the program averages 85%. The program is designed to assist participants to challenge their own belief and value systems to address violence behaviour within the family unit. Behaviours identified with perpetrators of violence are long term learnt behaviours, entrenched from a young age, which can present challenges when unlearning old patterns and adopting new skill sets. The Men's Behaviour Change Program fundamental principles works on cognitive reasoning, and in some instances it may be of benefit for offenders to repeat the program for reinforcing new knowledge and skills. This requires on going engagement and therapeutic intervention for clients to reinforce and support them through the change process. It is also of great benefit when partner contact/engagement is part of this change process.

#### Question Fifteen

***If you or your organisation have offered a behaviour change program, tell us about the program, including any evaluation of its effectiveness which has been conducted.***

**AND**

#### Question Sixteen

***If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing approaches to behaviour change, tell us about any Australian or international research which may assist the Royal Commission. In particular, what does research indicate about the relative effectiveness of early intervention in producing positive outcomes?***

Local Men's Behaviour Change Programs are running in the Mallee area. These are successful and there is a wait list for these. There has been a significant cost in getting staff trained to be accredited to run Men's Behaviour Change in the local area. The accreditation of trainers requires a prohibitive amount of time, travel time and cost. As such, it has been a challenge to get local trainers accredited to run the program and to make sure that those trainers who are available do not get burnt out from the workload of this increasingly popular program.

We have identified that there is a need for trainers in this program to be able to obtain their accreditation more locally. This will assist our Mallee area in overcoming the barriers we currently face in getting local staff trained to deliver the much sought after Men's Behaviour Change Program. The most significant barriers at the moment result from the fact that local staff must travel extensively to Melbourne for training. This presents significant costs of staff time and travel.

The most difficult aspect of delivering the Men's Behaviour Change Program in regional/rural areas is the immense process of having localised specialist training facilitators. Training was provided at a local level, and the process continues for trainees to complete Facilitator level 3. This will provide a pool of qualified facilitators Level 3 to deliver across the Northern Mallee Region. Sunraysia Community Health Service delivers the program in Mildura and Swan Hill, to both voluntary and mandated clients. With increased access of facilitators, the number of programs delivered per year will also increase. Demand is rising and we currently sit on a 3 month wait list.

We subscribe to the VicHealth framework for preventing violence against women. Based on global evidence, the framework highlights the following three themes for action:

- promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women
- promoting non-violent norms and reducing the effects of prior exposure to domestic violence
- improving access to resources and support systems.

Using this evidence, the VicHealth framework outlines the need to implement a coordinated series of strategies and actions to effectively prevent violence against women throughout society before it occurs. By examining the causes of violence against women, the framework provides guidance in developing health prevention work in this field. It identifies population groups, preventive actions and their long-term benefits.

In November 2012 Women's Health Loddon Mallee, was successful in attracting funds from the Department of Justice, to undertake a regional Preventing Violence against Women project in the Loddon Mallee. Loddon Mallee Takes a Stand uses a multi-pronged approach to address primary prevention of family violence in the workplace and in the wider community.

The components are:

1. Take A Stand Workplace training
2. Violence Prevention – It's Everybody's Business Conference in Bendigo, October, 2014. This has been followed up by Forums in Mildura and Swan Hill and workshops in Wycheproof, Wedderburn, Kerang and Echuca to ensure that people throughout the region have an opportunity for participation and engagement.
3. The development of a Regional Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Women in the Loddon Mallee.

The Mallee Family Violence Executive member, Women's Health Loddon Mallee, has been working to develop a Loddon Mallee Region Action Plan to prevent violence against women. Women's Health Services in several regions have recognised the benefits of having previously developed regional primary prevention plans which encouraged collaboration and uptake of best practice interventions. Women's Health Loddon Mallee has been working on the first plan for the Loddon Mallee region during 2014/15, using funding from Department of Justice and Regulation (as an activity of the Loddon Mallee Takes A Stand project) and the Office of Women's Affairs. Our approach has been to consult widely in the region with a view to creating an action plan and enduring governance structure which will support the ongoing shared commitment to primary prevention of violence against women.

The Action Plan project will be complete by October 2015. Our observations arising from undertaking a broad engagement approach to increase attention on primary prevention of violence include the following:

- There is a willingness of a broad range of organisations to do something to address violence against women and children. They require a structure and leadership to channel that willingness into action.

- For many organisations with strong opportunities to influence employee, member or community attitudes and social norms (community sector) the action planning process has provided the first opportunity to initiate violence prevention activities.
- For many human services workers and community based organisations core information about prevention approaches had not been previously available ie what violence is, what primary prevention is, the evidence about best practice prevention of violence against women and settings approaches (a core concept in health promotion)
- No other organisation in our region has the capacity (catchment, approach, role) to focus on primary prevention.

Stakeholders have said they would like to see organisations sign on to the following types of actions:

- Partnership and Leadership in the PRIMARY prevention of violence against women (PVAW)
- Workforce and Organisational Development in PVAW
- Community Education and Engagement in PVAW –including identifying a locally relevant ‘theory of change’
- Communicating PVAW messages
- Undertaking research in PRIMARY PVAW
- Challenging issues of intersectionality in PVAW (that is, challenging the ways in which racism, colonialism, and able-ism also cause violence against women – not just gender inequity and rigid gender norms).

The evidence which has emerged to date from working on the Regional Plan is pointing to the fact that organisations in the region did not feel well informed about appropriate strategies and actions and had high levels of motivation to initiate capacity building in the area of violence prevention. The training held to date has been of immense importance in providing the opportunities for organisations to come together to learn, participate and share knowledge.

#### Take a Stand Training

- 1) On the evidence of data collected so far, there is strong support for workplace-based bystander training addressing cultures of violence and gender norms. This model should be continued and expanded to workplaces across the region.
- 2) Settings based bystander training is able to be adapted for use with a wide variety of community, volunteer and recreation organisations. An investment in developing this model is required.

#### Violence Prevention – It’s Everybody’s Business Conference and Forums

- 3) Continue to invest in local, regional and State-wide conferences and forums - they build knowledge, commitment and collaboration
- 4) It is vitally important for workers from small communities and small organisations to be given opportunities to attend conferences, forums and professional development

#### Regional Action Plan

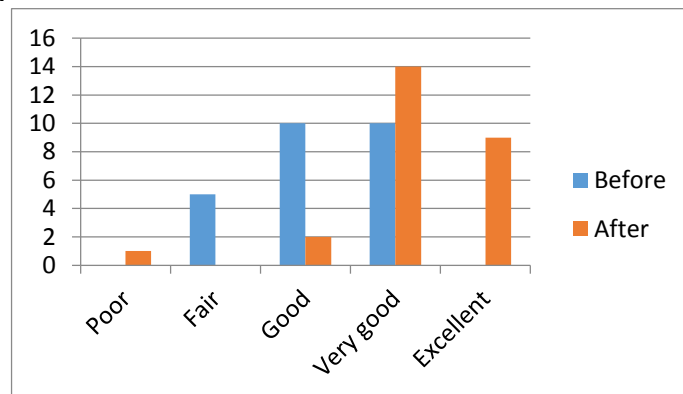
- 5) That regional planning and collective impact approaches to engaging regions in violence prevention work be funded to realise potential of regional plans, enhance regional capability and provide leadership.
- 6) Funding is needed for on-going collaborative activities which will support and build capacity for partnerships
- 7) That capacity building be funded and include further opportunities for learning and development in all sectors.
- 8) That further research about primary prevention of violence and evaluation of initiatives be funded at a regional level with a view to further building the evidence base for rural

best practice. In particular this should address relevant intersectional factors and rural characteristics.

Two regional forums were held in Mildura and Swan Hill in March, the first of a series of post-Conference Forums to be held across the region. The Keynote Speaker at both forums was Dr Shannon Spriggs Murdoch of the Mentors in Violence Prevention program, Griffith University. She stressed the vital role of bystanders in challenging prevailing social attitudes which act to minimize or condone violence against women. Her workshop was confronting in that it demonstrated the progression from jokes which demean women all the way through to rape and domestic violence. Her key message was that bystanders have an opportunity to influence change, and she demonstrated ways this could be achieved without putting oneself at risk of harm. Other presentations on PVAW projects such as Baby Makes 3, Loddon Mallee Takes a Stand and Living Safer Sexual Lives were well received.

In rural areas in particular, the tyranny of distance makes coming together for regular meetings much harder. Participants fed back that one of the major benefits of the Forums was the opportunity for networking with other service providers. The sense of working together as a community and the opportunity to share knowledge were mentioned.

The chart below represents feedback on: Change in knowledge about approaches to prevent violence against women:



### Take a Stand Training

Take a Stand is targeting 1000-1500 employees in a variety of local government, community and industry sectors across the Loddon Mallee Region (LMR). Multiagency training teams go into workplaces to carry out training with the aim of creating cultures and systems that foster nonviolent norms. Employees are trained to reduce acceptance of violence condoning attitudes and behaviours and workplace culture change will be strengthened with relevant Human Resources policy and Quality Improvement.

Take a Stand is one of VicHealth's violence prevention projects, piloted by Women's Health Victoria with Linfox. It uses workplaces as a site for intervention and a universal approach that targets all male and female employees of the participating workplaces. It raises community awareness by supporting attitudinal and behavioural change in organisations and therefore communities through workforce-focused initiatives, resources and tools.

Take a Stand specifically responds to workplace norms and beliefs and has been found to be effective in:

- Altering understanding about violence
- Altering perceptions about what is acceptable – "It's not OK"
- Altering perceptions about what others in the workplace think is acceptable – "Most people do not condone violence."

- Facilitating appropriate responses that challenge violence accepting attitudes – “I know what to say to my mates.”
- Providing safety for voicing attitudes that challenge perceived dominant norms – “My sense of belonging, my pride and my respect won’t be damaged if I say I do not condone violence.”

#### Evaluation Methodology for Take a Stand:

An external evaluator, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare was engaged to carry out the program evaluation. The evaluation design was determined to be a pre-post design with data collected at three points in program delivery: Focus groups will be conducted in larger organisations and in depth interviews will be used to collect qualitative data pre and post training in small organisations. Facilitator diary data will also be used.

#### Summary of Learnings: Why Is Bystander Training in the Workplace Important?

- By targeting all people as bystanders, and thereby moving away from focussing on ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’, there is an acceptable opportunity for all workers or community members to be active in violence prevention.
- It gives simple, clear messaging on what the problem is
- It provides an immediate action response – “this is what I can do”
- It provides tools which are non-threatening and easy to understand and to use
- It is empowering – people can replace a feeling of being powerless in an uncomfortable situation with , “I can safely act”
- It replaces assumptions and myths with facts and an understanding of the reality of the situation
- By working collectively in the training situation, it raises peoples’ consciousness around issues of gender, power and control.

#### ‘Violence Prevention – It’s Everybody’s Business’ Conference

The Conference aimed to reach a broad and diverse group of people from both regional (targeting the Loddon Mallee) and metropolitan centres to be a catalyst for action to prevent violence against women, and to raise awareness of violence prevention approaches. The ‘Violence Prevention – It’s Everybody’s Business’ Conference, aimed to be a conversation starter for our region. The conference brought together the most eminent thinkers and authorities in the sector. This gave our community members access to quality, current information on the types and causes of violence; provided the community with knowledge /skills to identify and prevent violence; raised awareness of violence prevention approaches in the community and instigated action to eliminate violence against women.

#### Conference delegates:

Two hundred and eighty-five delegates were fully registered for the ‘Violence Prevention – it’s everybody’s business’ conference. Over 300 people attended overall. The conference was successful in attracting delegates from local government, health and community services and the education sector.

#### Increased levels of knowledge and awareness:

The conference delegates rated themselves as having some prior knowledge of the types of violence against women (Good 26%, Very good 35% and Excellent 33%), however the self-ratings of knowledge of the types of violence shifted significantly after the conference (Good 5%, Very good 40% and Excellent 54%). Similarly, there were significant shifts in knowledge after the conference about the causes of violence against women and of approaches to prevent violence against women. The delegate survey results clearly show that the conference increased awareness about the types of violence, the causes of violence against women and knowledge of approaches to prevent violence against women, meeting the objectives of the conference.



Quality of the conference:

Many people have cited the conference as “the best conference on family violence I have ever been to”. When asked what it was about this conference that was so special, they spoke of how the personal stories of family violence survivors such as Rosie Batty and Anj Barker ‘brought the message home’ and engaged the audience in a powerful way on an emotional level. This contextualised the issues, so that the focus was maintained on the personal while examining the theoretical issues of violence prevention. At the same time practical examples of programs such as Baby Makes 3, Take a Stand, Living Safer Sexual Lives, Act@Work which are addressing primary prevention across the State were demonstrated so that delegates were given concrete pathways for action.

Where to from here:

A common theme arising from the conference was the need to focus on the underlying causes of violence against women (gender inequity and the acceptance of violence).

The conference has clearly acted as a catalyst for action and provided delegates with ideas about how they can contribute to the prevention of violence against women now or in the future (eighty - eight per cent agreed or strongly agreed).

Areas which conference delegates identified as needing to be addressed in future conferences:

- how to engage men in PVAW
- strategies for PVAW in diverse communities,
- a stronger rural focus,
- strategies for women with disabilities
- Violence in Aboriginal communities due to the different underlying causes of violence (colonisation versus the gendered construction).
- more about child protection and the role they have in PVAW
- School based strategies.

#### Question Seventeen

***Are there specific cultural, social, economic, geographical or other factors in particular groups and communities in Victoria which tend to make family violence more likely to occur, or to exacerbate its effects? If so, what are they?***

We have covered a large range of factors in Question 6 that we feel have an impact on family violence rates. We would also like to emphasise that our Mallee area includes many small and tight knit communities. It is within these communities that a lack of confidentiality and anonymity can make some victims hesitate to contact local services such as hospitals and police for fear of revealing their business to people who are also friends or friends of the perpetrator.

Rurality is a significant factor in its own right. The geography of rural areas facilitates the isolation that accompanies and supports rural family violence. Women who live in rural communities face factors such as geographic isolation, social isolation, prevalence of gun ownership, lack of alternative and crisis accommodation, and less access to support and legal services. All of these factors increase their vulnerability to family violence occurring, and their vulnerability when family violence is already present.

Recent studies demonstrate that violence against women increases after natural disasters such as bushfires, floods and severe droughts. In these situations, where ‘stress levels are high, perpetrators may have been heroes and where men are often unemployed and sometimes suicidal, speaking out in a small community may be seen as an act of disloyalty. There is a need for a strong shift in community attitudes in the good and bad times so that violence is not acceptable.

Health workers in rural communities face additional challenges when working to reduce family violence. They experience a lack of anonymity in the community and they live in close proximity to the victims and perpetrators they are working with on an ongoing basis. The ongoing proximity to victims and perpetrators has been seen to make victims and perpetrators less likely to challenge each other to make ongoing workable relationships because they know that any work will need to be long term and ongoing due to the fact that the family violence worker will always be nearby and aware of what is going on in their lives to a certain extent.

The rural factor is also a challenge because rural workers have difficulty attending face to face training. There is also a limited number of people to work with in their local area and this limits the likelihood of the positive experience that can come from encountering different views on how to work in the family violence field. Exposure to new ideas or exposure to a critical mass of people who pick up those new ideas is reduced, limiting change.

There are simply fewer workers and fewer organisations. Organisations and communities are generally highly collaborative (the positive) but not challenging (the limitation). We have noticed that a barrier to participation in workplace violence prevention is the assumption that by association organisations will be falsely linked to violence. Even more so, the lack of support available to respond to disclosures about violence that inevitably occurs when the topic of violence is raised.

Primary Prevention is carried out by stakeholders for whom this role is not core business. Therefore capacity building is not simply the provision of professional development to a known workforce. It must include community awareness campaigns, community based forums –through existing networks such as Primary Care Partnership and Area Partnerships, and provide networking opportunities.

Rural pilot projects are generally located closer to Melbourne where there is already great exposure to new ideas. A considerable effort is needed to get new resources, training and projects into more distant rural locations. As a result of lack of exposure to new ideas, gender stereotypes tend to be more traditional in rural areas. Although, as the example of the growing number of savvy women farmers attests, the number of real life examples that do not fit the stereotypes is a real phenomenon that remains somehow invisible when considering ‘ideal rural women’.

There is a lack of services for children experiencing family violence in the Loddon Mallee region. Member organisations of Communities for Children, auspiced by St Luke’s, Bendigo, have identified a serious gap in service provision for or on behalf of children experiencing family violence in the Bendigo area and by extension, in the Loddon Mallee. One program which operates on a primary prevention of family violence model, providing training to new parents, is Baby Makes 3. This program, which was introduced into discussion in the region at the “Violence Prevention – It’s Everybody’s Business” Conference and the Forums, has been warmly requested all around the region, particularly by Indigenous organisations that aim to strengthen families as a means of family violence prevention. However, there is currently no funding to bring this program into the Loddon Mallee.

A helpful approach to the challenges presented by living and working in rural areas would be to consider the following:

- Rural communities have a significant burden with regards to both the experience, response and prevention of family violence.
- Rural women’s health services should be empowered with long-term funding and authority to continue to leverage their leadership and expertise to support prevention activities
- Intersectional disadvantage experienced by sectors of the community such as Indigenous, disabled, homeless, isolated rural, CALD and young women be addressed with adequate

resourcing to ensure their safety, as these groups experience a greatly enhanced risk of violence.

- Strengthen access to good quality resources through accessible online and other options
- Funding of the Baby Makes 3 program across the Loddon Mallee region needs to be provided.

#### Question Eighteen

***What barriers prevent people in particular groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefiting from family violence services? How can the family violence system be improved to reflect the diversity of people's experiences?***

It is our experience that language barriers are an increasingly common issue for our services. Our services operate predominantly in English. Access to appropriate translating and interpreting services via telephone or video conference is often our only means of communicating with clients who cannot understand English. Access to these services is not always possible at the time and place we need them. Better availability of this service and access to materials in other languages would greatly improve the experience of non-English speaking people of our services.

Mildura is a rural city far isolated from capital cities and other large regional centres. Mildura is the largest centre in the Mallee region. The Mallee region is home to a widely dispersed population living in small towns without public transport. The nature of these small communities and their tight-knit social environment results in problems for victims of family violence whereby confidentiality is difficult to maintain. Community members from small towns face great difficulty accessing local services or seeking assistance without running into a person they know at a hospital, police station or local health centre. We feel that this places great stress on the victim and would result in victims feeling they are not able to access family violence assistance without the wider community finding out. Improved use of internet or telephone accessible assistance may help to improve this situation as would improvements in service delivery where the client could receive assistance without the service provider being easily identified by wider community members.

#### Question Nineteen

***How can responses to family violence in these groups and communities be improved? What approaches have been shown to be most effective?***

Better community engagement and understanding of Indigenous culture and laws could improve the responses to family violence victims from Indigenous backgrounds. An improved understanding and acknowledgement of different beliefs, societies, cultures and laws could also improve the service system's response to family violence victims from Indigenous backgrounds. Part of our work in this area is to support the delivery of Indigenous Cultural Awareness training as previously mentioned.

The development, and associated training, of the Victorian Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (known as the Common Risk Assessment Framework or CRAF), is a significant step forward in increasing the safety of women and children experiencing family violence. The Framework aims to develop common standards and practices among service providers to ensure that the focus of any intervention and support remains on the safety of those experiencing violence.

The rollout of this training across the Mallee has enabled a good range of service providers to deliver a strong and well informed response to clients. Further funding of this training will enable the Mallee area to have a broader range of service providers who understand and can effectively assist clients. We endorse the fact that violence prevention is everybody's business and so we need to have a wider range of service providers educated about identifying and responding to family violence.

### Question Twenty

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

The sharing of information between government departments and between government and non-government departments could be improved. Better coordination of policies and legislation could assist more efficient sharing of information relevant to preventing and addressing family violence.

Consistent messages about family violence including what is acceptable and not acceptable in society as well as accurate messages about the prevalence of family violence is an important part of making family violence a community issue that everyone feels able to act on.

Longer funding windows would assist program delivery and management and would allow successful programs to continue to operate. At present, there is sometimes a stipulation that only new programs are eligible for funding and this can result in disjointed service delivery.

Short funding windows means that community are regularly engaged with a project and then disengaged with when funding runs out. This can leave communities disenchanting.

### Question Twenty-one

***The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes which you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.***

Our observation is that funding for primary prevention of family violence needs to be long term.

Our finding is that more attention and work needs to be done on reunifying families after they have experienced and been separated by family violence. This is particular important where children are separated from their siblings.

Intensive intervention in family violence cases and the modelling of appropriate behaviour to families and individuals can be a very effective intervention and would benefit from increased implementation in this sector.

Greater accountability for people who perpetrate family violence – developing a broader range of diversionary programs needs to occur. We currently have a limited suite of options for perpetrators; Men's Behaviour Change, community corrections orders or imprisonment are not

enough. We need to intervene early to support people to develop healthier and better problem solving skills so that family violence is not the only way that people know how to respond.

The Mallee Family Violence Executive would be interested to meet and/or consult with the Royal Commission into Family Violence.