

## Royal Commission into Family Violence

Our clients are new arrivals, refugees and migrant families who reside in the City of [REDACTED]. I have responded only to the questions that are relevant for this organisation. We have providing family counselling and support for these clients through funding from the Family Relationship Services for Humanitarian Entrants (FRSHE) program for 6 years and this funding has been cut. This program supported and connected clients experiencing FV into the broader service system and provided culturally appropriate services. We are no longer able to assist these clients and cannot accept the many referrals from mainstream family agencies, who are not able to assist / support our clients in a culturally appropriate manner.

### 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.**

Which reforms have improved responses to FV?

- Introduction of family violence divisions in Magistrates Courts in some areas ( could be expanded into other high need areas i.e. [REDACTED] )
- Introduction of the Victorian police Code of Practice
- Introduction of the family violence protection Act 2008
- Establishment of the multi-agency panel involving several agencies ( could be expanded to include other regions outside of western region )

### Question 3

**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?**

All of the above are positive initiatives however for CALD communities, families, men and women, public education needs to be in mainstream media and in other languages, but also on ethnic radio, and through ethno specific agencies, newspapers etc. Translated brochures are not suffice.

A lot of funding for front line services was ceased and this will have a negative impact and needs to be reconsidered, taking away funding in one part of the service system just puts more pressure on other parts of the same service system.

Information on internet is not always appropriate and accessible as some people cannot afford internet at home, and also cannot read English or access sites that are all in English language.

#### Question 4

**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.**

The [REDACTED] has been involved in the Challenge Family Violence ([REDACTED] [REDACTED]) program which has targeted change behaviours in men, (not men as the perpetrators) which includes community leaders/ faith leaders and is currently being evaluated by [REDACTED]. This program also covers bystander intervention strategies. This program was funded by the Department of Justice and Regulation.

#### Question 6

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

Our clients who are newly arrived, refugee and migrant families often have the following issues/ conditions/ events etc. that are associated with family violence

- Financial hardship, patriarchal cultures, social isolation, lack of English language, intergenerational issues, trauma from war, challenge of male roles in the family structure, women more independent in Australia this causes conflict in family unit, women more financially independent in Australia this causes conflict in family unit, use of alcohol, use of drugs.
- Women threatened by family members and community members in Australia or overseas to stay in the relationship no matter what.

#### Question 7

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

Public awareness and education at grass roots level, not from the top down. Ie not just politicians and government working on this but community themselves working within their own communities.

Preventative education at schools, taking into account cultural differences/ sensitivities.

Effective intervention with legal consequences.

#### Question 8

**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.**

Gaps include

- Not enough translated materials
- Not enough culturally appropriate services
- Not enough funding allocated for some services to use interpreters so they don't use them and use family and children for interpreting.

- Need for services that support women when they are still deciding what to do, ( transition stage )  
i.e. leave or stay in the home. i.e. family support

### Question 11

**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?**

Successful ways of supporting ongoing safety include

- Providing options for women to stay or go with housing
- Developing safety plans and translating these into relevant languages for clients ( not in languages that are common) languages that are required
- Services that support families in violent situations

Gaps in approach include

- Not enough housing support for immediate situations and then long term housing after that time
- Better for mother and family to stay in family home for support and other services they are already connected to i.e. school, mat and child health, GP, family support services, own community living in same area etc.

### Question 12

**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?**

Some of our clients have participated in a behaviour change program however did not find it effective as it didn't fit with their culture or their language. Programs need to fit the needs of the client group and be adaptable not one size fits all approach. For our clients the programs need to consider and respect cultural differences. These differences need to be discussed and not ignored.

#### Question 14

**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?**

As stated above for questions 12. Our clients are fearful of losing their family and house so often intervention only works in short term and then clients often go back to the usual pattern. There needs to be more education and support for the woman or children so they feel they won't be more worse off if they leave the situation as to if they stay.

#### Question 17

**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?**

Some factors include

Religion, intergenerational culture, less educated women, social isolation with poor English language, no transport, no family or friendship networks in local area or Australia, pressure from family members to stay in relationship or the shame that will come to that family, some women who seek intervention orders are then shamed and banished within their own community.

Some people use the 309 visa to hold over women to stay in relationship until she gets permanent residency in Australia.

#### Question 18

**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?**

Preventative barriers include

- Wife's family overseas threaten her that if she leaves husband in Australia
- Men and women from refugee backgrounds often don't understand the legal system and their rights.
- Women don't know what their rights are and options
- Women don't understand the service system available
- Some cultures have a strong arranged marriage pressure
- Some women have no other family members or support in Australia

**Question 19**

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

Improved responses include

- More interpreters available and used by all agencies involved, more documents translated, which implies more funding for these integral services for people who don't speak English and agencies prepared to take the time to use these services
- Engagement of faith and community leaders,
- Need for more culturally appropriate services
- Media campaigns in other languages

**Question 20**

**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?**

- Need for free legal aid
- Need for counselling services
- Need to fund more services specialized in working with refugees to deliver this service, as they often come back to specialist services not satisfied with the mainstream service and often in a worse situation. ( FRSHE program refunded )

For any further assistance or information please contact me on telephone 

