



## Submission by Eastern Community Legal Centre to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

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Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) is located in the Eastern region of Melbourne and serves the Cities of Whitehorse, Boroondara, Manningham, Maroondah, Knox and the Shire of Yarra Ranges. ECLC offers free legal advice from its offices in Box Hill, Boronia and Healesville during the day, at night and also through various outreach locations across the East, with a priority being given to those who are disadvantaged. Having operated for 40 years, the ECLC is one of Australia's most established community legal centres.

The Eastern Region has a number of areas of significant disadvantage. Healesville, in the Shire of Yarra Ranges, is home to the second most populous indigenous population in Victoria. The cities of Whitehorse, Maroondah and Knox host large communities of migrants to Australia, particularly from the Horn of Africa and Burma.

In addition to direct legal services, ECLC also focuses on community development and education activities that empower clients, workers and the general community. It raises awareness of its service, new legal developments and human rights through various projects.

ECLC welcomes the opportunity to be able to provide our views on this area of the law that directly impacts upon our communities. ECLC has operated a family violence intervention order duty lawyer service at the Ringwood Magistrates Court for fifteen years. We assist applicants and respondents of family violence intervention orders to provide advice, negotiation and representation on mention days in the family violence list. We also provide advice and casework to family violence victims and respondents outside of the court mention days. One of our main priority areas is to advocate against family violence, particularly as it affects women and children. Our submission is informed by our casework and advice experience.

ECLC is a member of the Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership (EMR RFVP) and endorses the recommendations in the submission of the EMR RFVP. Our submission will particularly be addressing a number of the questions raised in the Commission's Issues Paper illustrating a number of 'best practice' projects of ECLC.

## **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.**

ECLC recognises that achieving gender equity in society, obtained via structural and cultural change is the key to prevention of family violence. However, ECLC also recognises that gender equity requires a long-term, co-ordinated approach. ECLC takes this opportunity to identify a model of practice that we submit may be considered best practice in early intervention.

### **MABELS Project**

*MABELS Project* (**M**others **A**nd **B**abies **E**ngaging & **L**iving **S**afely) is a new project in the Eastern region of Victoria funded by the Legal Services Board and the Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust. The project is a partnership between two local governments (Maroondah City Council and Yarra Ranges Council), the regional family violence service (Eastern Domestic Violence Service) and ECLC to provide a holistic, preventative family violence legal and support service within the maternal and child health sector. This project commenced in March 2015.

*MABELS Project* was developed in recognition that preventing violence against women and children is a complex task that has involved several levels of reform at both a government and community level to provide a stronger, safer and more integrated system. The family violence reforms have definitely led to an increase in the reporting of family violence with the number of family incidents that the police attended increasing by almost 80% between 2008/09 to 2012/13. This would strongly suggest that there is increased confidence that family violence will be treated seriously by the police and the justice system.

The data clearly shows a marked increase in the interrelationship between the health sector and the legal sector in responding to family violence. It also highlights the need to focus on prevention and early intervention in minimising the effects of family violence on the community especially amongst 'at risk groups'. In 2005, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that amongst Australian women who had experienced violence by a previous partner, 36% reported that this occurred when they were pregnant and 17% experienced violence for the first time when they were pregnant.

The number of children being born within each of the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities has been steadily increasing with 1,881 births in Yarra Ranges in the 2012 year and 1,446 in Maroondah. Taking into account multiple births, over 3,200 mothers would have a series of contacts with the Maternal Child and Health (MCH) service in the first year of their new

child's life. With the MCH Key Ages and Stages framework including further visits in the second, third and fourth years, these MCH nurses have direct contact with over 10,000 families annually. In recent years, MCH nurses have been required to screen all mothers when babies are four weeks old for family violence concerns. This role, while well placed, has been a new and challenging one for many MCH nurses, particularly where their understanding of family violence and referral is limited.

Further, the Enhanced MCH program is an additional specialist program that operates parallel to the universal MCH Program. Families are referred in to the program by the universal MCH Nurse. The Enhanced MCH Service assertively responds to the needs of children and families at risk of poor outcomes, in particular where there are multiple risk factors. It provides a more intensive level of support including short term case management in some circumstances. The Enhanced Nurse outreaches support to the homes of the more vulnerable families as opposed to expecting them to present at a MCH Centre.

*MABELS Project* works with the overall nurse programs and all nurses within the program within both the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities and target identified key MCH locations and the Enhanced MCH program. Most recent police family violence incident figures identify a significant increase in these two municipalities, with a rate of 73.4 incidents in Yarra Ranges and 82.1 incidents in Maroondah, per 10,000 population. In both these areas, children were present in 32% of incidents. Despite this concerning data, it is known that family violence remains significantly unreported and these figures only include police reports. Given the research mentioned above with a higher risk for pregnant and new mothers, it is expected that this project will have a significant impact on a key cohort of vulnerable women and children.

Both the Yarra Ranges and Maroondah Councils have a number of Maternal Child and Health (MCH) Centres and one "Sleep and Settling" Centre. New parents, (particularly mothers) attend at the MCH Centres at specific times of their child's development in order to assess the children's physical progress. The Sleep and Settling Centres operate once a week and are an opportunity for primary caregivers to spend a whole day with the Maternal Child and Healthcare nurses to learn how to settle their children. The MCH Nurses note that the time period allocated to a Sleep and Settling Centre visit is a good opportunity for primary caregivers to become more comfortable with the Nurses and as a result, disclosures are often made to the Nurses in this setting in relation to issues that may be occurring in the home. This can include disclosures of family violence, relationship or financial issues.

It is recognised in research that people are twice as likely to consult with a non-lawyer about legal matters at first instance. Furthermore, in 27% of cases, people are likely to consult with a

health service provider at first instance about a legal problem.<sup>1</sup> This is due to the fact that healthcare providers are often working with families when they are extremely vulnerable (particularly after a child is born) and have a trusted relationship with their patients. Furthermore, many people are not aware that their concerns that they have raised with a healthcare provider is actually a legal matter.

In order to assist and empower people who have disclosed legal issues to the MCH Nurses, *MABELS Project* places a community lawyer and family violence advocate at Maroondah and Yarra Ranges “Sleep and Settling Centres” to be able to provide primary caregivers (mainly women) with legal advice, information and referrals in a range of legal matters. The legal issues may include family violence, family law, child protection, infringements or general civil matters. MCH Nurses and other healthcare staff are being provided with training in order to identify a legal and family violence referral opportunity to the community lawyer and family violence advocate.

The community lawyer and family violence advocate will also be available at a range of other MCH Centres in both the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges municipalities in order to provide advice and casework to clients as necessary.

It is important to note that by providing primary caregivers with the opportunity to be informed about their legal rights in a healthcare context, the focus for clients/patients will be on preventative care, not litigation. When people are able to be informed about their legal rights and responsibilities, they are more likely to feel empowered to make their own decisions. The legal clinic aims to empower client/patients to have control over what their preferred outcomes once they are informed of their legal options. In doing so, the client/patients’ safety, social well-being and/or health needs will be taken into account, supported and considered.

### *Peer professional development*

The health and legal sectors have different ‘languages’ and approaches to clients/patients. For example, nurses and doctors are required to mandatorily report suspicions of child abuse. Lawyers are not mandated to report and must act on a client’s instructions. Family violence advocates utilise a clear empowerment and advocacy model within a safety and risk assessment framework. All approaches, whilst valid, can be at risk of conflict. It is imperative therefore that all staff in the multidisciplinary team are provided with training and active partnership building to understand and respect each sector’s approaches to patient/client care and complex health and legal needs.

<sup>1</sup> Coumarelos, C, Macourt, D, People, J, MacDonald, HM, Wei, Z, Iriana, R & Ramsey, S 2012, *Legal Australia-Wide Survey: legal need in Australia*, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney, pp 111-112.

The MCH Nurses and other healthcare staff are being provided with training by ECLC to 1) identify legal issues and make appropriate referrals and 2) to understand the legal process in family violence, family law and child protection systems as well as by EDVOS staff in additional family violence risk assessment and safety planning skills.

The legal staff and advocates will also be provided with training by the MCH Nurses and other healthcare staff to understand the healthcare context and to make appropriate referrals. It is anticipated that the modules for this training will be able to be utilised on a regular basis, and rolled out as part of the general induction to new staff and to be utilised by other municipalities in the future. It is also anticipated that in being provided with this training, the healthcare providers will also learn skills to undertake preliminary advocacy. Training modules will be updated annually to ensure accuracy and reflect current societal trends.

### *Community Legal Education*

Both the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Shire Councils operate a range of parenting programs which are co-ordinated by their parenting educators. The parenting programs deal with a wide variety of social issues experienced by new parents. It is proposed that the community lawyer and/or other legal centre and EDVOS staff will work together with the parenting educators to provide community legal education to families within the Maroondah and Yarra Ranges Councils. It is anticipated that the joint modules for the community legal education will form a 'parenting legal education kit' which can be utilised and rolled out to other municipalities in the future. The content of the 'parenting legal education kit' will be updated regularly to ensure accuracy.

### *Collaborative learning and broader impact*

The monitoring and evaluation of the *MABELS Project* has commenced at an early stage and will continue throughout the life of the project. The project is adopting an integrated approach to shared problem-solving between the legal and healthcare sectors. It is anticipated that the learnings from the operation of the legal clinic, peer professional development, community legal education and partnership work can be initially applied across at least the remaining five municipalities in the eastern region.

Led by the Project Manager and the *MABELS Project* partnership, it is anticipated that the broader health, community service and legal system services will be engaged to raise awareness of the issues as experienced by clients involved with the project and to ensure that the lessons and outcomes from the project are utilised in as broad an environment as possible.

The emphasis within the vision of intervening as early as possible in family violence within a universal health service provides a key opportunity to significantly increase and impact prevention of family violence in the community.

Through the integration of a legal service into a healthcare setting, a Health Justice Project (HJP) such as *MABELS Project* is designed to break down barriers to accessible legal services for people experiencing health issues and to thereby bring about health benefits due to effective legal advocacy on behalf of patients.<sup>2</sup>

HJPs are a relatively new concept for service delivery in Australia. HJPs have existed for some time in the United States of America, with health organisations and hospitals partnering with lawyers as a way of addressing health issues which may have intersecting legal problems.

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<sup>2</sup> Noble, P. "Advocacy-Health Alliances: Better Health Through Medical-Legal Partnership", Final Report of the Clayton Utz Foundation Fellowship, August 2012, p 5

**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.**

**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?**

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

### **Family Violence Integration Project**

From 2011 to early 2015, ECLC auspiced the Family Violence Integration Project (FVIP), an innovative integration project funded by the Legal Services Board. The significant improvements that the FVIP has overseen have been driven by strong consultation with women who have experienced the court system and the agencies working at the Court. An early issue identified was a lack of separate waiting areas for people attending the Court, extending the fear of violence and lack of safety to the actual court experience. With the active support of the Court, the Police Family Violence Liaison Officer, agencies and the project, a separate waiting space has now been established at the Court for vulnerable women and children. It is notable that Ringwood Magistrates Court is one of the only courts in Victoria that has a 'Protected Persons' Space' to enable vulnerable victims of family violence to be able to wait for their court matters in a separate space from the alleged perpetrators of the violence.

The FVIP's vision was "to instil trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system."

Its aim was to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a coordinated and integrated manner, through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

In 2011, the project commenced with a consultation phase that successfully identified the integral issues for victim/survivors of family violence through their experience of applying for an Intervention Order:

- Limited access to information
- Limited support
- Risks to safety and privacy
- Limited legal response
- System issues
- Agency issues

The project also identified some key elements to an effective legal response. These all informed the recommendations for improving the Court experience for victim/survivors of family violence.

Much of the success of the FVIP can be attributed to the strength and commitment of the partnership of each of the key stakeholders in improving the legal experience for victim/survivors of family violence. This has created a more integrated response that is focused on the support and safety of victims of family violence through the Intervention Order Process.

In particular this has led to:

- The establishment of the Protected Persons Space (a separate waiting area for applicants for Intervention Orders)
- Morning Co-ordination Meetings on Family Violence Court Days (that identify high risk cases and responses)
- Increased information available to Court users
- Increased information available for service providers
- Regular training opportunities for community agency workers about Court and the Intervention Order process.
- Koori Court Support Worker role

Of the victim/survivors consulted:

- Almost all reported that they were “Very Well” supported through their Intervention Order Hearing, with one reporting being “Well” supported.
- All reported that they were very impressed and reassured with the level of support that they received and would never have expected such a response.



- All reported a high level of service from each of the IOSS services.
- All reported that they had been linked into the appropriate services at Court and had received appropriate referrals and information about relevant services beyond the Court day.
- Most reported that they could not think of anything that could have possibly improved their experience.
- All reported that applying for an Intervention Order was the right decision and that they felt safer as a result.

This is in very stark contrast to the feedback that was received through the initial consultation in 2011, where of the victim/survivors that were consulted:

- All reported that they felt extremely vulnerable because they had very limited (if any) information about Intervention Orders, the Court system and the legal process.
- Very few had been provided with a referral to an additional service with most reporting that they would have liked this to have happened.
- Most reported that they felt that the process did not appreciate the risks to their safety, forced them to justify their fear and exposed them to further danger.
- Most reported that they found the experience extremely overwhelming and distressing and did not want to even think about ever returning to Court.
- All the victim/survivors that were consulted felt completely overwhelmed by the legal information and the negotiation process that took place at the Court and reported negative comments made by Magistrates and/or the lawyer that did not exhibit an acceptable understanding of family violence.
- Most victim/survivors reported a feeling of powerlessness in regards to the 'system' which they did not feel appreciated the way family violence impacted them or their children.

The experience of the FVIP highlighted the necessity for prioritisation of integration across all levels of the Family Violence system in order to ensure safety and accountability for those engaged with the system. In particular, it is clear that there are some areas that still require much improvement. For example, almost all women consulted reported that they had received limited support, information and referrals at the application stage of their Intervention Order. Some reported that some court processes had led them to feel unsafe whilst others reported that the long waiting times made the experience difficult and often workers were too busy seeing multiple clients to be able to update them on what was happening. There were a couple of cases where they felt unprotected by the process where the perpetrator had been able to use the 'system' as a means to continue their violence.

It is notable also that the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) is not necessarily used or understood by all services who work in the Family Violence court system, and as a result, victim/survivors are receiving inconsistent services that can impact adversely upon their safety. We strongly believe that the CRAF training should be mandated across all organisations that work with direct service provision (including government departments). The work of integration requires constant maintenance in order to respond effectively to changes within the legal system and societal trends. It is our experience that an individual position that is funded specifically to co-ordinate integration is the best practice so that safety and accountability is clearly prioritised.

The FVIP has now been the subject of extensive evaluation as to its impact and effectiveness as a model that improves the safety of women and children accessing the Court system. Some of the key findings have included improving the co-ordinated legal response for people experiencing family violence; demonstrating a clear evidence base and expanding partnerships to ensure that women and children have better outcomes in the family violence court system. (The key evaluation reports are attached as appendices to this submission).

### *Key recommendations that have been informed by the FVIP:*

- **The Court should provide the lead in ensuring a strong consistent legal response to family violence**

The Court has increasingly become a pivotal point of contact for victims of family violence, particularly for high risk victims of family violence accessing the legal system and family violence system through a strengthened police response. The experience of the Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court has seen that an integrated response to family violence is crucial in responding to the safety, legal and support needs of victims and holding perpetrators accountable. This provides the Court with the unique opportunity to lead the provision of a strong integrated legal response to family violence.

- **A funded Family violence Co-ordinator should exist at every Court**

A strong partnership between the Court, Police, legal services and family violence services is essential in ensuring an integrated response to family violence. The coordination of the FVIP has ensured that there have been regular and consistent opportunities for the key partner organisations to work in collaboration in improving the legal response to victims of family violence. This has proven to be a central role in the ongoing success of the FVIP.

- **A funded Koori Support Worker should exist at every Court**

The Koori Court Support Worker pilot program at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court has been critical in identifying and providing a holistic response to Aboriginal victims and perpetrators of family violence. This role has also proven to have a broader influence on the wider family violence system by identifying Aboriginal community accessing the Court, increasing the confidence of Aboriginal community to attend the Court as well as building meaningful and culturally sensitive relationships with mainstream organisations.

- **The Court should provide state-wide education and training opportunities for service providers around Intervention Orders and Court processes**

The Intervention Order process can not only be difficult to navigate for clients but also for workers supporting their clients through this process. Through the provision of regular Information Sessions hosted by the Court the FVIP has seen a huge need and demand from a diverse range of community service workers seeking more information and understanding about the Intervention Order process and how to support their clients. This has demystified the process and made the Court more accessible for workers and their clients.

### *Steps 2 Safety DVD*<sup>3</sup>

*Steps2Safety*, is a video that explains the Family Violence intervention Order process at court in an easy to understand manner. The video has an accompanying flow-chart that is used regularly by lawyers and others as a visual guide to explain the process to clients. The flowchart can be used with or without the video.

*Steps2Safety* is able to be utilised across the State and is translated into five community languages.<sup>4</sup> The video is available in hard copy or also free online at [www.eclc.org.au/steps2safety](http://www.eclc.org.au/steps2safety). The online version is accompanied by a series of relevant services and contacts on a state-wide basis, (although this could be adapted locally). While the focus of the *Steps2Safety* is on the Family Violence Intervention Order Process, an earlier Magistrates' Court-produced video is focused on a contested hearing. A later Victoria Police-

<sup>3</sup> *Steps2Safety* was a partnership project auspiced by ECLC and funded by the Victoria Law Foundation (see website for full details). Clearer *Steps2Safety* (translations) was funded by the the Victoria Law Foundation and the EMR Regional Family Violence Partnership.

<sup>4</sup> The languages are Hakha Chin, Dinka, Arabic, Mandarin and Punjabi. These languages were chosen after consultation with the community legal sector, migration settlement services and the Ringwood Magistrates Court.

produced video is focused on Intervention Order breaches. All are available together at [www.eclc.org.au/steps2safety](http://www.eclc.org.au/steps2safety).

The video was originally conceived to be played in court and legal service waiting rooms so that people were able to learn about the family violence intervention order court processes. Posters and business cards were also developed so that victims could also utilise the resource in their own homes.

Notwithstanding the accessibility of this resource, and the fact that ECLC has made it available to Magistrates Courts across the state, it appears that it is underutilised potentially due to lack of awareness about its existence. In fact, we understand that other projects are being undertaken to also explain the intervention order process. The feedback from our clients and partners has been that the video is extremely useful, particularly when people are considering applying for an intervention order for the very first time. Notwithstanding some concerns about broader distribution and awareness, *Steps2Safety* (English version) has been viewed online over 2,300 times to date and is also linked through other key websites.

### Further recommendations

In addition to the recommendations informed by the FVIP, ECLC recommends also that the **State Government use the FVIP as a 'best practice model' to improve integration in the family violence jurisdiction across the state.**

We contend that the successful integration of services that prioritises safety and accountability also includes providing relevant, appropriate and timely information to users of the Intervention Order system. **Where resources exist that can be provided to users of the Intervention Order system prior to them attending court for the first time, we strongly advocate that these resources should be made available and encouraged to be used by the courts, who should take a proactive role in making this information available.** *Steps2Safety* is one such resource.

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Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this very important issue, and please do not hesitate to contact Belinda Lo, Principal Lawyer at Eastern Community Legal Centre on [REDACTED] or call 9285 4822 or [REDACTED] if you have any further queries in relation to the matters raised in this submission.

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# Evaluation of the Family Violence Integration Project Stage 2

FINAL REPORT | NOVEMBER 2014

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Prepared by Effective Change Pty Ltd  
for the Eastern Community Legal Centre



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## Acronyms used in this report

ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
ECLC	Eastern Community Legal Centre
EDVOS	Eastern Domestic Violence Service
ERFVP	Eastern Region Family Violence Partnership
FCLC	Federation of Community Legal Centres
FVIP	Family Violence Integration Project
IFVRAG	Indigenous Family Violence Regional Advisory Group
IOSS	Intervention Order Support Service
LSB	Legal Services Board
RAJAC	Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
RMC	Ringwood Magistrates' Court
VCAT	Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
VOCAT	Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal

# 1. Introduction

## About the Family Violence Integration Project

The Family Violence Integration Project based at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC) commenced in 2011, with the aim of improving the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence through the partnership and collaboration of agencies working at the RMC. Funded by the Legal Services Board (LSB), and led by the Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), the project is supported by the RMC and the agencies, who work together to provide the Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) at the RMC.

## Partners

The organisations that together form the FVIP partnership are:

- ♦ the Ringwood Magistrates' Court
- ♦ Eastern Community Legal Centre
- ♦ Victoria Police
- ♦ Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS)
- ♦ Victoria Legal Aid Ringwood
- ♦ Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program – EACH Social and Community Health
- ♦ Eastern Men's Behaviour Change Consortium
- ♦ Court Network
- ♦ Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership
- ♦ Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT)
- ♦ The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)
- ♦ Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service
- ♦ the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC).

## History of the FVIP

Supported by funding from the LSB in 2011 and 2013, the FVIP has retained its vision to '*instill trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system*', primarily around the Ringwood Magistrates' Court. At the same, with continued funding, the project has been able to embed its initial aims, set new goals and enlarge the partnership. Funding received in 2013 enabled expansion of the partnership to include VOCAT, VCAT, Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service and the Eastern Metropolitan RAJAC.

## FVIP Stage 2 Project Priorities

The FVIP Stage 2 was funded to continue the project's aim to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court and to expand its focus on other areas of the justice system and raise broader systemic issues in the family violence response based on the partnership's growing expertise.

## Purpose of the evaluation report

With the conclusion of the project's funding, this report aims to document:

- ♦ the work of the FVIP partnership and the successful features of this work,
- ♦ the FVIP partnership's achievements and
- ♦ the key lessons emerging from this important project which may have broader application in the field.

The evaluation has been on-going since the project's commencement in 2011. This work is based on a compilation of the previous evaluation and progress reports, an analysis of FVIP documents, access to FVIP records, attendance at FVIP Steering Committee meetings, observations of Information Sessions and interviews with key stakeholders.

## 2. What the FVIP did and why it works

### Created the FVIP Partnership

Context and rationale	<p>The FVIP Partnership formed because partners had a strong belief that the victims/survivors' experience of applying for an intervention order at the RMC could be improved. While most of the partnership organisations already collaborated around court processes for intervention orders, they acknowledged that there was scope to improve the co-ordination and integration of services for court users. They also recognised that informally structured partnerships are unlikely to improve without imperatives, such as formal agreements, explicit goals, clear roles and responsibilities, resourcing and accountability processes.</p>
What the FVIP did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Built on the existing Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS)</li> <li>♦ Developed a role for the FVIP Partnership that was different, but complementary, to the existing IOSS</li> <li>♦ Created the partnership</li> <li>♦ Created a range of structures and accountabilities for the operation of the partnership:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ governance involving all relevant CEOs</li> <li>♦ working groups involving operational staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>♦ Set clear goals and developed a workplan</li> <li>♦ Monitored and reviewed the workplan</li> <li>♦ Monitored and regularly reviewed how partners perceived the partnership was functioning</li> <li>♦ Continued to 'raise the bar' and set new challenges</li> <li>♦ Invited new partners in when the partnership was ready</li> </ul>
Why this works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Partners are motivated and committed to a common purpose</li> <li>♦ The partnership has a sound governance structure</li> <li>♦ The partnership is resourced with a coordinator position</li> <li>♦ Partners are accountable for their actions and commitments</li> <li>♦ Partners attend meetings regularly, listen and share information</li> <li>♦ Partners review and suggest strategic changes</li> <li>♦ Partners are prepared to compromise and change</li> <li>♦ The partnership has evolved and expanded over time</li> </ul>

## Focused on safety

Context and rationale	<p>Enhancing and improving safety and support for victims/survivors is the central principle of the FVIP project. The FVIP is predicated on ensuring that the justice and court systems offer applicants a safe environment in which to come forward, and an environment which avoids re-traumatising those who have experienced violence.</p> <p>This requires more than an emotionally safe environment, it also means that applicants are protected from the potential or actual threat of harm or intimidation while attending court.</p>
What the FVIP did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ The partnership fixed their sights on enhancing safety and support for victims/survivors</li> </ul>
Why this works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ By asking a simple question - '<i>Will this improve the safety of victims/survivors?</i>' - every proposed action of the partnership can be assessed, decided and prioritised</li> <li>♦ The clarity of this principle provides the partnership with a device that simultaneously supports goal setting, decision-making, monitoring and review.</li> </ul>

## Created better access to support services and improved coordination

Context and rationale	<p>Victims/survivors' enter the family violence system through a variety of pathways and may have little or no knowledge of the range of services available to support them. While there has been a steady focus in Victoria on creating a more 'joined up' family violence service system over the past decade, concerns about fragmentation and lack of coordination of services continue to surface in research and public comment from agencies such as the Victoria Police.</p> <p>For this reason, one of the FVIP's goals has been to improve coordination of services and ensure better access to services for people in the system. The FVIP has been guided by the principle that being linked in to the appropriate services should not rely on the victim knowing what is available – people should receive the same access to services, irrespective of the doorway by which they enter the system. Effective referral processes are also a goal of the FVIP as they work in the best interest of both the client and the agency, by ensuring that the right person gets to the right agency as quickly as possible and, at the same time, ensuring that agencies' time is not wasted with inappropriate referrals.</p>
What the FVIP did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Created a Support and Referral Working Group, reporting to the FVIP Steering Committee</li> <li>♦ Held Morning Coordination meetings on family violence sitting days with all members of the IOSS attending</li> </ul>

- ♦ Co-located services in the Protected Persons' Space on family violence sitting days
- ♦ Developed the IOSS Guide, documenting all agencies, services, their eligibility criteria and referral requirements
- ♦ Reviewed and improved referral protocols
- ♦ Developed standardised referral tools for the partnership
- ♦ Enlarged the FVIP partnership to ensure that a wider range of agencies / organisations were represented
- ♦ Provided information and training for generic agencies which includes advice about referring into support services
- ♦ Encouraged informal as well as formal networking between services
- ♦ Resourced the work of the FVIP through the FVIP Coordinator role

### Why this works

- ♦ The partnership identified gaps and barriers to effective referrals, and addressed these issues.
- ♦ The partnership enables partners to maintain their focus on reviewing and refining referral processes.
- ♦ The combined effects of meeting regularly, improved communication and more familiar and mature organisational relationships, ensure that partners are better positioned to coordinate the services that are delivered to clients.
- ♦ As the partnership has access to the networks of each partner agency, there is greater opportunity for better coordination of services across a wider network.

## Provided education and training for the broader service system

### Context and rationale

The family violence sector needs to work with the broader community. Links are required with agencies beyond the family violence sector – from schools, hospitals, community health services to council services and beyond, so that any agency which comes in contact with someone experiencing family violence can make an appropriate referral if required. Equally, private sector organisations, such as private legal providers, should be able to make an appropriate referral. In order to achieve this, this broader network of organisations needs to understand the services available to which those experiencing violence can be referred.

### What the FVIP did

- ♦ Provided information sessions at the RMC, using a panel format with a range of partner agencies presenting.
- ♦ Included question and answer segments.
- ♦ Provided targeted workshops to share information relating to ATSI and CALD communities
- ♦ Distributed resources to accompany the information sessions.

### Why this works

- ♦ Naturally extends the networks of the partners.
- ♦ Distributes accurate information to the community.
- ♦ Allows participants to meet representatives of the FVIP agencies.
- ♦ Provides the experience of meeting in a court facility, which is often a new

experience for participants.

- ♦ Contributes to improving the appropriateness of referrals.
- ♦ Widens the reach of services.

## Improved the legal response to victims/survivors of family violence

**Context and rationale** The FVIP's foundation research around victims / survivors' experiences at the RMC found that their experiences, and levels of satisfaction varied considerably. There were no clear reasons for why one person could have a positive experience, and another's experiences were negative, but those who had had a negative experience were disappointed to some degree with the response of the legal system. Reasons for this also varied, but included factors such as not feeling safe in the space, a lack of coordination across services, lack of information and lack of follow-up. These results therefore framed the FVIP's vision to improve the legal response to victims/survivors of family violence.

### What the FVIP did

- ♦ Work closely as a partnership to:
  - ♦ identify deficiencies in the legal and support responses and
  - ♦ develop remedies to these responses.
- ♦ Enlarge the original partnership to include:
  - ♦ tribunals where family violence is a key contributor – VCAT, especially in relation to tenancy issues, and VOCAT.
  - ♦ community support agencies, including the local Aboriginal Healing Service
  - ♦ relevant local networks, including the regional Family Violence partnership and the RAJAC
- ♦ Establish a legal clinic for those living in the outer regions of the court's catchment area. This takes in semi-rural communities where access to legal support services is limited and people could be at higher risk due to physical isolation.

### Why this works

- ♦ All partners are involved in formulating ways to improve the legal and support responses.
- ♦ Involving RMC staff, the magistracy and the police in the discussions, as well as legal service providers is vital to the success of improving legal responses.
- ♦ Involving a wide range of support services in the discussion with police, courts and legal services ensures that there is an analysis of problems that lie at the intersections between the legal and community sectors, and can take a holistic point of view.
- ♦ Support from executive levels of all partner agencies allows decisions to be made and implemented.

## Advocated for further improvements

Context and rationale	<p>Continued growth in the reporting of family violence matters means that this issue is an on-going community priority. Through the FVIP model, partner agencies have had the opportunity to implement and reflect on innovative ways of workings. The partnership has generated learnings about new ways of working that are replicable and of strategic value to the relevant sectors. The FVIP has therefore taken the approach that learnings from their experience should be shared more broadly with government, funders and relevant sectors, in order to inform public policy.</p>
What the FVIP did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Share information through various forums and advocate for the needs arising.</li> </ul>
Why this works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Advocacy on the basis of real world experience, enables replication of success and potentially allows others to avoid pitfalls, as well allowing successful strategies to be further extended.</li> <li>♦ Sharing information with government, funders and relevant sectors enables the experience of the FVIP to inform policy considerations and developments.</li> </ul>



### 3. Key achievements of the FVIP

*The most enduring legacy of our work is the commitment to work together to make the experience less traumatising for victims of family violence and I think that is what this project has achieved.*

*FVIP member agency*

#### A dynamic and evolving partnership of organisations with a shared commitment

The history of the FVIP is that of a long-term relationship between partner agencies sustained by their shared commitment to the partnership's vision to *'instill trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system'*. The partnership has been both durable and adaptable. All founding members have remained with the partnership over that time despite the challenge of insecure funding, and they remain committed to its continuation. Over time, new agencies have joined the partnership by invitation.

With these new members, the partnership's scope has deepened to include Indigenous-specific services and networks and widened to include tribunals, such as VCAT and VOCAT. While these tribunals can lack strong connections to the family violence service system, they are often dealing with matters where family violence is a direct or indirect factor.

The FVIP partnership has reflected on its partnership over its operation, using a Partnership Analysis Tool. This tool is predicated on the notion that *"If partnerships are to be successful they must have a clear purpose, add value to the work of the partners, and be carefully planned and monitored."* Among the tool's components is a partnership checklist which provides a range of statements relating to the key features of a partnership, categorised as:

- ♦ determining the need for the partnership
- ♦ choosing partners
- ♦ making sure partnerships work
- ♦ planning collaborative action
- ♦ implementing collaborative action
- ♦ minimising the barriers to partnerships
- ♦ reflecting on and continuing the partnership.

FVIP partners were surveyed using this checklist on three occasions: 2011, 2012 and 2014. The results show the interesting progression of the partnership. With the third administration of the survey in 2014, the majority of members (five out of seven respondents) 'strongly agreed' that:

- ♦ *The perceived benefits of the partnership outweigh the perceived costs*
- ♦ *The action is adding value (rather than duplicating services) for the community, clients or agencies involved in the partnership*

Across the three survey periods, these were the only statements that attracted strong agreement from the majority of respondents.

Statements where the majority of respondents (five or more) 'agreed' are provided in Table 1.

### Partnership Analysis: Areas of most frequent\* agreement

Beginning (2011)	After 12 months (2012)	After 3 years (2014)
<b>Determining the need for the partnership</b>		
	Willingness to share ideas, resources and power	Perceived need for the partnership in terms of common interest and complementary capacity
		There is a clear goal for the partnership
<b>Choosing partners</b>		
History of good relations	Core business seen as partially interdependent	Partners share common ideologies, interests and approaches
		History of good relations
		Partnership brings added prestige to partners individually and collectively
		There is enough variety among members to have a comprehensive understanding of the issues
<b>Making sure partnerships work</b>		
	Management support	Management support
	Partners have the skills for collaborative action	Partners have the skills for collaborative action
	Roles, responsibilities and expectations clearly defined and understood	Administrative, communication and decision-making structure is as simple as possible
	Administrative, communication and decision-making structure is as simple as possible	
<b>Planning collaborative action</b>		
Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the partnership in their own organisations		All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action
		Lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear
		Participatory decision-making system that is accountable, responsive and inclusive
<b>Implementing collaborative action</b>		
		There is an investment in the partnership of time, personnel, materials or facilities
<b>Minimising the barriers to partnerships</b>		
	There are informal ways for sharing information and resolving disputes	There are formal structures for sharing information and resolving disputes
<b>Reflecting on and continuing the partnership</b>		
		There are processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions
		The partnership can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work

\* Five or more respondents out of six respondents (2011, 2012) or seven respondents (2014)

These results show changes in the investment of effort and focus over the years. For example, in the middle years, members clearly perceived the focus of effort was on ‘making sure the partnership works’. The results also show that the partnership commenced with a ‘history of good relations’ but by the time of the final survey, the majority of members agreed that the FVIP partnership was achieving benchmarks of good partnership practice across most areas and categories.

Management literature stresses the challenges that organisational partnerships need to overcome to succeed. The FVIP partnership confronted many of the standard challenges – problems over demarcation, decision-making, maintaining momentum, sharing responsibilities for action, differing work methods and philosophical paradigms. In the face of these challenges, the FVIP partnership has not only survived but thrived, sustained by members’ sense of common purpose, strong and committed management, and the belief that the partnership has added value for clients, the community and agencies. In addition to the partnership model itself, key achievements of the FVIP nominated by member agencies through the 2014 survey included:

- ♦ *the strength of relationships, particularly with ‘partners outside of the court environment’*
- ♦ *improved networking between court, legal services, police and ancillary services.*

*The (enduring legacy of our work) is the FVIP model as a benchmark for others to follow.*

## What a partnership delivers: improved quality and integration of services

As the Partnership Analysis Tool highlights, partnerships need to have a purpose. Analyses of the family violence system have long identified lack of coordination, lack of integration and poor communication as key deficiencies in the system. Over the past decade, family violence reforms in Victoria have focused on addressing these issues (amongst a raft of other issues).<sup>1</sup> The introduction of the Regional Family Violence partnerships is an example of an initiative aiming to improve service integration. What distinguishes the FVIP from broader regional and sub-regional initiatives is the project’s localised approach and highly specific focus.

The FVIP has gathered together services/agencies, including some services that would not otherwise sit at the same table, to focus very specifically on practices and processes at the Ringwood Magistrates’ Court. Member agencies, including those participating in regional partnerships, have highlighted the integration of services, better coordination of services and improved communication at, and around the processes at the RMC, as key achievements of the FVIP. Members also highlight the ‘wholistic approach’ to family violence at the RMC made possible through the range of participating services and the fact that improved integration on the micro level flows over to improved integration and ‘better management of family violence services in the eastern region.’

The work undertaken by the FVIP to achieve improved coordination (see Section 2) includes:

- ♦ a combination of formal and informal forums for discussion around referral and coordination, allowing for planning and delivery of day-to-day services, as well as consideration of issues around coordination of services and legal responses, at a strategic level,

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au/Family-Violence-Reforms\\_C27](http://www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au/Family-Violence-Reforms_C27)

- ◆ development of tools and resources to support better coordination, and
- ◆ the support of a dedicated project coordinator to assist the FVIP's work on service integration.

**What do you think are the key achievements of the last 4 years of work?**

*A coordinated process enabling all professionals an opportunity to work together, identify any potential issues and clarify any questions amongst the team so the women who are supported receive an efficient service.*

*FVIP member agency*

## What integrated services deliver: improved safety for women and children

Integrated and coordinated services deliver service efficiency, but in the family violence context, the prime importance of service integration is that it greatly improves the safety of women, children and other victims/survivors of family violence. Member agencies report that the FVIP '*links partners to work together in a seamless way to support women through the court process and maximise safety*'. The FVIP consultation reports<sup>2</sup> show that over the years, there has been a marked improvement in applicants' sense of safety and increased reports of feeling protected and supported while at court. Member agencies also reported that they receive positive feedback from clients about the service they receive.

Applicants derive a sense of safety from a combination of features that include both their physical and psychological safety. The FVIP has continually monitored and reviewed safety procedures at court, to ensure that from the moment the applicant arrives, and sometimes, from the point when the applicant is leaving their home, processes are in place to support their safety.

Through the coordination of services at RMC, safety considerations and risk management strategies are continually being addressed. Applicants will not always be aware of the steps taken to provide for their safety. All agencies review the Family Violence list the day prior to hearings, in order to plan for all cases, but with a special focus on cases of higher risk and/or complexity. For example, the Victoria Police Family Violence Coordinator may contact the applicant prior to the hearing day to ask if they need support, such as being accompanied to court. However, in consultation with the FVIP partners, it may be decided that it would be safer for an agency such as EDVOS to contact the applicant rather than the police. Services may notify new court users about the Protected Persons' Space available to them, their support people and if needed, their children, in order to reduce anxiety prior to court and on the day of the hearing. The Morning Coordination Meeting, held on sitting days, addresses risk management issues and responsibilities for the hearing days. This could include matters that should be brought to the attention of security, or ensuring that a Court Network volunteer is available to support an isolated person if needed.

As the Morning Coordination Meeting is part of a hierarchy of meeting structures, this meeting can focus on the immediate issues of the day, while systemic and practice issues, emerging trends, or

<sup>2</sup> FVIP Consultation Reports, 2011, 2012, 2013

new ideas can be referred to the FVIP meetings, one of the FVIP Working Groups, or the Court Users Meeting, for more in-depth consideration and recommendations.

What an integrated service model can potentially achieve is necessarily linked to the role and scope of the agencies participating in the partnership. With VCAT and VOCAT's membership of the FVIP for example, the horizons of the partnership have expanded and the platform for delivering integrated services is extended. VOCAT's membership derived from the observation that there was a limited number of applications for victim of crime assistance from those who had participated in an FVIO process. Through VOCAT's membership a number of systemic changes were implemented, including Victoria Police making referrals to VOC at the point of a family violence incident, VOCAT attending the RMC on family violence hearing days and VOCAT joining the panel presentations at IOSS information sessions.

Member agencies report that key achievements of the FVIP's integrated service approach, include:

- ♦ *better safety outcomes for women and children*
- ♦ *an improved pathway for applicants attending court for hearings*
- ♦ *improved access for applicants to ancillary services including family violence support and mental health support.*

#### ***More people making sure I'm safe***

A young girl in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne feels safe and protected from the grandfather who sexually abused her as a result of the cooperation of the Intervention Order Support Services operating at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

Legally this case was considered 'difficult', made more so when the abuser contested the intervention order. The young girl and her mother were required to attend five hearings over six months to reach their final order.

While the court hearings were stressful, both mother and daughter felt positive about their experiences at court. From her first contact with the Registrar, the mother felt that their story was listened to carefully and respectfully. The Registrar highlighted her concerns to the Magistrate, which the mother felt made a critical difference to the case. The Magistrate reviewed the supporting evidence and ensured that the Final Intervention Order responded to the mother's concerns, preventing the grandfather from being within 500 metres of the young woman, wherever she may be. The Final Order was also put in place until the girl reached the age of 18.

This experience brought the mother and her daughter in contact with most of the supports and services that make up the RMC IOSS - court staff, magistrates, lawyers, police and victim support services. Despite the fact that her grandfather was released from jail during this period, the young woman felt safer with the Final Intervention Order than when he was in jail because *'there were more people making sure she was safe.'*

## Providing culturally-specific support for Aboriginal clients

With Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service and the Eastern Region RAJAC joining the FVIP partnership in its second stage, considerations around safety and improved legal responses for Aboriginal clients can be informed by Aboriginal cultural knowledge and expertise, including cultural safety within a court and legal setting. Boorndawan Willam provides a Koori Support Worker at the RMC, one of only a handful of such support workers in place at magistrates' courts in Victoria. This worker, in attendance at the RMC on Tuesday and alternate Friday FVIO sitting days, can:

- ♦ provide culturally-specific advice and support to people who are applying for or responding to a family violence intervention order or family violence safety notice
- ♦ provide information about court processes
- ♦ make referrals to legal services, family violence support and other ancillary services, such as mental health support
- ♦ conduct risk assessments and give information about how to keep safe from further family violence.

With Boorndawan Willam in the FVIP partnership, the pathways for referrals across and between agencies are strengthened for Aboriginal clients. At the system level, Boorndawan Willam is able to advise member agencies about culturally safe and respectful policies and practices. Boorndawan Willam has also participated in the IOSS Information Sessions, and provided specific workshops on *Supporting Indigenous clients through the Intervention Order process*, thus reaching a wider range of community agencies with Indigenous-specific information.

## The first Protected Persons' Space in a Victorian court

*'He (ex-partner) made an application to get back at me. I really didn't want to come to Court. I didn't feel safe and this is just putting me in further danger. I just want to give up but my family and friends are forcing me to keep going. There is nothing they can do stop him. I kept repeating to myself all morning 'I'll be ok in that room (the PPS)'. I wouldn't have come if I knew I wouldn't be allowed to sit in that room...'* FVIP Consultation Report, March 2013

The 'Protected Persons' Space' at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court is a separate waiting area for applicants of Intervention Orders. It is one of the first designated waiting areas for FVIO applicants in Victoria. It was established in August 2011 and was officially launched by the then Victorian Attorney-General, Robert Clark in November 2012. Protocols have been developed for use of this space (which was previously used as office space for another organisation) and are included in the IOSS Guide. Clients who choose to wait in the Protected Persons' Space are monitored to enhance their safety. The space is reasonably large, has a self-serve kitchen and chairs and desk space, where services can quietly consult applicants. There are toys provided for children and pamphlets and information available for applicants. All agencies inform their clients about the Protected Persons' Space prior to their hearing date. This has been reported as a factor in supporting and encouraging people to attend Court. All applicants are routinely asked if they wish to use this space when they present at the registrar's desk. Victims/survivors using the Protected Persons' Space have indicated that the room's existence shows them that the Court considers it important to provide for and respect their safety.

In addition to ensuring safety at court, the Protected Persons' Space functions as a 'de facto' one-stop shop. Staff from support services, such as the domestic violence service and victims' assistance can talk privately to applicants while they are waiting. As the Attorney-General observed in his official launch speech '*...from the point of view of the person looking for help there is a seamless transition – they can move with help and support from one agency to another as needed rather than feeling like they are passed on and left to their own devices...*' Applicants who have not had any prior contact with support services can observe how workers interact with other clients, and can be casually introduced. This creates an environment where clients, particularly vulnerable and isolated clients, can gain trust in agencies and build the confidence to ask questions and link in with support services. At the same time, by virtue of being in the one space, agencies and court staff can effectively and efficiently monitor applicants. They can gently approach clients and check on their needs. They can provide information and answer spontaneous questions.

Fundamentally, though the function of the Protected Persons' Space is to provide safety. The foundation research for the Family Violence Integration Project showed that the experience of waiting at court in the same physical space as the perpetrator of violence, caused distress and risks to safety for the applicant. As the Family Violence client advocate observed of the Protected Persons' Space '*In this space you can quite simply breathe – put your thoughts together – with no fear of repercussions.*' The space also improves safety for people arriving and leaving the Court premises. As a monitored space, applicants can discuss concerns for their safety with any of the service providers in the Protected Persons' Space. Through the Morning Coordination Meetings, police and service providers are conscious of applicants at risk and monitor their arrival and movements during their time at court. Court staff can alert Protective Services of concerns for safety of clients or the court.

More than half of the member agencies nominated the Protected Persons' Space as one of the FVIP's key achievements and most important legacies.

## Information Sessions and Education

Over three years (2012, 2013 and 2014), the FVIP has provided seven information sessions and six workshops, reaching 453 participants. Well over 100 organisations were represented across the participants. These sessions, held at the RMC, provide a broad range of organisations with exposure to the court, an understanding of the Family Violence Intervention Order process, and most significantly, an understanding of the various services in supporting people through this process and how to refer their own clients to these services and some basic information to distribute to clients.

	2012	2013	2014	Total
Information sessions	2	3	2	7
Workshops	-	4	2	6
Participants	200	147	106	453
Organisations represented	60	50	44	154

## Continued advocacy

Throughout its lifespan, the FVIP partnership has continued to advocate for improvements to court processes relating to family violence. The importance of this work is that the perspectives and knowledge of this unique partnership are added to the broad range of family violence advocacy work. In addition to communications with the Attorney General and the Shadow Attorney General (particularly in the lead up to the November 2014 Victorian election), the FVIP has undertaken this work by contributing to the strategic planning of the Eastern Region Family Violence Partnership and the knowledge base of the Federation of Community Legal Centres. Based on the FVIP partnership's experience and knowledge, the key advocacy messages are the need for:

- ♦ courts to provide the lead in providing a strong and consistent approach to family violence, particularly in terms of delivering an integrated response to family violence
- ♦ a funded Family Violence coordinator at every court, in order to resource and support the coordination of services and the partnership
- ♦ a funded Applicant Support Worker and a Respondent Worker at every court to provide the links between applicants and support services and respondents and appropriate services, such as Men's Behaviour Change programs.

In 2014, the RMC received funding from the Department of Justice for the positions of a Family Violence Registrar, an Applicant Support Worker and a Respondent Worker.



## 4. What can be learnt from the FVIP?

*Courts and DOJ can see how valuable external services are to the smooth and efficient running of the court. Courts can maintain a focus on safety and risk for women and children. Women and children's safety has been the focus...*

*FVIP member agency*

### The partnership

#### Membership

From the experience of the FVIP, it is evident that a court-based partnership structured around the notion of providing safety for women and children experiencing family violence, is a vital mechanism. The partnership, while crucial, is, however, a means not an end in itself. The FVIP partnership found it was important that the partnership started small, with a narrow and specific focus, and expanded as the partnership matured and gained confidence in its workplan. With funding over four years, the FVIP partnership was sufficiently well-established to increase its membership in 2013, thus enlarging its scope to focus on Indigenous clients and referral pathways to VOCAT and VCAT. Each of these additions helped the project maintain momentum and added to the achievements of the partnership.

#### Coordination and support

One of the less visible but essential factors contributing to the success of the FVIP has been the work of the FVIP Coordinator. The FVIP Coordinator resourced the partnership, undertaking initial research in the courts to identify concerns about court processes and safety, consulting with member agencies, supporting the various committees and working groups, suggesting strategies, resolving issues, developing resources, organising and contributing to the Information Sessions, ensuring that the partnership worked through the actions it had committed to, reporting back to the funding body, identifying future funding options and ensuring that information flowed accurately to members. The FVIP Coordinator participated in the majority of meetings, including the Morning Coordination meetings. She maintained a consistent presence in the court, observing and talking to women applying for FVIOs and keeping in touch with service providers, so that she had an up to date knowledge of issues and concerns. When this work is done well, it supports the well-oiled running of the partnership – done badly, it would have the potential to derail the partnership. As one agency observed, one of the partnership's key achievements was having 'a dedicated professional coordinator that has held the partnership throughout the journey.' For those seeking to learn from the FVIP, ensuring that the partnership has a dedicated coordinator, with the personal and professional skills to support the partnership is one of the critical lessons.

*(The coordinator's) enthusiasm and commitment to the project has been the driving force...*

#### Structures

Having a range of meeting structures with different but complementary aims has been important to the success of the FVIP. Matters of immediate concern on hearing days can be referred to the morning coordination meeting, the FVIP Steering Committee has been the forum for strategic

governance, and the FVIP working groups provide the platform for the court and agencies to work together more deeply on systemic and process issues. Meetings were consistently well-attended – a function of many factors including organisational commitment, effective coordination, a sensible and clear work agenda and sharing of the workload – therefore contributing to their effectiveness.

## Safety

The FVIP partnership's work in relation to safety has been extensive, encompassing work in relation to systems, practices, and policies, and is well-documented throughout this and other FVIP reports. The key lesson to note however in relation to these achievements has been that the principle of 'ensuring the safety of women and children' has guided every step of the FVIP's agenda. This principle has been the touchstone for every decision and action, and has without doubt contributed to keeping the partnership focused and united in pursuit of that goal.

## Timing and tenacity

The Protected Persons' Space is a unique resource in Victorian courts. While the FVIP partnership worked hard to ensure that this space was available for FVIO applicants, there were elements of luck and timing in securing the space. This space became available as one tenant left the court building. There were multiple parties interested in the space, however, because the FVIP partnership had developed strong relationships at court, because the FVIP message around safety had been extensively promoted, because there was a united partnership advocating for this space, and to some extent through timing and tenacity, the space became available for use as a Protected Persons' Space. In part, the lesson from this experience is to have an opportunistic mentality – ready to review and grasp opportunities as they arise, if they support the goals of the partnership.

## Spreading the message

The IOSS Education Sessions were consistently well-attended over three years, indicating a clear demand for information and resources. These sessions not only enabled dissemination of information, they broadened the reach of the partnership and greatly increased the number of agencies with an understanding – if only superficial – of court processes and support services, who left the sessions knowing how to link someone in need to the right service.

## 5. The Future

The FVIP funding will cease in early 2015, and further funding has not been sourced, presenting an unclear future for the partnership. Partners have expressed their commitment to maintaining the partnership, and to expanding it to include the newly funded court Applicant Support Worker and Respondent Worker. However, without the funding, the resources of the Coordinator will no longer be available, and it is not clear how this workload would be managed.

Recent developments in Victoria introducing Family Violence Registrars into magistrates' courts offers the option of transferring responsibility for coordination of the FVIP into the responsibilities of this role. Other potential options include sharing responsibilities and workload across the member agencies, and/or the Eastern Region FVP taking on this role, given this partnership focus of this role.

Whichever option is taken up, it will be important that the new iteration of this partnership continues to build on and extend the achievements made to date, including the important role of the Information Sessions.



Evaluation of the Family Violence  
Integration Project:  
Final Report

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Effective Change Pty Ltd  
for the Eastern Community Legal Centre  
February 2013





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Attachment 1: Family Violence Integration Project Consultation Report

Attachment 2: Family Violence Integration Project – Stage 2 Consultation Report



## Summary of Key Findings

### Overarching project outcomes

1. The Family Violence Integration Project has clearly made steady progress towards achieving its three key goals of improving the coordinated legal response for victims/survivors of family violence; demonstrating a successful partnership model and sharing its work and achievements with the broader community.

### Clear evidence base

2. A clear evidence base has been developed to inform the Family Violence Integration Project's work in improving the response of legal and support services to victims/survivors of family violence.

3. From the evidence base and issues identified, a workplan has been developed with recommendations for actions to address each issue. The simple, but coherent and structured approach of the project work enables the evidence base and activities to be continually monitored and reviewed.

### Improve coordinated responses

4. The collaboration of agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court has improved significantly through the Family Violence Integration Project. Improvements are evident through tangible outcomes, such as policies and procedures that provide a more coordinated response for applicants; through feedback from participating agencies and through the structures established to support the on-going collaboration, in particular the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, providing a governance and coordination focus to the work and the Morning Coordination Meetings, providing a coordinated service response for clients during their attendance at court.

5. The success of the collaborative effort of the agencies involved in the Family Violence Integration Project is evident in some of the project's key achievements, most notably the establishment of Victoria's first and only Protected Persons' Space of its type, in a magistrates' court. While the primary purpose of this area is to provide a safe and separate physical space for clients, it is also a de facto 'one stop shop' for clients where the Intervention Order Support Service members can:

- provide information to clients
- coordinate services for clients
- assess and monitor client safety, and
- refer clients to services.

From the client perspective, the Protected Persons' Space allows clients to:

- sit separately from the respondent in a safe, comfortable and supportive environment
- safely be accompanied by support people



- bring their children to court, if no other alternative is available, and
- consult with multiple service providers in one room.

It contributes significantly to clients' feelings of safety and anecdotally it appears, can be instrumental in supporting clients to attend court.

## Expand existing partnerships

6. The Intervention Order Support Service has been expanded to include EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program and Anglicare, the agency funded to provide the Men's Respondent service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. With these service providers joining the Intervention Order Support Service and attending court at least weekly, applicants have faster access to support for victim of crime applications and access to counselling and respondents have access to information, support and referrals.

7. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has expanded to include the Court Network. This ensures that the key services operating at court and key service providers working with Applicants and Respondents participate in the steering of the project's work.

## Education and case coordination

8. The Intervention Order Support Service has provided information sessions for agencies that work with people who may be victims or perpetrators of family violence. In 2012, around 200 representatives of a wide range of agencies attended three information forums.

## Access to information

9. Through the project, referral processes to Victims of Crime Assistance and Counselling have improved, in particular through the attendance at court of the Victims' Assistance and Counselling Program worker, and as a result more timely information is available to clients and service providers.





## Key Lessons

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The experience of the project generated a number of important lessons that continue to inform work in the second stage of the project. They are documented here not only as a record of the lessons learned through the project, but also for their potential to inform other work in the family violence setting.

### 1. Have the safety of women as the central objective of the work

In practical terms, having the safety of women as the central objective of the work means that:

- ◆ All actions are driven by the agenda of increasing the safety of women.
- ◆ There is an in-built test for all decisions '*Does this increase the safety of women (or not)?*'
- ◆ All project partners are unified around the common objective of increasing the safety of women, despite the different imperatives of their organisations.

The structure of the project is deliberate. Establishing partnerships, as an example, is often an objective of work in family violence. The rationale is that partnerships support integrated work. However, the work in establishing partnerships is difficult and susceptible to distraction, derailment or losing momentum. In contrast, with the FVIP's structure, the desired result of increasing the safety of women is at the centre of the work giving the project coherence, clarity, focus and momentum. With this approach, establishing a partnership can be seen as a means to an end, but not the end result.

### 2. Start working with a specific and narrow focus

The Family Violence Integration Project started with a narrow, localised focus: *increasing the safety of women attending Ringwood Magistrates' Court in relation to an intervention order matter*. This narrow and localised focus provided a place to start and prevented the task from appearing over-whelming.

### 3. Share the workload and increase the number of people involved

A Steering Group guides the work of the FVIP and all partnership agencies are represented on the committee. Using a working group approach to key tasks, work is progressed by smaller groups of people. This allows people to focus their energy on areas of particular interest. More importantly it provides more time and space for discussion of issues and brings in more perspectives, as agencies' operational staff can serve on working groups.

### 4. Driving the work from outside the Family Violence sector

With the work driven by a Community Legal Centre rather than a family-violence specific service, it sends a strong message that family violence is everyone's responsibility, not just that of the family violence sector.

### 5. All partners feel a sense of ownership of the work and achievements of the FVIP

While the ECLC is the lead agency for the project, there is a strong ethos that all partners share in the successes and the challenges of the work. This creates the strong sense of unity and also sets up a focus on



committing to the work for the longer-term when external funding has ceased and it will need to be self-funded and integrated into the work programs of all agencies.

## **6. Cultural change gains its own momentum**

The partnership has found that the project has started to influence the culture at Ringwood Magistrate's Court, with examples of staff groups not involved in the project taking initiatives of their own volition to increase the safety of women involved in family violence matters.

## **7. Continuous quality improvement is now a way of thinking amongst the group**

Partners are now initiating their own improvements to increase the safety of women involved in family violence matters, well outside the initial brief of the project.

At the outset of the second stage of the project, in keeping with the project's open approach, members visited other courts to learn about good practices that could be implemented at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. This initial investigation is now informing new case-management approaches currently being developed.

Inspired by practice elsewhere, when an Affected Family Member does not attend court, Victoria Police at Ringwood Magistrates' Court now adjourn the hearing for one week rather than have the order struck out. During that week, police check on the Affected Family Member's safety, conduct a risk assessment and check whether any assistance is required to return to court.

## **8. The two-way benefits of the partnership**

Pre-dating the Family Violence Integration Project, there was a long history of trying to establish morning coordination meetings between agencies and the court on Family Violence sitting days, with limited success. This effort was re-ignited with the Family Violence Integration Project. With stronger relationships created through the Steering Group, more open discussions were possible. Given the pressures on court time, there was some reluctance to attend the Morning Coordination meeting without clear evidence of how it would benefit court efficiency. However, other agencies found the meetings very beneficial, particularly through the participation of the court. Since learning the value of their attendance to other agencies, the court is regularly represented and the Morning Coordination meetings are a key element of the success of the project. There have been additional benefits, as external agencies have gained insight into the court's care and concern for Affected Family Members.

## **9. Sharing learnings and extending the influence of the work**

The Family Violence Integration Project provides information sessions for agencies with an interest in the work of the court in relation to family violence. These sessions have been very well attended and positively evaluated by participants. This has enabled the reach of the project to extend far beyond the formal partners.



## **10. Success unites members**

Key achievements help to galvanise a partnership. The Family Violence Integration Projects successfully established the Protected Person's Space in the Ringwood Magistrates' Court one of the first of its kind in Victoria. The Protected Person's Space was launched by the Victorian Attorney-General in November 2012 and gained extensive positive media coverage. This key achievement has generated a palpable sense of pride in the group and provided continued motivation for the work.

## **11. With success comes higher expectations**

With the second stage of the project commencing, it is evident that partnership agencies now have a deeper knowledge of the work they are engaged in and higher expectations of what can be achieved. The 'bar has been raised'.



## Introduction

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The Family Violence Integration Project, based at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court, aims to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a coordinated and integrated manner. The project was undertaken by a partnership of agencies, led by the Eastern Community Legal Centre. It was funded through a major grant of the Legal Services Board from February 2011 – January 2013. The Eastern Community Legal Centre has recently received funding from the Legal Services Board to continue the project for a further two years.

This report documents the evaluation of the first stage of the Family Violence Integration Project.

### Project Background

The process of considering and seeking an Intervention Order is a highly complex and challenging experience for victim/survivors. There is, however, scope to make systemic and strategic improvements to this process, especially through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies. Driven by local agencies, the Family Violence Integration Project has sought to affect systemic and strategic change.

### The Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court

The Intervention Order Support Service has operated at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court since 2002. This service originated through a partnership between the Eastern Community Legal Centre, Victorian Legal Aid and EDVOS – the Eastern Domestic Violence Service, with the support and cooperation of the Ringwood Magistrate's Court.

The Intervention Order Support Service partnership identified a need for greater coordination and integration of support at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

### Project Partners

The Intervention Order Support Service partnership expanded for the Family Violence Integration Project to include the nine organisations listed below. It continues to grow and include new partner agencies.

Members of the Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court	
	Court Network
ECLC	Eastern Community Legal Centre
EDVOS	Eastern Domestic Violence Service
EMBCC	Eastern Men's Behaviour Change Consortium
EMRFVP	Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership
EVACP	EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program
RMC	Ringwood Magistrates' Court
VLA	Victoria Legal Aid
	Victoria Police



## Project Aim

The overarching aim of the Family Violence Integration Project is to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a coordinated and integrated manner, with a focus on the partners working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court. The project's vision, aim and goals are:

- Vision** To instil trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system.
- Aim** To improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a co-ordinated and integrated manner, through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC).
- Goals**
- ◆ Improve the co-ordinated and integrated response for victim/survivors of family violence accessing the legal system.
  - ◆ Demonstrate a successful partnership model and a range of strategies that could be utilised and adopted in other regions.
  - ◆ Present key learnings and recommendations to be distributed and considered for wider community engagement work.

## Project management and resourcing

The Family Violence Integration Project is led and managed by the Eastern Community Legal Centre. The ECLC engaged a Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator to lead the development of the project, coordinate its implementation, facilitate communication between partners and ensure that the project aims are achieved within timelines. The Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator is also responsible for resourcing the evaluation of the project.

## Structure of the report

The evaluation report is structured around achievements, in a broad sense, against the project's goals followed by greater detail against the project objectives. It concludes with suggestions around its future focus with the second stage of the project.

## Methodology

The evaluation has been undertaken primarily as a desk-based review of evaluation information due to limited resources, such as partnership analysis survey results and material developed by the Family Violence Integration Project. The evaluator has advised on evaluation methods and tools and met regularly with the Project Coordinator and the ECLC. The evaluator has also attended the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group and the launch of the Protected Persons' Space, and consulted with partners on these occasions.



## Project Overview

Driven by a clearly articulated and forward-focussed vision, aim and goals, the key elements of the Family Violence Integration Project include:

Project element	The Family Violence Integration Project Structure
Management	Eastern Community Legal Centre
Resourcing	Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator
Governance	The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group
Working groups	<p>Three working groups, reporting to the Project Steering Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited information and Support Working Group and Referral Pathways Working Group</li> <li>• Risks to Safety and Privacy Working Group</li> <li>• Systems Issues Working Group</li> </ul>
Key objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies for improved services.</li> <li>2. Establish improved coordinated responses for parties (especially victims/survivors) engaging with the legal responses of the family violence system.</li> <li>3. Utilise and expand the existing partnerships of agencies currently delivering an Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.</li> <li>4. Develop and implement education and case coordination strategies to improve the pathway and experience of parties entering and exiting the court system.</li> <li>5. Ensure that victims/survivors are well informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs.</li> </ol>
Project workplan	<p>Project activities were articulated for each of the five objectives. Arising from the project's initial task of developing a clear evidence base, six priority action areas were determined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to information</li> <li>• Limited support</li> <li>• Risks to safety and privacy</li> <li>• Limited legal response</li> <li>• System issues</li> <li>• Agency issues</li> </ul> <p>Responsibility for investigating the priority areas was allocated to either a working group or to the Project Steering Group.</p>
Monitoring	<p>Indicators of success were articulated for each of the five objectives. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group measured progress against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work undertaken in the six priority areas</li> <li>• reflection on whether the project was reaching its own measures of success</li> </ul>
Reporting	<p>Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator provides regular progress reports to the Steering Group</p> <p>Annual reports provided to the funding body against achievement of objectives</p>



## Key Findings

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*I often feel overwhelmed. It is an uneasy journey through pain and shame to navigate unfamiliar systems, access assistance from places that you have never been before, deal with legal issues,, talk to police, find out how to now live and all the while reeling from the effects of violence and the breakdown of a relationship.*

Victim/survivor advocate speaking at the launch of the Protected Persons' Space, Nov 2012

The Family Violence Integration Project commenced with a reasonably modest aim that had three parts. Firstly, *to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence*. In order to achieve this outcome for people affected by family violence, the aim included working *in a co-ordinated and integrated manner*. Evidence from academic research, the daily experience of services working in the family violence sector and the litany of client stories informed this part of the aim. When services are coordinated and integrated, victims/survivors of family violence are spared the trauma of endlessly repeating their story to each worker they encounter or the challenge, during a time of distress, of discovering and referring themselves to the full range of legal and community services that are available. The third part of the aim focussed this work on *the partnership and collaboration of key agencies working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC)*.

While the project partners were clear about the project's aim and took on each of its parts in effect as guiding principles, at project commencement in 2011, none of the partners envisaged that just 21 months later in November 2012 the Attorney-General would be attending the Ringwood Magistrates' Court to launch one of Victoria's first Protected Persons' Spaces – a safe and separate space for intervention order applicants to wait whilst attending court. The Protected Persons' Space is a high point in the achievements of the project. However, this was achieved partly by serendipity – the space became available by chance when a tenant of the building vacated, and largely by effective advocacy and a strong partnership – space is at a premium at all courts and there is competition for any vacant space.

This success though should not obscure the hard work, the small but instrumental 'wins' that preceded it and the commitment of the partners to improving the court experience for victims/survivors.

### Overarching project outcomes

- ◆ Goal 1: Improve the co-ordinated and integrated response for victim/survivors of family violence accessing the legal system.

Achievements in this area include:

- ◆ The establishment of the Protected Persons' Space, which provides physical safety for applicants whilst at court, and through the co-location of applicants and service providers, clients can be seamlessly and conveniently referred across services.
- ◆ Improved procedures and protocols implemented by the registrar, such as an automatic risk screening for all intervention order applicants and referral to the Protected Persons' Space.
- ◆ Protocols governing the Protected Persons' Space.
- ◆ Morning Coordination Meetings on Family Violence sitting days, where risks to safety are examined.



- Greater focus of all services on following up clients.
- Recently instituted practice of adjourning cases for one week in the event of a 'no show' in order for police to undertake a safety check of the applicant, rather than striking the case out.
- ♦ Goal 2: Demonstrate a successful partnership model and a range of strategies that could be utilised and adopted in other regions.

Two key structures have been consolidated through the partnership. The first of these is the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group with management level representation from key services, as well as the Regional Family Violence Partnership. This group operates a flexible model, with smaller working groups created to address priority issues and engage operational staff in the work of the partnership. It is resourced by the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator. The second key structure is the Intervention Order Support Service. This service, comprising the key agencies represented at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court on the Family Violence sitting days, predates the project. As a group, it did not have a strong history of working together on a regular and consistent basis. Through the project, Morning Coordination Meetings have been instituted between the key services attending court on the Family Violence list days. While initially attendance at each of these forums was patchy, there is now regular and full attendance. The groups have needed to work through issues and broaden their understanding about other services, and their imperatives to reach this point. However, with a clear focus on improving the legal responses for those affected by family violence whilst attending Ringwood Magistrates' Court on intervention order matters, and the impetus of external project funding, momentum and progress has been maintained.

Each of these structures could be replicated at other courts, and informed by the approaches that the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has tried. The work of this group has been assisted through a dedicated coordinator role.

- ♦ Goal 3: Present key learnings and recommendations to be distributed and considered for widercommunity engagement work.

The Intervention Order Support Service and the Ringwood Magistrates' Court delivered three information sessions in 2012 to a broad audience of service providers who work with victims or perpetrators of family violence. Participants found these sessions to be extremely informative and useful. Information distributed at these sessions include the Intervention Order Support Service Guide, developed through the project and providing information about referral pathways and each of the organisations involved in the service.

The evaluation of the Family Violence Integration Project contributes to the project's knowledge base and provides information that can be disseminated by the project to wider community / legal sector to inform work in other locations.

#### **Key Finding:**

1. The Family Violence Integration Project has clearly made steady progress towards achieving its three key goals of improving the coordinated legal response for victims/survivors of family violence; demonstrating a successful partnership model and sharing its work and achievements with the broader community sector.





## Clear evidence base

**Objective 1: Develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies for improved service**

### Activities

In order to develop an evidence base about effective strategies for an improved service, the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator facilitated consultations with key stakeholders at the beginning (September, 2011), middle (March, 2012) and end (January, 2013) of the project.

#### Consultations with agencies

The purpose of these consultations was to identify the services provided by each agency and areas where services intersected, and as the project progressed, to measure perceived changes over time about the effectiveness of the service system.

All agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service Partnership were consulted. Other agencies external to this partnership but based in the region and with a direct or indirect interest and need to know about the IOSS were also consulted. Consultations were conducted through surveys and focus groups.

#### Consultations with people who had experienced family violence

The purpose of consulting people who had experienced family violence was to collect data on the client experience and ensure that the project was grounded in consideration of the client experience. Consultations were held with people who had experienced family violence and had accessed the Ringwood Magistrates' Court and applied for an Intervention Order.

Clients were provided with project information, ethical considerations in terms of participating in the research and a consent form and were invited to participate in a consultation. Consultation options included face-to-face interview, telephone interview, written survey or group discussion. All those participating opted for either face-to-face or telephone interviews.

#### Reporting

The Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator has prepared consultation reports at the completion of each of the project's three consultation stages. The reports are provided to the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group for their endorsement for future action.

### Outcomes

As a result of the project's research and consultation activities with clients and agencies, six priority areas for action were identified in the Stage 1 Consultation Report:

1. Limited access to information
2. Limited support
3. Risks to safety and privacy
4. Limited legal response
5. System issues
6. Agency issues



The elements of an effective legal response were also identified from this research in terms of information, support, risks, legal response, systems and agencies. This has provided the Family Violence Integration Project with direction to guide their actions, aiming for achievable, good practice.

Informed by the elements of an effective legal response, and evidence-based areas for action, the Family Violence Integration Project identified recommendations to make improvements under each priority area and possible actions. The actions are delegated to the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator, working in conjunction with either the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group or one of its working parties.

The Family Violence Integration Project has therefore created a simple and coherent workplan, based on key issues to be addressed. After each consultation phase, the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator has prepared a Consultation Report documenting achievements, progress and opportunities for each priority and equally importantly, the future focus for action, which ensures that the project maintains momentum through its activities. The Family Violence Integration Project documents its work and structure in a simple, one page outcomes flowchart, which is updated at appropriate stages. The project has clearly met its indicator of success of having '*key recommendations for action for improving service*'. (See Attachment 1: Family Violence Integration Project Consultation Report and Attachment 2: Family Violence Integration Project – Stage 2 Consultation Report)

#### Key Findings:

2. A clear evidence base has been developed to inform the Family Violence Integration Project's work in improving the response of legal and support services to victims/survivors of family violence.
3. From the evidence base and issues identified, a workplan has been developed with recommendations for actions to address each issue. The simple, but coherent and structured approach of the project work enables the evidence base and activities to be continually monitored and reviewed.

## Improve coordinated responses

**Objective 2: Establish improved coordinated responses for parties (especially victims/survivors) engaging with the legal responses of the family violence system**

### Activities

#### Development of the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group and Working Groups

The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group was established in 2011 at the outset of the project. Chaired by the CEO, Eastern Community Legal Centre and resourced by the FVIP Coordinator, the Steering Group is actively involved in the oversight of the project. Membership of the group has expanded during the life of the project to its current membership of nine agencies.

The Steering Group established a Working Group model so that work on priority areas for action identified through the consultation phase could progress simultaneously and efficiently and operational staff could contribute to the discussions, in particular around day-to-day practice. The FVIP Coordinator is a member of each working group, records notes and undertakes the agreed tasks. The Steering Group establishes the



brief for each Working Group and the groups report back to the Steering Group. Three Working Groups have been created:

- ◆ Limited Information and Support and Referral Pathways Working Group,
- ◆ Risks to Safety and Privacy Working Group, and
- ◆ Systems Issues Working Group.

### Partnership survey

In order to reflect on the Steering Group's partnership and coordinated responses, a 'Partnership Analysis' was undertaken with the partner agencies, using a modified VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool. This was administered as an electronic survey at the beginning and end of the project. Additional questions sought partners' views on topics such as what 'success' in the project would look like and changes that would be evident in the way organisations work together at the beginning of the project. At the end of the project, partners were asked about what changes were evident through the project and what has been different for clients, as well as identifying future improvements for clients.

### Outcomes

There has been considerable activity in relation to this objective and achievement of outcomes.

The establishment of the FVIP Steering Group in itself is acknowledged by members as a significant outcome, providing the first forum for all these parties to meet around the common goal of better co-ordination and integration of family violence services and an improved response for victims/survivors of family violence. Evidence of improved and better-developed agency relationships includes:

- ◆ increased opportunities for interaction
- ◆ increased communication and secondary consultations occurring
- ◆ improved case-coordination
- ◆ increased confidence and trust in the roles and expertise of IOSS workers

The Steering Group has worked productively on a range of complex issues. The group has worked through the challenges that typically face a new partnership, but after two years of activity there is a real momentum to the activity of the group, meetings are well attended and the workload shared fairly across members. There is a genuine long-term commitment to change and continuous improvement evident in the group. The FVIP Coordinator is a trusted resource for the group, and her role in supporting the project and undertaking key tasks is valued.

The Steering Group's Partnership Analysis scores at the beginning and end of the project reflect the level of commitment and on both occasions resulted in scores equating to: '*A partnership based on genuine collaboration. The challenge is to maintain its impetus and build on the current success.*' The score at the end of the project dropped slightly from 140/175 to 133/175 potentially indicating a higher level of expectation from the group. The highest score achieved both times was in the area of '*determining the need for the partnership*', showing the level of clarity and agreement on the need for the partnership held by the partners. The lowest score recorded both times was for '*minimising the barriers to partnership*', showing that there are still challenges in this area, such as the need for 'formal structures for sharing information



and resolving demarcation disputes'. In addition to high levels of support on the need for the partnership, there was 100% agreement or strong agreement for the following statements, indicating the key elements of the partnership experience:

- *The partners see their core business as partially interdependent.*
- *The managers in each organisation support the partnership.*
- *Partners have the necessary skills for collaborative action.*
- *All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action.*
- *Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the coalition in their own organisation.*
- *There is a core group of skills and committed (in terms of the partnership) staff that has continued over the life of the partnership.*
- *There is a clear need and commitment to continuing the collaboration in the medium term.*

The work driven by the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has resulted in not just a well-functioning partnership, but in a number of significant, tangible outcomes in the priority action areas, described below.

### **Information**

The *Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) Guide* has been developed which documents the service, the Family Violence Integration Project, the roles of the partner agencies and information about court assistance and safety. Details on partner agencies includes their role, contact details, the organisation, the work they undertake in relation to family violence and the intervention order process and criteria for accessing their service. The Guide is for agencies involved in the IOSS and other agencies needing this information. The IOSS Guide also include client-focussed information, such as the 'Commonly Asked Questions' about the experience at court, the process involved in the intervention order process and commonly used legal terms. The guide is useful both for agencies within and outside the family violence sector and for individuals attending court for intervention order matters.

Other resources developed include an Application Stage Referral Sheet as well as *Steps 2 Safety* (funded by a grant from the Victoria Law Foundation) providing information for clients about the family violence intervention order process in DVD, pamphlet and poster formats. The Ringwood Magistrates' Court and partner agencies distribute this pamphlet widely. Information sessions for generalist and specific family violence service providers is a key element of the work in this area – see Objective 4 for further information.

### **Support**

The FVIP Steering Group has improved relationships and collaboration between services. The institution of **Morning Coordination Meetings**, held on the morning of the two Family Violence list sitting days at Ringwood Magistrates' Court, has been particularly significant in coordinating services and improving services for clients. The Morning Co-ordination Meetings involve all agencies in the Intervention Order Support Services. They provide the opportunity for court, legal and support services to review the list, identify any potential vulnerable cases or additional support needs and share required information between services. They improve the level of coordinated responses for clients and have resulted in increased communication and trust between services. Through the operation of the Morning Coordination Meetings and the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, referral pathways between agencies



have improved, and therefore, clients' access to services has improved. The group has developed protocols for members to absent themselves from discussions if there is a perceived conflict of interest. This has been a useful learning for non-legal agencies, for example, in broadening their understanding of the responsibilities of legal officers to act in the interests of their client.

### Safety of victims / survivors

The '**Protected Person's Space**' at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court is a separate waiting area for applicants of Intervention Orders. It is one of the first designated waiting areas for family violence applicants in Victoria. It was established in August 2011 and officially launched by the Victorian Attorney-General, Robert Clark in November 2012. Protocols have been developed for use of this space (which was previously used as office space for another organisation) and are included in the IOSS Guide. Clients who choose to wait in the Protected Persons Space are monitored to enhance their safety. The space is reasonably large, has a self-serve kitchen and chairs and desk space, where services can quietly consult applicants. There are toys provided for children and pamphlets and information available for applicants. All agencies inform their clients about the Protected Persons' Space prior to their hearing date. This has been reported as a factor in supporting and encouraging people to attend Court. All applicants are routinely asked if they wish to use this space when they present at the registrar's desk. Victims/survivors using the Protected Persons' Space have indicated that the room's existence shows them that the Court considers it important to provide for and respect their safety.

*'...when people do come to Court to seek protection, to seek to have their rights upheld they know that they can do so in an atmosphere of security and support.'*

*Attorney-General Robert Clark  
Launching the Protected Persons'  
Space, Ringwood Magistrates'  
Court,  
9 Nov 2012*

In addition to ensuring safety at court, the Protected Persons' Space functions as a 'de facto' one-stop shop. Staff from support services, such as the domestic violence service and victims' assistance can talk privately to applicants while they are waiting. As the Attorney-General observed in his official launch speech *'...from the point of view of the person looking for help there is a seamless transition – they can move with help and support from one agency to another as needed rather than feeling like they are passed on and left to their own devices...'* Applicants who have not had any prior contact with support services can observe how workers interact with other clients, and can be casually introduced. This creates an environment where clients, particularly vulnerable and isolated clients, can gain trust in agencies and build the confidence to ask questions and link in with support services. At the same time, by virtue of being in the one space, agencies and court staff can effectively and efficiently monitor applicants. They can gently approach clients and check on their needs. They can provide information and answer spontaneous questions.

Fundamentally, though the function of the Protected Persons' Space is to provide safety. The foundation research for the Family Violence Integration Project showed that the experience of waiting at court in the same physical space as the perpetrator of violence, caused distress and risks to safety for the applicant. As the Family Violence client advocate observed of the Protected Persons' Space *'In this space you can quite simply breathe – put your thoughts together – with no fear of repercussions.'* The space also improves safety for people arriving and leaving the Court premises. As a monitored space, applicants can discuss concerns for their safety with any of the service providers in the Protected Persons' Space. Through the Morning Coordination Meetings, police and service providers are conscious of applicants at risk and monitor their arrival and movements during their time at court. Court staff can alert Protective Services of concerns for safety of clients or the court.



## Legal responses

Court procedures have been tightened or improved, and the court has taken a much broader role in connecting with the community sector. The court has:

- ◆ developed a 'Commonly Asked Questions' sheet
- ◆ limited the number of people in the hearing room at any one time to improve the situation for the Applicant
- ◆ run information sessions for Family Violence services.

With the Protected Persons' Space comes the capacity for duty lawyers to consult their clients on the court premises, safely and with the opportunity to seamlessly refer clients on to domestic violence or victims' assistance services. Through the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group and the Morning Coordination Meetings, staff and agencies are able to provide a more coordinated service for clients.

*'...the Family Violence Act is all about protection – that's at its absolute heart, that is its legislative purpose and philosophy; that's what we are applying, that's what we are expressing as we run and operate our busy courts.'*

*Ian Gray,  
Chief Magistrate  
(until Nov 2012)*

Partners recognise the work required to improve legal responses as an on-going activity. As a result of recent visits to other courts, Victoria Police at Ringwood Court have changed their procedures around Affected Family Members who do not attend court. Based on practices encountered at another court, Victoria Police now adjourn the hearing for one week, rather than have an order struck out, and during that time the police follow up with the Affected Family Member to conduct a risk assessment.

## System and agency issues

Partners recognise that improving legal responses for people affected by family violence is a continuous process. Current consultations, for example, have highlighted the need Applicants have for clear, concise and consistent information prior to attending court – during the application stage. While there has been a noticeable improvement in feedback from clients about the process, it remains a confronting experience during a time of high stress and hyper vigilance. A key theme in client feedback remains the request for clarity and consistency in the legal response - from lawyers, magistrates, police and the court.

Through the partnership, the group is involved in a dynamic process, examining how ad hoc problems can be solved, as well as continually focusing on addressing systemic issues. With the working group model, issues around the service system or the way the specific agencies work together can be referred to the appropriate group for consideration and suggestions for improvement. The group has reached a point in its maturity where differences between agencies do not create stumbling blocks. An example of this sort of distraction is the variation in terminology for people who have experienced family violence – lawyers and the courts use the terms of 'Affected Family Member' (from the Family Violence Act) 'applicant' and 'respondent'; the police can use the terms of 'victim' and 'perpetrator', domestic violence services use the term 'victim/survivor' and the Victims of Crime service uses the term 'client'. The importance of different terminology is respected, and while initially agencies preferred their own terms, they now recognise that no single term will serve all. Group members have developed their understanding of the imperatives of each service and the strengths and limitations of their roles in relation to victims/survivors of family violence.



**Key Findings:**

4. The collaboration of agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court has improved significantly through the Family Violence Integration Project. Improvements are evident through tangible outcomes, such as policies and procedures that provide a more coordinated response for applicants; through feedback from participating agencies and through the structures established to support the on-going collaboration, in particular the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, providing a governance and coordination focus to the work and the Morning Coordination Meetings, providing a coordinated service response for clients during their attendance at court.

5. The success of the collaborative effort of the agencies involved in the Family Violence Integration Project is evident in some of the project's key achievements, most notably the establishment of Victoria's first and only Protected Persons' Space of its type, in a magistrates' court. While the primary purpose of this area is to provide a safe and separate physical space for clients, it is also a de facto 'one stop shop' for clients where the Intervention Order Support Service members can:

- provide information to clients
- coordinate services for clients
- assess and monitor client safety, and
- refer clients to services.

From the client perspective, the Protected Persons' Space allows clients to:

- sit separately from the respondent in a safe, comfortable and supportive environment
- safely be accompanied by support people
- bring their children to court, if no other alternative is available, and
- consult with multiple service providers in one room.

It contributes significantly to clients' feelings of safety and anecdotally it appears, can be instrumental in supporting clients to attend court.



## Expand existing partnerships

### Objective 3: Utilise and expand the existing partnerships of agencies delivering an IOSS at the Ringwood Magistrate's Court

The Intervention Order Support Service has expanded to include a representative of the EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program and a representative of Anglicare.

The Anglicare Men's Respondent Worker attends the Ringwood Magistrates' Court on both family violence sitting days to provide information, support and referrals to men who are responding to an intervention order application. This is also an opportunity to discuss options that prioritise the safety and well being of children and women.

The EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program Worker attends the Ringwood Magistrates' Court weekly, to coincide with one of the family violence sitting days. The result of this is that clients can be immediately referred to this service and if they meet eligibility requirements, they can commence steps to apply for a victim of crime application, including seeking access to counselling for adult applicants or for children affected by family violence, without being required to make contact with yet another service.

Whilst the Intervention Order Support Service predates the Family Violence Integration Project, this group did not meet on a regular basis and did not have a forum to consider or address systemic issues. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has provided that forum, and ensures that representation extends beyond core services, such as the Court, Victoria Police and legal services. The Court Network, the Eastern Region Men's Behaviour Change Consortium and the Regional Family Violence Partnership are all represented and able to contribute to the work of the Steering Group. Given the external and continuous improvement focus of the group, there is capacity to continue to expand the partnership in the future. The Family Violence Integration Project has identified the need to develop and extend their relationships and partnerships with Indigenous agencies in the region. This is commencing with relationships developing through training participation and visits to agencies by the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator. During the next phase of the project it is hoped that stronger ties and protocols can be built in partnership with Indigenous agencies.

The Intervention Order Support Service Guide, an initiative of the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, has been distributed widely through to the networks of group members.

The Ringwood Magistrates' Court and the Intervention Order Support Service delivered three Information Sessions (discussed further below) in 2012. The purpose of the session is:

- ♦ to build relationships and partnerships between the Intervention Order Support Services and service providers in the region
- ♦ to extend the reach of the work of the Intervention Order Support

What have been the main successes in terms of referral pathways? Through the Family Violence Integration Project Information Sessions, there appears to have been an increase in referrals to organisations from court users and community/welfare agencies.  
*Information session participant*





Service, by ensuring that the wide range of community agencies who may encounter people who are victims or perpetrators of family violence:

- ♦ are informed about available services
- ♦ know how to make appropriate referrals, including to the police and legal services
- ♦ have up to date information available for their agency and for distribution to their clients
- ♦ have an overview of the intervention order process.

#### Key Finding:

6. The Intervention Order Support Service has been expanded to include EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program and Anglicare, the agency funded to provide the Men's Respondent service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. With these service providers joining the Intervention Order Support Service and attending court at least weekly, applicants have faster access to support for victim of crime applications and access to counselling, and respondents have access to information, support and referrals.

7. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has expanded to include the Court Network. This ensures that the key services operating at court and key service providers working with Applicants and Respondents participate in the steering of the project's work.

## Education and case coordination

**Objective 4: Develop and implement education and case co-ordination strategies to improve the pathway and experience of parties entering and exiting the court system**

The focus of education and case coordination focus of the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group is on:

- ♦ Improving knowledge **broadly** across the service system
- ♦ **Deepening** understanding and knowledge of the specific Intervention Order Support Services

To address the broad information needs, three *Information Sessions about the Intervention Order Process and the Support Services available at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court* were delivered in 2012 (March, July and October). These sessions were attended by approximately 200 participants, representing agencies and services ranging from maternal and child health services, community and Indigenous health services, schools, family relationship centres to migrant and multicultural services. Delivered through a panel style format in the Magistrates' Court, the half-day sessions included short presentations from each of the Intervention Order Support Services as well as presentations from other court services (the Dispute Settlement Centre and the Mental Health Court Liaison Service). People attending were invited to email questions with their registration details to enable panel members to cover these areas in their responses. Holding the sessions in the Magistrates' Court was also designed to provide participants with a sense of the experience on the day for people involved in an intervention order application.

What was information did you find most useful?  
*The security of seeing the Family Violence partnership in action.*  
*Information session participant*



Feedback was received from over 80 participants from the three sessions. Of this feedback, there was almost universal agreement that the format was appropriate and that the content of the session was useful and informative. Areas that participants found 'most useful' elicited comments such as:

- *Roles of various people at Court*
- *Understanding the language and the process.*
- *The DVD (Steps2Safety) was excellent – a good visual aid to the session.*
- *The application process for an Intervention Order – this will enable me to provide more appropriate support to my clients when needed.*
- *Just generally being able to hear from various bodies of the family violence system rather than through one focus.*
- *All of it as it highlighted the extent of the services wrapping around family violence.*
- *The legal mentions, directions, contest and the distinction between these.*
- *Diversity of speakers was excellent and the linkages between the services in supporting victims.*



Ringwood Magistrates' Court and IOSS Information Session, Ringwood Magistrates' Court, 2012

Feedback recorded about the session was consistently positive. It is acknowledged that the session provides a general overview, but participants were positive about hearing from the range of services and learning about the various roles and responsibilities. They received printed information, such as the Intervention Order Support Service Guide and Steps2Safety material. Participants appreciated receiving

the referral flowchart and other 'useful leaflets'. Many suggested that the session should be a regular feature of this and other Magistrates' Court. Suggestions to improve the session included:

- Involving a Magistrate in the panel discussion
- Involving service providers working with Indigenous communities and culturally diverse communities
- More information on working through the process with older people / young people / people with mental health or drug and alcohol issues

However, participants also valued that the sessions were focused and ran to time. Suggestions from participants such as opening with an Acknowledgement of Country, acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, have been taken up.

In terms of deepening project members' understanding of each other's services and roles, planning and presenting the Information Sessions as a panel greatly contributed to this.

#### **Key Finding:**

8. The Intervention Order Support Service has provided information sessions for agencies that work with people who may be victims or perpetrators of family violence. In 2012, around 200 representatives of a wide range of agencies attended three information forums.

## Access to VOCAT information

**Objective 5: Ensure that victim/survivors are well-informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs**

Initial consultations with agencies sought information about the extent of victims' accessing Victims of Crime (VOC) support and reasons for low uptake of this service.

The FVIP Coordinator consulted the Victims' Assistance Program representative. Consultations identified that there is often a lag of 3 – 4 months after a family violence matter and intervention order proceedings, before a client is ready to seek victim of crime assistance.

Changes and improvements that have been initiated through the Family Violence Integration Project project include:

- ◆ Victoria Policerefer victims to VOC assistance at the point of first contact with the police in relation to the family violence matter.
- ◆ Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program worker is now based at Ringwood Magistrates' Court once a week, on a family violence list day, to provide information about victims of crime support services and application processes.
- ◆ The Intervention Order Support Services provide written information about victims' assistance options and the information is reinforced through discussions with clients.



- ◆ The Intervention Order Support Service Guide includes information about victims' assistance options and contact details. This information has been widely distributed across the region to service providers.
- ◆ A representative of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal Registrar is one of the regular speakers at the Intervention Order Support Service Information Sessions and can answer questions from participants.

In combination, all of these strategies have increased the number of applications for VOC assistance and increased referral options for clients. Continuing to improve access to Victim of Crime information and assistance is the focus of the second stage of the project.

**Key Finding:**

g. Through the project, referral processes to Victims of Crime Assistance and Counselling have improved, in particular through the attendance at court of the Victims' Assistance and Counselling Program worker, and as a result more timely information is available to clients and service providers.



## Future Focus

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The Family Violence Integration Project at Ringwood Court has received further funding from the Legal Service Board. Through this second stage, the project will further develop the collaboration and expand the project focus to other areas of the justice system, in particular the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to consider broader systemic issues in the family violence response.

With the project collaboration's focus on continuous improvement, feedback is consistently sought about areas for future focus. Areas that have been raised through the first stage of the project for future work include:

- ◆ Providing information for clients at an earlier stage – i.e. during the application and pre-court stage
- ◆ Working more closely with Indigenous agencies, including Indigenous family violence agencies
- ◆ Working more closely with culturally linguistically diverse clients and specific support services
- ◆ Working more closely with magistrates, for example, a magistrate joining the Information Session panel or joining the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group
- ◆ Working to have the Applicant and Respondent Worker roles as funded positions and mandated referrals to Men's Behaviour Change programs

What can your agency do to create the best chance for further success?

*Continue to work together as a group who all have the same purpose rather than each agency with their own agenda.*

*Family Violence Integration  
Project partner agency*

These suggestions will be considered in shaping the next iteration of the project.

